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**Roses and Thistles**

by Reinette_de_la_Saintonge

Summary

Edmund returns home to Scotland after leaving America hoping to find some peace of mind. When his sister finds out about the reason for his swift departure from America and his
broken heart, she vows to do everything she can to see her brother happy again, even if this means breaking the law and blackmailing a man she has never met. Things come to a head when Edmund is summoned back to America by Spyhunter-General Benedict Arnold. Once again close to Anna, will the two find back together? And how will his sibling’s dabblings in spying, intelligence-gathering and playing senior officers on both sides of the conflict off against each other affect the outcome?

Notes

This is my attempt at an eventual Annlett-reunion. The story picks up in season three with Edmund about to board the ship and events will be slightly altered from there until the plot enters the speculative realms of season four.

Since I am new to this, I hope the formatting worked out well enough for you to be able to read the story in a visually agreeable block of text.

Please be aware that this chapter is going to mention suicide (contemplated only).

This is all for now; more notes can be found in the end.
Star-Crossed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, 1834)

Carefully, he removed his possessions from the small chest of drawers. Not that there was much to pack; most belongings had been left untouched as he had gathered them upon leaving Setauket; the neatly folded clothing and accurately stacked books in his trunk belying the hurry and emotional turmoil they had been packed in. The ship would be leaving for England in the morning and yet he had not started packing the remainders of his belongings properly. Scattered around him on the bed lay items of clothing, most of them part of his uniform that, until now, had marked him as a major of His Majesty’s Army and a few other things of little to no importance to him; a brush, his knife for shaving and a small bourse which funded his stay at the boarding house.

These things were nothing but impersonal companions to the monotonous days he had spent in York City, bare necessities to help maintain the outward appearance of a man of principles, integrity and respect. Looks could be deceiving, he thought, for what of all these things was he now? He had permitted himself to be fooled by the woman he loved who had slighted him on their wedding day to protect him from the same people she conspired with to free America of British rule. She was entangled in a web of spying and lying and he had not noticed the full extent of it all, blinded by a pair of brown eyes and spell-bound by her sharp wits and warm smile. The whole matter was even more complicated of course, thinking of the involvement of Abraham Woodhull, son of his former friend Richard Woodhull, the town’s magistrate, his wife Mary and several others he either did not know or did not want to know about.

His departure was certainly for the best. Setauket would probably still be buzzing with the story of his failed wedding, Anna’s counterfeit divorce papers and Judge Woodhull’s interruption of the ceremony. Unwillingly, he had probably slaked the town’s thirst for gossip for an entire year. While everybody else still relished in the scandal and would be telling the story on and on until it mutated into something even more horrendous than what had happened in reality (although he doubted this could ever be possible), at least one person would be happy: Captain John Graves Simcoe of the Queen’s Rangers. Simcoe’s, and there could be no other word for it, sick and perverted mind would certainly insinuate to him that this was his final victory- at last he would be able to molest town and townspeople unmolested while the new commander of the garrison was already busy enough keeping the remaining troops together and out of trouble with Simcoe’s men who haughtily deemed themselves above law and order and whose moral code and demeanour mirrored their commander’s. But that surely wasn’t the most important thing for Simcoe. The real, the big, the only thing that probably mattered to him even more than all of his military exploits combined was the fact that now, Anna would remain unmarried, if it could be called that- for she continued to be married to her first husband, a defected ex-tavern owner whose handwriting she had forged to fake a divorce as soon as
she had lured him, the fool that he was, into loving and eventually proposing to her. With Anna gone from Setauket as well, Simcoe could complacently relish in the story of their wedding that never was and the fact that now neither of them would be at Anna’s side. Oh, he would enjoy the amount of human sadness and despair that kept his crippled soul alive and featured so prominently in the dramatic non-wedding. His happiness would be complete if he had the chance to find out about his last conversation with Anna a few days ago here in this very boarding house. Especially the three words she could not bring herself to say. On one of her undoubtedly vital missions to the rebel cause she had stopped by and tried to explain everything. Nothing she said was of real importance to him, save the very last thing he asked her. When asked if she had ever loved him, she had remained silent. He had made every attempt to make her feel comfortable, risen above his social insecurities to be with her, openly confronted Simcoe on several occasions (something that was not done lightly, for confronting this man was the same as signing one’s own death warrant) and would even have forced the sun to circle the earth at her request. Anna had misused his love and loyalty and thrown him back into the dark void located in a corner of his mind he last inhabited during his horrendous captivity - ironically, what rescued him eventually was not the thin blanket that had provided him with at least a little shelter from the cold, nor the knife the rebel captain had left for him in an attempt to coax his feeble mind and body into suicide but that in the long term had aided his escape, no, it was the thought of Anna and the possibility of seeing her again that had kept him alive throughout his terrible ordeal. Kept. What did he live for now?

No, he had to stop this. Overthinking about Setauket and what had happened did him no good, no, it rendered him even more embittered and desperate to be struck by either a stray bullet or lightning to put him out of his misery. No, he mustn’t even think about that again, yet he did. He glanced at the knife across the bed. He could do it now, what difference would it make to the world? The only difference would be a few nastily stained bedsheets for the proprietor, which could surely be replaced at reasonable expenses and that he would finally sleep in peace for the rest of eternity without having to endure unwanted fabrications of his subconscious that tormented him every single night since leaving Setauket with the image of Anna, standing in his former room at Whitehall, looking out of the window. Entering the room, he called her name, but when she turned at the sound of his voice, her face transformed into the night sky. After a short while, her face always dissolved into countless stars. It was in this moment he realised he was back in captivity again. His eyes still fixed on the sky, hoping to retrace Anna’s features star by star, a tarp was thrown over his wooden cell, blocking his view of the sky. Overcome by a sudden coldness that was not the wintry night air, he would wake up shivering and, although it was uncomfortable for him to even think about it—crying.

But he mustn’t let a bad dream come in the way of his new life across the sea. Who could tell what was still to come? And after all, what is done cannot be undone. Setauket was in the past, as was his military career, soon to be fading to grey in an abandoned corner of his mind together with other assorted memories he would rather forget. Now, he had to look forward, his face to the east where first England, and then the homely rugged green hills of his native Scotland would embrace him, the lost son, back in her fold. His mother would be happy to see him, as would a handful of old friends from before his deployment overseas and his sister. They might keep him occupied for the time being until he settled somewhere, maybe Edinburgh, Glasgow or even London, wherever he could find anything to do. Who would employ a former officer who left the colonies in dubious haste and in even more dubious circumstances? He wasn’t young anymore either. Maybe someone somewhere would take pity on him and give the Oyster Major some work as a clerk, let him do what he did best during his time in the army. Admittedly, had it not been for his father’s loss of the family fortune, he would never have joined the military. In all honesty, he had always abhorred the bloodshed and violence—unlike Simcoe, who seemed to live for every unnecessary drop of blood spilled. This was another good thing about leaving though— he would never have to endure Simcoe’s presence again.
Time must have passed quickly because when he finally wakened from his thoughts, the street outside the window had changed from mellow, slightly clouded sunset colours to utter darkness. A glance on the clock in the room told him that it was about time to finish his packing and go to sleep if he didn’t want to miss the ship in the morning. -Which he didn’t. Although he tried hard to fall asleep, he spent the night more awake than anything else, troubled by the events of the past once again. He wondered if it would ever stop. Sometime in the morning, when the first promising line of bright pink on the horizon announced the coming of another day, he finally drifted into an uneasy sleep made even more uneasy by the return of his dream.

