



The Traitor's Wife: A Novel

By Allison Pataki

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A riveting historical novel about Peggy Shippen Arnold, the cunning wife of Benedict Arnold and mastermind behind America's most infamous act of treason...

Everyone knows Benedict Arnold—the Revolutionary War general who betrayed America and fled to the British—as history's most notorious turncoat. Many know Arnold's co-conspirator, Major John André, who was apprehended with Arnold's documents in his boots and hanged at the orders of General George Washington. But few know of the integral third character in the plot: a charming young woman who not only contributed to the betrayal but orchestrated it.

Socialite Peggy Shippen is half Benedict Arnold's age when she seduces the war hero during his stint as military commander of Philadelphia. Blinded by his young bride's beauty and wit, Arnold does not realize that she harbors a secret: loyalty to the British. Nor does he know that she hides a past romance with the handsome British spy John André. Peggy watches as her husband, crippled from battle wounds and in debt from years of service to the colonies, grows ever more disillusioned with his hero, Washington, and the American cause. Together with her former love and her disaffected husband, Peggy hatches the plot to deliver West Point to the British and, in exchange, win fame and fortune for herself and Arnold.

Told from the perspective of Peggy's maid, whose faith in the new nation inspires her to intervene in her mistress's affairs even when it could cost her everything, *The Traitor's Wife* brings these infamous figures to life, illuminating the sordid details and the love triangle that nearly destroyed the American fight for freedom.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A most impressive debut." (Philippa Gregory)

"One of the best, best, best historical novels, I was riveted...I couldn't put it down." (Kathie Lee Gifford, The TODAY Show)

"Pataki smoothly weaves intrigue and personality with critical historical facts...Historical fiction lovers will look forward to more from this promising new novelist." (*Publisher's Weekly*)

"A well-balanced narrative... events offers fresh perspective, plenty of intrigue and a host of interesting, multidimensional characters." (*Kirkus (starred review)*)

"If you read one book this year, make it Allison Pataki's THE TRAITOR'S WIFE. Few authors have taken on America's Revolutionary War so convincingly, and this story of Benedict Arnold's wife will appeal to lovers of historical fiction everywhere. Highly, highly recommended!" (Michelle Moran, international bestselling author of Madame Tussaud)

"Allison Pataki's captivating debut novel examines history's most famous tale of treachery through a woman's eyes. Meticulously written and well-researched, this story will transport you back to the American Revolution and keep you turning pages with both its intrigue and love story. *The Traitor's Wife* is a well-told tale." (Lee Woodruff, author, blogger and television personality)

"I consider this to be the debut of a major writer of historical fiction." (Mary Higgins Clark)

"The Traitor's Wife is a gripping novel steeped in compelling historical detail. Pataki writes lyrically and succeeds in bringing to life, and humanizing, notorious characters from our nation's past. Ultimately a story about honor and heart, readers will have a hard time putting this book down." (Aidan Donnelley Rowley, author of Life After Yes)

Allison Pataki has given us a great gift: a powerful story of love and betrayal, drawn straight from the swiftly beating heart of the American Revolution. Replete with compelling characters, richly realized settings, a sweeping plot, and a heroine who comes to feel like a dear, familiar friend, *The Traitor's Wife* is sure to delight readers of romance and lovers of history alike. (Karen Halvorsen Schreck, author of Sing For Me)

"Everything the casual reader of American history thinks they know about Benedict Arnold will be handily upset by the skillful and mesmerizing storytelling of fiction newcomer Allison Pataki. This text is a treasure and a treat." (*CBA Retailers and Resources*)

About the Author

Allison Pataki is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Traitor's Wife*, *The Accidental Empress*, *Sisi: Empress on Her Own*, and her forthcoming novel, *Where the Light Falls*. Allison's novels have been translated into more than a dozen languages. A former news writer and producer, Allison has written for *The New York Times*, ABC News, *Huffington Post*, *USA TODAY*, Fox News, and other outlets. She has appeared on the *Today* show, *Fox & Friends*, *Good Day New York*, *Good Day Chicago*, and MSNBC's *Morning Joe*.

Allison graduated Cum Laude from Yale University with a major in English and spent several years in journalism before switching to fiction writing. A member of The Historical Novel Society, Allison lives in Chicago with her husband and daughter. To learn more and connect with Allison, please visit AllisonPataki.com or Twitter @AllisonPataki.

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The Traitor's Wife

CHAPTER ONE



“Never Anger Miss Peggy”

May, 1778

Philadelphia, PA

CLARA KNOCKED on the front door once, twice. She checked the address scrolled on the worn piece of parchment again. Her grandmother's familiar handwriting directed Clara to arrive at the Shippen mansion on the corner of Fourth and Walnut Streets, deep in the district that housed the city's wealthiest residents.

A crack of a coachman's whip drew Clara's attention away from the Shippens' door, and she gazed over her shoulder toward the street—a noisy thoroughfare of horse hooves, carriage wheels, and the deafening drum of marching British soldiers. A servant leaned out of a window several houses down and emptied a series of chamber pots onto the cobblestone street before disappearing once more into the home. The closeness of the noise and stink was unlike anything Clara had ever experienced on the farm.

The Shippen mansion, like its adjacent structures, was composed of red brick and built with an orderly symmetry: the sort of architectural purposefulness she'd heard about since George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had built their homes in this style. The tight row of brick society homes lining Fourth Street resembled one another but for the shutter shades; some houses had green shutters, some light blue, some dark blue, some white. The Shippens had elected to paint their shutters black.

The Shippen mansion sat back from the street, flanked in front by a small patch of grass and two cherry trees in the full bloom of late spring. The entryway, a wide wooden door, stood above three short steps and below a triangular pediment. A top row of arched dormer windows poked out from the sloping roof, with two rows of shuttered panes below. The windows—built not only for allowing in light, but also for their decorative appeal—testified to their owner's wealth; a passerby on the street might be so lucky as to catch a glimpse of the famous Judge Edward Shippen studying his books, or spy one of his beautiful daughters as she flitted through the vast parlor on her way to receive a gentleman caller.

This must be the right home. Clara knocked at the imposing front entrance again. The door opened, and Clara was greeted by the lined face of a woman past her youth.

“Good afternoon.” The woman had soft features framed by a graying bun, which peeked out around the edges of a clean, white-linen mobcap. She greeted Clara with an appraising smile.

“Is it Clara Bell, come at last?” The aged woman opened the door wider to reveal a fine appearance—an indigo petticoat made of linen to accommodate the warmer weather, draped by a clean linen apron. On top she wore faded gray stays over a crisply pressed white blouse. A fichu was tied around her neck to ensure the modesty required for service in such a fine home. She rolled back her cuffed sleeves and waved Clara inside.

“Thank you, ma’am.” Clara entered through the open door, clutching her tarpaulin sack as she stepped over the threshold. The woman closed the front door behind her, shutting out the noise and stink of the street and allowing Clara to ease into the airy interior of the home. Its soundless tranquility was a welcome relief after the hustle of Fourth Street.

“Well, Clara Bell, we’ve been awaiting your arrival all day.” The older woman smiled, taking Clara’s sack from her arms. “Was it a tiring journey from the country?”

“It was fine, ma’am,” Clara answered, even as she was certain her haggard features betrayed her fatigue.

“You took a post carriage?”

“Aye, ma’am.”

“That must have cost you a small fortune.”

“I’m grateful to have the employment, ma’am.” Clara managed a timid smile, finding words evasive in the grand hallway in which she’d suddenly found herself. She felt as though she’d awoken into this buffed and varnished grandeur without a clear recollection of the circumstances that had brought her to Philadelphia. Clara blinked, remembering. The abandoned farmhouse. Oma dying. In her last moments, her old grandmother penning a letter to a friend from years ago. Oma urging Clara to leave the Hartley farm, as the Hartleys themselves had done, fleeing the approach of the British and the Iroquois.

“I am Mrs. Quigley, housekeeper for the Shippens.”

“Very nice to meet you, Mrs. Quigley.”

“Yes, well . . .” The housekeeper’s reply faded to a sigh as she surveyed Clara’s appearance. Clara stood still, feeling her cheeks grow warm; her warm-weather petticoat of linen was creased and dusty from the trip, but it was the only one she possessed of its kind. She’d only rotate it out of her wardrobe when the weather changed and the crisp autumn air required her wool petticoat. Unlike this housekeeper, Clara’s clothes were not bought in a store, but were homespun, sewed by Oma. Clara wore her petticoat and stays in the cotton ticking pattern, off-white fabric with blue stripes. Her apron, once white, had been laundered so many times that it now bore a yellowish tint.

“Follow me, Clara.” Mrs. Quigley turned and crossed the room in several brisk strides. Clara followed, hurrying to take in the surroundings as she kept apace. The Shippens’ front hall was well lit by a wall of broad, clean windows. The focal point at the center of the hall was the expansive staircase, which drew the eyes up in a languid arc until it reached the second floor. Removed from the entrance was a maple fireplace. A fire crackled even on this warm spring afternoon, filling the front hall with its welcoming aroma, which mingled with the distinct scents of furniture polish and ladies’ perfume.

“Quite a bit grander here than it was at the farmhouse, I imagine.” Mrs. Quigley turned just in time to catch Clara, eyes rapt, examining a feather-light shawl of creamy robin’s egg blue. It was store-bought and fine, its

border embroidered with yellow silken flowers, its colors as bright as a springtime morning. It had been left, haphazardly discarded over the back of an upholstered armchair, as if its owner could be reckless with an item so fine.

“Miss Peggy’s shawl. We better put it back in her closet where it belongs or we’ll never hear the end of it.” Mrs. Quigley scooped up the expensive item. “All right, then, follow me, child.” Clara trailed the housekeeper through an open doorway into an ample drawing room. The Shippens’ furniture seemed designed to impress the eyes with ornate decoration as much as to entice the body into its plush comfort. The chairs of the drawing room were carved out of smooth mahogany, their slender curves varnished to a glossy sheen. Clara’s legs suddenly felt leaden with fatigue; how she longed to sink for just one moment into one of these chairs.

“You look like you’ve never been inside a drawing room before, girl,” Mrs. Quigley remarked, fluffing a silk pillow on a nearby settee.

“Not one like this, ma’am, I haven’t.” Clara’s eyes roved hungrily over every detail of the quiet room, the only sound issuing from an encased clock, taller than Clara herself, that occupied a far corner. Oil paintings in bronze frames adorned the walls. A soft splash of May sunlight streamed in through the windows, mingling with the dancing shadows cast by the fresh white candles in their sconces. How fine they must be, the people who frequent these spaces, Clara thought. At night, when the sunlight vanished and only candlelight remained, how easy it must be for them to slip into a corner and whisper a piece of gossip or listen to a verse of an admirer’s poetry.

“Enough of your daydreaming. What do you think, girl?”

“It’s . . . it’s lovely here,” Clara stammered, looking around with ill-disguised awe.

“It’s nice, isn’t it? Course, you’ll hear every day how the money’s gone and the furniture is growing outdated, but I think it’s just fine.” Mrs. Quigley smiled, the skin around her serious eyes creasing into a soft, worn pattern. “Well, Clara, you’ve had a long trip from the countryside; let’s have you come in and catch your breath.” Mrs. Quigley led Clara through the drawing room past a smaller, smartly decorated parlor with salmon-colored walls, shelves of books, and a silk sofa across from a card table.

“Books for the judge, cards for the ladies. That’s how they’ll spend their evenings. Course, Miss Peggy won’t be contented with either activity—she wants to be out dancing every night.” Mrs. Quigley kept a brisk pace as she crossed the room. Once through the parlor, a doorway allowed entry into a separate wing, which could be closed off from the front of the house. The two women proceeded now down this long, narrow passageway. No light shone here except for that which pierced the small windows of the rooms on either side of the corridor, and there was no ornamentation on the clean white walls. Clara stole quick glances into the rooms as she followed the housekeeper. Some rooms appeared occupied, others abandoned. This wing, she realized, housed the Shippen family’s servants.

Clara peeked into the empty rooms she passed—most held just bedframes and unused chamber pots, but they looked comfortable and of a good size. “Mrs. Quigley, if you please, why are all of these rooms empty?”

Mrs. Quigley sighed, jingling a set of brass keys as she led Clara farther down the hall. The old woman appeared unsure how to answer the question. “Just a few years back we were at full capacity, with two servants in each of these rooms. But we’ve had to let so many folks go, most of the rooms are empty now.”

“On account of the war?” Clara asked.

“You’re a curious one, aren’t you?” Mrs. Quigley glanced back over her shoulder at Clara, studying her for a moment before answering in a hushed tone. “You’ll have heard that Judge Shippen has refused to take a side—either Tory or Rebel.”

Clara nodded. The Shippens were one of the city’s most prominent families. The news had traveled as far as Hartley Farm when Doctor William Shippen, the judge’s brother, had come out strongly for the colonials. That’s when his brother, Clara’s new employer, had cut all business dealings to avoid appearing partial to either army.

Mrs. Quigley continued in a muted tone. “Without much coming in, we run a lean operation now that the war is on.”

Clara wondered why it was that they were bringing her into the household under these circumstances. Mrs. Quigley must have guessed at her thoughts.

“But Mistress Peggy fought hard to fill your post; she insisted to her father that we had need for a lady’s maid in the household. What with me, well, I’m busy enough running the home that I barely have time to tend to the missus, let alone her two daughters.”

“What are they like?” Clara asked.

“The Shippen ladies?”

“Aye,” Clara nodded.

Mrs. Quigley considered the question. “You shall see for yourself, soon enough.” The old woman halted at the end of the corridor. “Here we are, Clara. After you.”

Clara hesitated, standing still.

“Your bedroom, child,” the housekeeper said. “Go on.”

Clara passed the housekeeper, her eyes lowered. Her bedroom? It would be the first room she’d ever had to herself. At the farm, she’d always slept on a straw pallet beside the kitchen fire, Oma’s snoring frame curled up beside her. But here she had a bedframe. And a door that could shut, offering an entirely new privilege: privacy.

