

# *Loving a Wild Stranger*

**By Kelli A. Wilkins**

[www.KelliWilkins.com](http://www.KelliWilkins.com)

# ***Loving a Wild Stranger***

*A woman running from her past... straight into the arms  
of an untamed man*

In a moment of desperation, Kathleen Stanton flees her pampered life in Kingston, New York and ends up stranded in a small town in the Michigan Territory. Out of money and forced to rely on her instincts, she impersonates a handsome stranger's mail-order bride.

Committed to her deception, Kathleen calls herself Michelle and starts her new life with Luther in an isolated cabin in the wilderness.

Luther can't believe his luck when his beautiful bride arrives, but something doesn't feel right about his new wife. Michelle has terrifying nightmares involving a man named Roger and is reluctant to talk about where she came from.

Luther's friend, Redfeather visits and tries to convince Luther to send Michelle back east. Distrusting Michelle, he warns Luther that his bride is not what she seems.

But Luther is in love with Michelle, and he is harboring a secret of his own—one that might force Michelle to reject him when she learns the truth.

Michelle falls in love with Luther and adapts to her new way of life. Together, they face off against brutal townspeople and overcome harsh living conditions.

When they finally give in to their desires and agree to become a proper man and wife, a dark figure from Michelle's past resurfaces and threatens to destroy everything.

*Loving a Wild Stranger*

Copyright © 2017 by Kelli A. Wilkins

Cover designed by Eve Grinnell

Image courtesy of RomanceNovelCovers.com

This book is a work of fiction.

All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be transmitted or reproduced in any form, or by any means, without permission in writing from the author, with the exception of brief excerpts used for the purposes of review.

*Loving a Wild Stranger* was originally published by Amber Quill Press under the title *Wilderness Bride*

# ROMANCES BY KELLI A. WILKINS

*A Deceptive Match\**  
*A Secret Match\**  
*A Most Unusual Princess\*\**  
*A Most Intriguing Temptation\*\**  
*A Most Unfortunate Prince\*\**  
*Beauty & the Bigfoot*  
*Confessions of a Vampire's Lover*  
*Dangerous Indenture*  
*Four Days with Jack*  
*Killer in Wolf's Clothing*  
*Lies, Love & Redemption*  
*Loving a Wild Stranger*  
*Midsummer Night's Delights\*\*\**  
*Midwinter Night's Delights\*\*\**  
*Trust with Hearts*  
*Ultimate Night's Delights\*\*\**  
*The Viking's Witch*

\* *A Deceptive Match* and *A Secret Match* are related titles with shared characters. However, each novel can be read separately.

\*\* These titles make up the *Royal Desires* series.  
Although connected, each book stands alone as an individual read.

\*\*\* These novellas complete the *Naughty Nobles* trilogy.  
It is recommended that they are read in sequence.

Visit Kelli's website: [www.KelliWilkins.com](http://www.KelliWilkins.com) for additional titles as they become available.

# CHAPTER 1

Michigan Territory, 1823

*“Get her, Roger! She’s going to tell!”*

*Kathleen peeked out from behind the tree in time to see Roger tackle the young woman to the ground. Her nude body glowed in the moonlight.*

*“She won’t tell anyone anything.” Roger knelt over the struggling girl, pinning her shoulders down with his knees. “I’ll make sure of it.”*

*Kathleen held her breath, too petrified to move or make a sound. If Roger and his friends knew she had followed them out here... If they knew she had seen the vile thing they’d done...*

*Her skin prickled as Roger pulled a knife from beneath his jacket. He wasn’t really going to—*

Kathleen jerked awake and bumped her head against the stagecoach window. She wrapped her arms around her chest and shoved the horrid memory away.

It was another nightmare, another reminder of what Roger had done. Despite the fact she was far away from him, he still terrified her. Maybe this time he wouldn’t find her again.

She looked out the coach window and saw faded wooden buildings facing the street. They were approaching a small town. How long had she slept? Where was she? It didn't matter. She wouldn't stay long.