Wakened from his shallow rest by one of the servants rapping at the door, he got dressed, and after a light breakfast and making his final payments, he quietly slipped into the street, waiting for his transport. It was not his desire to say farewell to the other officers; he was certain that the amount of dishonest fond farewells and forcefully cheery toasts would not so much aid as destroy his already feeble nerves.

Boarding the ship, he turned around for one last time for one final view of York City. The plan was not to turn around again until the ship would reach open waters with the coastline out of sight. Things were already hard enough for him.

Standing on board the ship he wondered what Anna was doing right now. She was not missing him, that was for certain. Abraham Woodhull, Captain Simcoe or whatever other men wherever she was now had taken a fancy to her now would see to that. She probably didn’t even think about him anymore. Maybe she had already forgotten him in the arms of a handsome young rebel lieutenant who had everything he lacked. How could he ever have thought a woman like Anna Strong, beautiful, amiable and above all, clever could beset her eyes on him, a man whose face was not easy to the eye, who grew timid in the company of strangers and above all, women, and who, despite the uniform, could not even hope to be held for the dashing war hero that songs and stories lauded? It was as much his fault as it was hers. He should have known, but vanity had blinded him. Setauket’s most iridescent specimen of womankind could never possibly have fallen for the non-existent charms of the bone-dry Oyster Major.

The ship was bound to depart within minutes and he still kept his eyes fixed on the brightly glimmering ocean. He would have liked to blame the tears running silently down his cheeks on the brightness of the sun on that particularly splendid sunny day, but in all honesty he knew they were shed for Mrs Anna Strong of Setauket, the barmaid-turned-spy. He closed his eyes, partly to avert the other passengers’ curious looks, and for the other part to shield his eyesight from the dangers of prolonged exposure to sunlight. He concentrated on what his other senses could detect around him; the smell of fish and salt in the air, the sound of the water lapping against the sides of the ship, people conversing, sailors shouting orders at each other or exchanging bawdy jokes. All of a sudden, this typical harbour soundscape was torn apart by a loud cry. “Major!”

It was her voice, her voice, just like on the day he had been abducted. He turned, breaking the promise he had made to himself of never lying eyes on America again and hastened to the railing. There she stood, Anna Strong, radiant as ever, her cheeks red from running, her face convulsed with what he read as despair. “Edmund!”, Anna screamed from the top of her lungs, causing passers-by to turn their heads. Two low-ranked soldiers standing guard nearby walked over to investigate the commotion Anna was causing and pulled her away from the quay. She resisted them, her eyes still fixed on the ship, attempting to hook her feet in some little crevice or crack in the ground, but in vain. In this moment, he was certain their eyes met briefly- hurt, despair but also hope and affection.
collided for a fraction of a second until the soldiers dragged her further and further away and quickly
the three figures melted seamlessly into the busy beehive that was the harbour at this time of day,
nowhere to be seen anymore.

Edmund Hewlett still stood at the railing, petrified, unable to speak, his eyes darting around,
searching for Anna’s dark head in the crowds, hoping desperately she was well and safe. He wanted
to run, run far, run through the streets of York City shouting her name at the top of his lungs until he
found her but his feet felt numb; he couldn’t move. In this very moment, the sailors gave the
command to retrieve the anchor. The ship pulled out of the harbour and Edmund Hewlett remained
at the railings until the town and indeed the American coastline in general were no longer visible in
any detail without a telescope; a faint strip of green indicated that somewhere there was some island
or continent in the ocean, but he couldn’t tell if it was real or just his imagination.

He should have jumped. Just as Anna did when she left the boat crossing the sound in Setauket,
which reminded him once again that he was no soldier, no brave man. Maybe they would have let
him disembark at short notice had he only asked. And even if not, he could have jumped into the
water, the distance from ship to quay was not great nor perilous, even a mediocre swimmer could
have accomplished this feat. He should have jumped. Now, Anna was truly lost to him, once and for
all.

York City, the afternoon of the same day.

It had taken Anna all of her patience and charm to plead a case of mistaken identity to the two
soldiers. The men, not particularly keen on dealing with the matter since no one was hurt and no
property missing or damaged, had let her go with a half-hearted warning. Nodding in feigned
obedience, Anna walked back to the harbour. Sitting down by the water, her feet dangling over the
edge, she wondered where the ship was now. Where Edmund was.

It had been reckless to try and make him stay, she scolded herself. A selfish mistake that could
possibly have put her, Ben, Robert Townsend and a host of others in grave danger. The only reason
why she was in York City at all was to complete a secret mission for Ben- at least officially. In truth
she had volunteered for the job in hopes of meeting Edmund for a second time to negotiate a possible
reconciliation. Not that she expected a teary-eyed embrace and endless kisses, but a parting of ways
on, since good was given their shared history out of the question, neutral terms, a clean cut severing
the ties that had once tethered their hearts so closely together once and for all.

The nature of the task that had brought her to York City in the first place, namely to pick up a few
innocent enough-looking books Robert Townsend had inscribed in invisible ink with the intelligence
he harvested directly from the British officers spending their time at Rivington’s Corner, had
provided an ideal opportunity.

Eager and anxious to meet him again, her first inquiry had not been after the books, but Edmund. To
her horror, Robert’s answer had informed her of his imminent departure, prompting her to act
quickly. He, cool and analytic, had wordlessly handed her the two thin volumes of French poetry
while whispering the name of the ship in her ear. He always knew everything; the man who had
transported Edmund’s luggage to the harbour on his cart was by chance a loose acquaintance of his
who had shared the news of a British officer leaving with him in a conversation outside the coffee
house not too long before Anna’s arrival. The man, an overly talkative yet generally amiable soul,
had not known what a significant piece of information he had imparted with Robert. And Robert, assuming inquiring after the departing officer was part of Anna’s tasks while in York City, had passed the information on to her.

The books chronicling the latest news from York City’s officer elite in invisible letters now lay tucked away in a basket beside her concealed beneath a colourful cloth, always close by her side, never unguarded. Not even Edmund could distract her from her task.

