

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com
Check out the latest about HeartQuest Books at www.heartquest.com

Copyright © 1997 by Lawana Blackwell. All rights reserved.
HeartQuest edition published in 2004 under ISBN 0-8423-7229-6.

Cover illustration copyright © 2004 by Robert Papp. All rights reserved.

HeartQuest is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of either the author or publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blackwell, Lawana, date

Song of a soul / Lawana Blackwell.
p. cm.— (Victorian serenade ; 4)
ISBN 0-8423-7965-7 (pbk.)

I. Title. II. Series: Blackwell, Lawana, date Victorian serenade ; 4.

PS3552.L3429S66 1997

813'.54—dc21

96-47577

Printed in the United States of America

10 09 08 07 06 05 04
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Prologue

March 12, 1868

IN a Covent Garden backstage dressing room, mezzo-soprano Clarisse Pella winced as a hairpin scraped her scalp. “I’ve hurt you, ma’am?” the girl gasped, her eyes wide with horror.

“No.” Clarisse angled her face in the mirror to study the hairpieces mixed in with her own glossy black curls. “Pin them in tight. I do not want them coming loose onstage.”

When the girl was finished, Clarisse got up from the dressing table and studied her reflection in the cheval glass in the corner. The plum-colored velvet dress she was wearing boasted a tight, square-cut bodice, a low-pointed waist, and long sleeves puffed up at the shoulders. Except for the heavy stage makeup, Clarisse strongly resembled portraits she had seen of sixteenth-century Spanish royalty. She would be playing the part of Eboli tonight, a princess in King Philip II’s court. The role called for great beauty and coloratura, and even at the age of thirty-five, Clarisse still possessed both.

“Is this your first time to sing in London, ma’am?” asked the girl, who stood off to the side watching. Clarisse gave her a long-suffering smile and reminded herself that the girl was hired for her hairstyling genius, not for her knowledge of opera.

Song of a Soul

“I have sung everywhere,” she answered. Tonight’s debut of Verdi’s *Don Carlo* would be only one of dozens of operas in which she had performed during her eighteen years on the stage. She walked back to the dressing table and took a sip of water.

In a few minutes, the stage manager would call for her. Already she could hear the orchestra tuning up, and voices buzzed as the nobility and gentry were being ushered to their seats. Queen Victoria was to be in attendance, she had heard. But Clarisse was not the least bit nervous. She had sung for royalty all over Europe.

A knock sounded at the door, and she signaled for the hair-dresser to open it. It was too early for the call to go onstage, and for fear of affecting her voice, she did not allow flowers in her dressing room from well-wishers and admirers. She set down her glass and eyed the door curiously. A young boy stood there, trying to see past the six inches of opening the girl allowed.

“Signora Pella is busy,” the girl told him. “What do you want?”

“I’ve a telegram for her, miss. I was told I could bring it to her here.”

Probably congratulations from Cecilio for beating Adelina Patti out of this part, Clarisse thought, smiling to herself. “Let him give it to you. I’ve time to read it.”

The girl obeyed and closed the door again. When she turned back to Clarisse, her face had suddenly gone white as chalk. “I-I’m sorry, ma’am!”

“What is the matter?” Clarisse demanded. Then she looked down at the envelope the girl was holding. Its borders were black.

Trembling, the hairdresser asked, “Should I fetch someone to be with you while you open it?”

Clarisse stared at the envelope. All she could think about was what an opportunity this would be for Faye Donatello, her understudy. On opening night, the opera critics were out en masse, hungry for fodder to use in their newspaper columns. An understudy who assumed a starring role on opening night would be the talk of all England the next day—provided she possessed the talent to give a strong performance. Miss Donatello had such a talent, Clarisse knew, with youth and beauty to match.

It wasn’t fair, she thought, that a mere understudy would set the standard by which all future performances of the role of Eboli would be measured. Critics could be fickle, even to famous prima donnas . . . and just what if Faye Donatello gave a better performance than she?

“Signora Pella?”

Clarisse looked up at the girl’s face. “Put it on my dressing table. I will read it afterwards.”

“But it’s got black—”

Clarisse ignored the cold chill that snaked up her spine. “Then three hours will not make any difference, will it?”

