

Barbara Cartland

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Sailing To Love

the Barbara Cartland pink collection

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SAILING TO LOVE

He was sitting on the bed just behind her. His body barely touched hers, but it was enough to make her intensely aware that she was wearing only a thin nightdress. She wondered if he too was thinking of the fact that she had nothing on beneath it. And if so, did that thought tempt him? Did she sense a faint tremor go through his body? Could he sense the tremor in hers?

Perhaps he did, because he turned her gently so that she lay in his arms, her loosened hair flowing over her shoulders. He stroked it with light fingers before lowering his head so that his lips just touched hers.

She felt herself soften and grow warm under that kiss. It was gentle, tender, waiting for her response and suddenly she felt safe. Her hands seemed to find their own way, touching his face, his hair.

He drew back a moment to look down into her eyes, silently asking her a question.

She gave him her answer with a smile.

The Barbara Cartland Pink Collection

Barbara Cartland was the most prolific bestselling author in the history of the world. She was frequently in the Guinness Book of Records for writing more books in a year than any other living author. In fact her most amazing literary feat was when her publishers asked for more Barbara Cartland romances, she doubled her output from 10 books a year to over 20 books a year, when she was 77.

She went on writing continuously at this rate for 20 years and wrote her last book at the age of 97, thus completing 400 books between the ages of 77 and 97.

Her publishers finally could not keep up with this phenomenal output, so at her death she left 160 unpublished manuscripts, something again that no other author has ever achieved.

Now the exciting news is that these 160 original unpublished Barbara Cartland books are ready for publication and they will be published by Barbaracartland.com exclusively on the internet, as the web is the best possible way to reach so many Barbara Cartland readers around the world.

The 160 books will be published monthly and will be numbered in sequence.

The series is called the Pink Collection as a tribute to Barbara Cartland whose favourite colour was pink and it became very much her trademark over the years.

The Barbara Cartland Pink Collection is published only on the internet. Log on to www.barbaracartland.com to find out how you can purchase the books monthly as they are published, and take out a subscription that will ensure that all subsequent editions are delivered to you by mail order to your home.

If you do not have access to a computer you can write for information about the Pink Collection to the following address:

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Titles in this series

1. The Cross of Love
2. Love in the Highlands
3. Love Finds the Way
4. The Castle of Love
5. Love is Triumphant
6. Stars in the Sky
7. The Ship of Love
8. A Dangerous Disguise
9. Love Became Theirs
10. Love Drives in
11. Sailing to Love

SAILING TO LOVE

BARBARA CARTLAND

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THE LATE DAME BARBARA CARTLAND

Barbara Cartland who sadly died in May 2000 at the age of nearly 99 was the world's most famous romantic novelist who wrote 723 books in her lifetime with worldwide sales of over 1 billion copies and her books were translated into 36 different languages.

As well as romantic novels, she wrote historical biographies, 6 autobiographies, theatrical plays, books of advice on life, love, vitamins and cookery. She also found time to be a political speaker and television and radio personality.

She wrote her first book at the age of 21 and this was called *Jigsaw*. It became an immediate bestseller and sold 100,000 copies in hardback and was translated into 6 different languages. She wrote continuously throughout her life, writing bestsellers for an astonishing 76 years. Her books have always been immensely popular in the United States, where in 1976 her current books were at numbers 1 & 2 in the B. Dalton bestsellers list, a feat never achieved before or since by any author.

Barbara Cartland became a legend in her own lifetime and will be best remembered for her wonderful romantic novels, so loved by her millions of readers throughout the world.

Her books will always be treasured for their moral message, her pure and innocent heroines, her good looking and dashing heroes and above all her belief that the power of love is more important than anything else in everyone's life.

"Love always seems so far beyond the horizon, but it is really much closer than anyone imagines."

Barbara Cartland

CHAPTER ONE

- 1879

"The trouble with this house is that it was built for a family. Now there's only Miss Venetia."

The man's voice came from within the kitchen, and was answered at once by a female voice.