She had been too late- Edmund was gone. She had a part in his departure, it had been her wish to see him go to safety- viewed from this perspective, her plan had worked, despite the heartbreak it had caused her. Was that not something to at least acknowledge, having sacrificed one’s own happiness to save someone else? Or did she save him? He had looked so distraught, so small on the big ship, as if he was on the brink of contemplating hurling himself into the ocean. All she could do now was pray for his save journey and a warm welcome by his friends and family at home.

Staring to no fixed point on the horizon, Anna let the hours slip by, lost in her thoughts, contemplating her past, the decisions that led to all this, the decision to let Edmund into her life- it had been the best, she decided after a long time of weighing arguments against one another, and the worst. The best because nobody had ever loved her this way before- his kindness, his respect and how genuinely he cared for her wellbeing set him apart from men like Selah, Abe or even worse, Simcoe, who regarded her as their possession either by right of marriage, on grounds of habit or by conquest. Edmund had never tried to claim her in such a way- he listened, he loved her for who she was, not for what she should be, what she had been or what fantasies he projected onto her. He loved her, not a portrait painted to suit the taste of the client, the sitter so much modified toward a stone-solid ideal they were barely recognisable anymore.

He loved her. And that was the worst part about it.

She loved him, too- never before had she ever felt in the same way for Selah or Abe- alas, they had each picked their sides. First and foremost, she was an American sworn to serve her country. He was a redcoat, perhaps in more recent days a more decent one than most, but still a man sworn to protect the Empire. Perhaps they were never meant to be. Perhaps in another life, another Anna and another Edmund would find happiness regardless of their respective allegiance to one country or the other.

For one moment, she allowed herself to indulge in the memory of their first kiss. The pain was almost unbearable so she pulled away, back into the chilly harbour breeze. The sun was about to go down behind her in the west while her eyes still looked eastwards, towards Scotland, towards the man she loved.

Dusk had come slowly and gingerly, the first stars crept unto the rich purple and blue blanket of the new night. Looking at these stars, Anna found herself wondering if he could see them now as well.

Perhaps through admiring the same stars above their heads the universe would knit them a little closer together for one brief moment? It was a comforting thought.

Getting up on her sleepy legs, Anna took her basket and hurried away, finally able to muster enough clarity of mind and strength to continue on her mission. After all; though she was heartbroken and trying to battle the draining sadness that threatened to consume her in the wake of having lost Edmund, she was still a spy. If she could not be happy, a truth she would have to learn to accept, she could at least contribute to the future happiness of others, a task best done by doing her duty to her country.
Unremarked upon by Anna, a shooting star illuminated the sky above her head for one brief moment. Had she seen this tiny spec of brightly glowing rock fly across the skies, perhaps she would have remembered the night Edmund had introduced her to the art of stargazing. One of the things he had told her about was that he was a strong believer in a celestial order, governing the entire universe and ensuring every ever so little star knew its place and the choreography of its allotted movements.

If this truly was the case, why then did some stars escape their assigned places seemingly at random, bravely rebel against their fate of being mere footmen in the natural order of precedence of celestial bodies to shine, for one brief second, brighter than the rest, be seen, be admired, be themselves, even if this means they forfeit their allotted place among the other stars?

Even though Anna missed the star’s fiery chariot-ride across the heavens, Edmund, somewhat delayed by low winds not too far away from the American coastline on the Atlantic Ocean, did see it.

He remembered how shooting stars possess, according to popular belief, the possibility to make a wish that, if it remains unspoken, comes true in the future. For the first time in many years, he thought back to when he was a child and his mother would take him on her knee and tell him to make a wish when they watched the skies at night-time when he was not tired enough to sleep yet or had awoken from a bad dream. He remembered how sincerely a six-year-old Edmund had once believed in the magical powers of shooting stars and made a wish.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you have enjoyed this first chapter- I promise things will get a little more light-hearted soon. Until then, I am glad for any feedback or critique you may have for me!

There is also something I would like to mention with respect to the story: "Roses and Thistles" is going to be part of a trilogy called "Of Dusk and Dawn", a sort of family-saga which is going to explore several generations of Hewletts and their take on the events of the Revolutionary War:

Act I: Roses and Thistles

Act II: Time and Tide Wait for No Man
Two small chapters bridging the events between the first and the third instalment, the beginning of Time and Tide Wait for No Man is set in the lavish ambience of a Regency ball when all of a sudden the past catches up with our now aged heroes. In the second half of the story, things come to an end almost equally unexpectedly in 1806 in the shape of a newspaper article…

Act III: Lost and Found
Roughly eighty years after the events of TURN, a young woman and her new acquaintance, a strange young man with an odd interest in the Revolutionary War, piece a family mystery together that has been put to rest almost eighty years ago. As the past slowly reveals a web of half-truths, blatant lies and painful memories swept under the carpet of time, what effect will the unleashing of this secret have on the living? A somewhat dark Victorian “big house”-tale about love in times of war and war in times of love…
The Written and the Spoken Word

Chapter Summary

Edmund arrives in Scotland and jumps to a wrong conclusion, his sister makes an unexpected discovery and John Graves Simcoe reveals a little too much information to Benedict Arnold.

Chapter Notes

To give you the fair warning you deserve: This chapter features Simcoe indulging in his poetic labours.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[...]

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

(William Butler Yeats, When You Are Old, 1892)

Time passed slowly aboard the ship, time Edmund tried to pass by sleeping away the days hoping sleep would provide him with a refuge from the harsh reality he found himself in. Alas, sleep was not found easily with the ship being tossed from left to right, backwards and forward on Neptune’s whims. Although the ship was not the most run-down vessel offering passages to England and even despite having paid a hefty amount of money for a good cabin, Edmund had made an unpleasant discovery on the second night aboard. Water was leaking in disconcerting amounts into his cabin, not even nearly enough to alarm the sailors, but enough to worry a landsman and drain basically anything he owned in the clammy smell of salt and old seaweed. After a few days, scarcely anything was left dry; clothes and bedding damp from the perpetual humidity that would surely give him
pneumonia before the ship reached England.

How he survived this journey, he knew not. If his memory didn’t deceive him greatly, his passage to America had been a lot less unpleasant in direct comparison to the tempestuous ordeal of his departure. Three weeks at sea came and went before land was sighted in the east; three weeks he considered wasted, much like his time in America. Wasted time he, when awake, spent re-reading some of the books he had taken with him or composing a letter, nothing of which came to any fruition; the letters danced in front of his eyes whenever he tried to make sense of them and order them into words and the lines he tried to compose himself were no better either.

Bruised from being tossed about during the last storm at sea, wet and worst of all, lost in the perpetual darkness of his mind, Edmund eventually disembarked in Southampton.

As his feet touched British soil once more, for the first time in years, he felt he should be happy- had he not made it home from the war? Shouldn’t a soldier returning home be full of excitement to see his home, his friends, his family once more?