The stagecoach lurched to a stop. After weeks of being jostled in the cramped coach, she welcomed the stillness. The coach listed to one side as the driver hopped down. She braced herself to deal with him again.

"End of the line. This here's Ranford," he said as he opened the door.

Kathleen stepped from the coach and frowned. The tiny town appeared deserted. The driver took her trunks off the top of the coach and dropped them onto the wooden planks that served as a sidewalk.

"That's the livery, this here's the saloon, and thar's the store." He pointed around the gray town, his sweat-soaked armpit inches from her face.

The driver's stench made her eyes water. She pulled her gloves from her dress pocket and fanned the air under her nose.

"If'n I was givin' out advice, Missy, I'd tell you two things. Either git yourself back on this coach and leave with me, or see about sendin' word home asking for return fare back east. Ain't no other coaches coming through here anytime soon." He scratched his bald head, then continued.

“Whatever it is you’re runnin’ from cain’t be so bad you’d wanna stay in this godforsaken place. I’ll be leaving after a drink and a poke at Clyde’s. You got any sense in your skull, you’ll be waitin’ fer me,” he said, then sauntered down the street.

Kathleen squared her shoulders. *Wait for him?* She knew what she’d get if she waited—abused and killed, then dumped along the trail somewhere.

The driver had leered at her whenever they stopped to let the horses rest or when he had to relieve himself. He knew she didn’t have enough money to pay a return fare, and he’d offered to let her work it out in “trade.”

Getting back on the stagecoach was not an option. She would have to take her chances in this sorry excuse for a town until she could scrape together enough money to keep moving.

*End of the line. Now what?* Her head hurt, and she was running out of ideas. With the little money she had left, she might be able to get a room and food. Then what? Send a wire home and beg for money? Forgiveness? No, it would be better to keep traveling west where nobody knew her.

She broke from her thoughts as she spotted a tall man approaching her. He wore clothes made from animal skins, boots, and a brown hat. She bent over her trunks and pretended to dust them off with her glove.

The man's boots clomped on the wooden boards, then stopped next to her. She waited a few seconds before glancing at him out of the corner of her eye.

“Afternoon, ma’am.”

Kathleen raised her head and glanced into his green eyes. Startled, she dropped her glove in the dust and bent to retrieve it. “Afternoon.”

The stranger knelt before her, white glove in hand. “I hope I didn’t spook ya,” he said, as he fingered the silky material.

She took a moment and studied his tan skin and long black hair. His gaze locked onto hers, and she swallowed hard. As she took the glove, their fingers touched and an odd tingling sensation raced through her.

“Er, no, you didn’t. Not at all.” She rose at the same time he did. “Thank you for your kindness.”

The man smiled. “My pleasure, anytime. Have a good day, ma’am.” He touched the brim of his hat and walked off.

Kathleen took a deep breath and tried to regain her composure. What was it about the man that made her feel so flustered? It couldn’t be those dazzling green eyes or the rumble of his low voice. At least he hadn’t leered at her bosom like all the other men she’d come into contact with.

Who was he? Where had he come from? Had he been watching her? It wasn't every day an unescorted woman got off a coach in the middle of nowhere. She was alone in town, and she would be noticed.

"Come on, Kathleen," she whispered as she pulled on her gloves. "You've got to think fast."

She had to make a plan. There was no time to stand in the street wondering about a man she had just bumped into. It wasn't proper, and it wasn't easy to control her breathing.

She gathered her skirts and headed for the general store. Maybe something inside would give her an idea. She had made it all the way from New York on her wits and instincts. She'd have to find a way to keep going and not get distracted over the stranger.

The heavy smells of tobacco and leather assaulted her as she entered the small store. Two men were leaning against the wooden counter, talking. They gawked at her as she went down one of the three aisles.

She ignored them as she stared at the shelves lined with tin plates, iron skillets, and blankets. From the way the fat man was looking at her, she knew she wouldn't be safe in town for long.

