

What Readers are Saying ...

“A veiled Victorian lady with a hidden past finds love and self-acceptance on a rail journey through 1854 America in *The Wayfaring Widow*. Casey Cline’s writing is sweet, intelligent, and rich with historical detail. The perfect read for fans of road-trip romances!”

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“*The Wayfaring Widow* by Casey Cline is the perfect weekend read. Set in the 1850s, readers will love touring the various American cities alongside Victoria, Isabella, and their escort Harrison. Victoria is none-too-happy at having the closed-hearted Harrison along, especially since she’s struggling to overcome a difficult past. But soon she discovers that Harrison is battling his own troubled past, and the pair slowly learn to see beyond each other’s protective exteriors. *The Wayfaring Widow* is a slow-burn romance that will take you on a sweeping journey of love, healing, and second chances.”

—HEATHER B. MOORE, *USA TODAY* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE WAYFARING WIDOW

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW SERIES
1

CASEY CLINE



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Published by Scrivenings Press LLC

15 Lucky Lane

Morrilton, Arkansas 72110

<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-529-8

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-530-4

Editor: J.L. Burrows

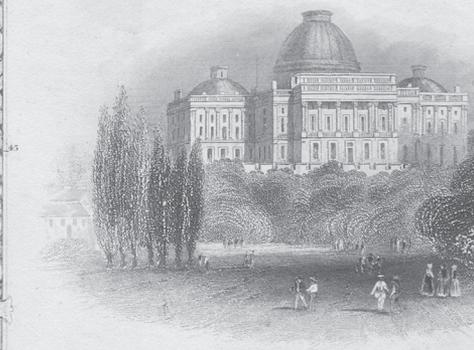
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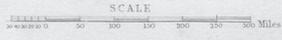
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*To Vince, for your unwavering faith in me, and to Leena and Cora,
may you have unwavering faith in yourselves.*

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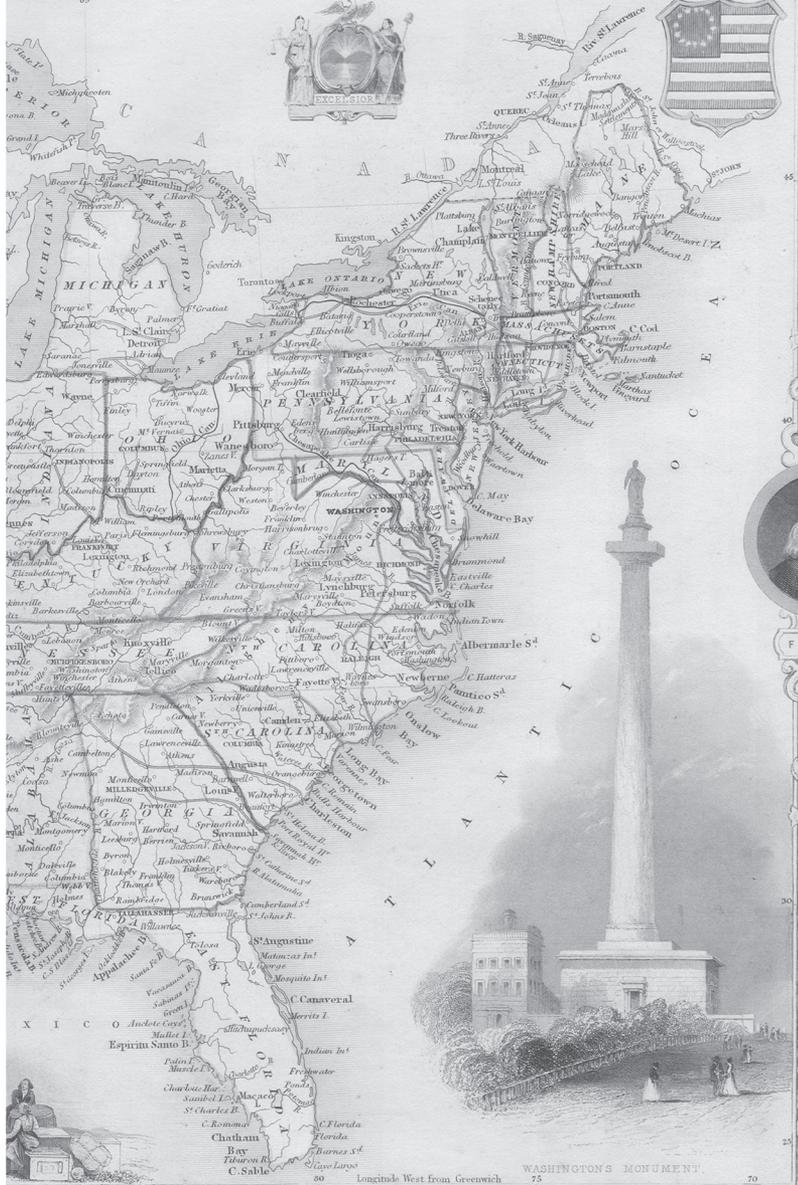


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STATES.