What family? Since his father’s death seventeen years ago, the only family he had left were his mother and sister. And judging from the letters he had received in answer to his own (or not received for that matter), he was not certain if they would be happy to see him. He had no family of his own, he realised with a pang in his heart, no wife, no children to welcome him at the hearth of their small cabin somewhere, surrounded by heathery hills; the children laughing and playing in the nearby stream and he and his wife sitting beneath an old tree by the riverside watching them frolic in the clear, cool waters.

He would never have that. Some men were lucky in their marriages, some weren’t and some were destined to remain alone forever. Perhaps it was for the best, for what woman would truly want to live out her days at the side of an old, broken man with only seven toes and a melancholic disposition?

And what other woman could he ever love in the same way he had loved Anna Strong? Loved. —Loved? It was said so much easier than done.

The following day, after a night equally unpleasant to those spent aboard that wretched ship but with different torments for a variation (instead of violent storms a hoard of drunk soldiers in the inn below his room made it impossible for even the weariest soul to close their eyes), Edmund headed north and reached the homestead of his youth after another thirteen days spent in stagecoaches and run-down inns. None of the innkeeper’s daughters and alewives however was as beauteous and tantalising as the woman who once poured the liquor for the bawdy privates and arrogant officers in Setauket. There were a few dark-haired, dark-eyed women among them; yet none could compare to Anna Strong.

On the thirteenth day of his journey, Edmund reached Dumfries. From there, the old coachman Edmund had hired, a distant cousin of his sister’s late husband who remembered him despite his long absence, offered to divert his route via Edmund’s old home somewhat outside the village of Duncleade north of Dumfries. Dressed as best as his first drenched, then sea-air dried and mud-stained wardrobe did allow, Edmund, wig and all, tried to give away the impression of what he thought an officer returning home should look like.

Occasionally, he peeked through the hangings shielding the carriage passengers from curious looks and while he recognised the streets and certain buildings once they passed through Duncleade, it came as a shock to him how much even here in rural Scotland things had changed since his departure years and years ago. As a youth of fifteen, he would have known all the people on the streets. Today, he was looking in strangers’ faces. Deep inside, he wished the carriage ride would never end.
He was not ready to face Mother and Elizabeth, the sister he had until recently thought to be the closest thing to a confidante he had, didn’t know what to tell them or how to explain anything about his sudden arrival at all.

For all they knew, he was going to get married in America to Mrs Anna Strong- a letter that was never answered. Instead, they had chosen to ramble on and on about the usual small-town gossip and had even possessed the gall to ask how he was doing.

The carriage had to stop sometime and eventually it did. Allowing himself one last deep breath before descending from the relative security of the heavy curtains, Edmund was surprised to hear an excited woman’s voice exclaim his name. Quick footsteps rushed up to the carriage and opened the door with unnecessary force and before he was even able to process what was happening, a shock of almost black hair and eyes the colour of the sea on a stormy day flung themselves at him.

Eliza Greenwood, née Hewlett, had all but dragged him out of the carriage and into a tight embrace.

As soon as his sister had quit strangling him to death, it was his mother’s turn to repeat the procedure. Given their open disapproval of his no longer relevant marriage ambitions, the two seemed to be fairly happy to see him. As long as no questions were raised regarding the whereabouts of the espoused they must presume him to have now, life in the same house with them for the time being would at least be endurable for as long as their joy to see him lasted.

With somewhat restrained cordiality, he greeted each woman in the proper fashion before following them inside to be showered with sweet treats, food and red wine like a school boy on home leave.

When she opened the carriage door, Eliza was close to shrinking back in shock of the sight that had presented itself to her: the man inside did resemble her brother, but more like a bad effigy or waxy death-mask resembles a living person; some basic characteristics being recognisable, the rest almost alien to those who had known the person in life, a strangely stiff and un-lifelike recreation failing to capture something that no longer is.

Edmund’s face was almost as pale as Death Himself, the lines on his forehead, around his mouth and beneath his eyes hardened; the mouth that in their childhood had flashed many an awkward toothy smile at her now downturned at the corners and even thinner than before. The worst were the eyes however; where once a warm glimmer had resided, now almost unblinking dark voids stared at her from beneath unusually luscious eyelashes. Had she not ambushed him into an embrace and felt the warmth of his body and the beating of his heart, he could just as well have been a sorry puppet dressed as an officer with all its strings cut. No, this Edmund was nothing like the brother she once used to have. Of the man who was now seated at the table and politely answered Mother’s questions in the most impersonal and diplomatic way possible, nothing reminded her of the boy she had grown up with, the little brother two years her junior who had been as bashful and sensitive as she had been pert and almost wild; while she had spent her childhood climbing trees and playing little tricks on family and household staff with impish delight, Edmund had been bookish to almost reclusiveness, gentle and considerate where she would shout and pompously demand. Well, they had both grown up; at her age, she no longer fancied gathering her skirts around her hips and inspecting the branches of the walnut tree (and, hiding in the foliage, throwing nuts at unsuspecting passers-by) and had become quite an avid reader herself in her teenage years, but whatever was going on with Edmund was out of the ordinary.

People always said the war alters those who fight in it drastically- yet this could not be the cause of Edmund’s ghost-like appearance, because he had reassured them in almost every letter that he was safe in a small town with only his garrison to command and a wayward captain to keep an eye on.
Had he lied? Lying was concerningly uncharacteristic of Edmund. In the few cases a young Edmund had overstepped a line and was in danger of being scolded by their parents, he had always reverted to cleverly-arranged half-truths. He was not a liar, at least half of his story was always true, the other half usually a clever construction of additional information, things that remained unsaid and his gravest facial expression that could almost magically convince anybody of his honesty in any situation. So, assuming what Edmund was telling Mother over tea and dainties was half of the truth minus some issues he was cleverly avoiding or downplaying, he

-had come home, just like this. He made it sound as if such a doubtlessly important and life-altering decision had been made on a mere whim.

That was all the information he was willing to reveal.

After two hours of almost torturous questioning by his mother and sister, Edmund managed to escape them by retiring to his room under the pretence of being tired from the long journey. In a way he was, but not as much tired of the road as he was of this life in general.

For now, he must at least give his new life a chance, he decided in an unexpected bout of rather short-lived optimism. See where things would take him.

If the weather would not change unexpectedly in the evening, the skies tonight would offer a prime opportunity for stargazing. That was, well, not nothing- definitively something of some sort. A start, at least.