Of course, when compared to the front of the Shippen house—with tables serving no purpose other than to host card games, and silver bowls serving no purpose other than to hold flowers—these quarters were dull. But Clara could barely contain a giggle over the thought of having her own room.

“Nothing fancy, I’m afraid. Will it suit you?” Mrs. Quigley fidgeted with her brass keys, apparently in a rush to get to her next chore.

“Suit me? Why, a room to myself . . .” Clara looked around her new domain. There was a single straw mattress on a rusted iron frame. A simple dresser of dark walnut stood against the opposite wall, and a thin desk and stool occupied the corner. The window, small but bright, faced out the back of the house. Clara

crossed the room and peeked out the window. She spied the formal garden, done in the Continental style with tightly clipped shrubs, pruned rose bushes, and a tidy carpet of green lawn. Beyond that was a small orchard, its trees appearing to hold the first signs of apples. Cherry blossoms bloomed in the May warmth, forming neat columns of shady pathways. The manicured grass, so unlike the wild fields of the farm, was intersected by meandering pebbled walkways, where her ladies must tread when receiving finely dressed visitors. Birdsong pierced the blue sky, as did the aroma of fresh-petaled flowers. It was an Eden in the midst of the colonies' busiest city.

Behind the garden stood a rectangular stable, where Clara spied a young man sitting between the large doors. Clara watched this figure as he plucked out a simple melody on a handmade guitar, as if entertaining himself while awaiting the arrival of some riders. Suddenly aware that he was being surveyed, the stableboy paused his singing, looking up in time to catch Clara's gaze. She ducked her head back behind the window, blushing.

"Oh, so you've seen Caleb." Mrs. Quigley was beside her at the window, swinging it open to allow in the fresh spring air.

"Who is he, ma'am?"

"The resident troublemaker." Mrs. Quigley smirked, wiping the dust from the windowsill.

Clara glanced back outside and noticed that the young man named Caleb was no longer sitting at his post. She inhaled, taking in the heady scent of fresh flowers. "Mrs. Quigley, have you grown accustomed to all of this?"

"Aye, it's a beautiful old home, all right, but don't let it seduce you. There's plenty to be seen in this house that ain't so beautiful." Mrs. Quigley's eyebrows arched a moment before her face softened. "Clara, I hope you don't mind my saying so, especially after I've only just met you, but you look just like your grandmother did. Course, when she was a lot younger."

Clara lowered her eyes, her focus blurring at the mention of her Oma.

Mrs. Quigley continued. "She was a dear friend of mine, and I was happy to have the opportunity to help her."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"I know you'll miss her."

"Indeed." Clara's eyes stung with the threat of tears, but she did not wish to weep before her new employer. Still, it seemed strange, illogical, to refer to her grandmother as someone from her past.

"When she wrote, asking me to find a post for you in the Shippen household, I was eager to help. Anything to make her final rest a bit easier." Mrs. Quigley sighed, and Clara bit her lip, hesitant to respond in case her voice cracked.

"But enough of that business. Where were we? You think you shall be comfortable here?"

"Very." Clara straightened her posture, grateful to change topics.

“Good.” Mrs. Quigley slapped the mattress once, producing a cloud of dust. “You’ll get one fresh candle a week, and not more, so mind you how you use your nighttime lighting. Quills and ink you’ll have to request on a need-by-need basis.”

Clara thought about this: she had no one to write.

“Judge Shippen tries to be generous, but there’s only so much he can manage, especially with trying to keep Betsy and Peggy in the latest fashions.” Clara could tell from the housekeeper’s terse manner that this was a topic she’d discussed before.

“Now, Clara, I suppose you’ll want to change before you meet Mistresses Peggy and Betsy?”

“Change?” Clara looked for the second time with disapproving eyes over her own appearance. “Oh, ma’am, I’ve got just the one other petticoat in my sack, a wool one.”

“One other petticoat? Did they not give you clothing on that farm?” Mrs. Quigley was a kind woman, but she could barely conceal her dismay.

“Only what Oma and I had time to sew. Sorry, ma’am.”

“Oh, don’t be sorry, child.” Mrs. Quigley sighed. “I’ll talk to my husband. He’s the judge’s valet and the foreman of the servants. We’ll see what we can arrange. Perhaps we can advance you a little bit of your wages to get you some fresh clothes. You’re a lady’s maid to the Shippens now, and we will want you to look the part. Now,”—the housekeeper paused, girding herself with a long, slow inhale—“let’s go meet the Misses Shippens.”

Clara followed Mrs. Quigley up the staircase that connected the servants’ quarters to the second floor. “This is our passage, so that we can travel up and down without disturbing the family.” Mrs. Quigley’s breath grew uneven as she climbed upward. Clara noticed a short, round woman with orange hair descending the staircase toward them, weighed down by an armful of linens.

“Oh, hello, Brigitte, you’ve changed the beds?”

“Aye, Mrs. Quigley.”

Mrs. Quigley paused, looking at the woman. “Clara, this is Brigitte, the chambermaid. Brigitte, meet Clara, the new maid to Miss Peggy and Miss Betsy.”

“Nice to meet you, Brigitte.” Clara curtsied to the older woman.

Brigitte nodded a wordless greeting in their general direction before continuing past them down the stairs.

“We’ll have time for introductions to the rest of the servants later. For now, it’s important that you meet your ladies.” Mrs. Quigley’s voice grew quieter as Clara followed her farther up the steep, narrow flight of stairs. “The ladies should be back from riding any moment, so first we’ll return this shawl to Miss Peggy’s bedchamber. We’ll meet Miss Peggy first, and you must try to make a good impression. You’ll see very quickly that Miss Peggy is the favorite of the judge.”

“Does the judge have just the two girls?” Clara asked.

“The judge and Mrs. Shippen had four children. Miss Elizabeth—they call her Betsy—is the eldest. She’s to be married soon, which will be a tremendous relief for his Judgeship. Betsy is followed by Miss Margaret—Peggy they call her. And then two boys, both of whom died.” Mrs. Quigley sighed. “Such sweet boys, such a shame to lose them so young.”

Clara nodded her silent reply.

“So now it’s just Miss Betsy and Miss Peggy. As far as I was told, you are to wait on both Miss Betsy and Miss Peggy, but we’ll see how they do about sharing. Miss Betsy does not seem to need her own maid, especially since she and Mrs. Shippen are so preoccupied these days with the coming wedding.” The housekeeper cocked her head. “Once Miss Betsy marries Mr. Burd, it’ll be just Miss Peggy in the house. She shall probably be the one who demands most of your time and attention.”

“Are they close, the Misses Shippens?” Clara paused atop the stairs.

“Well . . .” Mrs. Quigley weighed her next words. “They are very different. I don’t think I’ve ever had a cross word from Miss Betsy. Miss Peggy . . .” The housekeeper looked down at her young mistress’s light blue shawl, musing on its unseen owner. When she continued, her tone was barely a whisper. “I’m sure you’ve read about Miss Peggy—in the society pages?”

“No, ma’am. We servants didn’t get much chance to read the society pages at Hartley Farm,” Clara answered.

“Miss Peggy is”—the old woman paused—“quite pretty. A favorite of the young British officers in Philadelphia. Smart. And . . . strong-willed.”

Clara tried to imagine her new mistress sitting in the formal drawing room downstairs, holding forth amidst a group of admiring officers, but she suddenly found it hard to conjure the image; none of the girls at the Hartley farm had inhabited the same world as Peggy Shippen.

“It’s best you don’t ever keep Miss Peggy waiting. And under no circumstances should you ever argue with her. Try not to arouse her temper.” Mrs. Quigley eyed Clara in the dark stairwell with—what was it—pity? “Of course, you’ll learn all this for yourself, in time. That is, if you last.”

And with those final words, Mrs. Quigley pushed open the door to move from the servants’ stairwell into the second-floor corridor. Here, even in daylight, the candles on the walls were lit, producing a pale, amber light that danced off the framed oil paintings. How was it possible, Clara wondered, to own this many paintings? Clara scanned the quiet hall, covered by finely stitched red carpet, no doubt bought from a London carpet maker. She tried to step softly, but the wood of the floor creaked below her boots and made her feel as graceful as an ox. This hall, the quiet inner realm of the Shippen family, felt like a private space in which she had no business treading. Did Miss Peggy realize how lovely her home was? Clara wondered. Or was this corridor just another hallway to her?

Mrs. Quigley led Clara past an open doorway that peeked into a grand bedroom, its windows as tall as the ceiling, its bedframe draped in ivory-colored curtains. Clara glanced in but did not pause until they reached the next doorway.

“Miss Peggy’s suite.” The housekeeper hovered on the threshold, looking once more over Clara’s humble appearance. “Are you ready?”

“Aye.” Clara nodded, but all this pomp had succeeded in thoroughly wracking her nerves. When they stepped in, Clara gasped, her gaze flying upward to the high ceiling. Opposite her, floor-to-ceiling French windows offered a view over the same gardens Clara had just admired. From somewhere below, horses clipped by, the sound of hooves on the cobblestones reaching them in an even serenade. Miss Peggy’s four-poster bed soared high off the ground, and looked like it could easily fit four people under its creamy silk canopy. On top of the bed, in addition to a heap of satin-covered feather pillows, there were several silk dresses, any one of them costing more than Clara’s monthly wages. They lay in wrinkled and unceremonious disarray, cast aside after a past revelry now complete, like leftover dishes at a formal feast forgotten once the guests move on to dessert.

“How about some fresh air, what do you say?” Mrs. Quigley crossed the room with her authoritative stride, pulling roughly at the French windows, as if she felt no need to tiptoe through this space. “Well, don’t just stand there like a sack of flour, Clara. Help me open these windows.” Mrs. Quigley looked at her new hire with a mixture of bemusement and frustration.

“Miss Peggy has been riding all afternoon with her sister, Miss Betsy, and Miss Betsy’s suitor, Mr. Edward Burd.”

“Does Miss Betsy sleep in here too?” Clara looked at the oversized maple bed, thinking that perhaps there were two who occupied the space.

“Share a room? Ha! You think the Shippen girls would ever share a bedroom?”

“It’s certainly big enough for two.”

“This house itself isn’t big enough for those two at times. They’d last one day before Miss Peggy shredded her sister like a wildcat. No, Miss Betsy is in the bedroom next door, the one we just passed.”

“Oh. What a grand room to have all to one’s self,” Clara said. Back at the Hartley farm, five people would have lived in this space. “Are all the rooms in the house this big?”

“You think her room is something, you should see her wardrobe.” The housekeeper pointed toward the corner of the room, where an imposing structure of varnished pine stood. Mrs. Quigley walked toward the armoire, folding the blue silk scarf neatly and tucking it into a drawer. “Course she frets and complains that they are all outdated dresses, but I think they look very fine. With the war, it’s a wonder she gets new dresses at all.”

In the distance across the garden, figures moved toward the stable. Clara watched from the window and saw the same young man—Mrs. Quigley had called him Caleb—whom she’d noticed earlier. He’d put his guitar away and was leading a broad-chested horse of a rich chestnut hue by the bridle. Clara’s heart leapt; did this mean her new mistresses had returned home from their ride?

“Come away from the window, child, and listen to me,” Mrs. Quigley snapped, her pose suddenly rigid. “After a day of riding, the ladies will want to change out of their riding habits. Best you help Miss Peggy first, just so that there’s no unpleasantness. Miss Betsy has no problem dressing herself. The misses have got a social event to attend tonight, so Miss Peggy will select one of her fancier gowns. She’ll probably complain to you that she has nothing new to wear. That girl never lets her poor father forget that she wants new clothing.”

Clara nodded, feeling her nerves tighten.

“And you’ll need to do her hair for dinner. Can you do hair?” Mrs. Quigley asked.

“I can. I did Mrs. Hartley’s hair sometimes.” Clara answered, relieved that she would be up to the job in at least one way.

“It’ll probably be a different fashion for Miss Peggy, but that’s all right, just do what she tells you.” Mrs. Quigley crossed her hands in front of her waist.

From downstairs, a door opened and shut. The front hall filled with the sound of female laughter. “I hear them, they are back. Quick, Clara, stand up straight.”

Clara felt a growing sense of discomfort as she tried to calm her unsteady nerves. It didn’t help that the old woman now appeared tense as well. How had she allowed herself to think she, Clara Bell, belonged in a house such as this one? She patted down her skirt and adjusted her cap.

“Don’t fidget, child. Just be still.” Mrs. Quigley’s snappy order did little to soothe Clara’s worry.

Footsteps ascended the grand spiraling staircase, the click of a lady’s heels on the wood. Then the heeled tapping grew muffled as Peggy paraded down the carpeted corridor. Clara’s eyes were fixed on the door, so that she saw it opening wider. Clara took a deep breath and put on the mask of a polite smile as a slight, trim figure appeared in the doorway. The young lady, who appeared to be the same age as Clara, fixed her clear blue eyes on the two figures by her bedside.

“Ah!” Peggy Shippen screeched, recoiling in the doorway. “Oh, Mrs. Quigley.” She said the name like a censure, clutching her bosom with a small, gloved hand. “You gave me such a fright.”

“Please, I beg your pardon, Mistress Peggy.” Mrs. Quigley nodded submissively, and Clara mimicked her. “We should have warned you we were in your bedroom.”

“Yes, indeed, I thought I had seen a ghost.” Peggy looked from the housekeeper to the unknown girl beside her. Clara longed to fidget, to make sure her hair was tucked neatly into her white mobcap, but then she remembered Mrs. Quigley’s instructions to be still. “And who is this with you?” Peggy crossed the room, tossing her horsewhip haphazardly onto the ground as she approached the two servants.

“Miss Peggy, this is Clara Bell. Our new maid. She will be attending to you and your sister.” Mrs. Quigley stepped forward, gesturing toward Clara.