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One



September 1854

Victoria Clarke lay on the bottom bunk in the cramped stateroom aboard the RMS *Canada* and waited for her stomach's next revolt. How was this adventure a better fate than being the widowed family member no one wanted?

Though the steamship had survived last night's storm and the previous ten days of the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean from Liverpool, it still dipped and rolled in the lingering winds. Would they make it to Boston today?

Salt and sickness wafted in the air, and Victoria cursed herself for believing she could brave such a journey. Back in England, the possibility of adventure for a twenty-eight-year-old widow had seemed exciting, alluring even, especially with Isabella's convincing stories about America's enticements. Now, in the dark and dank bowels of a tossing ship three thousand miles from home, it seemed downright ridiculous.

Victoria would meet her younger friend in Boston. Though Isabella's father had paid her passage to America, it was difficult to conjure up appreciation for her friend's generosity at present.

The ship pitched again, as did Victoria's stomach, and she scrambled to her washbasin. She hadn't been this sick since the early weeks of her pregnancy. Oh, she would have doted on the child, but apparently, it wasn't meant to be.

Thankfully, the ship's signal whistled—a timely interruption to the melancholy direction her thoughts were headed and a sure sign they were nearing their destination. She, too, must look ahead to the future. After all, she was nearly to America, the “Land of the Free.”

When the ship's speed and lurching both slowed, she took the opportunity to set her appearance to rights and tidy the cabin. She combed her raven-black hair into its typical, serviceable chignon and smoothed the wrinkles on her careworn, faded black mourning gown.

Even though the requisite two-year mourning period following Silas's death had passed, Victoria still wore dark colors, not out of any devotion or homage to her late husband, but out of grief at the loss of herself. She picked up the final piece of her ensemble—the black lace veil—and pinned it to her hair under her bonnet so it covered the left side of her face.

Isabella had grown accustomed to Victoria's appearance, but strangers had not. When the two discussed the trip a few months ago, Isabella had promised they could avoid any mention of, or interaction with, men on the trip. Learning to trust men again was thankfully not on the itinerary. Clicking her valise shut, Victoria donned her mantle and gloves to ward off the chill and made her way up to the rain-slicked deck, ready to catch her first glimpse of this foreign land.

With her hands gripped firmly around the slippery railing, Victoria squinted into the black night. The still-heavy mist in the air swallowed any light from the port, but its sounds and smells reached her, as the port workers exchanged shouts with the ship's crew while other vessels, docked at the wharf, creaked and groaned against their mooring lines. The pervading top note of fish, combined with base notes of rotting food and unwashed bodies, threatened to send Victoria back to the washbasin. The native tongues of the other passengers crushed around her—German, French, Spanish, Dutch—mingling in a motley hum accompanied by the rhythmic churning of the steamship's wheels.

The curtain of mist parted, and the wharf—and Boston—finally emerged into view. Hundreds of ships' masts bobbed in front of the shadowed facades of brick and stone buildings, while pinpricks of light winked determinedly through the dark. Anchoring took a veritable eon, and when the gangplank finally banged to the wharf, the passengers became a crush, jostling and pushing against Victoria as they moved *en masse* toward solid ground. *Was such incivility necessary after the days of accord they'd shared aboard the ship?*

A sharp elbow jabbed her ribs.

"Ouch!" But the commotion drowned out her cry of pain. Victoria took a deep breath to force her pounding heart to calm. As she squeezed farther into the multitude, the opportunistic hands of another passenger snagged her valise. *The audacity!*

"Unhand it, please!" Either the would-be thief obeyed her petition, or she successfully wrestled the luggage from his grasp. Regardless, she'd regained control of her baggage. Now, to regain control of her emotions.

Avoiding the shouts and scuffles for the hired carts and

hacks, Victoria found refuge in a relatively quiet corner of the wharf and scanned the crowd of bodies for Isabella. At just under five feet tall, Isabella would be challenging to find in the throng of towering gentlemen and their tall top hats.

Mother Nature resumed a steady rainfall, further adding to the gloom. Cold and wet seeped through Victoria's mantle, gown, and petticoat layers, numbing her toes despite the newness of her sturdy ankle boots. Shivers wracked her body.

A hand gripped her shoulder from behind, and she emitted a small shriek. Whirling around, she met Isabella's bright eyes.

"Victoria!" Isabella enveloped her in a tight embrace with a strength belying her diminutive size. She took Victoria's valise and led the way through the swarm.

"How was your journey? My voyage had calm seas the entire way, so I had to entertain myself. I became quite adept at backgammon—and avoiding my cabin mate. When she wasn't imbibing, she would regale the passengers, especially the men, with her coarse and profane anecdotes. Quite deplorable, really." Isabella gave an insouciant wave. "But such is the price one pays for adventure, right?"

No, adventure had exacted far too high a price already, but perhaps with some sleep, Victoria's outlook would improve. She pressed a wet strand of hair back behind her ear and did her best to follow Isabella's ramblings, while navigating the muddy street. Her feet squelched in the soupy mess, and at one point, she almost lost a boot entirely to its clutches.