The front door opened and the dark-haired stranger strolled into the store. Kathleen bowed her head and pretended to read a can of evaporated milk as her heart hammered faster.

\* \* \*

Luther spotted the lady from the coach the second he entered the store. He closed the door behind him and watched her turn away.

Who was she? What would bring such a beautiful young lady to this unsettled wilderness? He noticed a lock of her golden hair had fallen out from under her white bonnet. Why was she traveling alone?

“Well, look who’s here. It’s Luther.”

He glared at Jed, not surprised to see he’d gotten fatter over the winter and lost more of his hair.

“I came for supplies.”

The floor creaked as he made his way toward a barrel of apples. He saw the lady look up, then glance down again. Was she shy or afraid? He focused his attention on the apples. He had no business looking at a woman like her.

“So whatcha want today, Luther?” Jed asked.

Luther took four apples from the barrel and walked to the counter. “These apples, three sacks each of flour, sugar, and coffee.”

He rummaged in his doeskin jacket for his money. Jed never let him buy on credit, and the little bit of cash he had needed to last until autumn. “Any mail?”

The man standing next to Jed chuckled, showing gaps where his teeth had been. “Hell no, Luther. Who’d write you? President Monroe?”

“Don’t start with me, Pete,” he growled. “I ain’t in the mood. You know damn well who.”

“Oh, the mail-order place,” Jed replied. “No, Luther, the woman you tried to buy ain’t got here yet. Why don’t you give up? It’s been over a year. They ain’t gonna find a woman who’d sell her soul to be *your* wife.” Jed laughed. “Ain’t no woman that desperate in the whole world.”

“Especially after what happened to Julie,” Pete commented.

He shot Pete a death look. “Shut the hell up about her, or I swear—”

Luther turned as the woman from the coach brushed by him in her haste to get outside. What had spooked her?

“Looks like you scairt another one off,” Jed taunted.

\* \* \*

Kathleen’s knees shook as she strode down the sidewalk toward the livery. She had to get out of the store before there was trouble. Jed, the storekeeper, reminded her of Roger. She felt sorry for that man,

Luther. He'd seemed nice enough when he gave her back her glove. Why did Jed act so mean toward Luther?

She kept walking. It didn't matter. She had more important things to worry about.

The coach waited near the livery, and her trunks still sat on the sidewalk. She had some time left. What should she do? She didn't dare get back on the coach, but this town was awful and she didn't want to stay here.

Perhaps she could throw herself on the mercy of the church. There had to be one somewhere and the reverend would take her in. Or would he?

Kathleen crossed the street and entered the livery. A round-faced man slouching behind the counter straightened up.

"You must be from the stage," he said, gazing at the front of her dress.

She folded her arms across her bosom and looked him square in the eye. "How did you know?" she asked, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Because I've been with all the women in town and you ain't one of 'em. You Clyde's new girl? I'd pay two dollars for a night with you." He winked.

"How dare you! I'm looking for the church."

The man spit a stream of tobacco juice on the floor next to her brown boots. "We ain't got a church. If you ain't the new whore, then what are you doin' here?"

She spotted the newspaper the man had open on the counter in front of him. An advertisement for wedding lace gave her an idea. "I'm a mail-order bride."

"That so?" He scowled. "Who's the lucky man?"

Kathleen twisted her skirts and tried to stall for time. "There's a problem with the papers you see..."

She glanced out the window. The driver stood near the coach, scratching his head. A second later, she heard the familiar clomp of boots on the sidewalk.

This was her one chance. It had to work. She had always trusted her instincts, and now she could only think of one answer. Her gut told her to take the risk. "Luther's his name and—"

"Luther?" The liveryman's eyes widened. "Well, you're in the right place." He arched an eyebrow. "You sure it's Luther?"

She nodded as the coach pulled away. All hope of escape left town in a swirl of dust. Her trunks lay abandoned on the sidewalk.