“I see.” Peggy nodded, narrowing her eyes on Clara. “So you are to be my new maid?” Peggy ran the length of Clara’s height with her eyes, circling her as she would examine a horse on the auction block. Having a girl like Peggy Shippen this close to her was a sensation entirely new to Clara; Peggy’s presence seemed to loom larger than her petite frame, spreading throughout the room like the scent of her rosewater-steeped skin.

If Peggy Shippen thought her own appearance looked plain or out of fashion, what must she think of her maid’s apparel? Clara wondered. Peggy was short and thin, with her elaborate dress fitted to draw attention to her narrow waist. She wore a silk riding jacket of a rich forest green with a black velvet collar and matching cuffs. The buttons down the front were closed so that the jacket fit snugly, tailored perfectly to her frame. The accompanying skirt draped over a wide-waisted pannier so that her trim waist expanded into an

alluring, hourglass shape. On her head Peggy wore a small bonnet of the same green silk, which rested neatly on the blond curls she had clipped back above her neck.

“Mrs. Quigley”—Peggy turned back to her housekeeper—“thank you for bringing her to me. You may leave us now.”

Mrs. Quigley curtsied, and then, with a fleeting glance in Clara’s direction, left the bedroom. Clara, aware that etiquette dictated that she should not speak first, kept her gaze fixed on the wooden floor.

“The new maid.” Peggy was opposite Clara now. Even in her heeled, leather riding boots, she stood several inches shorter than Clara. “Look at me.”

Clara obeyed, lifting her focus from the floor into a pair of bright, round eyes.

“What did you say your name was?” Peggy walked toward her new maid, shocking Clara by taking her hand in her own.

“Clara Bell, ma’am.”

“And what do you expect you shall be doing in my room for me?”

“I was told to help you and Miss Betsy dress for supper, Miss Peggy.”

“Never mind helping Betsy,” Peggy said. “She’s downstairs teasing her fiancé, giving him hope he might get a goodbye kiss. Poor Neddy, he might as well be wooing a nun.”

Clara felt her cheeks redden as she lowered her eyes to the floorboards.

“You shall help me dress, Clara.” Peggy paused a moment before smiling. “It’s not right that you should split your time between me and my sister. Why, Betsy’s already got herself a fiancé.”

“As you wish, ma’am.” Clara balled her fists, twisting the cotton cloth of her skirts in her fingers. Best stay quiet, best not to have an opinion on this sisterly struggle, she told herself.

Peggy continued. “I think you and I shall be great friends.” With that, Peggy lifted her skirt, offering a sudden view of her bloomers, as she loosened the laces of her heeled boots. “Feels good to take these boots off.”

Clara nodded, stretching her arms forward to receive the boots from her mistress. In stocking-clad feet now, Peggy crossed the room and sat at her vanity table before a broad, clean mirror. “I had too much wine this afternoon.” Peggy yawned, unclipping her riding cap and shaking her blond curls loose. “I just get so enthralled by the good wine, the French wine, like what we used to drink before the war. Father doesn’t buy it anymore.” Peggy ran her fingers through her hair, still yawning. “Besides, wine is the only way to pass the time with the two of them, they’re so dull.”

“Perhaps you have time for a nap, my lady?” Clara suggested timidly, not sure what else to say.

“No,” Peg answered absentmindedly, as she leaned closer to the mirror to scrutinize her face. “I must dress. After dinner Betsy and I have a big evening—dancing and card games at Lord Rawdon’s.”

“I see.” Clara nodded.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” Peggy turned, staring at her maid. “Dress me!”

“Oh, yes, of course.” Clara fidgeted, shifting her weight from one foot to the other.

“Well? What is it?” Thinly veiled frustration permeated Peggy’s voice now, and Clara remembered the advice of the old housekeeper: never anger Peggy.

“My lady, I will be happy to help you dress. It’s just . . .” Clara held forth her hands—her nails caked in grime, her palms stained from the dusty road. “Perhaps I might wash my hands first?”

Clara’s spirits sunk with the look of irritation that crossed her new mistress’s face. “Very well. Come here.” Peggy offered her basin of fresh water. While Clara dipped her hands into the cool bowl, sending the floating flower petals aflutter, Peggy watched. “How did you get this job, Clara? Where did you work before this?”

“If you please, my lady, I worked at Hartley’s farm in Lancaster.” Clara dried her hands on her apron. “Right next to your own family’s farm, where you lived for two years at the outbreak of the war.”

“I know where Lancaster is.” Peggy narrowed her eyes, her tone suddenly chilly. “Do not mention that farm again, understood?” Peggy shook her head, blinking her eyelids as if to tamp out the recollection Clara had summoned to her mind. When she spoke again, her voice had regained its composure. “There are things that happened there that . . . that I do not wish to remember.”

“I do apologize.” Clara cringed. This was not going well at all, and Mrs. Quigley’s warning suddenly seemed prophetic: she wouldn’t last here. It had been foolish to think that she, Clara Bell, a servant from Hartley’s Farm, would be up to the task of serving a lady like Miss Peggy Shippen.

Clara detected the sound of footsteps ascending the staircase. “Peggy?” a woman’s voice called out.

“It’s Betsy.” Peggy turned to the maid. “Quick, run behind my closet, out of sight. Go!” Peggy practically pushed Clara away from her, and Clara obeyed, heart racing as she dashed behind the hulking piece of furniture.

“Peggy.” A timorous voice now drifted in from the doorway of the bedroom. From her spot, Clara could see Miss Peggy but not the elder sister.

“Oh, Betsy, hello. Well, did you let Mr. Neddy Burd see an inch of flesh? Perhaps a kiss, if only on the cheek?” Peggy’s voice was cool and taunting as she turned from her seat before the mirror.

“Stop teasing, Peggy.”

“Poor man looks wound up tighter than a spring. Won’t you at least let him see a glimpse of your ankle, Bets? He may be patient, but even saints have their limits.”

“Peggy, quit being vile or I shall tell Papa.”

“Oh, what do you want, Bets?” Peggy cocked her head to the side.

“Mrs. Quigley tells me our new maid is here.”

“Is she?” Peggy sounded bored.

“Yes. Mrs. Quigley said she was with you.”

Peggy raised her hands as if to ask, where? Clara receded farther behind the armoire, feeling as guilty as a thief.

“But . . . Mrs. Quigley just told me.”

“Bets, you see perfectly well that I am here and this so-called maid is not. What would you like me to say?”

Betsy paused, quiet. “Where did she go?”

“I do not know, Bets, I have yet to lay eyes on her.”

“Oh,” Betsy said. “Well, if she turns up, will you send her my way? I’d like help dressing.”

“Of course,” Peggy agreed, her tone obliging.

“But do you promise, Peggy?”

“I shall send her your way, I promise. Now, Bets, I’m about to dress myself. Be a dear and close the door?”

Betsy left without a word, quietly closing the door behind her.

“Come here.” Peggy wheeled back around, so that her gaze now fixed on her maid through the mirror. She waved her hand. “I said come here.” Her face was encouraging, even sweet. Clara treaded forward, keeping her eyes down.

“Thank you.” Peggy took Clara’s hand in hers and gave it a soft, conspiratorial squeeze. Clara felt uncomfortable, ill at ease over unwittingly taking part in a lie to one of her new ladies.

“Lean down beside me, Clara.” Peggy urged her maid closer, her voice suddenly silky, and this sweet tone did more to put Clara on edge than any previous iciness had. “You know, Clara, you are not ugly. In fact, I’d say you’re quite pretty. For a farm girl.” Clara looked into the glass before them, staring at the two faces. Hers was stained an unattractive, rosy pink after her long journey in the sun from Lancaster, while Peggy’s was creamy and unlined, like freshly pressed lace. Their complexions were similar—both fair, with light eyes—but Peggy’s hair was silky, the texture of freshly spun gold, while Clara’s appeared more like dried straw at the end of the harvest. Clara thought her eyes looked dull and colorless, while Peggy’s shone blue under shaped eyebrows and long eyelashes. Peggy’s gaze was alert, her features active, as though they were perceiving things, understanding things, which Clara herself had not even noticed.

“You flatter me, Miss Peggy.” Clara pulled her face back from the mirror, retreating behind her mistress.

“No, I don’t flatter people,” Peggy answered matter-of-factly, powdering the tip of her nose. “They flatter me. Go fetch my rose-colored silk dress.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And I’ll need my white satin gloves, my white heels, my widest pannier hoopskirt, and any of the ribbons—either white or pink—that you think would be agreeable with the rose silk of the gown.” Peggy pointed Clara in the direction of her wardrobe, and Clara crossed the room to retrieve the requested items.

“Tonight shall be very festive. Of course, every night is festive now that the British officers are in Philadelphia,” Peggy chattered, coating her lips in pink lard to tint them a bright hue. Clara stared into the vast abyss of Peggy’s crowded armoire. A rose-colored gown. But there must have been twenty pink dresses in the wardrobe. She saw silks in shades of pink that mirrored nature’s softest petals: cherry blossom, tulip, begonia, hydrangea. How would she ever determine which one her mistress had meant by “rose”?

“Well?” Peggy was still at her vanity, applying rouge to her cheeks.

“Rose, rose, rose,” Clara muttered as she fingered the parade of gowns. How lucky the girl who possessed just one of these gowns, and her mistress owned them all. Clara settled on what she determined to be the correct one, removing it gently from its hook and carrying it toward her mistress. When Clara advanced toward her mistress, she saw that Peggy had stripped down to her shift and stays, prompting Clara to blush and lower her eyes. She supposed a lady need not be modest with her maid, but Peggy didn’t seem self-conscious of her near nakedness at all.

“Oh, you’re as bashful as a nun. Or worse, my sister.” Peggy giggled. “I want you to re-fasten my stays to make them tighter.” Peggy turned around so that her backside was to Clara. Fixing her grip to one of the posters of the bed, Peggy braced herself for the assault on her waistline.

Clara untied the existing knot and pulled on the laces. The hourglass shape ensured by a lady’s bone stays looked much less comfortable than the cotton stays worn by servants like herself, and Clara felt a moment’s appreciation for her less-constricting wardrobe.

“Tighter, I can manage a bit tighter,” Peggy urged her maid, even as she appeared to struggle for breath. “I’m to have the smallest waist at the party tonight.”

Clara nodded, pitying her mistress but obeying her orders as she redoubled her efforts and pulled anew on the stays. The top of Peggy’s corset fanned out to add to the appearance of a full bosom and also to ensure that a woman was forced to hold her upper arms out, like a ballet dancer. With elbows bent and hands clasped together in front of her waist, she’d be in the position considered most ladylike.

“That’s enough.” Peggy winced, closing her eyes for a moment. Clara tied off the laces and awaited her next order. With her corset tightened and waist pulled in, Peggy leaned on Clara as she slid into her ample pannier hoopskirt.

“Goodness.” Peggy closed her eyes and reached tenderly toward her abdomen, still adjusting to her constricted breathing. “Always takes a minute to adjust.”

“I can loosen them.” Clara reached for the laces, regretting that perhaps she’d tied the stays too firmly.

“No, no.” Peggy shook her head, her breathing still labored. “All the gents like to imagine that they take my breath away. If they only knew it was the corset.” Peggy opened her eyes and smiled at her maid. “Now, the pièce de résistance.” Peggy pointed at the gown that was fanned out on the bed, its skirt taking up the entire

width of the bedframe. "I do love this one." Peggy stroked the rosy silk affectionately. "And so does he."

Clara, interest piqued, nevertheless let the comment drift aside like the breeze streaming through the open windows. She held the dress wide to help Peggy slip into it.

"Even loyalty to the British crown has its limits, I suppose." Peggy giggled.

"Pardon me, miss?" Clara wrinkled her brow, unsure of the meaning.

"My dress," Peggy said. "It's à la française."

Clara nodded. "Oh, of course." But still she had little idea of her lady's meaning, and Miss Peggy's smirk indicated that she suspected as much.

Peggy pointed down at her dress. "The tight stomacher visible in front, it's the highest fashion of the French court. And now the British."

"It's certainly very fine," Clara replied, admiring her mistress's figure. The bodice of the gown, with its white silk stomacher, hugged Peggy's curves before the expansive skirt spilled over the side hoops and cascaded to the floor in its rich, silky splendor. The creamy white skin of Peggy's arms peeked out under ruffled sleeves of lace. The neckline came low to show the hint of Peggy's bosom, decorated by a thin strand of pearls.

Dressing Peggy Shippen was an art form, Clara realized, and her mistress had more adornments in mind for this one evening than Clara possessed in her entire travel sack. After the gown was fastened snugly around the contours of her diminutive figure, there were the accessories to be put in place: stockings gartered above the knees, white satin shoes over her feet, pearl earrings that looked like large raindrops.

"You look like a doll, if you don't mind my saying so, miss." Clara marveled, her nerves softening under the comforting tonic of her lady's increasingly ebullient mood. Each time Peggy caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, her features seemed slightly more alight.

"We must hurry or we'll be tardy for dinner, and we wouldn't want Father to complain," Peggy chirped, lowering herself carefully onto her cushioned seat before the looking glass. "Well, what are you waiting for, Clara?" She looked at her maid.

Clara stared back, baffled; what more could be done to tune Miss Peggy's appearance? Was it not time that she leave and go assist Miss Betsy?

"I know what you're thinking. Forget Betsy, come fashion my hair," Peggy ordered, her tone dry.

"Aye, Miss Peggy," Clara answered, sidling up behind her mistress. So perhaps she would not have time to make Miss Betsy's acquaintance before dinner. "How shall we do it?"

"Continental fashion, like that French queen," Peggy replied, as she smeared more color across her lips. "The higher, the better." Clara had seen the occasional images of the French queen in the newspapers; she knew how Louis XVI's bride had made the pouf the height of fashion.

"Did the girls on your farm dress this fine?" Peggy flashed a dazzling smile at Clara through her reflection in

the mirror.

“Not at all, ma’am.” Clara pulled Peggy’s hair through her fingers. “I don’t think Mrs. Hartley ever asked me to fashion her hair like that of a queen.” She smiled, surprised but flattered by the interest Miss Peggy was taking in her.