1

July 7, 1883

EDMUND Woodruff IV rubbed his throbbing temple and glared across his desk at the young man seated before him. *Why do our children have the power to grieve us so?* he asked himself, though he already knew the answer. Love was the shackle that had so far kept him from throwing his hands up in resignation. Even if, at twenty-one, his youngest son was too thickheaded to see where his folly would ultimately lead him, Edmund still felt an obligation to intervene and point him in the right direction.

But this is the last time. I'm getting too old for such aggravation.
“Sir?”

Edmund looked up as Gregory's voice cut into his thoughts. “I would just like to say—,” his son began, looking as contrite as he always did when called on the carpet. But Edmund was not willing to listen to the young man's excuses just yet. He held up a silencing hand and continued to glare.

The tragedy was that Gregory had the potential to go as far in life as he desired. The brightest of Edmund's six children, he had made excellent marks at Owens College in Manchester before being expelled for scandalous behavior two years before. And easily he was the most handsome man in Walesby, for his dark hair and intense blue eyes, combined with the aristocratic

lines of his face, drew attention everywhere he went. *It would have been better if he had been ordinary looking*, Edmund thought. Good looks were a curse without the character to go with them.

Finally, he cleared his throat. “What possessed you to lock a cow in the vicar’s house?” he asked in a remarkably calm voice for his state of mind.

Gregory had been sitting there in rigid foreboding since being summoned into the study. Now a lightning-quick twitch played at the corners of his mouth.

“So, you’re still amused by your little prank!” Edmund snapped, and the vein in his temple throbbed harder.

Gregory’s face blanched. “I’m not, sir.”

“Then answer my question.”

“My friends—”

“Oh, I’ve no doubt your friends wagered you into it. How much money did this idiocy earn you?”

This time Gregory’s handsome face went crimson in an attempt to look indignant. The effect was spoiled, however, when he could not meet his father’s eyes. “It wasn’t a wager.”

“How much?” Edmund demanded.

After some hesitation, his son mumbled, “Ten pounds.”

“You will give that to the vicar for the inconvenience you’ve caused, along with your sincere apology.”

“Yes sir.” Though Gregory’s eyes were still lowered, there was an easing of his posture, a relief that the worst was over. “I’ll do that right away.”

“Not quite yet.”

“Sir?”

Edmund took a deep breath. “The examinations for

Cambridge are next month. I have arranged for you to take them.”

“Cambridge?” Now the young man looked up at him with a dazed expression. “But I don’t want to—”

“You’re going to enroll in the university, or I will purchase you a commission in the army. Either way, you will not stay in Walesby and shame your family any longer.”

“Father, please. Just give me one more chance.”

“That’s the problem, Gregory. I’ve given you too many chances already.”

The color came back to Gregory’s face. “And if I don’t choose to take the exam? You would force your own son into the army?”

Edmund sighed, the heaviness in his heart far worse than the pain in his head. “I would force my son to become a man.”

~

After leaving his father’s office, Gregory walked outside to the garden, where his mother usually sat with her embroidery. Sure enough, she was there in her favorite spot—between the goldfish pond and a bed of blue larkspur—her matronly frame bent over a hooped canvas in her lap. At his approach, his mother looked up at him and smiled.

“Gregory.”

She said his name, as she did all of her children’s and grandchildren’s names, in a tone that resembled a verbal caress. Gregory’s spirits lifted. Surely, if he were careful about it, he could convince her to talk his father out of this latest insanity.

He sat down on the bench beside her. “What are you making?”

“A sampler for little Frances’s nursery.” Frances was her latest

grandchild, his older brother Jeremy's daughter, who had just been christened the month before. Holding up the fabric, she pointed to an elephant she had just embroidered around the letter *e*. "Each letter of the alphabet will represent an animal."

"That will be nice," he said, feigning interest. "But tell me, what animal could you possibly find for *x*?"

"Xiphosuran."

Gregory had to laugh. "There's no such thing."

"Yes, there is, although I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it correctly. It's another name for a horseshoe crab."

"You're going to put a picture of a *crab* on a baby's sampler?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "It's either that or have little Frances go through life believing there are only twenty-five letters to the alphabet. At any rate, it will be a most attractive crab, I assure you."

Gregory smiled, secure in the knowledge that he could always put his mother in a good mood. Now was the time to work on her maternal instincts, he told himself. He would have to hurry if he were to make the start of the faro game at The Cat and Fiddle in a little over an hour.