"It's her home. She wants it to be just as it was when her mother and father were alive. If you ask me, what she really needs is a husband."

Miss Venetia Baydon walked away quickly, fearful lest her servants should discover her outside the kitchen door and think she was eaves-dropping. She hurried to the drawing room, but found it as lonely as everywhere else.

It was late summer, the leaves were beginning to fall and a fine rain was drizzling down, lending a dull, bleak aspect to the grounds of Baydon Grange. Soon it would be winter, almost a year since her parents had died suddenly of pneumonia within days of each other.

The house was quiet and lonely, the more so because she was short of money and now had to make do with a bare minimum of servants. Johnson, the butler, his wife the cook and two housemaids were all she could afford. Most of her horses were sold and still she had less than she needed.

'How long before I have to sell the house itself?' she thought. 'I couldn't bear that, yet I may soon have no choice.'

Mrs. Johnson had mentioned a husband in a way that made it clear she thought of Venetia as an old maid.

'I suppose that's what I am,' she thought wryly.

Twenty-four, unmarried with almost no money, she had little chance of marrying well now. Her only asset was her beauty. Her hair was a rich blonde, set off by eyes of sapphire

blue and men had been known to sigh over her. But she knew that a sensible man cared more for a good dowry than a pretty face.

She was well-born. Her mother had been the daughter of a Viscount and her father the son of a Baronet, but a third son with no hope of the title.

As she grew up, she and her parents had travelled a great deal together and it had been a happy life, even though they never had enough money for people in their position.

They had worried about her marriage prospects, introducing her to eligible young men whenever they could. At nineteen she had received a proposal from an extremely handsome young man and had accepted it, believing herself to be love with him. But the man had cried off when he realised how very small her dowry was. He was in debt and needed a bride with a large fortune.

Venetia had wept briefly, and then forgotten him so quickly that she supposed she could not have been really in love at all.

Four years later she had accepted another proposal under her parents' urging.

"Darling I know he isn't handsome," her mother had argued, "but he's well-off and will give you a home. Besides, you're twenty-three and not getting any younger."

Reluctantly she had become engaged and stayed that way for three weeks. Then she had broken off the engagement, unable to endure her fiancé's long, dull speeches about himself.

"I'd die of boredom," she said to her outraged parents. "There has to be a more exciting way to live."

"Exciting?" her Mama echoed. "Marriage isn't supposed to be exciting. What will happen to you when we are no longer here?"

That had been last year and now they truly were no longer here. She faced a dispiriting future, yet even so, she did not regret breaking her engagement.

'I will wait for true love,' she told herself. 'And if it never happens, then I won't marry at all.'

She knew that she was unlucky in that her family had not exerted themselves to help her. But her Uncle Edward, the Baronet, had daughters of his own to marry off. He contented himself by inviting her to visit his London home occasionally.

She enjoyed these visits, as they broke the monotony of her normal routine, and enabled her to see something of her cousin Mary, who was only a year younger than herself.

It was the attraction of opposites. Venetia was cool, collected, intelligent. Mary was forgetful, scatterbrained, slightly irresponsible but utterly charming in a childlike way.

Sir Edward Wenmore Baronet, had managed to secure a minor position at court, and was intent on climbing the social scale as far as he could. He had inherited wealth from his father, married more with his wife, and purchased for himself a large, elegant property just outside the town of Windsor, near Windsor Castle, in Berkshire. He had explained this choice as being necessary for a man who must continually be ready to serve the Queen.

He had married two of his daughters well, and was putting all his efforts into securing an advantageous match for Mary.

Now the family was spending the summer in the country, at Wenmore Priory, and Venetia saw them now and then, but not often enough to stop her feeling lonely and isolated. She had often felt that she was not really welcome at The Priory. Mama had told her that it was because she was so much more beautiful than Mary, but then dearest Mama was biased.

Lost in these thoughts, Venetia failed to hear a carriage draw up outside and did not realise that she had a visitor until Johnson entered, saying,

"Miss Wenmore to see you, miss."