A day after his arrival in the village of his youth, Eliza decided to include her brother’s clothing in the weekly washing. She would not have him run around the town in a stained shirt and reeking of sweat and seasickness. When it came to accurate dress, she was even more fastidious than her brother. Proper decorum ought to be upheld at all times, the world was crumbling enough already as it was, no need to let morals rot even further by running around in stains and crumples. Because Edmund was out of the house to follow an invitation of a neighbouring family a few miles away who were doubtlessly after some tales of adventures in the New World her brother could by no means deliver, she decided to take his traveling wardrobe, have it washed and ask questions later. Half an hour later, Eliza reclined on a small settee, engrossed in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, when she was pulled away from the pages by a young girl’s voice. The voice belonged to Mary, a young local girl who served as a maid in the household. Her duties included some general cleaning, washing and whatever else was required. She was a sweet girl, honest and helpful at all times. “Mrs Greenwood? I found this in Major Hewlett’s pockets when I was doing the laundry. Thought I should give it to you since the Major isn’t at home.”

Eliza cocked her head in the same way her brother did when he was either curious or not quite sure what to think of a certain person or situation. While the two of them were never thought to resemble each other much facially, both looked like inquisitive beagles when confronted with something curious or confusing, head cocked to one side, eyebrows slightly furrowed. Mary took this as a sign to approach her Mistress and handed a folded piece of paper to Eliza. “Thank you for your caution with my brother’s things. He always forgets something in his pockets.” She gave the girl an encouraging smile, sending her back to her duties. The piece of paper trembled in Eliza’s hands. This was not fear, this was utmost curiosity. What was so important her brother had kept it at his side for the entirety of his journey across the Atlantic?
No seal, the better. She could read whatever it was and nobody would ever find out. Should she? It was Edmund’s own fault after all that led to the piece of paper’s discovery. But spying could not be tolerated. It was not her place to mingle in Edmund’s business, she should return to her novel and show him Mary’s find after his return in the evening. But what could it be? Eventually, Eliza succumbed to her insatiable curiosity. Against her better judgement, she carefully unfolded the paper. The first thing she realised was that it was written in his hand- so maybe it was a letter after all, a letter he still needed to post? She should not be doing this. Edmund would surely be cross with her if she read it unauthorised. In the end, her efforts to restrain herself from temptation were all in vain and Eliza began to read:

Mrs Strong,

Since I did not have the chance to bid you farewell at our last meeting at the harbour, I hereby wish to do so. By the time you receive this letter, I have safely returned to my native Scotland which should be in accordance with your wishes.

Be certain my feelings for you were sincere and never corrupted by vice or unbecoming passion, which sadly could not shield me from star-crossed love. I loved you with all my heart. At this final parting of our ways, I wish to make peace with you and wish you happiness, wherever you may go and wherever you may find it.

- E. Hewlett

Eliza could not believe her eyes. Edmund? Her brother, the reserved and usually quiet man she had grown up with in love? In love with anything else than the night skies, his telescope or his beloved horses? And love of such quality at that? As far as she could remember he had never even courted a girl in their shared youth. She checked the letter for a full name and address. Anna Strong, Whitehall, Setauket. Who was this ominous Anna and what had she done to Edmund?

Answers had to be found, but Eliza was not yet sure how to proceed. She slipped the letter into her book and promised herself to investigate this matter further. At first, it had been curiosity. Now, it had grown to deep concern for her brother and his well-being. She had seldom heard or seen him so emotional, so articulate about his feelings -and they had known each other for all their lives. Something was gravely in the wrong, so would it be in Eliza’s power to make everything right again?

The more she thought about it, the more the Edmund who had returned from America seemed different from the man who had parted with her years ago. It was only natural for people to change after such a long time abroad that was doubtlessly littered with experiences an ordinary woman from the countryside could not comprehend; yet there was something more to his changed behaviour that seemed to become more subsumable with the context of this letter in mind.

For the time being, Eliza decided to retire to her room where she took the letter out again to examine it more closely. The handwriting was indubitably her brother’s. Not many people had such a neat and yet recognisable hand at the same time. Closing her eyes, she tried to remember the content of the letters he had sent home over the last year or so. Maybe there had been hints? A half-sentence maybe, the first rippling of a mightier wave, something, anything, at all? The letters proved to be a cul-de-sac as they contained nothing more than reports of the current weather across the ocean and the request to extend his warmest greetings to a few people from the village he was or had been loosely acquainted with.
While reading these lines it dawned on Eliza how little she actually knew about her brother. When his letters arrived they had always been a reason for joy in the house; but now Eliza realised that the content had been reduced to a secondary matter by herself and Mother, something she now felt utterly ashamed of. As long as the letters kept coming on a semi-regular basis it meant that he was alive, that there was a chance Edmund would come home one day, hopefully unharmed. As long as he could write letters it meant he was still in good health, thus kindling the fond prayer he might one day return, safe and sound. Now for the first time, Eliza realised that the letters meant so much more than confirmation of his persisting heartbeat. She should have been aware of their evasive nature months, maybe even years ago and should have acted according to her concerns. She couldn’t even tell when it had started. She had selfishly abandoned her brother to cherish the memory of the young man who left the house many years ago to join the army.

As soon as Edmund would return, she would talk to him. For the time being, without Mother, for her health was frail already. If things went well, maybe she and Edmund could start to mend things between them again. She was no longer the little girl engaged to young James Stretton- and he, judging from the letter, no longer the secretive, timid boy who suffered from permanent self-inflicted neck pains and colds obtained during extensive star gazing sessions. A tear softly dripped from Eliza’s nose. She knew nothing about Edmund anymore when in their childhood days they had been inseparable. How could she have stooped so low as to abandon her brother?

Rivington’s Corner, York City, two days after Edmund Hewlett’s departure.

“Interesting. I shall consider your proposal.” The man in front of him was nothing like the other British officers Benedict Arnold had come to meet. Most of them were open in their dislike of him on grounds of his defection. To them, he was nothing but a turncoat, frowned upon for his change of sides and universally mistrusted. This man on the contrary was willing to talk to him and even seemed to be genuinely interested in what he had to say, although he mistook his words completely.

“I am not proposing anything, Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe. I order you to.”

Although he was glad the man would at least talk to him without giving him the impression of being the most volatile snake in the grass that had ever worn a uniform, he was not only infuriatingly- well, he could not express it in a single word, but there was something unsettling about Simcoe. Maybe it was his peculiar eyes, their colour combined with his unblinking stare, perhaps it was that mincing voice of his, too calm, too high - or perhaps it was simply the fact that he readily disobeyed command.

“Your whole future, your name, depends upon the outcome of this war. I am commander of the Queen’s Rangers and have proven myself useful to our cause at Monmouth and around Oyster Bay. Tell me, why should I assist you in your enterprise? I should not like to risk my men for a forlorn cause.”