He peered off into the distance with what he hoped was a melancholy expression and breathed a sigh that was heavy but not too theatrical. "I will miss our talks, Mother." Actually, it had been weeks since he had last sought her company—when the bill for the dozen new shirts he had ordered had reached his father's hands, and he had needed an ally.

His mother put the canvas back down in her lap. "And so will I, dear." Her voice was shaded with sadness, but she didn't ask what he was talking about. It wasn't a hopeful sign. If Mother already knew what was going on, that meant she had been in on the decision—or had already been convinced

by Father to see things his way. Gregory knew he would have to be careful with his presentation.

“I do wish I could make Father understand how sorry I am about my past actions,” he began, heaving another sigh.

“Have you told him?”

The sympathy in her voice gave him some hope. “I have,” he replied. He hung his head and allowed his shoulders to sag. “But he still wants to send me away.”

After a protracted silence, his mother shook her head.

“The university will be good for you, Gregory.”

“But you don’t know how lonely it was for me in Manchester.”

“Oh, I don’t recall that you were *that* lonely.”

Gregory looked up at her, startled. Surely Father, who usually shielded her from the most indelicate incidents, hadn’t told Mother about that bit with the daughter of a smithy.

“I’m not proud of what I did,” he said, lowering his head again. He dared not take out his watch, but he wondered what time it was. If he left soon enough and rode Spartacus, his father’s fastest horse, he could still easily make the game. “I wish I could prove to you and Father how badly I wish to change my ways. Just one more chance would mean so much to me.”

His mother touched his shoulder, and Gregory stifled a victorious smile. He knew he could win his mother over—she always had been a soft touch.

She patted his shoulder gently. “You can prove it by doing your best at the university, Son.”

~

October 3, 1883

In London, nineteen-year-old Deborah Burke closed the catch on her trunk for what she resolved would be the last time. “If

I've forgotten anything, I'll just have to write Mother and ask her to send it," she told her younger sister Theresa. "I'm worn out from packing."

Theresa, one year Deborah's junior, drew a wool wrap of bright chartreuse from the open armoire. "Won't you need this?"

Deborah winced and then glanced at the door. "I suppose Laurel would notice if I left it behind."

"I imagine she'll be up here checking the room an hour after you're gone," Theresa replied, covering a giggle with her hand. "But just because you pack it doesn't mean you have to wear it."

Their youngest sister, fourteen-year-old Laurel, had decided to make all of her Christmas gifts last year—a touching gesture and a sweet idea. Unfortunately, she was attracted to colors that could be seen for miles. *It could have been worse*, Deborah thought. *She might have used the same wool she chose for Father's muffler*. She smiled inwardly at the thought of the garish fuchsia scarf. But like a good father, he gamely wore it during nippy weather and pretended to love it.

"You're right, of course," Deborah sighed. She took the wrap, folded it, and unlocked her trunk one more time.

Later, as she sat with her family in the dining room, she realized with a pang of regret that it was the last dinner she would share with them until Christmas. Lucy, the cook, had prepared Deborah's favorite dishes for the occasion: chicken-and-leek pie, braised shrimp, and Welsh rarebit, with treacle tarts and marmalade pudding for dessert.

"Lucy has boxed up several jars of apple chutney for Miss Knight," her mother told her. "She doesn't want you to show up empty-handed."

Deborah had grown up taking for granted the bond between her mother and the cook. Until she visited in the homes of some of her school friends, she had assumed this kind of relationship to be the norm. She traded smiles across the table with her mother, whose green eyes were so much like her own and whose honey-colored hair had only recently begun to show traces of gray.

Before marrying Father, Mother had been a servant herself, which was why she treated the household servants as people instead of property. Now she was a successful portrait artist, whose works were commissioned by such eminent people as Octavia Hill and Lord Randolph Churchill. But Mother would tell anyone who asked that her most prized works were the portraits of members of her own family, which occupied places of honor in the sitting room.

A lump came to Deborah's throat. She had been so eager to begin her tutoring with Signora Pella that she hadn't given much thought to how she would miss her family. Now the reality of her imminent departure struck her full force, and she blinked back tears.

"I'm surprised Lucy hasn't convinced Deborah to stow a roast goose away in her trunk," her father said from the head of the table. When Deborah looked over at him, he raised an eyebrow as if to say, *Are you all right?*

She smiled back and nodded, but the lump still remained. Though her father drew curious stares from strangers out in public, she thought him the most handsome man alive. The warmth and intelligence in his brown eyes made up for the severe scars on the right side of his face, wounds from the Crimean War. She had inherited her dark brown hair from him, as had Laurel, while Theresa's hair was light, like Mother's.

