



# Bride of a Distant Isle

*Sandra Byrd*

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## **Bride of a Distant Isle** Sandra Byrd

Miss Annabel Ashton is a teacher at the Rogers School for Young Ladies in Winchester when she takes a brief visit to her family home, Highcliffe Hall at Milford-on-Sea. She believes her stay will be short but soon learns that she will not be returning to the safety of the school. Instead, she remains at Highcliffe, at the mercy of her cousin, Edward Everedge.

Annabel protests, but as the illegitimate daughter of a woman who died in an insane asylum, she has little say. Edward is running out of money and puts the house up for sale to avoid financial ruin. He insists that Annabel marry, promising her to a sinister, frightening man. But as the house gets packed for sale, it begins to reveal disquieting secrets. Jewelry, artifacts, and portraits mysteriously appear, suggesting that Annabel may be the true heir of Highcliffe.

She has only a few months to prove her legitimacy, perhaps with assistance from the handsome but troubled Maltese Captain Dell'Acqua. But does he have Annabel's best interests at heart?

And then, a final, most ominous barrier to both her inheritance and her existence appears: a situation neither she nor anyone else could have expected. Will Annabel regain her life and property—and trust her heart—before it's too late?

## **Bride of a Distant Isle Details**

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# From Reader Review *Bride of a Distant Isle* for online ebook

## Kav says

I'm basking in the warm glow of Gothic Romance Reader Bliss right now. I've mentioned before how much I adore this genre, right? Ever since junior high when I discovered Victoria Holt. And good Gothics are few and far between in the Christian market. So you can just imagine the sweet ecstasy I've been in since I first opened this book.

Each page is steeped in mystery. Deliciously thrilling plot twists, sinister foreshadowing, and a bevy of intriguing characters who run the gamut from bad to good. And it's up to Annabel to figure out where their loyalties lie.

I adore Annabel. She refuses to allow herself to be defined by her circumstances. As a woman, she has little say in her future but that doesn't stop her from digging in her heels and engaging in her own game of subterfuge. Her faith is the beacon of hope that sees her through the most trying of times. I loved her dedication, her desire to seek divine counsel and her strength to stand for what she believes to be true. Very inspiring.

And now it's time for me to wax poetic over the Maltese captain. A swoonworthy hero with his own agenda. Even though Annabel can't be certain whether he is friend or foe, she can't resist his charm...and either could I. Oh goodness, but you'll need a fan for this read. Or maybe just stick your feet in the freezer periodically. This captain exudes toe-curling masculinity at every turn of the page. Be. Still. My. Heart.

Sinister tension builds as the story progresses. Who is for Annabel? Who is against her? And who will emerge triumphant at the end? With all that page-turning intrigue, Byrd held me captive right up to the very last page. .

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## Lynn Spencer says

**4.5 stars** Another good, moody gothic from Sandra Byrd. The plot relies a bit heavily on coincidence, but I found this a mesmerizing read nevertheless.

Annabel Ashton has come to her family home for what she believes will be a visit. However, she soon learns that she is basically a prisoner of her cousin, who is determined to marry her off to an unsavory acquaintance in order to shore up his own precarious financial situation. I liked Annabel as a narrator, but I often felt frustrated for her situation. Much of the gothic creepiness in this book comes from the fact that laws and mores of the time (mid-Victorian era) allowed Annabel's cousin to remove her from her teaching job and essentially hold her prisoner in the family home. Annabel is the orphaned, illegitimate daughter of Edward's aunt and an unknown Maltese man, so she has few options and little power over her own life in many ways.

Yet not all is doom and gloom. Annabel has been tasked with entertaining (and basically spying on) a handsome Maltese captain. As she gets to know Captain Dell'Acqua, Annabel finds herself very comfortable in his presence and the two form a friendship and deeper connection. The result is a romantic and very entertaining story.

One last note: Readers often mention that "inspirational" seems include only conservative Protestant books. However, the lead characters in this book are Catholic and their faith does play an important role in their lives. If you're interested in inspies from different religious traditions, you may want to check this one out for that reason, too.

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## **Beth says**

After reading the first two novels in the Daughter of Hampshires series, I have moved Sandra Byrd onto my list of authors that I will always read. *Bride of a Distant Isle* is a delicious concoction of history, mystery and romance. I love how each of those pieces interact with one another throughout the story; one is never overshadowed by the other. There is also a good bit of suspense and tension that made this book nearly impossible to put down. Sandra excels in creating an intense atmosphere, deftly weaving a tone of hope throughout this Gothic tale.

