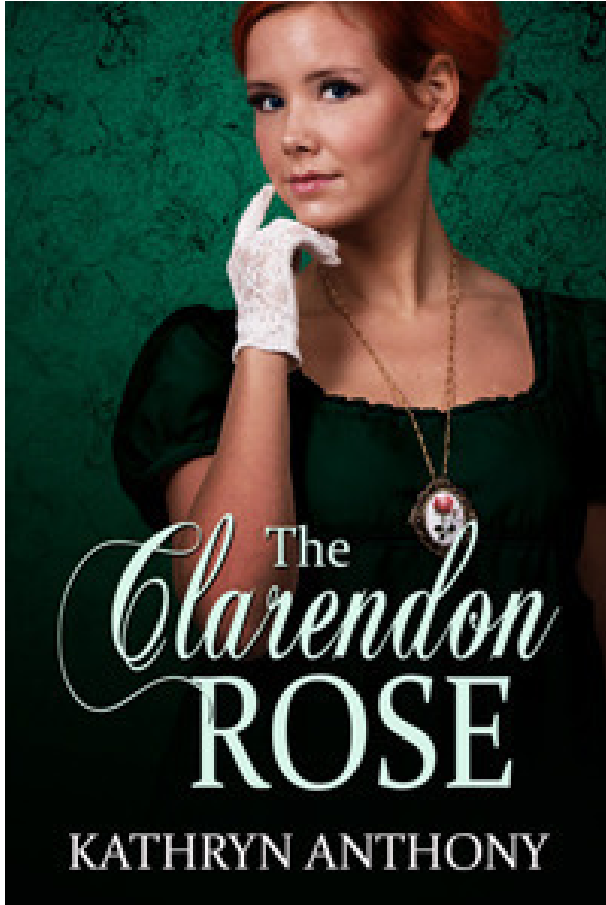


The Clarendon Rose



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Word spread through the countryside like the whisper of the wind through the branches of the tress: he's back. The prodigal son had returned. But that was one of the few things the whispers could agree upon. Some claimed he was a changed man-ready, finally, to shoulder the responsibilities that he had shirked for so many years. Others claimed that any apparent changes were merely a ruse-once a ne'er do well, always a ne'er do well. And the new duke had been far worse than a ne'er do well: he had been a rake, a degenerate and a scoundrel. The other thing that everyone agreed upon, whether tenant, servant or villager, was that it was a fine thing that Miss Tina had finally gotten engaged to Lord Edmund. That, at least, would keep her safe from the prodigal's degeneracy-for surely even the duke could not have sunk so low as to seduce his own brother's betrothed!