"Mary!" Venetia exclaimed. "How lovely to see you. I had no idea you were coming."

Mary ran forward and threw herself into Venetia's arms. Like her cousin she was fair, but whereas there was a richness in Venetia's looks, Mary's were pale, almost pallid. Her admirers called her fairy-like. Others called her insipid.

"Oh, Venetia," she cried, "I'm in such trouble and I don't know what to do about it."

Venetia stared at her with surprise.

Mary had never been a very emotional person. But now there was a note in her voice and an expression in her eyes which she had never seen before.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"I hardly know how to tell you," Mary said. "It's terrifying."

She was twisting her hands together as if they were somehow giving her the strength to speak.

"Papa has been to see the Queen at Windsor Castle."

Venetia nodded, remembering how Mary's father had always been very proud of being invited to Windsor Castle.

It was known to everyone that the Queen liked having men around her. She had a court of interesting and handsome men which, they all knew, helped to take her mind off the loss of her beloved husband, Albert. She had never recovered from his death.

"And did something happen there?" Venetia asked.

"Yes. I'm desperate, absolutely desperate. Perhaps the only thing I can do is to drown myself."

Venetia stiffened and stared at her.

"Nothing can be so bad as to make you want to die," Venetia told her.

"When Papa came back from Windsor Castle yesterday, he told me that the Queen wants me to marry her godson."

Mary's voice seemed to break on the last words and the tears were running down her cheeks.

"That must have been a surprise," Venetia replied. "But why are you so upset by it? Is he a terrible person?"

"I don't know. I've never met him. And it doesn't matter what he's like. I love – David."

"Who is he?" Venetia asked. "I cannot, at the moment, remember anyone called David."

"He is – the doctor's son at Coalville," Mary managed to gasp.

Coalville was a small town not far from her home.

Venetia now remembered a rather good-looking young man she had seen with Mary at one of the garden parties she had attended last year.

"He wants to marry me," Mary answered. "But he has only just passed his medical examinations. He has no money and not even a position at the moment. Papa wouldn't think him very important, while the man the Queen has chosen is the Earl of Mountwood."

Venetia drew in her breath, understanding at once.

As it happened she had heard of the Earl. A friend of her father, with a place at court, he had visited them once, full of news of the latest scandal.

"It's Mountwood," he had said. "Decent fellow, always pays up when he loses at cards – not that he loses often. The trouble is he's too handsome for his own good, and can have any woman he wants far too easily. That is why he's never married, doesn't want to be burdened with a wife and so on. The Queen chides him for his disgraceful ways, but he can reduce her to jelly with a smile."

"But surely he needs an heir?" Venetia's mother had said.

"Of course, but I've heard him say that one day he'll marry anyone at all, just to have an heir. I don't think he means to give up his other activities, if you see what I mean."

And now the choice had fallen on poor Mary, who was crying helplessly. Venetia felt desperately sorry for her, as she suspected her situation was hopeless.

"I am sorry, darling," she said, "but I can't see how you can escape this marriage if the Queen is set on it."

"I have to escape it," Mary replied in a whisper. "Not just because I love David, but also because I think – I'm almost certain – that I am having his baby."

Venetia gasped. For a moment she could not believe what she had just heard. Her arms tightened round Mary. Then she said,

"How could you do that?"

"I love him," Mary sobbed. "I love him and he loves me."

Venetia drew in her breath.

She now knew that Mary truly loved David, but how he could have given her a child was beyond Venetia's comprehension.

Where could they have been that such a thing could happen?

Almost as if she had asked the question aloud, Mary said in a broken whisper,

"We meet in a little house in the woods when it is cold and then he wants to kiss me. He makes it very comfortable with cushions and rugs and we are always so, so happy there."

'So happy,' Venetia thought, 'that Mary had surrendered to him. Now she was having his child.'

It all passed through her mind so that she felt almost breathless with the horror of it.

'How could she do such a terrible thing?' she asked herself.