“Well, you had better get used to it. Since the British seized the city from the . . . rebels”—Peggy could barely hide the contempt in her voice as it tripped over the word—“the hair must be higher, the corsets tighter. And the dresses! Before they got here, it was all homespun. But now the shops are open once more, and we get fresh silk, ribbons, lace.” She lined the lids of her eyes with charcoal as Clara wrapped strands of her blond hair around the iron, releasing them into buoyant curls.

Clara considered this, hesitating. Her mistress sounded as if she enjoyed the company of the British soldiers. Clara herself still nurtured a secret allegiance to the rebel cause. How could she admit this to her mistress? She could not, not if she hoped to keep Miss Peggy’s good favor.

“Everything has been so much more fun since the British got here! I think I’ve enjoyed myself more in six months than most girls do in an entire lifetime.” Peggy sighed, staring at a pair of silhouettes cut out of paper and leaning against her mirror. The lady looked just like Peggy in profile, drawn to the collar of an ornate dress, with her hair à la française. The man wore the British regimentals and tricornered hat, and his features were handsome, slightly delicate even. The silhouettes were arranged so the two figures appeared locked in each other’s gaze, immutable.

“Is that you, my lady?” Clara asked, studying the cut-paper silhouettes.

“Oh, yes. It’s me and Johnny.” Peggy’s forefinger reached for the paper and tenderly stroked the would-be cheek of the gentleman. “He made it for me—he promised that I’m the only one he made a silhouette for.”

Clara let that comment hover in the air, without response, as she continued her diligent styling of Miss Peggy’s hair. When her pouf was sufficiently high and her cheeks sufficiently rouged, Peggy sprayed her hair with the powder pump to infuse the faintest hint of white into her locks. She dabbed her wrists, neck, and bosom with floral-scented perfume, and stood to admire herself before the full-length looking glass. “Well.” She completed a twirl, the skirt of her gown and the smell of her perfume fanning out around her. “How do I look, Clara?”

Clara had never seen her equal. “I can’t imagine there will be a single gentleman in all of Philadelphia who will not want to stand beside you, Miss Peggy.”

“I’m sure Meg Chew will be dressed just as nicely,” Peggy retorted, her features turning sour for a moment. “But Johnny told me he’s looking forward to seeing me tonight, not Meg Chew.”

Clara, not sure of how else to answer, nodded. “Of course he is.” As Clara gazed once more in the mirror to admire her mistress, she caught sight of her own reflection, and couldn’t help but feel fresh embarrassment over her own plain, homespun figure.



THE KITCHEN in the Shippen home was a hive of activity—filled with harried servants, fragrant aromas, and serving dishes being jostled from hand to hand. Clara watched in awe as food traveled from the hearth

and somehow melded into the tantalizing presentations on the china platters. At the center of the kitchen around a long wooden table stood several servants, arranging the various ingredients into tidy, savory-looking dishes.

“Clara, there you are! How did it go with the Miss Shippens?” Mrs. Quigley looked over from where she was sorting a set of silver wineglasses. “You look lost child, come here and tell me how it went.”

“I hope it went well. I did Miss Peggy’s hair, and I helped her dress.” Clara gazed around, still distracted by the largest, noisiest kitchen she’d ever seen.

“And Miss Betsy? You’ve met her as well?”

“No, ma’am,” Clara answered, feeling guilty, as if it had been her own fault. She told the housekeeper about the exchange between the Shippen sisters and her orders to hide behind the wardrobe.

“Sounds about right.” Mrs. Quigley’s shoulders sagged as she listened. “Well, not your fault, Clara. And speaking of wardrobe”—Mrs. Quigley settled the final glass and then reached for a wine decanter—“I’ve spoken with Mr. Quigley, and we agree that you’ll need to spruce up your wardrobe a bit now that you’re a maid in the Shippen household.” The housekeeper looked over Clara’s attire disapprovingly again. “We shall be able to help you.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Clara could not help but smile—she could not remember the last time she’d had new clothes.

“It’s nothing, child. Now don’t just stand there completely useless.” The housekeeper took Clara by the arm and escorted her through the two rooms that abutted the kitchen. “The scullery is back here.”

“The . . . what, Mrs. Quigley?”

“I keep forgetting you’ve just come from a farm.” Mrs. Quigley sighed. “The scullery. It’s where the dishes are scrubbed, washed, and dried after the meals. You’ll help with that. And here”—the housekeeper moved fluidly to the next small room—“is the larder. The pantry?”

Clara nodded. That one she knew.

“Who’s this?” A wide-hipped, middle-aged woman with strong features and an accent Clara immediately recognized as German appeared from out of a nook in the pantry, her thick arms cradling a crate of peaches.

“Hannah, hello,” Mrs. Quigley said. “Meet the Miss Shippens’ new maid, Clara.”

“Ah,” Hannah shifted her cargo to her hip and wiped her hands on her dirty apron, reaching forward for a handshake. “The name’s Hannah Breunig. Cook for the Shippens.” She introduced herself with the same clipped diction as Oma.

“Clara Bell,” Clara answered politely. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Breunig.”

“It’s Hannah. But I’m sorry to say I don’t think anything’s a pleasure right now, not when this dessert still needs baking. But just stay out of my way and we won’t have a problem.” Hannah turned back to the kitchen and both Clara and Mrs. Quigley followed her.

“Ah, so this is the young lady who needs the new wardrobe?” Clara turned to see a man with thinning hair the same gray hue as Mrs. Quigley’s.

“Oh good, you’re here, Arthur.” Mrs. Quigley nodded at the man, who wore a formal white collared shirt with a tailored black jacket, cropped breeches, and buckled shoes. His thinning hair was combed back neatly. Clara noticed the servants in the kitchen stopping their harried work to curtsy as he passed them. “Hello, Clara Bell. My name’s Arthur Quigley. My first claim to notoriety is that I’m married to Mrs. Quigley. My second title is that I’m the butler and valet for Judge Shippen.”

“Mr. Quigley, it’s a pleasure.” Clara curtsied.

“Arthur, I’ve just told Clara that we’ve made arrangements to assist her with the . . . deficiencies . . . of her wardrobe.” Mrs. Quigley addressed her husband formally, though Clara noticed the way her stern eyes had softened.

“We shall be happy to help.” Mr. Quigley nodded. “Can you cook, Clara? In a pinch?”

“No, sir. I’m sorry to say I’m not much use with cooking,” Clara answered.

Mrs. Quigley leaned over the table and handed her husband the tray of neatly arranged wine goblets. “I would think with a grandmother such as yours it’d be the first thing you’d learn.”

“Quite the opposite, I’m afraid,” Clara answered. “Oma always did all the cooking, never wanted anyone else to ruin her food. I learned all the ladies’ arts. Hair styling, sewing, mending.”

“Well, Miss Peggy will certainly have you laboring at each of those tasks night and day,” Mr. Quigley answered, taking the wine decanter from his wife. “And have you met Miss Betsy as well?”

Mrs. Quigley interjected, answering for Clara. “It seems that Miss Peggy required Clara entirely for herself this afternoon.” The housekeeper’s eyes rounded out the message, and Mr. Quigley nodded.

“I see.” He turned back to Clara. “Best not to get involved in any territorial disputes, Clara. We’ve got enough men fighting a territorial battle across this continent, without starting another war in the Shippen household. You just keep your head down and do as you’re told, and if it gets too out of hand, you come to Mrs. Quigley or myself. Understood?”

“Understood, sir.” Clara nodded.

“You shall meet Miss Betsy at supper.” Mr. Quigley fidgeted with the collar of his shirt, as if to render its stiff creases even more crisp.

“Who is this? There’s a face I don’t recognize.”

Clara turned in the direction of a new voice in the crowded kitchen and found herself staring into a broad, smiling face. Like her, this man was younger than the other servants in the kitchen, with light brown hair and hazel eyes. He looked familiar. Yes, from his brown wool breeches and loosely fitted linen shirt, Clara could tell this was the guitar-playing groom she’d spotted outside the stables.

“I think I saw you earlier,” the young man spoke first, grinning at her. “The name’s Little, Caleb Little.”

“Nice to meet you.” Clara curtsied, lowering her eyes.

“I saw you looking through the window,” he continued. She felt her cheeks grow warm.

“And you are?” He raised his eyebrows.

“Oh, right, I’m Clara Bell. The new lady’s maid for the Miss Shippens.”

“Ah, Clara Bell, that’s an enviable post you have,” Caleb answered, cracking a lopsided grin. “I’m the stable groom.”

“And the footman, don’t forget, so wash your hands and get ready to serve dinner, Caleb,” Mrs. Quigley said, interrupting them.

“That’s right, I’m the footman now as well.” Caleb Little rolled up his sleeves and crossed the kitchen toward the washbasin. “Double duty since they sacked all the rest of the servants.” Caleb’s accent was more rough, more American, than the proper Quigleys or the German cook.

“And lucky to have the job, so I better not be hearing a complaint.” Mrs. Quigley raised a finger.

“Of course not, ma’am,” Caleb answered, leaning over to wash his hands and splash his face. Clara’s eyes lingered as he rubbed the back of his tanned neck with a wet rag.

“You’re going to be with Caleb at dinner tonight, Clara,” Mr. Quigley explained. “Watch how he serves, and you’ll fill in for him on occasion.”

Clara peeled her eyes from Caleb, turning toward the valet. “I’ve never served dinner for a family like the Shippens.”

“It’s not too hard, Miss Bell.” Caleb winked as he turned back to face her, toweling off his wet face. “As long as you keep Miss Peggy’s wineglass full, you should have nothing to worry about.”

“It is hard, and she should worry about it,” Mrs. Quigley snapped at Caleb. “And you could stand to worry a bit more too. Now start getting these dishes out on the table.”

“Sorry, Auntie.” Caleb nodded his head respectfully toward Mrs. Quigley before flashing Clara a mischievous grin. With that, the housekeeper handed her nephew the tray of wineglasses and pushed him through the door, ordering Clara to follow behind.



“DINNER IS ready to be served,” Mr. Quigley announced to the kitchen. His voice set off a fresh round of errands among the staff.

“The family is seated—go, go!” Mrs. Quigley kept Clara and Caleb running to and from the kitchen to the dining room, carrying tray after tray of hot food. Hannah had the Shippens starting with trays of meat: miniature game hens, a rabbit pie, and fresh sturgeon. Accompanying the meat were heaping bowls of rosemary potatoes, carrots from the garden, steamed fiddleheads, spinach, and roasted beets.

“My aunt acts like we are serving the royal family, but really you just have to make sure you don’t spill and you don’t trip. As long as you manage that, they’ll never even notice you’re in the room. All they’re looking at is the food and one another’s clothing,” Caleb whispered to Clara at the threshold of the dining room, but Clara wasn’t listening to the footman beside her. Her eyes were feasting on the scene before her, a tableau unlike the family meals she’d known at the Hartleys. The Shippens sat around a table of walnut, with ornately carved chairs showing the ornamental flair once again popular in Europe. The table was spread with a damask tablecloth, every inch festooned with the freshly polished silver and china plates wreathed in a floral pattern. “Ready?” Caleb paused beside her, weighed down by the plates of meat he carried.

“Caleb, I can’t. Let me watch you this first time,” Clara pleaded, placing her bowl of potatoes down on the buffet in the hallway. “I’ll drop something, or do something incorrectly, I just know it.”

“What’s the matter, Clara Bell? ’Fraid of a few Shippens just because they wear fancy clothes and pump powder into their hair?” Caleb smiled, his hazel eyes lit up with teasing.

“Let me see how you do it first. Please?” Clara pleaded.

“All right, just this once, then you’re helping me serve.” Caleb winked. “Here I go.” He straightened his posture, shrugging off the casual affability he’d displayed just moments ago in the servants’ quarters and marching into the dining room with sudden and impressive poise. Clara lurked in the hallway outside the dining room, watching the family from a concealed corner where they didn’t suspect her presence. She spotted her mistress first, the brightest spot in the dark, wood-paneled room. The candlelight danced playfully off her features, and the sight of Peggy Shippen made Clara freshly nervous. She stared on, admiring Peggy’s genteel features, her soaring hair, her perfect attire.

Caleb distributed the plates of meat evenly along the table and Clara watched, studying his graceful movements, the way he served the family members without getting in their way as they sipped their wine. Judge Shippen was greeted reverentially by each member of the family as he took his spot at the head of the table and led the group in a short prayer of thanks.

Beside the judge sat a man with a very similar likeness and a heavier frame. “That’s Doctor William Shippen.” Caleb was back by Clara’s side, whispering into her ear as they watched the family. “Doctor William is the judge’s cousin.” Judge Edward was like his cousin, Doctor William, in many ways, but seemingly more of a deflated version—as if there was less flesh on his bones and a wearier spirit shining through his eyes.

“Doctor William, unlike his brother, is known to be supporting the colonies,” Caleb explained.

Clara nodded. This was a well-known piece of gossip. “But Miss Peggy seems to have openly loyalist tendencies,” Clara whispered, thinking back to the conversation she’d had earlier with her new mistress.

Caleb considered this, his features folding into a casual, cockeyed grin. “Well, how many colonial men do you see in Philadelphia wearing store-bought suits, ready to serve her Champagne and caviar?” He stepped away to deliver a platter of sturgeon to the table.

Across from Doctor William, occupying the middle of the table, sat the Shippen girls, Peggy and the other young lady whom Clara knew to be Betsy. She was a less striking version of her younger sister. Like Peggy, she dressed à la française, wearing a silk gown of light lavender with a yellow stomacher. Her hair was fixed in a low bun that seemed simple beside Peggy’s elaborate pouf. Her eyes were the same blue as her younger

sister's, but less alert, and as Clara observed their body language she determined that Betsy took her cues from her sister, as if Peggy were the elder of the two.

