

[PDF] Let Love Find You

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Description:

About the Author Johanna Lindsey has been hailed as one of the most popular and enduring authors of romantic fiction, with more than sixty million copies of her novels sold. World renowned for her novels of "first-rate romance" (*New York Daily News*), Lindsey is the author of forty-eight previous national bestselling novels, many of which reached the # 1 spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Lindsey lives in New Hampshire with her family.

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Chapter One

LADY AMANDA LOCKE SIGHED as she gazed at her reflection in the oval mirror. Sitting at the vanity in the comfortable room she'd been given at her cousin Rupert's house in London, she imagined she saw a wrinkle at the corner of one eye. She gasped. Did she? She leaned closer. No, just her imagination and the light, but it wouldn't be long before it wasn't. She had just turned twenty! The *ton* would be calling her an old maid soon—if they weren't already.

She sighed again. Her maid, Alice, pretended not to notice as she pinned the last blond lock of Amanda's coiffure into place. That wouldn't have stopped Amanda if she felt like being vocal about her melancholy tonight, but she didn't. Alice had heard it all and heard it often. Amanda's whole family had heard it all, and she had a large family. But she *was* tired of complaining about such a sorry state of affairs, she just couldn't help it sometimes.

Her first London Season shouldn't have been such a disaster. It was supposed to be a roaring success. She had expected no less. Her family had expected no less. She was a beauty, after all, even quite fashionable with her blond hair and powder-blue eyes, and she also had the aristocratic bones that ran in her family. She was *also* the only daughter of Preston Locke, the 10th Duke of Norford. That alone should have had the proposals streaming in. And no one had doubted that she would outshine all the other debutantes that Season two years ago, herself included. But then no one had been prepared for the infamous Ophelia Reid, who had debuted that same year, and no one, not even Amanda, could compare to Ophelia's dazzling beauty.

It was almost funny, Amanda thought as she looked back on it, how jealous she'd been of Ophelia, so jealous that she'd spent most of that first Season stewing about it and thus ignoring the young men who had tried to get to know her. So really, she could blame that disaster on herself. But of course her emotions got out of hand, especially when she found out her own brother, Raphael, was also falling under the ice queen's spell.

Ophelia hadn't even been likable back then! Amanda recalled wondering how her brother could be so dense just because Ophelia was a raving beauty! Ophelia was manipulative, a liar, and spiteful to boot. Anyone with two eyes could see it, which meant every man in London that year wasn't utilizing both of his eyes, Amanda's brother included!

Rafe did fall in love with Ophelia, he did marry her, and he did tame the shrew. There was nothing *not* to like about the Ophelia her brother had married.

That had all been part of Amanda's first disastrous Season in London. Last year she'd tried to take her brother's advice to heart and just let love find her. She'd had fun doing so, maybe too much fun. Relaxing, just enjoying herself and the many entertainments, she'd found that she actually liked some of her beaux, could even call them friends now, but not one had ever pulled at her heartstrings. So before she knew it, her second London Season was over and she still hadn't found a husband.

Now, at the beginning of her third Season in London, she was quite desperate. *Something* needed to change this year because she obviously wasn't going about husband hunting the right way. She wasn't as silly and flighty as people thought, but even she knew that she gave that impression sometimes.

"You're bored already this Season, aren't you?" Alice said as she stood behind her.

Amanda frowned as she met the maid's eyes in the mirror. Was the problem that simple? Bored all day long, and then when she finally had something to do in the evenings, she was so pleased she

overreacted, behaving a bit more effervescently than she ought to?

She didn't try to deny it. "It's different here, not a'tall like at home in the country, where I've got so much to occupy me."

"Your aunt made a suggestion the other day. Why didn't you agree?"

Amanda rolled her eyes. "Help with that sewing class her friend started? I love needlepoint, but not enough to teach it to little girls who'd rather be out fishing."

Alice couldn't hold back her laughter. "I really don't think most little girls have fishing on their minds like *you* used to. But you should find something to do while we're in London instead of counting the minutes until the next party. Going from utter boredom to utter excitement isn't a good balance under any circumstances."

Amanda managed *not* to sigh again, but of course she was ready to leave the house and was already beginning to feel the excitement. Tonight could be the night she met her future husband. Well, it *could* happen. So she merely nodded to her maid and decided that thinking up a project to occupy her during the day could wait until tomorrow when she felt bored again.