I love the look at different cultures that this story and the first book provide. Annabel is the daughter of an Englishwoman and a Maltese father. Her heritage and that of Maltese Captain Dell'Acqua provide a compelling cultural background. As an illegitimate daughter, Annabel's future is not her own, but depends on her cousin Edward. The mystery of her legitimacy is a dangerous thing for her to attempt to uncover. Annabel is in a precarious position, and the reader truly doesn't know which characters to trust and which ones is a threat. Not only does her supposed illegitimacy put her at a disadvantage, but she must fight the stigma of being the daughter of a woman that perished in an insane asylum.

Annabel's helplessness is frustrating to modern readers, yet feels true to England in the 1850's, a time when a woman's pedigree and family background were of utmost importance. The first-person narration is always consistent to her character and makes this a very personal tale. Annabel's heritage and parentage make her diminutive in her family's eyes, yet she continues to hope that they have her best interest at heart. Complicating her situation even more is the appearance of mysterious Maltese items, beginning with a necklace that hints at her legitimacy. As the story continues, she realizes this isn't the case – she must find fortitude within herself, and her strong faith is tested to its limit. Her inner strength is admirable and entirely believable.

Whether it was mist-shrouded estate home of Highcliffe, a Victorian asylum, or the Great Exhibition in London, the different settings always feel authentic. Sandra's meticulous research shows through the time period specific descriptions of the setting; the unique details of Maltese traditions and the sad nature of life for the institutionalized are just two of the fascinating pieces of this story.

The ending is one of the best that I've read this year. Though the hero of the story is mysterious and dashing, the romance endearing and their chemistry evident, Annabel is her own rescuer, in a way that is both fantastic and realistic. It is wholly her story, one that is complemented by a tender romance, but not overpowered by it.

I am eager to meet the next "Daughter of Hampshire" in book three and am a happy reader for having found such a gem of an author in Sandra Byrd. Richly complex, atmospheric and compulsively readable, *Bride of a Distant Isle* is one of my favorite reads of 2016 and one I highly recommend to readers of historical fiction.

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## **Serena Chase says**

Why you should read it: Fans of Victoria Holt and Charlotte Brontë will be enthralled by Byrd's atmospheric storytelling, while those new to the Gothic style will find themselves transported to Hampshire, navigating a murky landscape of greed, desperation, madness and romance alongside Annabel.

And speaking of romance ... what reader is immune to a dashing seafarer? Captain Dell'Acqua is quite the fascinating, romantic sailor, and his descriptions of Malta, his homeland, are touched with sigh-worthy tenderness. Made even more charming by questionable motives that will keep readers guessing, it's no wonder he snags Annabel's attention (he most definitely snagged mine!).

Lush with Gothic detail and subtle touches of the supernatural, *Bride of a Distant Isle*, book two in The Daughters of Hampshire series, is a beautifully eerie Victorian romance that should not be missed. (from my recommendation at USA Today's Happy Ever After blog)

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## **Jennifer says**

3.25 stars. (Sorry to downgrade my rating from 3.5 stars to 3.25 stars. I just didn't enjoy this one as much as the first book.)

It's strange how I'm still surprised by how much I enjoyed this author's writing. Given that she seems to exclusively tell her stories from the first person perspective, it never ceases to amaze me that I can't put her books down. The Gothic spookiness, the possibility of becoming insane or merely being declared insane, and the overall mystery of this book was enjoyable and compelling. I liked the clean the content, the faith at the center of this story, and the resourcefulness that the author finally lent the heroine.

However, there were quite a few aspects of this book that were missing for me. I didn't like that we don't know much about the hero. He's not very developed and since we never have a chapter in his pov, I didn't feel like I knew him very well. Was he a merely flirt or a rake? What about the other woman he's seen with around the village? Hm.

Also, the overwhelming circumstances and helplessness that the heroine finds herself in was a little OTT after a while. It just seemed so hopeless. Oh, the despair. The despair almost did me in after a while. And I understand why the author built up that feeling until the heroine's major revelation that she could only depend on herself to escape her crazy circumstances, but the events following her epiphany tempered my admiration for her abilities. Of course, I would argue that historical accuracy matters, which means the heroine can't be a feminist or too much of a bluestocking, but I do wish that the author didn't make her languish for quite so long.