At the opposite end of the table from the judge sat the lady of the house, dressed in a simpler style than her two young daughters. "That's Mrs. Margaret Shippen," Caleb said, returning from the table, "the judge's wife." She wore a plain gown of plum-colored silk with no ornamentation, her neck covered by a white linen neckerchief that seemed all the more modest beside her daughters' exposed bosoms. Mrs. Shippen had graying hair and wore nothing on her face except a tense expression, but she listened attentively as her husband spoke.

"The French may be clamoring to enter into the war on the side of the colonies." The judge took a slow, deliberate sip of wine, his lean fingers clutching the silver cup tightly. "But I tell you, brother, they will not. They can't afford another war."

"Brother." Doctor William's voice boomed in comparison to the judge's meek tones. "You have the kind and timid nature that assumes, I believe incorrectly, that monarchs arrive at their decisions by determining what is right and prudent, not by what is beneficial to their Empire. A chance to remove the British threat from this continent and ensure his hold over Canada? Of course Louis will join the war. The French have made that apparent after the colonial victory at Saratoga." Doctor William paused. "Edward, am I expected to eat this meat by itself?"

Caleb picked up the bowl of potatoes that Clara had not yet delivered, placing them in her hands. "Your turn, Clara Bell, they're asking for the potatoes."

Clara hesitated. "Must I go in?"

"You lived in the countryside swarming with Iroquois and you're afraid to serve some potatoes?" Caleb teased her. "Follow me." Caleb picked up a bowl of cranberry relish and led her into the dining room.

The eyes of the judge and Mrs. Shippen turned upon Clara, and she froze near the threshold of the dining room. Silence filled the room. The only noise was a pop from the hearth, where a log collapsed. When the judge did not speak first, Doctor William addressed Clara.

"Well? Are those potatoes for us, then?" he asked, a good-natured smile lighting his ruddy features.

"Who is this? Is this her?" Betsy turned to her sister, speaking about the unknown face.

"Oh," Peggy piped up. "Everybody, this is the new maid, Clara."

"You're the girl that Mrs. Quigley sent for?" Judge Shippen asked.

"Indeed, sir, Excellency, Judge," Clara answered.

"Any one of those three titles shall do, but not all three at once." The judge laughed.

"Nice to meet you, Clara," Doctor William answered. "Now bring those potatoes here. I happen to be starving."

"Yes, sir." Clara obeyed, depositing the potatoes in front of Doctor William.

“Clara helped me dress for dinner.” Peggy sipped her wine, turning to her sister.

Betsy’s spoon clamored to her plate. “She did? But you promised you would . . .” Seeing her younger sister’s smirk, Betsy did not finish, but crossed her arms in front of her body.

“Calm yourself, Betsy. I had her fashion my hair for Lord Rawdon’s soiree tonight. You hardly needed help managing a hairdo like the one you’re modeling.”

At this second insult, Betsy’s pout threatened to turn to genuine tears. “Well, why did she not help me?” Betsy turned from her sister to her father. “Papa, you told Peggy that we were to share the new girl, but Peggy’s kept her all to herself.”

“But Papa, Betsy doesn’t need a maid, she already has a fiancé. I don’t see why she needs help getting ready for parties when all she does is sit in the corner and sulk that Neddy wasn’t invited.”

“Girls, if you are going to quarrel, there shall be no new maid at all.” Mrs. Shippen’s features were pinched, and Clara noticed that she barely nibbled on her food. For her part, Clara wished to finish serving the potatoes and disappear from this room.

“Mama, I am not quarreling. I just don’t think it’s fair that Peggy always gets—”

“Enough, Elizabeth,” Mrs. Shippen snapped at her elder daughter, rubbing her temples in a slow, rhythmic gesture. “I have a headache. I cannot bear another row tonight.”

“You always have a headache,” Peggy muttered to herself, sipping her wine.

Betsy, having lost the round to her sister, changed tracks. “Fine. Then I’m not going with you to Lord Rawdon’s tonight, Peggy.” Betsy uncrossed her arms and took a forceful stab at the bowl of potatoes offered by Clara. Clara braced herself, struggling to keep the dish steady.

“I don’t care.” Peggy shrugged her shoulders and leaned to help herself to the same dish.

“But you can’t go either, then.” Betsy tugged on the bowl of potatoes, so that Clara was pulled back toward the elder sister.

“Why is that?” Peggy stared down her sister, challenging her.

“Because you aren’t allowed to go out alone, remember? Mama? Papa? Remember you told Peggy that she comes home too late and spends too much money and she shan’t be allowed out alone anymore?”

“We did agree to that, Edward.” Mrs. Shippen threw a weary look to her husband, already fatigued by the coming spat.

“Nonsense!” Peggy cocked her head. “All the girls go out alone. You don’t see Meg Chew or Becky Redman with a chaperone. Papa, don’t listen to this spoilsport.”

“But not all the girls find themselves the subject of ridicule, Margaret.” Mrs. Shippen turned a mirthless expression on her daughter. “It has already been agreed upon. If your sister will not accompany you, you shall not go.”

“Ridicule? How have I been made the subject of ridicule?” Peggy’s eyes smoldered as she turned from her sister to her mother.

“Well, you lost your entire purse at cards the other night, for one thing.” Now Betsy appeared to have the upper hand, and Clara noted genuine concern in Peggy’s eyes; her evening plans might in fact be thwarted.

“When your purse contains nothing more than a shilling, that’s not a difficult accomplishment,” Peggy said.

“Any money gambled is money wasted,” Mrs. Shippen retorted.

Peggy turned wild eyes to her father, and when he cocked his head, she saw that she might in fact be kept at home. “Papa, this is unfair. You must let me go. Betsy is just being petty. I planned on this long ago. Please tell me I may go.”

“We did tell you, my dear Peggy, that you would need accompaniment from now on.” The judge avoided his daughter’s eyes, keeping his attention on his plate.

Peggy glanced from her father to her mother, her lips pursing as she watched her chances recede. She avoided her sister, who smirked beside her. Then, glancing up at her new maid, Peggy showed a flash of inspiration. “Fine. I’ll take Clara with me.”

Mrs. Shippen answered quickly. “We know nothing of Clara.” Looking up at Clara, Mrs. Shippen spoke quietly, almost inaudibly. “I apologize, Clara, I am sure you are a young woman of impeccable character, but it takes time to build trust.”

Clara nodded, wondering if they were done with the potatoes so that she might retreat into the other room.

“Once Clara has been here several months and Mrs. Quigley vouches for her character, then perhaps she may become a companion.” Mrs. Shippen finished.

“Mrs. Quigley!” Peggy repeated the name. “Mrs. Quigley too. Send them both. Send the whole servants’ quarters, for all I care. Papa, how about if Mrs. Quigley and Clara accompany me?”

Judge Shippen deliberated and his wife watched with a strained expression. Judge Shippen threw his brother a look as if to congratulate him on not having daughters.

“Dear, sweet Papa, please do not make me suffer. Please tell me that I may go.”

“All right, Peggy my dear.” The judge’s posture sagged as he agreed. “Take Mrs. Quigley and this new girl. And try not to spend money at cards, please.”

“Anything for you, Papa.” Peggy bounced up from her chair and flew to her father, whom she showered in enthusiastic kisses. Smiling at Clara, Peggy nodded.

“Whose soiree is this?” Judge Shippen asked.

“Lord Rawdon’s. It’s at his home,” Peggy answered her father as Clara slipped out of the room, determining that the potatoes were no longer of interest to the family.

“There, you survived.” Caleb greeted Clara at the serving buffet. “Though your presence certainly caused quite a stir.”

Clara sighed, fearing that the judge might regret having brought her into his household.

“And you’ve managed to get yourself an invitation to a soiree tonight.” Caleb smirked.

“About that.” Clara winced. The thought of such a party filled Clara with dread: a home full of young women just like Peggy, and in addition, English officers!

“There now, don’t look so fretful, Clara Bell. You’ll have Mrs. Quigley with you. And I’ll be driving you over in the coach.” For some reason that Clara could not explain, Caleb’s words and his presence served to quell her nerves.

She smiled, relieved to be in this quiet corridor with him and away from the Shippens. “I seem to have set off a feud among the sisters.”

“Nothing new.” Caleb shrugged. “Mrs. Shippen complains of headaches every day—but how could she not have a headache with that chorus to listen to? Now, these meat pies need serving. How about you help me?”

When they reentered the dining room, the family conversation had shifted away from their own battles back to that of the war between the colonies and the British. Clara tiptoed in behind Caleb, offering a meat pie to Judge Shippen.

“Why did the Battle of Saratoga make the difference?” Mrs. Shippen fed herself a small bite of fish, looking to her husband. Her brother-in-law answered first.

“It’s simple, Margaret. Benedict Arnold, in winning at Saratoga, has proven to the French that the Americans can actually win this war. Arnold provided the proof that those reluctant Frenchmen needed. Not to mention, he’s rallied the entire populace, a fact very much appreciated by our General George Washington.”

“But brother”—Judge Shippen served himself a sliver of the meat pie, which Clara held before him—“I still believe that it is in the best interest of the colonies to renounce violence and mend the relationship with the mother country. It baffles me that you don’t see it that way. Why must we sever our ties with a country that shares our religion, our history, our sensibilities, even our blood?”

Before Doctor William could answer his brother’s question, Peggy interjected. “My father, like all of us, is still hoping that the Continental Congress will accept the peace measures put forward by the crown.” Peggy spoke confidently, summoning Clara toward her so that she might herself be served a slice of the meat pie. “King George has proven himself both forgiving and benevolent.”

“Ah.” Doctor William turned to Peggy, impressed. “So my niece has an inclination toward politics?”

“I do.” Peggy cocked her head and drained her wineglass. “I am in close acquaintance with a great number of British officers, and follow the updates of the war with great interest. I was very disappointed to read of Benedict Arnold’s victory in Saratoga and the ensuing hints by the French that they would align themselves with Washington and the rest of the rebels.”

“Brother, your youngest has beauty and brains, even if I do not agree with her politics,” Doctor William said,

seemingly charmed by his young niece. “Well, dearest Peggy, in spite of your and your father’s aspirations for peace and unity, which come from pure hearts I’m sure, the Continental Congress will never reattach itself to King George and England,” William answered authoritatively, leaning back to make room for his full belly. “They have declared themselves a free people, and are willing to fight until that dream of liberty is realized. And they will fight now, I believe, with French assistance.”

“But, brother.” The judge reentered the discussion, his voice quiet. “I hope that you don’t speak these dangerous thoughts outside of these walls. Such language could get you in trouble.”

“The British won’t hold Philadelphia much longer.” Doctor William shrugged, taking a swig of wine.

Now Peggy answered. “I think you underestimate the strength of the crown. I have the chance to mingle with members of the British officers quite often, and—”

“Mingle, is that what you call it?” Betsy simpered.

Peggy ignored the comment from her sister. “And the British feel no such insecurity in their hold over Philadelphia. Or the colonies as a whole.”

“My dear niece Peggy.” William took another hearty bite of meat, enjoying the debate. “The Redcoats are barely beating us when we are nothing but a ragtag bunch of volunteers. How shall they defeat us once we have the purse of Versailles backing us?”

“France cannot afford this war.” Peggy pushed on, impressing Clara with her knowledge of politics and economics. “Louis has enough trouble keeping that Austrian-born wife of his under control. I think he’d better subdue Marie Antoinette and do battle with her profligate spending before engaging against foreign enemies.”

Clara slipped out of the room and stood just outside the threshold of the dining room, where she could continue to listen to this family discussion. The judge, shifting in his seat, seemed less enthused by the topic. “How was your recent trip to Virginia, William?”

“Oh ho, trying to change the topic, are you, Eddy?” William’s voice boomed.

“Papa,” Peggy interjected, smiling at her father, “as interesting as this has been, may I be excused? I must prepare to depart for Lord Rawdon’s.” Peggy made to rise from the table but her mother’s stern voice stopped her.

“Peggy, we have not finished our meal. You will stay and eat with us.”

Peggy turned from her mother to her father. “Please, Papa, I shall be late, and they’ll begin the card games without me.”

“Cards?” Mrs. Shippen’s interest was suddenly keen. “We just told you: no more gambling at cards. Edward, I think this is a mistake. I think Margaret should do as her sister plans to do, stay home tonight and do something to feed her mind.” Mrs. Shippen rubbed her temples once more, shutting her eyes.

Judge Shippen eyed his daughter and wife wearily.

Peggy made a face. "But we already agreed I could attend."

"Would you not like a night at home with your parents?" Mrs. Shippen opened her eyes, still massaging her forehead.

"Do you think I dressed like this for a night of reading with my parents?" Peggy laughed. "Papa, you already promised that I could go." She directed her focus toward her father, her expression growing taut.

"Peggy, my dear, I did not realize that it was cards again . . ."

"Papa!" Peggy widened her eyes, interrupting her father. "I shall refrain from the card games, I promise." Peggy paused. "And besides, a night spent mingling with the finest, most well-educated officers of the British Army is certainly a night spent enriching the mind."

"Is that so?" Betsy sniggered, exchanging a meaningful glance with her mother.

"Well, they are certainly a lot more interesting than your boring old Mr. Burd." Peggy turned, snarling at her sister.

"All right, all right, enough of this quarreling. Peggy, you may go to Lord Rawdon's," her father acquiesced. "But not until we've finished supper. Your mother has ordered a peach tart for dessert."

"But Edward . . ." Mrs. Shippen clenched her jaw.

"Margaret, please." The judge held up his hand, silencing his wife. "And Peggy, please do not stay out as late. I'd like you home by midnight." Judge Shippen looked at his daughter dotingly, while Mrs. Shippen sighed in frustration, dropping her silverware down on her plate. Peggy tossed a smirk in her mother's direction.

"Ready, Miss Bell?" Caleb was beside Clara, pulling her from her observation of this family drama.

"Will you please stop calling me 'Miss'? You've been here longer than I have. Please, call me Clara."

"Only if you'll agree to call me Cal."

"All right, all right." Clara nodded.