Simcoe’s attempt at a solemn face was almost comical; it was evident the ginger was mocking him. Patience, Benedict, patience, Arnold tried to calm himself as he watched Simcoe gesturing nonchalantly with a breakfast knife in his hand while talking. It was irritating and made him angry, almost as angry as the man’s habit to tap the table in a broken rhythm with the fingers of his other hand. He wanted to slap that arrogant milk-faced bastard across the face and snatch the knife away from him but that might prove his undoing. The last person Simcoe attacked with a piece of cutlery at the table, or so rumour had it, did not finish his plate…

“And yet you have been evicted from Setauket by Colonel Cook on grounds of your brutal treatment of the villagers. I would say there is room for us both to better our reputation in the army.”
“Who told you I am interested in that? I did what I had to do and I stand by it. It was the deliberate misrepresentation of events by some personally disgruntled with me that prompted Cook to evict me. I am by no means interested in serving your cause for self-betterment among our fellow officers. Your decision to change sides has nothing to do with me, so give me one reason why I should decide to assist you.”

Simcoe smiled. He knew Arnold needed him (and his men) badly for his mission, which allowed him to play hard to get. The whole point of his little power play had been to test Arnold. He would inevitably end up working with this man whether he liked the idea or not. He could at least ease the burden of yet another incompetent superior by establishing a hierarchy early on.

“I need your men. I need you. I need everything I can get to get this business successfully done.” These words obviously did not escape Arnold’s mouth with ease, Simcoe remarked with satisfaction.

That was all he had wanted to hear all along. He didn’t need Arnold. Arnold needed him.

“All right. But do not count on sudden bouts of magnanimity on my part in the future.” He gave Arnold what he considered a benevolent smile and shook his hand, careful to squeeze Arnold’s exactly to the point of inflicting the greatest possible pain without actually breaking any bones.

Reflecting on their conversation so far, Simcoe arrived at the conclusion that Arnold was a fool whose blatantly open interest in self-betterment, monetary values and public recognition allowed any man who was able to recognise these weaknesses to make Arnold dance to his tune.

The turncoat was as easy to read as a child’s hornbook. Given that after André’s untimely demise Arnold would continue the hanged man’s work, he was his new superior, at least in theory. How boring to blindly serve an ignorant, self-centred master. And equally unwise. For the good of the British Army and himself turning the hierarchy had been the most prudent thing to do.

Apparently his handshake had not put Arnold off conversing with him, because he started to enquire after the Rangers’ recent activities and Simcoe’s own military past.

On the table, the knife lay temptingly in wait for him to pick it up again and play with it. It was too blunt to inflict any greater harm with it than cutting a slice of bread, but it would suffice well enough to twiddle it in his hands to distract his restless fingers and mind from Arnold’s incessant chatter.

“I served on Long Island under the ‘Oyster Major’ before I took command of the Queen’s Rangers”, Simcoe answered yet another of Arnold’s questions.

“Who is this Oyster ‘Major’?”

Apparently the new spy-hunter general did not even bother to catch up with the talk of his own side’s officers. Another weakness he might one day find very useful in Arnold.

“Major Edmund Hewlett. He was the major who commanded the town where I was stationed, Setauket. “

“Commanded?”

“Left for England as far as I know.”

“Why?”

“It is a rather amusing story- slighted at the altar or should I rather say, saved from the odious crime
of bigamy by the magistrate who was to conduct the wedding service. The woman he was bound to marry was, as the good magistrate discovered, still married to another man—a runaway rebel who is supposedly alive and well behind enemy lines. The good major of course, thus humiliated—

He broke off mid-sentence. Suddenly, he realised what he had been saying. While recounting the story of Hewlett being humiliated, he had, blinded by the infinite satisfactory delectation the thought of Hewlett suffering caused him, forgotten that this matter was not about the frog-faced major alone.

-Anna Strong.

True, she had hurt him quite badly. Despite his greatest efforts, she had chosen the little major over him and still— a sharp pain located in the area of his chest where most people had a heart (which he apparently lacked, as he had been informed often enough in the past) told him that he had just done great wrong. She was a runaway rebel now herself, he noticed, at least according to the gossip his intact ear had caught on the streets of Setauket.

Yet somehow despite all this, the thought of seeing her harmed by Arnold or his men made him uneasy.

Love, hate, torment. God, he hated her, so, so much.

-And loved her with equal fervency.

The words were spoken; it was too late to take them back. If he didn’t want Arnold to be interested in her, he must interest him in Hewlett, Simcoe figured.

“So, the woman. Where is she now? She was probably planning to marry him to gain a new source for British intelligence she could later report to the rebels?”

“No, you mistake the situation. It was Hewlett who saw through her dilettantish dabbling in conspiring with the enemy all along. He courted her to gather intelligence for our side. How could he have known she would be so devilish as to deceive him so cruelly?”

Admittedly, the picture of the former commander of Setauket he tried to sell to Arnold looked nothing like Hewlett. Hewlett was a gullible weakling, no John André-esque head of intelligence. Much as it pained him to be forced to say things about Hewlett that were not rooted in mockery or anger, it had to be done to protect Anna. Remembering the power of his stare, he looked Arnold straight in the face. A little intimidation was always beneficiary when dealing with people.

“Where is she?”

“Hm. How would I know? I only came back after the comic tragedy had happened; both parties had already left Setauket. There was more pressing business to attend to than a third-rate country wedding. Though I believe rumour has it she drowned herself in the sound, yet no body has ever been recovered. Others say she has wandered north to Canada where she has family. I do not typically mingle with gossip-laudering washerwomen, all I can say is we were not able to find her.” Arnold looked dissatisfied. Good. Next, the bloodhound would go after Hewlett.

“Then where is Hewlett? He might know things his lady might have confided in him. Things we might need to know—“

“As I said, the man has departed for England a few days ago”, Simcoe said calmly as if he tried to explain some basic matter of yes or no to a toddler.
“I’ll need him back here. I need to know everything.” With that, Arnold rose from the table, half-audibly composing what sounded like a letter to give Hewlett the joyful news that he would not leave military service as soon as he thought and would be ordered back to York City.

Simcoe’s head reeled busily with a multitude of thoughts when he returned to his abode that evening. Arnold, Anna Strong, Hewlett—there was so much to think about. Should Hewlett really be foolhardy enough to return to York City instead of running for the European mainland as soon as he received the letter Arnold was doubtlessly going to send him, he might be given a chance of avenging the humiliation he had suffered at the foul toad’s hands. The stab in the abdomen had hurt rather badly, even more so after he had also stolen Anna Strong from him. Perhaps his involuntary slip-up was not as unfortunate as he first thought. As long as Anna was safe—here she was again, invading his mind.