Overall, I still really enjoyed the reading experience this book provided. I liked the epilogue and look forward to reading more from this author.

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## **Alice says**

Written in a style of equal gritty Bronte and elegant Austen, this novel played out like an Elizabeth Gaskell

BBC drama in my head! Rich. Engaging. Vividly misty and cold. Emotional farewells between reader and characters. Story and setting were brilliant! Intricate and intriguing with plenty of eerie mystery and singular situations. The element of insanity is not one commonly written in historical fiction (that I have known), and I was impressed with the layers it lent to this book. Well written and hand-in-hand with the singular and slightly odd style that "gothic" is.

While the essence and style of the novel is consistent with the rest of her works, there was a theme of Catholicism throughout, which didn't lend itself necessary to the story and felt out of place for Byrds writing. That being said,

Bride of a Distant Isle was like a brilliant collision between Jane Eyre, North & South (Elizabeth Gaskell), and the upstairs/downstairs element. Another Byrd masterpiece for all fiction lovers!

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## **Rachel says**

This was a highly intriguing and entertaining historical novel with many Gothic overtones; however, unlike most Gothic romances typical in the 19th century, this novel had a great deal more mystery because several of its characters are full rather than flat, so it made it harder to tell who some of the villains were in the story, which in turn made the story more interesting and suspenseful. In any case, it was a well written novel that I thoroughly enjoyed, and it has earned a place on my favorites' list.

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## **Jamie says**

One of the things I'm really loving about Sandra Byrd's current series, Daughters of Hampshire series (you know, besides fabulous writing and intriguing stories with mystery), is how she brings different cultures as key parts of the stories (the first, Mist of Midnight, had hints of India. Also it was one of my favorite reads last year, so go read it!). It's not something I have really seen in books written about 1850s England, but I absolutely love love love it.

Like I mentioned, I loved how Byrd brought about another culture and how it was for those in England. This book focused on Malta and since I knew next to zero about it, I loved learning more and how she weaved it perfectly in the story. Not only that, but the look at Catholicism during this time in England was fascinating too.

I also have to say the thread of mystery was done so well too. And our Annabel and Captain Dell'Acqua? Loved them!

"All will be well in the end; if it's not well, then it's not the end."

This book also gets you, how shall I say, "involved." I wanted to be in the book, so I could have punched some people in the face (not really internet, I'd go for the kneecaps. I kid people. Kid!). Oh man, did some folks in this book make me angry...And I absolutely loved it!

So yes, if you couldn't tell, this series continues to get better and better and I'm already looking forward to more.

Fans of Sandra will absolutely love this one and historical fans, if you haven't read any of Sandra's book, get

on it! (She also has a fabulous contemporary novel series you should read as well!)

What's a recent favorite Victorian novel you've read?

(Thank you to NetGalley for a copy of the book in exchange for my honest review)

See more at: <http://booksandbeverages.org/2016/03/...>

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## **Karen R says**

An intriguing tale of mystery, danger, and romance set in Victorian England.

Recalled to her ancestral home Highcliffe Hall, Annabel Ashton leaves her teaching position thinking she will return soon, but her cousin Edward and his wife have other plans for her, which seem to be more sinister than she'd ever imagined. While forced to remain there, she hopes to find the truth of what really happened to her mother before it's too late. The second book in the Daughters of Hampshire series definitely has a Gothic feel to it, with references to Edgar Allan Poe, the bleak setting of a manor house perched on a cliff looking out towards the sea, named the Edge of the World by Annabel, a genuine heroine in need of a serious rescue on many levels.

Told from Annabel's point of view, the descriptions of the dark manor house, surrounding countryside, and windswept seashore, coupled with the threats to her life, made me feel like I'd stepped into a scene from Jane Eyre or a Victoria Holt novel. It felt so somber at times, especially as it seemed more and more that she had no one to defend her, with few friends to count on, and the web of deception laid by her cousins is cinched tighter. Then, the hope of faith shines through, as Annabel prays that God would help her, reminded that He will never leave nor forsake us. The touch of the supernatural or divine intervention added a mystical sense to her story, plus some interesting twists.