"Well, congratulations, Clara Bell. You survived your first Shippen dinner. All that remains is dessert." Caleb put the peach tart in her hands and smiled at her as she once more entered the dining room.

After the dinner, the judge and Doctor William retreated to the study while Peggy excused herself. Clara remained in the dining room to clear the table. The elderly woman she'd seen earlier, in the stairwell, emerged as if from the air.

"Caleb, that is Brigitte, right?"

"Call me Cal."

"Sorry, Cal. Is that Brigitte?" Clara asked.

“Oh, yes. Brigitte is Hannah’s sister. She doesn’t talk much, except to Hannah. She cleans the dishes, strips the bedding, dumps the chamber pots. All the sorts of jobs that allow her to avoid speaking to anyone. But you better go to Miss Peggy—she’s probably in a hurry to get to this soiree. Especially if André will be there.”

“Who’s André?” Clara remembered back to the cut-out silhouette that Peggy had attached to her mirror, the face of the handsome British officer. “Miss Peggy mentioned someone named ‘Johnny’?”

“The very same. John André is the man who is about to make your life very difficult.”



“HOW VERY predictable that Betsy would pass on this soiree, when General Howe himself will be there. Does she not know that wherever the general goes, the best officers are sure to follow?” Peggy stood in front of Clara, adjusting her gloves as the carriage rolled to a halt before her. “But then, she’s as averse to fun as Mother is.”

“Good evening, Miss Peggy.” Caleb hopped down from his perch and with one fluid gesture opened the coach door and extended his hand toward Miss Peggy.

Peggy let her eyes slide sideways toward her maid. “At least I have you here with me to help me . . . what was it . . . behave?” Peggy flashed her dazzling smile—that look that appeared sweet and yet had the effect of putting Clara more on edge—before taking Cal’s outstretched hand and hoisting herself and her full skirt through the carriage door.

Clara entered the carriage behind her mistress, receiving a teasing grin from Cal as she did so. Mrs. Quigley entered last, complaining that she did not have the luxury of taking a night off to attend a soiree, not when there was silver to be polished, china to be scrubbed, table linens to be pressed and sorted. But, Clara noticed, the old woman had changed into a clean, fresh dress of green and purple calico and had pulled her hair back tightly, giving her a more formal appearance than she’d modeled earlier in the day.

The carriage carried them west past the bustle of Market Street, just as the shop owners were shuttering their windows and wishing one another a pleasant night. As the last rays of daytime poured down, the Shippen carriage sped forward on an increasingly rural road toward the Schuylkill River.

“We are getting you new clothes, Clara.” Mrs. Quigley rested her hands in her lap, twisting a kerchief in tight knots. “It is not acceptable for you to be attending a soiree at Lord Rawdon’s looking like a farm hand.”

Clara, tired from the day, wished to reply that she would have happily stayed home, that she would have preferred to retreat to her private, quiet bedroom and have an evening of peace, but Oma’s stern face remained in the fore of her mind, so she simply smiled politely and answered, “Yes, ma’am, thank you.”

As Caleb urged the horses to speed ever quicker toward the Schuylkill, Peggy’s mood soared. She did not look at her maid or her housekeeper, but rather kept her gaze fixed firmly out the window, staring at the sun-streaked river, which appeared as if engulfed in flames, and the darkening evening into which she could not wait to be set loose.

Caleb slowed the carriage as they approached a mansion, large and well-lit, perched on the hill above the river. In the indigo pall of twilight, a large British flag was visible where it hung at the front of the mansion.

Peggy spotted their destination and pinched her cheeks, drawing a rosy blush from her ivory skin.

“Is this Lord Rawdon’s home?” Clara regretted the question the instant she saw Mrs. Quigley’s stern expression: servants were not supposed to break the silence. Peggy, however, seemed all too happy to reply.

“The British seized this house from a prominent rebel when he was forced to flee.” Peggy tugged on a loose wisp of golden hair, pulling the curl taut before allowing it to spring back into its coil. “How very fortunate for us. It makes a perfect spot for a summer fête.”

The horses pulled the Shippen carriage under a porte cochere and they were greeted by an entourage of wigged footmen. Peggy alighted from the carriage, clapping in delight at the military band that stood on hand to serenade the arriving guests. “Music!” Peggy exclaimed.

“Miss Shippen, welcome.” A middle-aged man in the bright red jacket of a British officer appeared, bowing opposite Peggy in a low curtsy. “You are a vision, Miss Shippen, as always.” Clara watched the greeting as Caleb helped her exit the carriage.

“Lord Rawdon, this is magical.” Peggy cocked her head, sending her strands of blond curls dancing around her cheeks. Had she practiced that perfectly coy mannerism before the mirror of her bedroom? Clara wondered.

“Miss Shippen, I hope you will do me the honor of allowing me to sit beside you at the card table this evening?” Lord Rawdon, though nearly twice Peggy’s age and seasoned in battle, appeared cowed before his dainty gowned guest.

“But of course, Lord Rawdon. It would be my honor to be seated beside the host.” Peggy smiled, but turned her attention to the crowd of guests assembling farther down the hill. “Well, Lord Rawdon, I would not wish to monopolize your time. A host is in high demand at his own party.”

“Please, Miss Shippen, the others are gathering under the tent on the lawn. Once my guests have arrived and we are a full company, I will meet you there for cards and Champagne.”

“Thank you, Lord Rawdon.” That was all the permission Peggy needed to take her leave. Peggy curtsied once more, perfectly polite, before lifting her skirts up and walking briskly across the lawn.

“Better follow.” Cal directed Clara’s gaze toward the retreating figure of Miss Peggy and Mrs. Quigley, who labored to keep apace.

“Will you not join us?” Clara asked, her gaze darting between the familiar sight of Cal and the large crowd of elegantly dressed revelers down the hill.

“I’ll have to take care of them first.” Caleb cocked his head toward the Shippen horses. “Good luck, Clara Bell.” He leaned close and whispered in her ear. “Don’t let them take your money at cards . . . these Redcoats are good at parting us simple Americans from our purses.”

Clara laughed. “Thanks for the warning, Cal.”

Cal led the carriage toward the stables to water the horses as Clara’s eyes traveled down the lawn toward the tent. A canopy hung against the velvety blue of the early evening sky, and a trellis draped in ivy welcomed

the guests inside. Small, circular tables for parties of six were arranged throughout the tent, covered in white damask tablecloths and crystal Champagne flutes. Throughout the tent, arrangements of freshly clipped wildflowers spilled out of vases, their perfume mixing with the fragrances dabbed on women's wrists to give the air a fresh, springtime aroma. Chandeliers of tiered candles hung overhead, and the light not only danced on the faces of the revelers but on the glasslike surface of the nearby Schuylkill River.

Clara trotted toward the figures of Mrs. Quigley and Miss Peggy and reached them just as they stepped inside the tent. Mrs. Quigley was pulled immediately into the task of fetching Champagne by a servant, and Clara stood alone beside her mistress before the assembly.

"Oh my," Clara sighed.

"What is it?" Peggy cocked her head toward her maid.

Clara, who had not realized she had uttered her thoughts aloud, stammered, "It's enchanting, that's all." Her eyes traveled to the far corner of the tent, where a string quartet played a languid waltz that could barely be heard over the sounds of laughter, flirtatious compliments, and the occasional bawdy joke.

"Oh, yes of course." Peggy waved a gloved hand, less interested in the décor and the music; Clara noticed her lady's eyes darting from face to smiling face, seeking out one smile in particular.

"Hello, Peg." A man, dressed in a suit of pale robin's egg blue, waved as he crossed the tent toward Peggy.

"Joseph Stansbury." Peggy leaned in and kissed the man, who appeared to have spent longer dressing than even Peggy herself. His cheeks were bulbous, cherry-colored orbs stained in blush, below a heavily powdered wig of tight curls. His heeled shoes looked as though they could have been chosen from Peggy's wardrobe.

"I love this rose shade on you." Joseph studied Peggy's dress with interest, speaking in a distinctly British accent.

"Thank you." Peggy performed a playful twirl. "I like the blue on you, Stansbury."

"Yes, the blue would complement you nicely, with your eyes," the man agreed, cupping his chin in his slender fingers, a ring on his middle finger catching a glint of candlelight.

"I'll have to order a gown in that color. How is your store?" Peggy asked.

"Business is good now that the British are back in charge."

"I shall toast to that." Peggy smiled.

"We got some new dishes today, straight from London. You're going to love them." He turned his sharp eyes on Clara. "And who is this?"

"Oh, this? This is nobody." Peggy shook her head. "Just my new lady's maid." Peggy waved her hand perfunctorily in the direction of Clara. "You know how my parents are suddenly so concerned with protecting my virtue."

“So they send this poor creature out to protect your honor?” Stansbury’s eyes narrowed on Clara—her homespun clothing, her dusty boots, her weary posture. Clara balled her fists but bit her lip to prevent the utterance of an impolite retort.

“Well, I’ll say this much: you know you’re a lady, Peggy Shippen, when you get your own lady’s maid.”

“Haven’t I always been a lady?” Peggy teased.

“Well, does she have a name?”

“Of course, Clara is her name. Clara, this is Joseph Stansbury, the china merchant on Market Street. We’ll pay a visit to his store soon.”

“A pleasure.” Clara curtsied, as she’d seen her mistress do, before the china merchant.

“Shall we go get some Champagne?” Joseph Stansbury offered a thin arm to Peggy.

“In a minute. I’ll come find you inside, Stansbury.”

“Are you shooing me away?” The merchant pouted, crossing his arms.

“Please, Stansbury, just go, quick!” Peggy waved the man away as she turned toward a figure in a red coat gliding toward her.

“Miss Shippen.” The dark-haired officer approached in several smooth strides, the sword at his waist swinging back and forth as his heels clicked confidently on the ground.

This man, Clara realized, was John André. She could see the resemblance to the cut-out paper silhouette in the bedroom, but he was more arresting in person. Major André’s body was tall and lean, adorned in a stiff red coat and tight-fitting breeches, with the glossy leather boots of the British officer. He wore his dark hair pulled back, a ribbon tied loosely at the nape of his neck.

“Major André,” Peggy answered, her voice suddenly faint.

“You look ravishing, as usual, my dear.” André took Peggy’s hand and gave it a soft kiss. He was close enough now that Clara detected the faint, sweet scent of Champagne on his breath. As she stood beside her mistress, Clara felt the smoldering intensity of his brown-eyed gaze.

“Major André, I—” Peggy said, not taking her hand away from his lips.

“What is this formality, *ma chérie*? I prefer ‘Johnny,’ you know that.”

“Johnny . . .” Peggy allowed both of her hands to be scooped up in his—her skin even more white against his dark, olive coloring.

“Johnny.” Peggy inched her body closer to his, so that she was looking up into his face. “I wore the rose gown. It’s your favorite, right?”

Her hands in his, he lifted her arms wide so that he might stare, unabashedly, at her figure. Clara cringed at

how bare and vulnerable her mistress suddenly appeared: her exposed shoulders and collarbone, her tiny waist, the broad cascading skirt. “Magnifique.” André winked at Peggy, and his approval was met with several exaggerated blinks of Peggy’s eyelashes. “Though I must say, whatever dress you put on immediately becomes my favorite.”

Peggy demurred, a sheepish blush, and Clara realized that this was the first time since she’d met Peggy that her mistress had very little to say.

“Shall we?” Major André wove his arm through Peggy’s, “Entrons-nous?”

Leaving Clara near the tent’s entrance, Peggy allowed herself to be escorted under the twinkling chandelier and deeper into the tent. “Oh, Johnny, I’m so glad that Lord Rawdon has arranged for the string quartet tonight. Your military bands—your drums and your fifes—are all fine for your marches and battles, but for cards and Champagne, I just want the violins.” Peggy’s voice was like warm honey as she tilted her head sideways, looking up at her escort and gliding farther away from Clara.

“That girl.” Mrs. Quigley was back at Clara’s side, muttering under her breath with clear disapproval.

“You’re back.” Clara’s frame slackened with relief as she caught sight of the old woman.

“Not for long, I fear. Apparently I left my work behind at the Shippen home only to work at another person’s home.” Mrs. Quigley clasped her hands together in front of her skirt, turning toward the receding figure of Miss Peggy. “And I return to find her already scooped up by the most notorious flirt of the bunch.” Mrs. Quigley stared at André with mistrust. “Had Miss Peggy not been born to a high family like the Shippens, well, I don’t like to think what might have become of her . . .”

But Clara’s eyes wandered back to the figure of Miss Peggy, whose entrance into the tent seemed to have attracted dozens of watchers. Miss Peggy floated flawlessly through the crowd, turning heads as she passed, greeting her fellow guests but never entering into conversation long enough to cede Major André’s attentions. Her movements, so honed and subtle in their natural elegance, reminded Clara of a willow branch lilted in the breeze.

“Now what happens, Mrs. Quigley?” Clara took in the scene as if it were some play she was attending for the first time.

“Easy, Clara, you’re not the swooning type as well, are you? We’ve got enough on our hands with Miss Peggy.” Mrs. Quigley frowned at Clara, who made a sudden effort to throw back her shoulders and not appear so entirely rapt with the surroundings.

Mrs. Quigley sighed, clasping her hands together behind her back. “Now they’ll play cards and sip Champagne for the next few hours, and we’ll stand here and look on as the night grows chilly. Once they’ve had just enough to loosen their morals, they will grow sleepy and we’ll carry our mistress home, where we will deposit her safely into bed.” Mrs. Quigley nodded her chin, staring crossly once more at Major André.

“Do we stand here the whole time, watching?”

“Yes, we do, and now you know why I see this as a waste of a night.” Mrs. Quigley snapped, suddenly ornery. Clara decided against telling the old woman how excited she was by the idea of watching this evening unfold.

Mrs. Quigley jerked her chin toward Peggy. “But it was wise of the judge and Mrs. Shippen to make sure Miss Peggy was not unaccompanied. I don’t like to repeat gossip, mind you, but I’ve known the folks in this town long enough to catch wind of the tales that are being spread about. And lots of folks have been talking about the . . . friendship . . . between our Miss Peggy and that officer of late.”