Lost in maudlin fantasies, he sat down at his desk, took a leather-clad little book from the drawer and began to write, write of what could have been, what might have been—what perhaps still might be if he were given a chance to get his hands on Hewlett, which seemed now more likely than before. Oh how he would make this sorry joke of an officer suffer, just as he was suffering now—


Not knowing why I love or hate, I wander through this land
A warrior, disciple of Mars who, if taken by the hand,
Would set aside his bayonet if only you would ask-
Would cast aside the fire lock and let fall the warlike mask
If only your hands would take mine and guide me to the light
Guide me, blinded that I am and bravely lead me on,
Like Eurydice and Orpheus be John Simcoe and Anna Strong.
Don’t turn your head walk fast ahead, so we might see the day
And in a field in springtime I will crown thee Queen of May.
I’ll take your hand and lead you through old Whitehall’s oaken gate
Where Mars and Venus shall be joined, by Law of God and Fate.

Smiling to himself, he clung on to an airy wisp of dark hair that wavered softly in the breeze of an imaginary spring day and from there directly into the reality of errant ink-stains on his fingers with which he tried to catch it, only to trap nothing but air between his fingertips.

Thus distracted, Simcoe was for the moment blissfully unaware of the consequences his involuntary revelations to Benedict Arnold, spy-hunter general, would soon unleash…
Duncleade: There is, to my knowledge, no village by this name anywhere. I made it up as the residence of the Hewlett family.

“Your whole future, your name, depends upon the outcome of this war.” - This line was lifted from one of the trailers for season four.

Love, hate, torment./Not knowing why I love or hate etc. - Allusions to Catullus 85, a poem quoted in full by Simcoe in season 2 when Akinbode asks for leave to accompany Cicero to Philadelphia.

And last but not least, thank you for reading! As always, your comments, kudos, critique and suggestions are greatly appreciated!
Past, Present and Future

Chapter Summary

While Arnold’s letter is on its way to cross the Atlantic, Edmund opens up to Eliza, a misunderstanding is resolved and Eliza has an idea.
This chapter is a little long...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[...]

Adieu, but let me cherish, still,
The hope with which I cannot part.
Contempt may wound, and coldness chill,
But still it lingers in my heart.

And who can tell but Heaven, at last,
May answer all my thousand prayers,
And bid the future pay the past
With joy for anguish, smiles for tears?

(Anne Brontë, Farewell)

In the following weeks, nobody saw much of Edmund. Eliza and Mrs Hewlett were deeply worried because the only times he would leave his room were during clear, starry nights to sit and stare, barely protected from the cold in his banyan, on the rooftop all night to stargaze. Occasionally he could also be coaxed out for dinner with the family; but these rare meals with him, spent in awkward silence since neither Eliza nor Mother knew what to say to this much changed Edmund, made everyone uncomfortable and so it was decided between mother and daughter to leave Edmund in peace and sent him a plate upstairs instead. Often, the plates returned without having been so much as touched and if they were, no more than a few bites were missing.

Anna, what had she done to him?

All these years in the military Eliza had always half-expected a letter to be delivered to her doorstep to inform her of her brother’s demise in a battle or skirmish with enemy forces followed by an eerie rum-filled barrel with whatever remained of him inside, preserved as unceremoniously as a sour pickle. During these years, she had grown used to the idea of having to face the loss of her brother one day. It was not a pleasant thought at all, but one she had forced herself to get acquainted with for her own and her brother’s sake. Who would have thought one single woman had had a more devastating effect on him than all of General Washington’s men combined? Familiar with the cruelty of love, Eliza’s thoughts wandered off to her own wedding that had never been meant to be, though for very different reasons.

Before her marriage to Jeremiah Greenwood at the age of twenty-five, she had been engaged to
James Stretton, first-born son of Sir Henry Stretton, the wealthiest landowner in all of Dumfriesshire. It was just like a fairy tale. She, the daughter of an impoverished tradesman who barely made ends meet, fell in love with the richest and in her eyes handsomest eligible bachelor in the entire world— or at least the shire. Silly as young love always is, the two of them, probably inspired by Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, decided they would not tell anybody of their romance, knowing full well they would be met by objection from at least one set of parents. They met whenever they could, their mutual favourite being nightly meetings out in the open, far away from their families somewhere in the fields surrounding the village.

*Youth must have some dalliance, of good or ill some pastance,* once wrote a young King Henry VIII, and he was right. Only that she and James made the mistake to forget that other youths might also enjoy nightly pastimes, though of a very different kind.

During a particularly enchanting night in August Eliza remembered because of the unusual amount of shooting stars in the skies, she had lain in the embrace of her first love and watched how threads of exquisitely spun silver hurried across the sky only to disappear again in a matter of seconds. All was perfect, peaceful and quiet until steps approached from behind, disturbing the serenity of the scene. To her horror, the disruptor of her piece was no other than her brother, a map of the night sky tucked under one arm and his telescope at the ready. Never until this day had Eliza seen Edmund so embarrassed as on that starry night in August when he was seventeen years old. His face turned a particularly blazing hue of scarlet that was even visible in the darkness of the night. Stammering, Edmund excused profusely in his own unique overcomplicated and time-consuming fashion for intruding and scuttled away.

The next day, he had approached her vowing nobody would ever hear a word about anything he had involuntarily witnessed from him.

Edmund kept his word and eventually, it had been James’ father who had, noticing his son’s frequent disappearances and some telling bruising on his neck, drawn the right conclusion and confronted his son one day over dinner who then confessed everything. Through his parents, word reached hers. While her father was keen for her to marry James for primarily economic reasons and Mother had given her blessing though she would have wished her only daughter to be courted in the “proper” way, it was his parents who objected their son’s intentions and even threatened to disinherit him should he marry her. Two years went by in which the Strettons did everything to divert James’ attentions from her to more eligible women of better breeding, better prospects and better money, but James remained steadfast in his intention to marry none but Eliza Hewlett.

Eventually, they relented and begrudgingly at first, opened themselves to the idea of having a comparatively poor daughter in law with no assets save her love for her husband-to-be and a good education.

Officially engaged, the wedding day was set on the first Sunday in September of the coming year, but the unexpected death of her father in June put the wedding on hold. The death of Mr Hewlett was difficult for both Eliza to process or even make sense of; a sudden illness had consumed him within a week with no prior signs of ill health. At first, even the doctors had thought it was just a cold. All of a sudden, her father was dead.

With the death of her father, Eliza reckoned, things had taken a turn for the worse for the entire family. It seemed as if this one tragic event had only been the harbinger of what was to come.

First, Edmund, now officially in charge of clearing all of Father’s business affairs after his death and paying off the outstanding debts to his creditors, had announced he would join the army. With a letter of recommendation from a distant uncle who had served in the Seven Years War, he would be sure
to make a career as an officer and thus good money, money the family needed quite desperately. Edmund had, by putting the family first, buried his dream to ever become an astronomer and study among Britain’s brightest at Oxford.