"Luther will be along to collect his feed." The man stared at her chest again. "What do you need one of

those services to get a man for? You spoilt in some way?”

She wanted to lash out and slap him. Instead, she ignored his questions and walked around the feedstore. *Kathleen, you got yourself into this, now get yourself out.*

There was no going back now. This man thought she was a mail-order bride. She tried to remember what she’d read about them. It sounded simple, a man sent money to a company and they sent a wife.

She tensed as the livery door opened.

“Hey, Karl. I pulled the wagon—” Luther stopped as he spotted her.

She averted her gaze and smoothed her skirts, suddenly ashamed of her appearance. What man would accept her unwashed and dusty?

The liveryman laughed. “Hell, Luther, looks like ya got more than you thought goin’ home with ya.”

“What’s that mean?”

Kathleen closed her eyes. What had she done? This wasn’t a game anymore.

“Seems your wife came special delivery on the coach.”

“My *what*?”

She heard the surprise in Luther's voice. What if he hadn't sent away for a bride like the men in the store had said? She had to think of a story, now.

Luther's boots clomped across the floor and stopped in front of her. When he cleared his throat, she opened her eyes.

Luther stood two feet away, holding his hat in his hands. His head was cocked to one side. "He foolin'? This a trick they paid ya for?"

"No," she whispered. "No trick."

As Luther's shoulders relaxed, his face softened.

Kathleen clenched her hands behind her back, took a deep breath, and started her story. "I had paperwork for you to fill out, but there was a problem on the stage and some luggage got left behind, so there's nothing for you to sign."

Her voice wavered, and she coughed lightly. "I sent the mail order place a wire. They said they'd send the papers as soon as they can, so..."

"That's fine, ma'am." He smiled. "My name is Luther Dubois, and you don't know how long I've been waitin' for you. Come with me. I'll put the feed on the cart, and we'll get settled." Luther lifted a bulky sack from the floor and walked to the door, obviously expecting her to follow.

She hurried after Luther. A chestnut-colored horse and a wooden cart waited outside the livery. Luther headed to the cart with the sack slung over his shoulder like a dead body. He half-turned to her. “He give you any trouble?”

“Who?” She looked up and down the street. Maybe the driver had merely moved the coach.

“Man inside, Karl. The men in this town ain’t known for their manners, especially when it comes to women.”

The street was empty. “He left,” she muttered. Now what?

“Who left?” Luther asked as he dropped the sack into the wagon.

“The coach. My trunks are over there.”

“I’ll fetch ’em. But I’m afraid I ain’t got room for you in back with all the supplies. You’ll ride behind me.”

She watched as Luther carried her trunks to the cart and tucked them in next to sacks of flour, grain, and other supplies.

“You ready, Miss...”

All of a sudden she realized that Luther had never asked her name. “Evans, I’m Michelle Evans,” she

answered. After months on the run, she was smart enough never to give her real name.

“Me-chelle, that’s French.” Luther smiled. “Miss Me-chelle, we’ll be on our way.” He mounted the horse and reached down to her. “Give me your hand and swing your leg over.”

Kathleen bit her bottom lip, unsure. If she did this, there was no turning back.

“Now don’t tell me you ain’t never rode a horse before,” Luther joked.

She rubbed her temple. The headache she had been fighting all day raged even stronger.

“You feelin’ all right?”

“I’m fine,” she lied. Yes, she was fine—if fine meant lost, terrified, and starving.

Kathleen placed her hand in Luther’s palm and he hoisted her onto the horse. She sat behind him and adjusted her skirts. Where were the saddle and stirrups? Luther rode only with a blanket and reins.

“Wrap your arms around my middle and hold on. We’ll get home before dark.”

Home? She clutched Luther as the horse lurched forward, willing herself to stay strong. If she started to

cry now, she'd never stop. What in heaven's name had she done?