The mention of a visit to the Great Exhibition was interesting, learning more about the Maltese culture that had such an impact on her mother's story, as well as her own identity. The Maltese Captain Dell'Acqua was an elusive hero figure, one that left me guessing a lot at his true motives. The treatment of the mentally ill, or those suspected as not being mentally stable, was a sad historical feature. Also the religious prejudices against Catholics that lingered even into the 1800's seemed a strong influence on how Annabel was treated, making her fate seem even more unfair. I found the author notes included at the end about the history of the area at the time to be quite interesting.

Readers who enjoy a good Gothic tale full of mystery, sinister characters, with a genuine heroine, a little romance, and a divine touch, will like this story. Recommend! 4.5 stars

(Book provided by NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for my honest review.)

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## **Bookish Ally says**

I love Sandra Byrd! I have, to date, never read anything she has written half heartedly. Instead, I am so thoroughly transported by her historical fiction, that I find her books to be the kind which I hurriedly finish

tasks to get back to the tale she spins.

In this story we are not only told a story in which we grow to love the heroine of this story, but we learn about some of the culture and customs of Malta and their people. We are also forced to look at the fates of countless Victorian women accused of madness for any number of reasons, often having nothing to do with mental health, but more likely for being inconvenient. As these asylums were barbaric at best, and this novel doesn't go into great detail, I will leave it to your imagination the innumerable ends that these women, who were buried alive in such places, faced.

There are also many other period appropriate references to customs, practices and mores. 4.5 stars for another splendid book by Ms. Byrd

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### **Rebecca says**

"Will you walk into my parlour?", said the Spider to the Fly, . . . . . "Oh no, no" said the little Fly, "to ask me is in vain, For whoever goes up your winding stair can ne'er come down again." - Mary Howitt

Miss Annabel Ashton is trapped within innuendos, whispers, memories, accusations; all stemming from her questionable past. As the supposed illegitimate daughter of a woman who died in an asylum, she has no inheritance and is at the mercy of those who do. When her cousin begins using Annabel's exotic beauty to attract the attention of potential business partners, she meets a handsome Maltese ship captain, Marc Antonio Dell'Acqua, whose smooth manners and engaging conversations are a welcome reprieve.

Sadly, resisting dark forces soon occupies Annabel's every thought, for she is being forced towards marriage to a hideous man whom she does not love and questioning her own sanity in the process; meanwhile, the only man who might save her is destined to sail. Enjoy this intriguing glimpse into the lives of those whose ancestry meant everything, whose faith had to rise to the occasion, and for whom, "all will be well in the end; if it's not well, then it's not the end".

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### **Staci says**

What a good novel! I thoroughly enjoyed this second book of the Daughters of Hampshire series. I liked it even more than the first, Mist of Midnight.

I enjoyed the history regarding the Catholic religion and asylums in England. The heroine, Anabell, was likable and it was a delight to watch her story and history unfold.

I recommend this novel for readers that enjoy mystery with their historical romance.

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### **Maureen Timerman says**

Once I became totally involved in this book, there seems to be non-stop moments of terror or intrigue, what



is going on? Annabel Ashton has grown up an orphan, but with family, that is, her mother's sister and her family. A constant companion at their estate was her cousin Edward, and now seems to be at his mercy. Annabel is Catholic and at this time period the papists have to more or less hid underground, England is Anglican. Her cousin is interested in money and his right to own the family home Highcliffe, and their may be proof that this all belongs to Annabel.

We watch, as Edward and his wife seem to go to all lengths to claim the heritage, including committing Annabel to a mental hospital. They try to marry her off to a very distasteful man; they also use her to get information.

If you enjoy a story that is full of action, seems there is never a dull moment, and a bit of romance thrown in, but even then we don't know for sure, if it true or some other form of the evil that seems to follow Annabel. I wondered if I would like this book from the first, but I loved it, it is full of history, and really keeps your attention.

I received this book through Howard Books Blogger Program, and was not required to give a positive review.

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## Margaret Chind says

Originally posted on Creative Madness Mama.

Last year, I found myself captivated by the writing in 's first book in the new Daughter of Hampshire series. I knew from reading that one as well as others in the past of Sandra's historicals that I needed to plan some time. When I read Sandra's books I'm not satisfied with a few minutes and done. I want to sit and pour in the details and get enveloped within the story. I have found that to be completely true once again with this latest book, *Bride of a Distant Isle*.

**Intrigue, friendship, romance, hardship, pride, adventure, feminist independence, and gentlemanly flirtations all reside within these pages.**

In addition to these first two books, a third in the series, *A Lady in Disguise* is tentatively scheduled to publish in 2017 and I can already tell you that I eagerly await that next release as well!