Father was the one who had made the arrangements for her voice lessons from the famous Clarisse Pella, now retired from the stage and residing in Cambridge as the wife of Lord Payton Raleigh. Ten years ago, Deborah and her family had attended a performance of Verdi's *Aida* at the Opera Comique while on holiday in Paris. Deborah, who was already showing promise with her choral lessons at school, had sat in teary-eyed absorption, caught up in the spell of Signora Pella's clear mezzo-soprano voice.

At that moment nine-year-old Deborah fell in love with opera and determined that she must one day become the weaver of such musical spells. With a recommendation from her school music teacher, she auditioned for and was accepted by the Royal Academy of Music in London. She proved herself a dedicated student. As a young woman, while most of her friends were giving their attention to soirees and fashions—and later, to finding suitable husbands—Deborah was spending two hours a day going over the scales. And her hard work paid off. She made her mark in the academy's opera productions, starting out in the chorus and progressing to larger parts.

Then last spring, a few months before graduation from the academy, she auditioned for and won the role of Amneris, the same role that Clarisse Pella had once played, in the academy's production of *Aida*. Deborah felt that she had reached the pinnacle of her dreams—how could she aspire to anything greater than playing the role that Signora Pella had so magnificently brought to life? But as the performance ended and the curtain calls went on, she discovered that this was not an end but a beginning. There was no place more exciting to Deborah Burke than the boards of the theater. Opera had become so much a part of her soul that she couldn't imagine life without it.

Upon graduation, most students of the academy began a life

of auditioning for the London opera houses. The majority of them would begin with parts in the choruses while waiting for that one big part that would establish their careers. That had been Deborah's plan, too, although she felt she still had much to learn to reach the perfection she desired. Hopefully, the polishing of her craft would continue with maturity, experience in various small roles, and her own vocal practice at home.

Then one day her father approached her with a letter he had received from Clarisse Pella. He had been secretly writing to the great diva for over a year, detailing Deborah's progress and asking if Signora Pella would consider taking her on as a student. He had kept his plan a secret from Deborah so as not to raise false hopes, especially since Signora Pella never answered his letters. When she finally did answer, it was in response to Father's account of how splendidly Deborah had performed in *Aida*.

"I will give your daughter one month," had been her succinct reply. *"If she is as promising as you claim, I will continue to teach her."*

Father's news brought an abrupt, though joyful, change to Deborah's plans. She would be taught by the very woman who had so inspired her a decade before!

Once the lessons were finalized, Father wrote to a friend of his late mother's, Helene Knight, to ask if Deborah might board with her. The eighty-year-old spinster—blind, but still in good health—replied that she would be delighted to have a young guest in her house and wouldn't dream of charging board.

~

"Did you pack your green wrap?" Laurel sat at the table next to Mother. Her intense tone of voice drew Deborah back into the present.

Ignoring a nudge from Theresa's foot, Deborah smiled at her youngest sister. "It's the first thing I'll see when I open my trunk."

After supper, the family sat around the game table in the library and played *vingt-et-un*. Except for Laurel, who had a strong competitive nature, everyone cared more about enjoying each other's company than actually winning. The laughter and good-natured banter that marked these family times struck a bittersweet chord in Deborah's heart.

"Are you getting tired, dear?" Mother asked when Deborah had grown quiet for several minutes.

Deborah smiled and shook her head. "I'm packing away some memories for later."

Her mother reached for her hand. "I pray you won't be too homesick."

"I suspect Signora Pella won't allow me the time," Deborah reassured her, although she knew better. She and her sisters had enjoyed opportunities to travel extensively, but always accompanied by their parents. Her father, Adam, had been in his late thirties when Deborah was born. He was a strong believer in family, even sending his daughters to day schools here in London when the trend among the wealthy was boarding schools. *We didn't have children so that we could send them away*, was his philosophy. *They'll be gone soon enough*.

For the first time Deborah allowed herself to consider how difficult this must be on her parents. If Signora Pella accepted her, for at least the next two years she would only be coming home for short visits at Christmas and Easter. She looked around the table at the faces that were so dear to her. Was her ambition worth the price she would pay?