Clara turned toward Miss Peggy just in time to see her deliver the final line of a joke that caused Major André to erupt in hearty laughter.

“Course, I haven’t got the faintest idea why Miss Peggy requested that you join her tonight, saving for the fact that she wanted to lay her claim on you over Miss Betsy.” Mrs. Quigley looked at Clara, her eyes serious. Clara could not help but smart at the comment—it did in fact seem as though Miss Peggy sought her companionship at least, if not friendship. And why should she not?

“Just you be careful, Clara. That’s all I’ll say.”

Clara nodded, obedient, but in her mind she was thinking about how delightful it would be to have a young woman as fine and sought-after as Miss Peggy to call a friend. If only Oma could see her tonight, at a grand soiree hosted by a lord!

“Oh there you are, Quigley, thank heavens!”

“Oh, bother, what now?” Mrs. Quigley and Clara turned to see a large woman, breathless, hovering outside the threshold of the tent. Like Mrs. Quigley, she wore calico print and a linen cap, and carried herself with an air of determined—if not a bit harried—authority. “Quigley!”

“Hello, Lottie. Splendid night you’ve arranged here.” Mrs. Quigley turned toward the woman and slid out of the tent, with Clara following behind.

“Splendid, my foot!” The woman crossed her thick arms. “Our cook has taken sick before finishing the fruit tarts. If Lord Rawdon finds out that his cook has chosen tonight, of all times, to get sick, he’ll sack her immediately.” The woman’s eyes were wide with panic. “Is this your new maid?” The frantic housekeeper eyed Clara. “Can you lend her to me? Just for tonight?” Before receiving permission, the woman clasped Clara’s arm in her hard, bracing grip and began to tug her toward the house. “We need someone to help finish these tarts.”

“She can’t cook, Lottie,” Mrs. Quigley answered, her voice thick with irritation about this fact. “Oh, for heaven’s sake, I’ll come.” Mrs. Quigley turned to Clara with a stern expression. “Right, I’m going to run up to the kitchen to help them for a bit. You”—she raised a finger in Clara’s face—“you, Clara, do not let Miss Peggy out of your sight for one minute. You hear me?”

Clara nodded, looking through the entrance into the tent to locate her mistress. “Aye, Mrs. Quigley.” The housekeeper still looked reluctant to leave Clara, or, more likely, Miss Peggy. She cast a nervous glance toward her young mistress and saw that Major André was squeezing her waist. “Not for a second!”

Clara nodded. “Yes, ma’am, I understand.” The two older women hustled away from the tent toward the house, arguing with each other as they crossed the lawn. Clara, alone outside the tent, pulled her neckerchief closer around her shoulders and turned back toward the party, fixing her gaze on her mistress. Lord Rawdon had once again found Peggy, and he’d succeeded in momentarily separating her from Major André.

Clara leaned in, too timid to enter the tent on her own, and instead paused at the threshold and strained her ears to pick up the strands of their quiet conversation. “My lady, Miss Shippen, that this land could produce beauty like you, it makes all thirteen colonies worth fighting for.” Lord Rawdon made these declarations with the unseasoned awkwardness of a man more skilled in battle than in the ballroom.

“You are too generous with your words, Lord Rawdon.” Peggy smiled under her host’s praise, but she edged away. She glanced over her shoulder, in the direction of Major André. He stood beside the musicians in the corner, his attention occupied with another gowned beauty. This lady was arresting in a manner entirely different than Peggy Shippen. While Peggy was petite in stature, with golden hair and a fair complexion, this woman was tall and full-figured, with glossy brunette locks and a warm skin tone. She was dressed in a silk gown of a rich scarlet red. Her hair, like Peggy’s, was pulled high up off her neck, and she wore a ruby necklace, which fell on her bosom and invited admiring stares from the officers who passed. Standing opposite Major André, she was his perfect complement.

“Admiring the cast of characters?” Clara jumped at the sound of a man’s voice, and she turned to see an unfamiliar face beside her under the trellis.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I did not mean to startle you, Miss . . . ?”

“Miss Bell. Clara Bell.” She shifted her weight. This man did not wear the uniform, as most of the men in the tent did, but he looked more dapper than a servant in his black wool coat, starched white linen top, and matching black breeches. Around his neck he wore a maroon cravat, and he held his black tricornered hat in his hand.

“Fascinating, isn’t it?” He inched his way closer to Clara, peering over her shoulder into the tent.

“I suppose,” Clara answered, shifting away from this brazen man.

“Which one are you here with?” The man asked, turning his gaze on Clara.

Clara straightened her posture. “I’m the lady’s maid to Miss Peggy Shippen.”

“Aha! Is that so?” This man, with neatly combed dark hair and light eyes, spoke with an accent that gave him away as British.

“Yes.” Clara looked at him, hoping he would now leave her in peace to watch the party and supervise her mistress. And where was Cal? she wondered.

“An enviable post, being lady’s maid to Miss Margaret Shippen. How did you manage to get that position?”

Courtesy required that she answer his question, though Clara did not wish to engage in continued conversation with this forward stranger, not while she was to be watching her mistress. She answered him, keeping her eyes fixed inside the tent. “My grandmother, before she died, was an old friend of the Shippens’ housekeeper.”

“Mrs. Quigley,” he answered. “But I thought the Shippens had cut their waitstaff?”

“That’s right.” Clara turned to him. How did this stranger know so much about the Shippen family’s situation?

“Go on—you were telling me about your grandmother?”

Clara looked into this man’s face. She had to admit he was handsome, even if she found his manners a bit uncouth. “When the Shippen family relocated to their farm in Lancaster at the start of the war, they were near the farm where I lived. My grandmother helped the Shippen family and their servants stay fed that first winter.”

“Ah, so you saved the Shippens, and now they’ve hired you. One favor returned for another favor?”

“I don’t know that I like being referred to as a favor, sir.” Clara bristled. “I intend to work hard and earn my keep. I’m no charity case.”

“Indeed you are not, Miss Bell. I meant no offense. Besides, it’s to you we owe our thanks for Miss Peggy Shippen’s presence tonight.”

Clara chuckled in spite of herself. “Nothing that dramatic, I’m afraid.”

“Mrs. Quigley is a fine lady,” the man added. Clara turned to him.

“And how is it that you consider yourself so knowledgeable about the Shippen home?”

The man smiled. “I spend enough time there, I ought to know a thing or two.”

“Is that so?” Clara’s eyebrows arched.

“I am the secretary to Major John André. The name’s Robert Balmor. Major André and I, we spend quite a lot of time with the younger Miss Shippen.” Robert smirked.

“I know that Major André is a favorite of my mistress.” Clara peered into the tent and saw that Miss Peggy was still embroiled in conversation with Lord Rawdon.

“And Peggy Shippen is a favorite of Major André’s as well,” Robert answered.

Clara did not like the way he spoke of Miss Peggy with such familiarity.

“Have you met that gentleman yet?” Robert pointed toward the man in the pale blue suit.

“Why yes, that’s Joseph Stansbury,” Clara said, feeling a surge of pride at knowing something as well. “He runs the china shop on Market Street. Miss Peggy introduced me to him when we first arrived.”

“Ah, yes. The illustrious china merchant from London.” Robert nodded. “He’s a good friend of Peggy Shippen’s. And, I suspect, the only man in the tent who is more interested in Miss Shippen’s ball gown than in what lies beneath it.”

Clara blushed and shifted her weight. How brazen the men were at this gathering! Seeking to divert the conversation, she pointed toward Major André and the brunette beauty at his side. “And who’s that lady? Major André has barely left her side since we arrived.” Clara knew her mistress would not be pleased about that.

“Ah, that’s Meg Chew,” Robert answered, a hint of reverence in his voice. “Not too difficult on the eyes, is she?”

“Miss Peggy mentioned a Meg Chew,” Clara said, remembering their conversation in her mistress’s bedroom.

“Yes, Meg Chew is a rival of Peggy Shippen’s. Her only rival, really.” Robert’s gaze flitted between the two women as they would between two pastries of equal allure. And he was not alone; Clara noticed that most of the men in the tent seemed to be angling to speak with one or the other.

Meg still had André’s attention, yet Peggy made no move toward him. She simply watched from the far side of the tent, smiling as if Lord Rawdon were the most charming man at the soiree. Clara couldn’t decide which of the two rivals was more enchanting. Peggy had a girlish vitality, a mischievous glimmer in her eye, while Meg Chew seemed haughty, supremely confident, even regal.

“Your master is an artist?” Clara asked, thinking back to the silhouette in Peggy’s possession.

“Yes, he’s constantly drawing sketches, cutting out paper silhouettes, even writing poetry.”

Clara nodded. “He gave one such silhouette to Miss Peggy.”

“And another to Miss Chew.” Robert cocked his head.

“That seems cruel,” Clara answered.

“He’s a great favorite of the ladies. Something about him—he writes a poem about them, speaks a little French, or draws their likeness, and they fall for him. His good looks don’t hurt, I suppose.”

Her mistress could tame him, Clara thought. She’d only known Peggy Shippen a few hours, but already she was certain of that.

“Problem is, the major can’t seem to make up his mind as to which one he wants,” Robert continued. “One week we are spending every afternoon in Judge Shippen’s parlor as André paints Peggy. The next week, he is strolling the gardens at the Chew mansion, composing a poem with Meg.”

Robert and Clara stopped speaking as Lord Rawdon crossed to the center of the tent and encouraged his guests to take their seats for card games. Wiggled footmen descended on the tables immediately, distributing cards and bowls of pistachios, and filling flutes with French Champagne. Clara watched as Lord Rawdon seated Peggy beside himself. Opposite them sat Meg Chew and Major André.

Well, at least she was at his table, Clara thought. “Who are the remaining guests at their table?” she asked, watching the seats fill.

“Joseph Stansbury you already know.” Robert pointed at the merchant who sat on Peggy’s other side. “And that other lady is Christianne Amile, another Tory belle.”

Clara watched as Major André clinked his glass against Meg Chew’s, saying something to make the brunette toss her rich curls back in laughter. Across the table, Peggy was chatting with an officer who had approached her to pay his respects.

“That’s Captain Hammond, coming to talk with Peggy now,” Robert said. “Another admirer.” Clara could sense Peggy’s frustration—it was evident in the slightly tense manner her gestures had assumed, even as she attempted to flirt with this other admirer. “Every man is paying his respects except your master, who seems to be entirely ignoring her.”

Robert weighed this, but did not reply.

“Why is he jilting her, spending the whole night with Meg Chew?” It wasn’t right, flaunting his courtship in front of Peggy’s face when he knew she cared for him.

“Well, I do believe he prefers Peggy Shippen,” Robert said thoughtfully. “But Major André is a smart man. The Chews are a much wealthier family. The Shippen money is old money, which is respectable, and there once was a lot of it. But since the colonies rebelled, Judge Shippen has halted all his business dealings. He’s afraid to trade with either the British or the rebels. It’s hard to believe how quickly their money has been sapped up.”

Clara looked at the yards of fine silk adorning her mistress’s figure, the string of pearls around her neck and in her vaulted hairdo. She thought back to the elegant coach in which they’d ridden to the party. “Not that hard to believe,” Clara mumbled.

Robert looked over his shoulder. “I could really use a glass of ale. Or better yet, Champagne.”

Clara stared at him, eyes wide.

“What? Just because we are attendants, we can’t enjoy the party too?” The keen way Robert looked at her put Clara on edge, and she angled her body away from his to look back into the tent.

“I am certain that I should not be drinking Lord Rawdon’s Champagne,” she answered.

“Tut, tut, aren’t you a proud one?” Balmor teased her.

“I must behave properly, in a manner befitting the Shippen household,” Clara answered, certain that her reply would have garnered Mrs Quigley’s approval; but now it seemed to garner Robert’s scorn.

“And you don’t think Miss Peggy is drinking Champagne in that tent?”

This point silenced Clara.

“We British don’t believe in being so stiff, Clara. War can be fun, can’t it?” Robert whispered in her ear, speaking so close that his breath landed on her neck, causing a few soft hairs to stand on end.

The string quartet struck up a minuet and the entire tent grew excited with the upbeat tempo. In the hustle of couples rising to dance, Major André got up from the table and slid beside Peggy. He extended a hand and lifted Peggy to dance.

“Ah, look who just asked Peggy to dance. Should we not mimic our very proper, very elegant employers?” Robert extended his hand toward Clara as he gave an exaggerated bow. “May I have this dance, my lady?”

“Oh, no, I can’t dance,” Clara answered quickly. The thought alone made her uncomfortable. Oma had never

let her learn.

“All you have to do is follow my lead.” Before she could protest, Robert had stepped toward Clara and wrapped one arm around her waist. Clara resisted. She’d never had such intimate contact with a man.

“I cannot.” She shook her head.

“I won’t bite, I promise.” Robert’s smile served to calm her, somewhat. He took her other hand in his own, and he began to sway opposite her, leading her across a small patch of the dark lawn. Over his shoulder, Clara caught glimpses of her mistress, who was floating across the dance floor, her eyes fixed on Major André.

“Is this so torturous, Miss Bell?” Robert stared at her, his head falling sideways.

“I suppose not, Mr. Balmor.” Clara suppressed the flush that rose to her cheeks.

The music came to an abrupt halt and Robert dropped her hands. Clara noticed, with surprise, that she felt disappointment when he pulled away.

Before Clara understood what was happening, the men in the tent had left their partners in the middle of the dance. They stood, arms heavy at their sides, gazes fixed straight forward. From somewhere, a drumroll started.

“What is going on?” Clara looked around the crowd, confused, and noticed that a column of British flags had appeared in the tent, marched forward by smartly dressed soldiers.