It just so happens that I have had this book in my stack of to be reads for a little longer than usual. As you may have noticed, book reviews have slowed down a little bit as homeschooling has picked up. (Plus there is that Rascal as a toddler reigning a bit of havoc as well...) While still a book in the Daughters of Hampshire series, *Bride of a Distant Isle* stands completely on its own. This is once again a page-turning gothic Victorian romance with a good bit of mystery. While we had a flare of India in *Mist of Midnight*, in *Bride of a Distant Isle* our flavor is decidedly Maltese. While I do not know much about Malta yet, it was interesting to learn snippets of this near Greek and Italy isle. (AppleBlossom will be studying Greece and Rome history next year, so I'm sure to be reaching for more books featuring such locales.) I was captivated from the first

page is an earnest statement.

I started reading *Bride of a Distant Isle* one evening and enjoyed myself that I hated to put it down. Later that night, we had storms and scared children and an insomnia mama and I read and read until finally around 5:30 in the morning I put the book down and blissfully got a few hours of sleep. Sandra Byrd's writing continues to impress me with each new book of hers that I read. While I haven't read her contemporary or youth titles, her historicals are fascinating and entertaining. Filled with vivid details that bring the characters alive and right off of the pages and into my imagination. I always know that with Sandra's books I will not be disappointed and I could definitely recommend this one highly. I'm disappointed that it had to end and now while I will await the next book in the Daughters of Hampshire series, I will attempt to find something to hold me over until then.

What is your favorite Victorian Romance novel?

More Sandra Byrd on Creative Madness Mama...

This review was originally posted on Creative Madness Mama.

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## Colleen Turner says

Find my full review at <http://aliteraryvacation.blogspot.com>.

I have long been a fan of Sandra Byrd's writing and have read and enjoyed all three books in her Ladies in Waiting series (To Die For: A Novel of Anne Boleyn, The Secret Keeper: A Novel of Kateryn Parr, and Roses Have Thorns) as well as the first book in this Daughters of Hampshire series (Mist of Midnight). I always know that when I see a new historical fiction book by Sandra is coming out I'm going to want to read it and I'm going to enjoy it. I'm happy to say that *Bride of a Distant Isle* kept her on this streak and once again provided hours of entertainment.

From the get-go I knew I was going to like Annabel. Right from the start she is thrown into one horrible situation after another - from being ripped from the school she loved teaching at to being thrown at a man she couldn't stand to having her very freedom ripped out from under her - and at every obstacle she refused to give up and barreled through to try and find the best outcome of each dire situation...and she did it all with more grace than I believe I could ever have had. I found her to be such a well drawn character, along with Captain Dell'Acqua and a most of the other secondary characters. I have to admit I wasn't as big a fan of the development of Mr. and Mrs. Everedge or Mr. Morgan (the man her cousin tried to force her to marry and who I didn't think necessarily warranted the vile disgust she seemed to feel for him, but that could just be me) but all of the other characters seemed very realistic.

I also really enjoyed the development of the surroundings our characters found themselves in. Sandra Byrd did an exceptional job of immersing me in the dark, slightly decaying Highcliffe Hall as well as the asylum we get to peek into. This whole world was so easy to see and experience along with the characters and I'm always delighted when an author is able to make me feel like I'm actually seeing the situations play out in front of me. It makes the reading experience so much more enjoyable!

I do have to say that I didn't have a very hard time figuring out the mysteries surrounding Annabel and who was involved in them. I don't want to say too much and spoil any surprises for other readers, but for me I had most of it figured out pretty soon, even if I didn't know the exact why's and how's. There weren't any big surprises or gasp-y moments, but that isn't to say that it wasn't enjoyable going along for the ride and seeing Annabel figure out what was really going on and whom she could really trust. I should also mentioned that this is clearly Christian fiction, so if you do not enjoy those elements in your historical fiction please take note. I think Sandra did a good job of never becoming too preachy (which I've experienced in other Christian fiction books and didn't enjoy) but I thought it should be noted.

I really do mean it when I say that I always know I'm going to enjoy a Sandra Byrd historical. She hasn't disappointed yet and this being my fifth book of hers I've read I have the upmost confidence that she'll continue to entertain me. Any reader who enjoys Christian fiction will especially love her books.

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