Then she recalled the silence in the Opera Comique after

Signora Pella had finished the powerful scene in act 4 where Amneris pleads for the life of Radames. During the song, the audience had grown as still as death, as if each listener had become part of the ensuing drama. A hush had descended—to breathe, even, was to be reminded that they were merely spectators. But after several seconds, the clapping of one pair of hands broke the stillness, joined by another, then another, until the walls of the huge auditorium vibrated from the applause and shouts of “Bravo!”

It would be worth the pain of separation.

~

“Would you care to walk with me for a bit?” Father said to Deborah when the game was over and Mother and the other girls had gone upstairs to prepare for bed. She took his arm, and they went outside to the garden. The quarter moon on the southern horizon, combined with a crusting of stars overhead, gave a lustrous hue to the deep lavender of the anemones.

Father cleared his throat as they walked along the cobbled path. “I’ve never been to Cambridge in all of my travels,” he began, “but all university towns are basically alike.” He gave her a crooked smile. “Well, maybe Oxford is just a wee bit better.”

Deborah smiled back. She supposed that the Oxford-Cambridge rivalry would always be part of him, even though he had graduated over thirty years ago.

“Unfortunately, Signora Pella didn’t use good judgment in marrying a Cambridge man,” Father went on, then stopped himself and smiled again. “I’m just joking now, you know. You’ll like the excitement of a university town.”

“I’m looking forward to seeing it.”

“But I want to warn you of something.”

“Warn me?”

He stopped walking and turned to her, his tone growing serious. “You’re a beautiful young woman, Deborah. There will be hundreds of young men who will compete for your attention. Most will be gentlemen, but a good number will be cads.”

“But just in Cambridge, of course,” she couldn’t resist teasing. “Surely there aren’t any cads at *Oxford*.”

He chuckled and shook his head. “I’m serious,” he protested. “It’s the cads that give parents nightmares and ruin young girls’ lives.”

“Surely you don’t think I would be interested in anyone like that, do you? Besides, I’ll be too busy with my music to socialize.”

“You have to allow yourself a little free time. There is such a thing as balance, you know. But getting back to the cads . . . sometimes they’re hard to recognize, especially when you’re so young.”

Deborah nodded. “Like the wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

“Exactly,” he agreed. “I must remind you that you’ve not spent a lot of time with young men. Discernment is more important to you now than it has ever been.”

He’s worried that he won’t be around to protect me any longer, Deborah thought. “I’ll be careful,” she whispered around the lump in her throat.

Father absently patted her hand, but his scarred face still wore an anxious expression. “Being careful isn’t enough, Deborah. You’ll need to listen to the still, small voice of the Spirit. And you’ll only be able to hear it if you stay close to God.”

He stopped walking and turned his face up to the night sky. The great oblong constellation of Andromeda was easily

recognizable directly south of the five stars of the Cassiopeia constellation.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Father said.

“Yes,” she answered. “It makes me feel so small.”

“Me too, sometimes.” He turned to her and smiled. “The Scriptures say that the heavens declare the glory of God. Your incredible talent was given to you for the same reason. But the temptation will be there to allow your talent to declare its *own* glory, to put your music ahead of God. You must constantly be on guard to see that doesn’t happen.”

Deborah marveled at how well her parents knew their daughters. Sometimes, especially while studying a new role, she found herself allowing every waking thought to be taken up with music, with no room for anything else. Afterward, with a contrite heart, she always resolved that she would never again consign God or her family to second or third place. But then . . .

“I will remember that,” she promised her father, squeezing his arm. “And I know that you and Mother will be praying for me.”

“Will *continue* praying for you,” he corrected gently, his eyes shining. “You’ve been in our prayers every day for nineteen years.”

~

October 4, 1883

Gregory Woodruff slumped in his seat and stared gloomily out the window of the moving coach at the red-brown ironstone cottages of Walesby sloping down to the river Rase. He had never felt any appreciation for the charm of his picturesque village, but he would not give his mother and father the

satisfaction of pleasant conversation. He caught them watching him with worried eyes and smiled inwardly. If they wouldn't change their minds about sending him away to Cambridge, at least he could ruin their morning by sulking. It was a small victory, but as he was still tied to their purse strings, it was the only one he could afford.

He pretended not to hear his father clear his throat, looking up only when his name was finally spoken. Reluctantly he tore his eyes from the window. "Sir?"