Then almost as if she was being given the answer to her question she thought,

'Love is what every woman hopes to find. Love from a man whom she loves is something almost divine. After all, it was that knowledge that made me choose a single life rather than the wrong marriage.'

"Papa has everything arranged so that I have no chance to say no," Mary sobbed. "The Earl is coming to the house tomorrow night and the wedding will be the next day."

"The next day?" Venetia gasped.

"Yes, I'm trapped. Look – " Mary put her hand in her pocket and produced an envelope.

Opening it, Venetia saw that it was an invitation to the marriage of the Earl of Mountwood and Miss Mary Wenmore, two days ahead. It was true that Sir Edward was rushing his daughter into this before she had time to think.

It was monstrous.

"What am I to say? What can I do?" Venetia asked herself as Mary went on crying.

Then quite suddenly she knew the answer.

It was almost, she thought later, as if it came from Heaven itself.

In some strange way she could not put into words, she felt it was an answer which flew from the sky and touched her heart.

Her arms tightened around her cousin. Then she said,

"Now stop crying, we will find a solution to this problem. But we have to be very, very clever. One mistake and we'll all be beheaded or whatever punishment the Queen thinks appropriate for us.

"Now listen to me, Mary. We're going to save you from marrying a man you haven't even met and make it possible

for you to marry the man you love, whose child you may already have in your body."

She thought as she said the last words that this was something she had never expected to happen to anyone she knew.

She would never have considered it possible for herself.

But as it had happened, and she was very fond of Mary however difficult it might be, she had to save her.

'And if she's carrying David's child,' she thought, 'how could she pretend to her unwanted husband it was his child?'

She took her handkerchief and wiped Mary's eyes.

"You need not marry this man," she said, "because I'm going to take your place."

Mary stared at her.

"You would make such a sacrifice for me? But how can you?"

"Because I have no one that I love or who loves me. And so I will marry this man chosen for you by the Queen. I only hope that in some way we will become friends and perhaps enjoy each other's company."

Mary gave a cry.

"But how can you be sure Papa won't guess that I'm not the bride?"

"That is where we have to be very clever," Venetia said. "You must pretend to agree to this marriage. Be charming to the Earl when he comes to your house."

"How can I do that when I hate him?"

"He is of no importance to you," Venetia said. "I am marrying him but if he's ghastly as he may be, I will at least not have a broken heart, as yours would break if you have to leave David."

"So you have to listen now to exactly what you have to do. It is the same as going on the stage. One mistake and the

audience will laugh at you. Or, in this case, they will be very angry with you."

"I will do exactly what you tell me to do," Mary promised. "*Oh!*"

"What is it?" Venetia asked, seeing her stricken look.

"There's something I forgot to tell you."

"I'm sure there is. As long as I've known you, you've been forgetful and scatterbrained. All right, tell me the worst."

"As soon as the wedding has taken place the Earl has to go to India."

Venetia stared at her.

"India?"

"Yes, for about a year."

Venetia drew a long breath and spoke with ominous calm.

"Where in India?"

"A place called – um – the North-West frontier. I think. Or it might have been Calcutta. Or do I mean Delhi?" "*And you just forgot to tell me?*"

"Well, I don't know anything about India," Mary said fretfully. "It's just – abroad, isn't it?"

"It's part of the British Empire. So I suppose it's still abroad. What is the Earl going to do when he gets there?"

Mary's eyes glazed and Venetia guessed that this was another detail that had escaped her attention.

"He's – he's going to be – attached to something," she said wildly.

"You didn't happen to find out what he's attached to?" Venetia asked patiently.

"It's to do with the Government – or he's carrying important documents – or something like that."

It was clearly useless to expect any more from her and Venetia gave up. Besides, a thrilling anticipation was growing inside her.

India.

The exotic East. Another world, thousands of miles away from her quiet little corner of England.

And she had thought she would never know excitement.

Now, all the excitement anyone could possibly want, was being handed to her. To refuse was impossible. This was fate.

Suddenly Venetia laughed.

"Very well," she said. "India it is. When is he going?"

"Immediately after the reception," Mary explained breathlessly.

