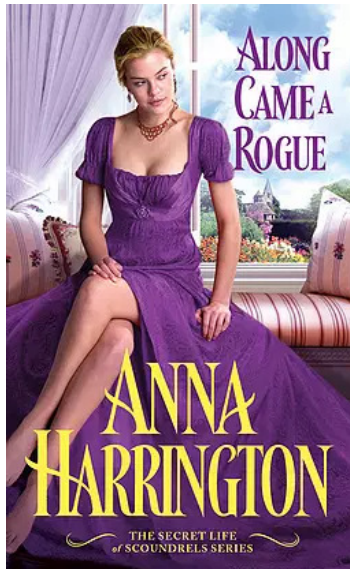




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Bonus Scene:

ALONG CAME A ROGUE



We learn in ALONG CAME A ROGUE that Grey was wounded during the Peninsular Wars, which resulted in his being sent back to England and into the War Office as a spymaster. Because of the novel's timeline, however, we never get to see that scene. I thought it was important to establish why Grey is so indebted to Thomas and why he feels responsible both for Thomas's life and his death. (FYI – it also explains why he detests brandy so much.)

Behind British Army Lines San Cristobel, Spain November, 1813

Captain Nathaniel Grey pressed the blood-soaked rag harder against the bullet wound on his thigh, just inches above his knee, and tried to ignore the strong stench of blood, urine, and sweat inside the abandoned barn being used as a field hospital, so strong that bile rose in his throat. But he couldn't ignore the screams, those blood-curdling cries of agony sounding all around him. Despite his best efforts not to show emotion, he shook with fear and pain.

"Hold steady," Colonel Edward Westover ordered as he leaned over the cot and reached toward the blood-splattered thigh, to pull tight the leather strap around his leg to help staunch the flow of blood. The colonel was dedicated to the men under his command—the Dashing Devils of the First Dragoons were infamous among the ranks of the British cavalry, having earned their nickname well in fighting against the French. But a special bond existed between the colonel and his two captains, Nathaniel Grey and Thomas Matteson, both of whom served bravely at his side for the past three years and who were as close as brothers.

At the pull of the strap, Grey sucked in a mouthful of air between clenched teeth and let loose a curse so venomous that a young infantryman lying ten feet away turned white and reached protectively toward his wounded shoulder.

"If you can still curse like that," Edward said with grimace, "you're going to live."

But it wasn't living that worried Grey now. It was whether the surgeons would take off his leg. "Looks like we'll be going home together, then, Colonel."

Edward's face darkened with guilt. A ball had caught Grey in the thigh, tearing a hole cleanly through the muscle six inches above his knee, and although he knew the colonel felt responsible for all his men, Grey placed the blame squarely on the French bastard who shot him.

"This isn't your fault, Colonel," Grey assured him. "You saved my life by getting me back here." His eyes grew solemn. "Thank you."

Silently, Edward clasped his shoulder.

Captain Thomas Matteson weaved his way through rows of wounded men toward them, somehow managing to find amid the squalor and chaos the clean cloth he carried in one hand and the bottle of liquor in the other. He popped loose the cork capping the unmarked bottle, sniffed it and took a swallow, then coughed.

"Rot gut." As the young captain handed the bottle to him, Grey knew his friend was trying to keep from his face the fear gripping him over the wound and the guilt he felt at surviving the battle unscathed. "But it'll help."

Grey took a swallow and gagged. "Christ! It tastes like lamp oil."

Edward's gaze flicker to the wound, "Drink it," the colonel ordered quietly. "You'll need it."

As Grey drank the spoiled brandy, fighting to keep each gulp down in his belly and not cast up his accounts, Thomas pulled away the bloodied cloth and replaced it with the clean one, pressing it down hard despite the shudders of sharp pain shooting through Grey's body. His eyes rose slowly to meet Edward's in a silent exchange.

Edward nodded somberly. "I'll fetch the surgeon."

Silently, Edward clasped his shoulder.

As Westover walked away, Grey grabbed Thomas by his uniform coat, fisting the coarse wool in his hands and pulling the lad down close to him. "Not the leg, Thomas. Promise me—you won't let them take my leg."

"If they have to amputate to keep you alive—"

"Then I don't want to live." His breath came labored as he panted hard against the pain and now the sickening dizziness from the brandy. "I'd rather have a bullet through my head, and I swear to God I'll put one there myself if they cut off my leg. My life will be over. I'll have nothing. Do you understand?" He pulled Thomas closer, close enough to smell the brandy on his breath. "Promise me."

He shook his head. "And if I can't stop them?"

Grey pulled a pistol from beneath his coat and pressed it into his hand. "Then use this before I regain consciousness."

"I will not."

"I trust you with my life," he whispered, folding his friend's fingers around the gun. "And there's no one else I trust more with my death."

Thomas stared down at him silently, his eyes and face grim.

"Promise me."

He nodded solemnly. "I promise."

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