\* \* \*

**Order your copy of *Loving a Wild Stranger* here:**

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01N6M551H>

Apple: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/id1190943526>

B&N: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/loving-a-wild-stranger-kelli-a-wilkins/1125413251?ean=2940154172131>

Kobo: <https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/loving-a-wild-stranger>

Scribd:

<https://www.scribd.com/book/335361512/Loving-a-Wild-Stranger>

Page Foundry:

<http://www.inktera.com/store/title/51d0c248-fe8d-4a14-b1db-b524786870f4>

## ALSO AVAILABLE...

If you like historical romances, take a trip back in time with these sensual novels...

### *Lies, Love & Redemption*

Shot and left for dead, Sam Hixton stumbles into a general store on the Nebraska prairie and collapses into the arms of Cassie Wilcox.

Cassie's world is turned upside down when the handsome stranger drops into her life. Sam is another complication she doesn't need: her business is dying and her trouble with the townspeople is escalating. Yet she's determined to keep the store open — no matter what the cost.

As Sam recovers from his injuries, he hides the truth about his identity and convinces Cassie to let him work in the store. He's attracted to her and admires her independent nature but quickly realizes Cassie's in way over her head.

They fight their growing attraction, and Cassie questions whether she can trust her fragile heart to a mysterious stranger. *Will he accept her once he knows about her troubled past?*

Cassie resists Sam's advances and represses her feelings until one fateful night when they give in to their fiery passion.

Together, they work out a plan to save the store but find their efforts are thwarted—and their lives endangered—by the locals.

Sam's secret returns to haunt him and pulls him away just when Cassie needs him the most. *Will he regain her trust when she learns the truth?*

Cassie has everything invested in the store—can she save it and find true love with Sam before it's too late?

**Order your copy of *Lies, Love & Redemption* here:**

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Lies-Love-Redemption-Kelli-Wilkins-ebook/dp/B01JMJLOU4>

B&N: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/lies-love-and-redemption-kelli-a-wilkins/1124391964?ean=9781942546665>

Links to other platforms:

<http://medallionpress.com/books/lies-love-redemption/>

## ***Dangerous Indenture***

Eager to escape her past in Ireland, Shauna Farrow signs on to become an indentured servant to Joshua Stewart, a wealthy man in Pennsylvania Colony.

But a life of servitude quickly turns to drudgery, and her hopes for starting over and creating a better life for herself are waning—until she meets her master’s roguish son, Ashton.

Shauna fights her growing attraction to Ashton, torn between propriety and acting on her emotions. But amidst their flirting, something dark stirs. Shauna soon discovers why no other servants will work for the strange Stewart family.

Stewart House has an unsavory reputation: a previous servant died there under mysterious circumstances. When another servant goes missing in the middle of the night, Shauna is convinced that a member of the family is responsible.

When Shauna’s investigation leads her too close to the truth, it’s up to Ashton to save her before time runs out.

**Order your copy of *Dangerous Indenture* here:**

Amazon: [http://www.amazon.com/Dangerous-Indenture-Kelli-Wilkins-ebook/dp/B00JMHZNIG/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF](http://www.amazon.com/Dangerous-Indenture-Kelli-Wilkins-ebook/dp/B00JMHZNIG/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF)

[8&qid=1398257669&sr=1-1&keywords=dangerous+indenture](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/dangerous-indenture-kelli-wilkins/1118590458?ean=9781605427157)

B&N: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/dangerous-indenture-kelli-wilkins/1118590458?ean=9781605427157>

Links to other platforms:

<http://medallionpress.com/books/dangerous-indenture/>

## *The Viking's Witch*

About to be burned at the stake by her fellow villagers, Odaria does what any betrayed witch facing certain death would do. She calls down a curse. Within seconds, rampaging Norsemen raid the village, capturing everyone except her.

But her reprieve is short-lived, and Odaria lands in the clutches of the Norse leader Rothgar. Can she remain true to herself and fight her growing attraction to this domineering man, or will she fall under his influence and be used for his ambitions?