She had to admit she was nicely decked out for not one but two parties tonight. Amanda did one last twirl in front of the full-length mirror to make sure nothing was out of place. It wasn't. Her maid was superb in that regard. The pale pink of the new evening gown highly suited her and was perfect for her mother's rubies at her neck and ears.

She didn't look any different from how she had during her first Season, when she'd thought she'd be the first among her friends to get engaged and she hadn't ended up engaged a'tall. *Let love find you, it will, you know*, Ophelia had assured her. Yes, but when? How long was she supposed to wait for that magical moment to happen?

Amanda went downstairs to see if her cousin Avery had arrived yet. The second of Aunt Julie's three sons, Avery had his own flat in London now, but Amanda had sent him a note in the afternoon, informing him that she was in need of a chaperone tonight, since Aunt Julie's oldest son, Rupert, and his new bride, Rebecca, hadn't yet returned from Norford as Amanda had hoped they would. And Aunt Julie's third son, Owen, was too young at sixteen to be anyone's escort.

Amanda had stayed at the St. John household last year for the Season as well, since her father didn't own a town house in London. And she could depend on two of her St. John cousins as well as their mother to serve as her escorts, even if none of them were ideal. But now her old friend Rebecca Marshall was part of the household, too, having recently married Rupert St. John, and *she* was ideal.

Amanda had been delighted by the news of Rebecca and Rupert's marriage. Rebecca would make a perfect chaperone because Amanda could actually have fun with her. But Becky had surprised Amanda by flatly refusing at first, claiming it didn't seem right because she was several years younger than Amanda. But Amanda's stubbornness had kicked in—she could be quite tenacious without even realizing it—and she'd convinced Becky to agree. But then Becky had hied off to the country without a by-your-leave, putting Amanda back at square one with her old choices.

She so hoped her old friend had returned by now. She wasn't worried that Rupert would want to tag along. He'd had his fill of balls and parties. He'd been Amanda's escort in the past and never failed to cause a stir, as handsome and flirtatious as he was, which tended to make every other gentleman

present quite jealous, and jealous men didn't want to dance. That was why she only asked Rupert to chaperone her as a last resort.

His mother, Julie, was just as bad! She'd raised her three boys on her own after her husband, the last Marquis of Rochwood, had died, and she tried to be both mother and father to them, which, unfortunately, had turned her into somewhat of a bully. As Amanda had told Rebecca recently when she'd been trying to talk her into being her chaperone, "While Aunt Julie will agree to accompany me to parties, she'll also spend the entire night grumbling. And believe me, there aren't very many men who don't quickly retreat after receiving one of her scowls."

Rebecca had made a good point though: if Amanda's beaux could so easily be intimidated by her aunt, then they weren't for her. Amanda had to admit she'd been glad when a few of the more obnoxious ones had been scared off by Aunt Julie.

Amanda had almost reached the bottom of the stairs when her steps slowed. She wondered if Avery had arrived yet. While he never minded escorting her—at least he never complained about it—he usually had to cancel his own plans to do so, which made her feel bad. Occasionally, he wasn't available because he was out of town.

She supposed she should have waited to dress for the evening until she had received confirmation that he was coming. Now she started to panic. Aunt Julie would be furious if she had to dress at the last minute to join her. But Amanda had already canceled two engagements because of Becky's absence. She simply couldn't cancel the two tonight, not when one party was being given by one of her closer friends, and the other by her sister-in-law, so Amanda had decided to attend them both—but not without an escort!

It wasn't Avery who appeared in the parlor doorway, drawn out by her loud sigh, but the man standing before her made her forget every one of her woes.

"Father!" She flew into Preston Locke's open arms. "What are *you* doing here? You never come to London except on business."

He gave her a brief hug before he set her back to explain, "I consider this business, family business. I came to find out what your cousin Rupert was doing here while his new bride was in Norford. You do know they didn't even bother to inform me of their marriage?"

Amanda winced for her cousin's sake. Her brother, Rafe, had done the same thing, married Ophelia Reid on the fly, as it were, without telling the family first, and their father had been quite put out about it.

"Well,..."

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