“There he is.” Robert strained forward to see a small figure, just entering the tent. He was older than the rest of the men, and flanked on both sides by officers, aides, and attendants. The shoulders of his red jacket were weighted down with oversized silk epaulets, and he wore a scarlet sash across his narrow chest. On top of his head rested a white wig of tightly wound curls. He looked throughout the tent scrupulously, his eyes fixating on each officer, who, in turn, seemed to stand a little more erect under his gaze. Clara turned to Robert, curious.

“That is General Howe,” Robert whispered. “General William Howe, Commander of the British troops in America.” The military drums pounded out a rhythmic roll until the men, in perfectly rehearsed unison, saluted him.

With a wave of his hand, the general told his men to resume their dancing, and he took a seat at a table with two of his aides-de-camp. At this point, Lord Rawdon’s attendants paraded into the tent with dishes of fruit tarts and silver pots of coffee.

“I see Mrs. Quigley helped them finish the desserts,” Clara said, pointing at the sweets being deposited on the tables.

Robert glanced around the tent, noticing how all the officers were suddenly consumed with the arrival of General Howe. “Now’s our chance,” he whispered. “I’m going to steal us a bottle of Champagne. Come help me.”

“I certainly shall not.”

“You act so offended, Clara.” Robert smirked. “But I bet that when I return, I shall be able to convince you to have a glass with me. Have you ever had French Champagne before?”

“I have not.” Clara crossed her arms.

“Well, it’s one thing the French got right. I’ll be back and you’ll see for yourself.” Robert was off, gliding undetected toward a vacated table on the outer edge of the tent. The officers, still jostling to approach the general, did not notice as he swiped a full bottle.

“Now I must just find us two glasses!” Robert smiled at her, holding up the frosty bottle. “I’ll be right back.” With a wink, Robert disappeared farther into the crowded tent.

Clara looked on—appalled, yet somehow amused. What would Oma say about such a brazen young man? But Clara was the maid to a lady as grand as Peggy Shippen now. Was she not allowed to share just a bit of the fun being enjoyed by the rest of the partygoers? And Robert had turned out to be perfectly polite to her. And hadn’t she spotted servants taking clandestine sips of Champagne all night outside of the tent? The mood inside the tent was too merry, the evening too pleasant, the music too cheerful for her to decline a small glass of Champagne.

Clara turned her gaze back to the dance floor, looking for Peggy. She scanned the dancing bodies, looking for that bright spot of pink silk. But where had her mistress gone? At the tables, where couples had resumed card games, there was no pink. Clara checked near the band, in the queue of guests lined up to meet the general, but her mistress was nowhere in the tent. Clara’s heart quickened. In the excitement of the general’s entrance, she had lost sight of her mistress and had allowed her to slip away, unnoticed.

“Oh, no.” Clara felt as if she might cry. Her first night and she’d already failed at her job. Mrs. Quigley would dismiss her for sure. She stepped away and hurried along the perimeter of the tent, wondering if perhaps Miss Peggy had stepped outside to get some air. But it was so dark, she’d never be able to see. And then Clara detected a sound, a faint giggling, coming from down the sloping hill by the bank of the river. Clara squinted, willing her eyes to see in the darkness.

“Johnny!” More laughter. The voice by the river was, without a doubt, Peggy’s.

Clara focused in on the sounds. A blurred outline slowly took shape as Clara’s eyes adjusted to the night. Two figures. Peggy and Major André, sitting beside each other near the river.

“I thought I’d never be able to steal you away from our gracious host, the esteemed Lord Rawdon.” Major André’s genteel British accent was easily detectable now that Clara had located them.

“Fortunately General Howe provided sufficient distraction,” Peggy answered, leaning toward her companion. They clinked glasses and then Peggy drained her Champagne. Clara noticed, with horror, that André did not sip from his own glass, but instead offered his drink to Peggy as well. She drank it.

“If I were Lord Rawdon, I’d have never let you out of my sight, not for one minute. Not when every other gentleman in that tent is just waiting on his opportunity to pounce on you.” Major André leaned in toward Peggy playfully—was he tickling her?—prompting her to erupt in laughter.

“Oh, Johnny, I’m so glad it was you who pounced first.” Peggy hiccupped, and the two of them leaned toward each other.

Clara watched, shocked, as Major André took Peggy's chin in his hand and pulled her face to his. Before Clara could protest, Major André was kissing Peggy. These were not the tame kisses a gentleman placed on a lady's hand or a lady's cheek—these were brazen kisses, kisses that ought to offend a lady's sense of decorum. Clara wanted to run in between them, to intervene, but she noticed with horror that her mistress was happily returning the kisses. But then, to her relief, Peggy pulled her lips away.

"I am not sure I shall allow you to kiss me any longer." Peggy edged her body away from André's, staring back toward the tent as if she might leave him alone by the river. She still had the hiccups.

"Why not, my darling? Why would you torture me?" André reached his arms toward Peggy, but she swatted them away, crossing her arms like a petulant child.

"You certainly spent enough time talking to her tonight," Peggy said with a pout, and Clara knew instantly to whom her mistress referred.

"My darling." André's shoulders sagged, his body entirely willing to play the part of the penitent lover. "I was merely being polite. I can't outright reject her when she speaks to me. You know that Meg means nothing compared to . . ."

"Don't say her name," Peggy answered, her tone icy.

"Fine." André threw his hands up in defeat. "I shall not."

"Do you prefer her?" Peggy turned on him, and even in the dark, Clara could sense how intently she stared at him.

"Not at all, my darling. How many times must I tell you?" Yes, but did he not say the same thing to Meg Chew? Clara wondered.

André's hands inched closer to Peggy's body, and this time she did not swat them away. She did, however, turn her face when he tried to kiss her.

"Tell me," she said.

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me that I'm your favorite, Johnny."

André was consumed by his desire, Clara could tell; he would say whatever he needed to say in order to resume kissing her. "You are my favorite, Peggy."

"And you love me, and me alone?"

"You know I do, my darling Peggy."

"Then tell me. Say it."

"Why must you torture me?"

“Say that you love me!”

“I love you, Peggy Shippen.”

“Fine, you may kiss me now.”

“I think you like to see me suffer, my darling.” André leaned toward her, placing a long, slow kiss on the side of Peggy’s neck. And then it was whispers Clara could not fully detect, soft kisses, a giggle. And then suddenly, in the middle of the dark, inconspicuous night, Major André and Peggy were lying down beside each other, spread out in the grass. Clara strained her ears and detected more whispers, a sigh. When Johnny’s hands stroked Peggy’s bare neck, threatening to rove even lower, Clara was certain that her mistress would at last remember her virtue and protest. But to her shock, the only protest issued from Peggy’s mouth was a sigh. Clara could have fainted in shock.

To think of the proper young woman she’d watched at dinner just a few hours ago, discussing politics with her uncle and father—a doctor and a judge! What would Peggy’s father think if he knew about his daughter’s scandalous behavior? He’d be devastated.

Major André was removing his coat now, prompting Clara to stagger backward with fresh horror, as her mind flashed back to scenes she’d accidentally witnessed on the farm, scenes she’d unwittingly walked into in the hay loft or the rear stall of the dairy barn. She was reminded of what she had heard about how she herself had been conceived—the disgraceful act that Clara’s own mother had performed out of wedlock, the act that had ultimately taken her mother’s life. No, she didn’t survive the childbirth, Oma had told Clara, because of the cardinal sin that she’d participated in to create Clara’s life.

And now her mistress, the well-bred, highborn Miss Margaret Shippen, was sprawled in the grass with a man who was not her husband, while all of Philadelphia society reveled just feet from her! Such a thing, if discovered, would ruin Miss Peggy. Clara had to intervene, before this went so far as to be irreparable to her lady’s reputation. Perhaps Miss Peggy didn’t know what her kissing would lead to, what that man was capable of doing to rob her of her virtue.

“Miss Peggy.” Clara edged down the hill toward her mistress, her voice shrill.

Her mistress did not respond, but rather kept running her fingers through John André’s black hair, now loose of its ribbon. Clara experienced fresh horror as she saw, through the feeble light of the moon’s reflection, that Major André was allowing his hand to wander toward the hem of Miss Peggy’s skirt. Why did her mistress not protest?

“My lady, Miss Peggy!”

This time both Peggy and Major André looked up.

“You’re wanted, my darling.” Major André kissed Peggy’s bare neck, sounding irritated by the distraction.

“Oh, it’s just my maid,” Peggy answered him. “Clara, go away.” Peggy shooed her maid with her hand and refocused her attention on wrapping her arms around Major André’s waist.

Clara turned toward the tent, desperate. Fortunately, no one in the tent was looking in their direction; they were too consumed by their Champagne and dancing. But then her situation went from desperate to dire

when she spotted the familiar figure of Mrs. Quigley. The housekeeper was standing at the entrance of the tent, scanning the crowd for some sign of Miss Peggy. Just a matter of minutes now before they were discovered, and Clara would be tossed out of the Shippen home before she'd even spent a night there.

A fresh giggle, followed by a prolonged sigh, told Clara that Miss Peggy had no intention of rebuffing her companion's roving hands.

"Mon Dieu, Peggy Shippen," André spoke in a low, husky voice.

Clara turned back now toward the couple. "Miss PEGGY! Please!" Clara was astounded that she had found herself in this position.

"There you are." A familiar voice. Robert was beside her, carrying two flutes brimming with Champagne. "I've brought some refreshments for us. What are you doing down here by the river?"

"Robert." Clara felt weak with relief. "Thank goodness you're back."

"Did you miss me?" Robert grinned, his features delighted at her reaction. "I'm sorry if I've kept you waiting." He was moving toward her. Was Clara imagining it, or did he appear like he might try to kiss her? Were all the men at this party completely mad?

"Robert, please." She stepped away from him and shook her head, diverting his attention. "Look, down there!" She pointed at the two figures reclined on the lawn. "My lady and Major André are down there acting very indiscreetly. And Mrs. Quigley is going to see. She will most likely embarrass my mistress and most definitely dismiss me."

"Where am I looking?" Robert narrowed his eyes in concentration.

"There! At Major André and Miss Peggy." Clara pointed.

"Oh, I see." Robert looked from the housekeeper back to the couple down by the river. "Yes, that's a problem, you're certainly right about that." He took a few steps closer to Peggy and the major.

"Major André." Robert cupped his hands and called in their direction, his voice much more assertive than Clara's had been. "Major, the old woman is coming back." Then, under his breath, "So you might want to remove your hand from under Miss Shippen's hoopskirt."

When Clara saw the two figures separate at that warning, she was so relieved she could have kissed Robert.

"Oh, thank goodness," she sighed. "Thank you, Robert. Thank you."

"Maybe's it's not an enviable post you have here after all." Robert smirked, still standing too close.

Clara did not have time for this man's flirtation, but rather kept her eyes pointed on her mistress as Major André wished Peggy good night, whispering some salacious secret into her ear before rising. Peggy stayed on the lawn, adjusting her jewelry, ensuring that her dress was in place and her hair had not gone lopsided, while André rose and strode toward his secretary. "Balmor, let's go. I've had enough of this party."

"Well, Miss Clara Bell, it's been a pleasure. Don't blame yourself for tonight getting sort of . . . out of hand."

Robert placed his hat on his head. “This Philadelphia society may be genteel, but it’s not tame. In fact, sometimes it makes the French court at Versailles seem like a nunnery in comparison.” Robert tipped his hat once with a small bow, and then he disappeared into the night with his master, who was muttering something about a tavern.

Silently, Clara approached her mistress. Peggy was looking out over the river, her pale skin glowing in the light of the moon reflected off the water’s calm surface. She stirred when she heard Clara beside her.

“Oh, Clara,” Peggy spoke calmly, as if she had not just mortified her new maid. “Hello, Clara.” Peggy’s voice was soft, girlish. “Sit beside me.”

Confounded, Clara obeyed, sitting down slowly on the grass as the river lapped the shore. She was furious with her mistress, having just been forced to witness such a scene of her indiscretion.

Peggy turned her face so that she was just inches from her maid. Clara observed that the pouf of her hair had deflated, so that the curls now hung around her face. Her eyes were ablaze, her cheeks flushed, giving her a sort of mad, savage look. Clara decided in that moment that she’d never seen anyone more beautiful. “Oh”—Peggy leaned her head slowly on her maid’s shoulder, exhaling a slow, serene sigh. Clara stiffened, but tried not to show how nervous such a gesture made her. “Clara, now you know. I am so in love.”

II.

“All is lost.” Peggy repeats the words into the abandoned bedroom, as if through repetition she will find their sense, a meaning. “But I don’t understand.”

I turn and leave her alone in the bedroom as I make my way down the steps. I find Benedict Arnold in the cramped drawing room with the bewildered messenger.

“Did they say with whom this spy had conducted his rendezvous? Did this spy, this British fellow, offer up the name of his fellow traitor?” Arnold asks. The messenger, confused, shakes his head.

“I know nothing of the matter, sir, simply that I was to deliver this letter with haste.”

“But did you hear anything else, man?” Arnold towers over him. “The letter says the spy was apprehended with secret documents. Documents intended to give over the fort at West Point, and the body of our Commander Washington. Who gave him these documents?” Arnold waves the letter in the messenger’s face, his voice thundering down at the man from the deep recesses of his stocky frame.

“I do not think they know yet, General Arnold,” the messenger answers, apologetic. But this answer satisfies my master, convinces him that high command has not yet pieced it together. Has not yet discerned his own central role in the plot.

Perhaps there is still time. Perhaps he can avoid the hangman’s gallows after all. But Washington rides toward him this very instant, expected at the farm for breakfast. Expecting a casual breakfast with Benedict Arnold, one of his favorite generals, and Arnold’s pretty wife. He must be quick. I know what he is wondering: should he take his wife with him or leave her behind? To leave her would be risky for her. And yet Peggy Arnold can take care of herself. She can play the role of siren; laughing, and flirting, and dancing until she’s clouded the judgment of every man in the room.

No one will suspect a flower of such beautiful bloom to conceal a serpent underneath. She can manage it. She can manage anything.

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