His father and mother exchanged glances, and for the first time it struck Gregory how old and tired they looked. *Has Father's hair been that gray all along?* he mused. And had he been too busy to notice the lines along his mother's forehead? For a brief moment he felt a surge of remorse, wondering if their concern over his antics had aged them as much as time had. But no doubt their incessant worrying over the family name and the spending of money "responsibly" had played a hand as well.

"I've written to inform your aunt Helene that you'll be in Cambridge," his father said. "You will remember your promise to pay a call every Sunday, won't you?"

Gregory's heart sank. Yes, he had promised, but just so that his parents would stop reminding him about how his mother's blind old aunt would someday be leaving her considerable fortune to her great-nephews. Even as he had made the promise to his father, however, he had figured that an afternoon now and then was enough.

"*Every* Sunday?" he said in a voice just a shade too close to a whine. To Gregory, there was no greater torture than boredom. Bad enough that he would have to submit to the tedious, rambling lectures of the dons at the university—but

whatever did he have in common with an old woman? He couldn't even remember her since his last visit to Cambridge had been when he was a tot of only two or three.

He regretted his protest immediately, for his father again launched into the familiar discourse about the joy his visits would bring to Aunt Helene and how it would be good for him to be accountable to someone older and wiser, who cared about his well-being. Gregory focused his eyes on his father's face and pretended to listen, while allowing his mind to carry him back to the going-away party his friends had given him at The Cat and Fiddle two days before. After a few seconds, however, his ears picked up the word *money*, and he allowed himself to be drawn sharply back into the present.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

His father looked a trifle irritated, but he said after a short pause, "Mr. Ambrose Cornell is the solicitor who will be handling your expense money. His office is located on King's Parade."

Gregory nodded, his spirits lifting considerably.

"You will be allotted five pounds monthly," his father went on, shifting his hands on the cane he had propped between his knees.

Just then the wheels underneath them hit something in the road, causing the coach to lurch sharply. Gregory barely noticed, for the jolt to his insides was far greater. *Five quid?* Why, his allowance at Owens had been three times as much! "You must mean five pounds per *week*," he corrected his father.

"Per month. That's more than most wage earners have to provide for their families. Your meals and housing have already been taken care of, as well as your books. And I can't

see how you would possibly need any more clothes, after what you've spent on them this past year."

"But *five—?*"

His father's jaw tightened. "I'll not finance your gambling and carousing this time, Gregory. If you don't think you can manage, there is always the army. You'll thank me one day for—"

"Edmund," Mother interrupted finally, putting a gloved hand on Father's knee, "we won't be seeing Gregory until Christmas."

"All right." Father stared across at him for a second and then exhaled heavily. "Eight pounds monthly. When we get to the station, I'll write you a note to give to Mr. Cornell." He held up a hand as if heading off any arguments that Gregory might offer. "As long as I receive no disturbing reports from you. *And* as long as you visit your aunt Helene faithfully."

Suddenly Gregory realized that this cloud had a silver lining. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He straightened in his seat. *Aunt Helene has plenty of money. . . .*

"But don't you even think about begging from Aunt Helene," his father's voice went on, crushing Gregory's rush of optimism. "I've already written her that she's not to give you any financial assistance. Hopefully with less money to waste, you'll stay out of places where you don't belong and concentrate more on your studies."

Gregory sighed inwardly and slumped in his seat again. He wouldn't be drawing the fifteen pounds he had gotten while at Owens, but he knew it was useless to press for more. Besides, he had over seventy pounds warming the inside of his purse, money he had won last week. The way his luck at

cards was going lately, he could easily turn that into much more once he investigated the gaming opportunities at Cambridge.

His father was watching him with an air of expectancy, so Gregory forced himself to assume a grateful expression. “I won’t give you cause to regret it, sir.”

A Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

In case you're wondering what lies ahead on the pages stored in this author's mind, I see Deborah and Matthew marrying and having five children, and Deborah enjoying a long career in London's Royal Opera House.

I tell you this because my mother took issue with me for not spelling that out. "But you know that's what will happen," I argued. "I gave enough hints."

"I want to see it in writing," she insisted.

And so for Mom, and you if you share her opinion, I'll go the second mile and add that their youngest son George becomes even more famous than Deborah, touring Europe and the United States.

Thank you for reading *Song of a Soul*, the final story in my Victorian Serenade series. May God put a lovely song in your soul, dear reader, and may your footsteps keep time with the beating of his heart.

Warmly,

Lawana Blackwell