"Don't worry, dear," Isabella soothed, now half-dragging Victoria through the slog. "The three of us will be settled at the hotel soon enough, and you can change and rest. You must be exhausted given the delay and middle-of-the-night landing. We've been waiting here at the wharf for hours. They kept assuring us the ship would be arriving any minute."

Victoria uttered a sound of agreement and then focused in on one word in Isabella's monologue. "Three?"

Isabella did not break stride. "Oh yes, you did receive my letter, did you not?" But instead of providing the detail Victoria craved, Isabella went on to say, "Oh, we are almost there. We just need to take a left here. And no need to fear. The driver surely has your trunk loaded by now."

Well accustomed to her friend's easily diverted ways, Victoria steered the conversation back to the number in their party, anxiety rising in her throat. "Isabella, who is the third person? I thought it was to be just the two of us."

"Oh yes, that. My father insisted we have an escort. I reminded him it wasn't required of American women when traveling, but he was adamant." Isabella sighed, then shrugged. "You know how he is. Having been a clergyman for many years, he's extra-sensitive to propriety and safety."

Victoria stifled a cry of impatience. *Why couldn't Isabella just answer the question?* She tried once more. "Isabella, who will be traveling with us?"

"Oh, not to worry. Just an old family friend," Isabella said with another airy wave of her hand. Victoria waited for her to elaborate, but her once-garrulous friend was now infuriatingly tight-lipped.

Victoria's racing heart calmed a bit as she focused on the descriptor "old," picturing a balding, bespectacled man with a penchant for falling asleep on a whim as those of advanced age are wont to do. The man surely bore liver spots and a portly stomach too.

"Here we are!" Isabella held open the door of a waiting carriage, its two horses stamping restlessly to get going. Rain dripped from the brim of the driver's hat. He made to get down to help Victoria in, but she waved him off, took her soggy valise

from Isabella, gathered her equally soggy skirts, and climbed into the carriage's black void, eager for the sheltered rest the carriage offered.

She tried to sit, but met with a pair of legs instead of the carriage seat. Startled, she stood, only to bang her head on the roof, then trip over the other occupant's limbs.

"Take care, madam." The bodiless male voice, deep and gruff, was sharp and accusatory.

Victoria could find no words to respond. Instead, she moved to the other side of the carriage, but not without bumping the man with her valise in the process.

The voice let out an, "Oof, perhaps if you removed your veil at nighttime, you would see better."

Finally seated, Victoria flinched at the man's acerbic objections and tried her best to maintain her manners. "Sir. I—I do apologize." She licked her parched lips.

"Oh, come now, Harrison," Isabella chided as she slid in beside Victoria with no trouble at all, much to Victoria's chagrin.

So this, this gentleman—dare he be called such—is Harrison. Victoria shrunk into the corner of her seat.

The carriage lurched forward into the inky night, the clip-clopping of the horses' hooves harmonizing with the raindrops' beat.

"Harrison Wright, meet my dear friend, Mrs. Victoria Clarke." Isabella offered the introductions. "Victoria, this is Mr. Harrison Wright, an old friend of our family."

There was the word "old" again.

The gas streetlamps intermittently illuminated the carriage's dark interior and confirmed what she feared. Piercing eyes sat below a mop of inky hair bordering on disheveled. A rugged, clenched jaw rounded out what she could see of this man who wasn't in his seventies, or even his

fifties or sixties. He couldn't be much older than her twenty-eight years.

Oh no. Isabella had meant *old* as in long-established, not old as in advanced in age.

Harrison spoke first. "It's a pleasure, Mrs. Clarke," he said, his tone indicating it was anything but.

"Likewise." She attempted a smile but was capable of only a strained grimace.

Oblivious to the charged air in the carriage, Isabella prattled on. "Harrison so graciously agreed to accompany us. His father is a lawyer. And so is Harrison. They live in New York, you see, but Harrison had some business in Boston earlier this week, and it all worked out so perfectly for him to join in the journey, as we take a more circuitous route back via rail to New York, with sightseeing stops in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, and Niagara Falls, of course."

Nothing about this arrangement sounded perfect, and Victoria's already exhausted body couldn't comprehend the taxing itinerary Isabella had rattled off. Instead, she clung to her valise's handles and kept quiet.

"And, Harrison, I neglected to ask earlier. How is dear, sweet Georgina? Why, she must be nearing four years old already," Isabella said. "Are the spells still occurring?"

"Yes, she'll be four in March. And yes, with regularity." Harrison kept his eyes focused outside the carriage's window.

Isabella sighed sympathetically. "Such a shame, but she's lucky to have you as an older brother to care for her so. I do hope you soon find answers as to the cause."

"We know the cause." His tone implied the line of discussion was over.

Victoria looked from Isabella to Harrison.

He pierced her with a glower, and she quickly averted her eyes, swallowing around a lump forming in her throat. Isabella

had broken her promise that just the two of them would journey together. And she had chosen a cold and brusque man as their traveling companion.

Fear iced Victoria's veins—how similar Harrison's mannerisms were to Silas's. How would she survive the next few weeks with the formidable Harrison Wright?