"What?"

"He's leaving on the *Angelina*, a specially chartered ship that sails from Portsmouth that evening. We have to leave immediately after the reception."

Venetia gasped. Everything was rushing along much too fast for her. But she had said that she would do it and she could not back out now.

"Very well," she said. "I'll make a note of it."

"Oh, you are so wonderful," Mary said ecstatically. "The way you plan and organise things. I could never do it."

"That is undoubtedly true," Venetia said, rather amused. "How fortunate that you don't have to organise anything – otherwise the Earl might end up married to you, me, and probably your mother as well."

Mary giggled and Venetia was pleased to see her looking happier.

"But you simply must follow my instructions closely or we will be discovered." she added.

"I will do exactly as you say. But please come with me now so that you can stop me making mistakes."

"Come home with you?" Venetia questioned.

"Yes, after all you're invited to the wedding, and I'll say I wanted you to help me with my trousseau."

"Yes, it probably is better if I stay close by you," Venetia reflected. "Wait, I've had an idea. "If I have to go away to India with the Earl, this house will be empty. You must escape with your David while I am at the church marrying in your place and you two must be married at once. Then you must move into this house and live here."

Mary hugged her.

"You think of everything."

"I hope so. Now let's hurry upstairs so that I can pack."

Upstairs she packed all her very best clothes.

"Of course you must look smart when you arrive in India," Mary said.

"If I ever do arrive," Venetia answered with a smile.

"Of course the deceived bridegroom might drop me off en route or send me back by the first ship we meet which is returning home. Or I suppose he might just toss me over the side." She added cheerfully, "It'll be fun finding out."

"Oh Venetia, you're so brave."

"Well, you may have to be brave too because if he murders me I'll come back and haunt you."

It was when finally everything was packed in the carriage that Venetia took Johnson to one side and said,

"I am going to The Priory with Miss Mary and leaving everything in your hands. I might be away for quite a while. I've left some money in the desk to cover expenses."

On their way to The Priory they passed through a small village, where Mary stopped briefly at a shop.

"They take my messages to David," she told Venetia when she emerged. "I've asked him to meet me tonight in our place in the woods."

At last the carriage arrived at The Priory.

As the butler and two footmen hurried out to take their luggage upstairs, Venetia followed Mary into the drawing room.

Lady Wenmore was sitting at the writing desk. She got up when she saw Venetia had followed her daughter into the room and smiled as she heard Mary's explanation.

"How lovely to see you, Venetia," she said. "It's so kind of you to come and help."

Venetia smiled and responded politely, playing the role she had assigned herself. But she was thinking how much she disliked this chilly, haughty woman.

"I thought, with everything happening so quickly, you might need my help," she said sweetly.

Lady Wenmore smiled.

"My husband is delighted that Her Majesty should have chosen such a charming and delightful husband for Mary."

Venetia longed to ask how it was possible to know he was charming and delightful when no-one had actually met the man in question. But she knew it was the sort of thing she should not say.

Upstairs in her room, they unpacked her clothes, and Mary said,

"Now I must slip out and see David, to tell him everything. I'll be back soon."

When she was alone Venetia did some thinking. Gradually more details of her plan were emerging in her mind. At last she went downstairs and sought out Lady Wenmore in the drawing room.

"I must speak to you," she said. "It's important. You know that Mary is unhappy about this marriage?"

"I know that the silly girl is making difficulties," Mary's mother said impatiently. "I'm happy to see that you have brought her to her senses."

"I hope so," Venetia said quietly. "But we are living more or less on a volcano. I feel that at any moment Mary will break down and have hysterics. I mean to prevent that if possible."

"I shall be very grateful. But how?"

"I feel it would be a mistake for Sir Edward to take Mary to the church. If he does so I think Mary will cling to him at the last moment and perhaps refuse to go ahead with the marriage."

Lady Wenmore gave a cry but did not interrupt and Venetia went on,

"I think it best for you and Mary's father to go to the church ahead and not to say goodbye to her. Just move away and she will know that you will be there when she arrives."