After Rothgar witnesses Odaria's powers firsthand, he strikes a bargain with her. The raven-haired beauty will use her magical abilities to help him with his quest in exchange for safe passage off the isle. But can this

cunning woman be trusted, or is she using him to exact vengeance on her village?

Together they must fight bloodthirsty villagers, battle a mutinous band of Norsemen, find a missing Norse ship, and learn to trust each other . . . before time is up.

### **Order Your Copy of *The Viking's Witch* Here:**

Amazon: [http://www.amazon.com/The-Vikings-Witch-ebook/dp/B008R5185G/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1375813873&sr=1-1&keywords=Kelli+A.+Wilkins](http://www.amazon.com/The-Vikings-Witch-ebook/dp/B008R5185G/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1375813873&sr=1-1&keywords=Kelli+A.+Wilkins)

B&N: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-vikings-witch-kelli-wilkins/1112359676?ean=9781605421698&itm=1&usri=kelli+wilkins>

Links to other platforms:

<http://medallionpress.com/books/the-vikings-witch/>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kelli A. Wilkins** is an award-winning author who has published more than 100 short stories, 19 romance novels, and 5 non-fiction books. Her romances span many genres and heat levels.

***Beauty & the Bigfoot***, a paranormal-comedy, was published in September 2017.

Kelli released ***Trust with Hearts***, a contemporary romance, in July 2017. Her third gay romance, ***Four Days with Jack***, was released in June 2017. Kelli's trilogy of erotic romance novellas, ***Midsummer Night's Delights***, ***Midwinter Night's Delights***, and ***Ultimate Night's Delights*** was published in spring 2017.

***Loving a Wild Stranger*** was published in January 2017. This historical/pioneer romance is set in the wilds of the Michigan Territory and blends tender romance with adventure.

Kelli's third Medallion Press romance, ***Lies, Love & Redemption*** was released in September 2016. This spicy historical western is set on the Nebraska prairie in 1877.

Her writing book, ***You Can Write—Really! A Beginner's Guide to Writing Fiction*** is a fun and informative guide filled with writing exercises and helpful tips all authors can use.

Kelli posts on her Facebook author page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorKelliWilkins> and  
Twitter: [www.Twitter.com/KWilkinsauthor](http://www.Twitter.com/KWilkinsauthor).

She also writes a weekly blog:  
<http://kelliwilkinsauthor.blogspot.com/>.

Visit her website, [www.KelliWilkins.com](http://www.KelliWilkins.com) to learn more  
about all of her writings, read book excerpts, reviews,  
and more. Readers can sign up for her newsletter here:  
<http://eepurl.com/HVQqb>.

# CATCH UP WITH KELLI

**Here are a few links to find Kelli & her writings on the web**

Amazon Author Page:

[www.amazon.com/author/kelliwilkins](http://www.amazon.com/author/kelliwilkins)

Website: <http://www.KelliWilkins.com>

Blog: <http://kelliwilkinsauthor.blogspot.com/>

Newsletter sign-up: <http://eepurl.com/HVQqb>

Facebook Author Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorKelliWilkins>

Facebook Contemporary Romances:

<https://www.facebook.com/Contemporary-Romances-by-Kelli-A-Wilkins-1965702023664339/>

Facebook Gay Romances:

<https://www.facebook.com/GayRomancesbyKelliAWilkins/>

Facebook Historical Romances:

<https://www.facebook.com/Historical-Romances-by-Kelli-A-Wilkins-1703805359922371/>

Twitter: [www.Twitter.com/KWilkinsauthor](http://www.Twitter.com/KWilkinsauthor)

Medallion Press Author Page:

<http://medallionpress.com/author/kelli-wilkins/>

Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/KWilkinsAuthor/>

Goodreads:

[http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1123678.Kelli  
A Wilkins](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1123678.Kelli_A_Wilkins)

Authors Den:

[http://www.authorsden.com/visit/author.asp?authorid=61  
801](http://www.authorsden.com/visit/author.asp?authorid=61801)