"But this is so unconventional," Lady Wenmore murmured.

"So is this whole wedding," Venetia could not resist saying. "We must take emergency measures to make sure that everything goes smoothly and the Earl is not insulted."

Lady Wenmore moaned at the thought.

"I will get her dressed," Venetia said. "She and the bridegroom must go to the church together. It's unusual, but we can't help that. If he is wise he will travel in silence."

"I will tell him that she is very nervous and very shy," Lady Wenmore said.

"Which is true," Venetia said. "I think also that it will be wise for you not to follow her and the Earl to the vestry where they will sign the register. Instead arrange for them to go there alone, and then leave immediately by the door at the back, where the carriage which will carry them back to the house will be waiting."

"You mean she won't walk back down the aisle on her husband's arm?" Lady Wenmore protested.

"I think you need to get her out of the church quickly, before she has too much time to reflect," Venetia said firmly.

"You are right, of course. I will tell my husband that he and I will go to the church in advance. We will make sure everything is arranged exactly as you want."

"Excellent. After all, we both want Mary to be happy for the rest of her life," Venetia said.

Then she hurried back upstairs to find that Mary had returned.

"Everything is arranged," she told her. "Your parents will go on to the church without you. The bride and groom will follow together. While we're all at the church you will make your escape with David."

"Thank you, thank you, darling Venetia," she cried.

"You are so kind and so understanding and I can only pray that you will not be punished for all this."

"I will be hoping the same," Venetia answered with a smile. "But don't worry about me. Just make sure that you and David vanish before they come back from the church."

"But what about the reception?"

"Neither the bride nor the groom will be there. I've made a new plan. The Queen is going to send the Earl a letter insisting that he depart immediately, without attending the reception."

"Is she?" Mary asked, wide-eyed.

"No, of course she isn't. I'm going to write it on Windsor writing paper. You told me your father had some in his office. Get it for me quickly."

Mary was back in a moment with several sheets of paper.

"There will be one letter to the Earl and one to your father," she said, "explaining why the bride and groom won't be at the reception. And a third letter to the Captain of the

Angelina, saying that he must be ready to depart as soon as the Earl boards, which will be sooner than expected."

Venetia was already writing.

"There. Now it's done. Is there a servant you can trust to take this letter to Portsmouth tonight?"

"One of the footmen will do anything for me," Mary confided. "Give it to me, and I'll find him."

When she had gone Venetia sat down, wondering what on earth she was doing. Was she mad?

Well, it was too late to wonder about that now.

"It's done," Mary said, returning. "I gave him money for the train fare and he's on his way to Portsmouth. It's not a long journey so he should be back tonight."

"Then all that is left is for you and the Earl to meet this evening. Be very careful what you say to him. In fact, say as little as possible. Try to sound shy but not in any way aggressive."

"I will be careful, I promise you I will."

"Then let us decide what we are going to wear this evening."

They decided on a soft pink gown that made Mary look demure. Venetia's gown was a deep blue satin that brought out the colour of her eyes. It was a year old, for she could not afford to replace it, but it made her seem elegant and fashionable.

At last they heard a carriage draw up on the gravel outside.

"Are you ready?" Venetia asked.

"I think so," Mary said in a trembling voice.

"Remember you have to act your part as if you are on the stage. Be quiet simple and charming. No one must suspect for a moment that we are arranging a revolution which will astound and eventually horrify everyone."

But although she sounded in command, the truth was that she felt very nervous as they descended the stairs.

Sir Edward was waiting with the Earl of Mountwood. There was another young man standing just in the background, but Venetia barely noticed him.

"Ah, my dear," Sir Edward said genially. "How pretty you look. Lord Mountwood, allow me to present my daughter and her friend, Miss Venetia Baydon.

The two girls sank into polite curtsies. Over her head Venetia was aware that the Earl was extending his hand to Mary, murmuring something.

Then it was her turn. She rose to her feet and found herself gazing into the eyes of the most handsome man she had ever seen.