For a brief moment in time, the world stopped that day; Eliza could remember the minutes before she first heard the news of her father’s demise rather vividly, almost as if they had passed not years and years but mere seconds ago; they were racing their horses from MacPherson’s barn back to the house, in total a distance of just under two miles. Edmund’s skewbald Aethon and her dapple grey Gringolet neck-at-neck, they urged their horses on, laughing out loudly and shouting.

“I’m winning, Edmund! Told you so!”

“Wait until Aethon gets to the last quarter-mile, you two won’t stand a chance against us!”

“Enjoy the view of Gringolet’s rear, because that’s all you’re going to see!”

Edmund was wrong that day, he didn’t win the race. She had won, if only by an arm’s length. The second she dismounted, eager to celebrate her victory (and relish in Edmund’s annoyed facial expression), her world broke like a delicate porcelain cup fallen from the hand of a clumsy guest. Mother had come from the house and met her children outside to tell them the news at their return.

That last ride was the end of childhood, of innocence, for both of them. Bereft of their father and now burdened with his business and household, they had been forced to adapt and live up to their difficult inheritance.

It had been their last race that day. For only half a year later, James Stretton’s horse slipped and fell in a similar race with some friends and his brother William. James died by the roadside, buried beneath the large body of his horse, between Dumfries and Duncleade.

The news of this terrible incident spread quickly throughout the area and by the evening, all of Duncleade knew. It was Edmund who had gently taken her hands in his and told her. All Eliza could remember of the remainder of this sad evening was being wrapped up in the comforting embrace of her mother who let her cry and scream and shout all her sadness out loud while Edmund, never a man for great emotional expressions due to his quiet nature and general inclination to insecurity, had awkwardly patted her back and ran whenever either she or Mother required a handkerchief or a cup of freshly brewed tea. Two days later, his leave from military training was up and he was forced to leave his distraught family behind to go and resume his duties to King and Country in England. It was supposed to be a happy occasion, a brief family reunion but now all had changed, changed utterly.

So judging by the events of the past, Eliza felt confident to claim the Hewletts had never been particularly lucky, a family curse of sorts that had now decided to haunt Edmund again. Why, she and probably the rest of the universe as well, knew not. At least the letter had provided her with the reason why Edmund appeared so changed lately; Anna Strong.

On the question of reasons- why was it exactly Edmund’s and Anna’s ways had parted? From all that she could gather from the letter Mary had discovered somewhere among Edmund’s laundry, Mrs Anna Strong had hurt Edmund in a way he did not specify, possibly because both parties involved knew well enough what incident he alluded to. And then, there was the question of Mrs Strong. Mrs Strong? Maybe a woman come to a little wealth through widowhood, although a marriage based on a reason as mundane as pecuniary considerations did not sound much like Edmund at all.

Maybe it was time to talk to him after all. He needn’t know of the letter as long as he did not enquire about it directly. Only if asked by him would she reveal her find, if not, there was still the possibility
he had forgotten all about it and she could emerge from her shameful spying activities undetected.

That same evening, Eliza chose to strike. Instead of sending Mary or one of the other two servants upstairs with the dinner tray, Eliza, armed with two plates laden with pie and a bottle of the cellar’s finest knocked on her brother’s door.

“Enter.”

“Edmund, I—“ She broke off mid-sentence. Her brother, dressed in his dressing gown, sat at the small desk studying a map of the heavens. He did not even lift his head as she talked to him. The image of a world-weary tiger she had seen at a fair as a child sprung to her mind. Encaged and tormented with pebbles by cruel children, the beast had not even cared enough about its own existence to lift its head to growl or scare the children away and had instead remained still, its expressionless eyes fixed at a non-existent point on the horizon it could not see from the cage while stoically suffering under the onslaught of stones, insults and remainders of food. Something inside him was just like this tiger; brokenly alive.

“Here. Some pie for us and a bottle of our best red wine.”

“You have not come to bring me food, Eliza, what is the matter?” Of all the things he had become during his monastic reclusiveness, his impatience with people angered Eliza the most. Normally, she would have given him a piece of her mind, yet her goals kept her from doing so on this occasion.

“Indeed, I have not, brother mine. Be so kind and relieve me of my load, take a plate and let us talk. There are things looming around this house since your return that have not been addressed and weigh heavily on everyone’s shoulders.”

His sister’s concerned face touched him. He could not bear to see her sad and certainly not for his sake. He was not worth being sad and sorry for, the travesty of an ex-major infatuated with a rebel spy. His wounded soul had barely healed yet and it pained him to talk about Setauket. Not to forget the fear that Eliza and Mother could think worse of him after having heard the entire story. They had disapproved of Anna all along, as had been visible from their letters which never even mentioned her once, despite the perhaps bravest letter he had ever written informing his mother and sister of his wedding. When he had not received a direct reply, he had ceased to write about Anna and returned to the old weather and troop movement routine. If things would have gone according to plan, they would have replied with an invitation to come home and he would have surprised them one day with his beautiful new wife at his side on their doorstep.

-Which was never to be now. Reluctantly, he decided to open up to his sister about his past life on the other side of the ocean.

What Eliza was trying to do was in essence no different from what he once tried to do when Eliza’s
fiancée had died. He had been there for her or at least tried to, best as an awkward younger brother could try to comfort his grief-stricken older sister. But instead of going into hiding, Eliza had soldiered on, marched to the fife and drum of life without ever tiring of the road that saw her bury a husband and move back in with her mother. Eliza would have made a better soldier than him; persistent in her endeavours and true to her word, she would have ruled Setauket with an ease that would have sent even Simcoe back to his lair with his tail between his legs.

“Promise me not to talk to Mother about what I am going to tell you. If needs be, I will do so myself when the time is right.”

Eliza promised and Edmund began to talk; reluctant at first, the words soon poured out of his mouth, eager to be spoken, eager to be heard. He told her of everything in great detail about the evil captain, the dubious judge and his ne’er-do-well son, his bride, the kidnapping, the wedding that never was.

Eliza trembled with anger when she heard of his mangled right foot which now lacked three toes. He flinched and looked more than uneasy when he rolled down his stocking to reveal the extent of the damage upon her request to see it.

Oh Edmund. Gentle Edmund who many years ago could not even harm a butterfly had grown into a stern, battle-hardened man. Secretly, she vowed to herself that given the chance, she would send this Simcoe fellow packed with post-horse up to heaven- but of course not before she would have relieved him of three toes and probably some other member of his anatomy as well.

The night was slowly falling outside the window when Edmund finished his tale. Throughout the evening, Eliza had listened and comforted her little brother. The pie sat still untouched on his desk, the wine on the other hand had been opened to sustain them through Edmund’s tale. When he had ended, Eliza rested her head on his shoulder. Seated on his bed, the two silently watched the sun set behind the hills.

“I am so, so sorry, Edmund” Eliza said, choking back a tear.

“Well, it would have, ah, helped if you or Mother had answered my letter regarding the matter of my ardent admiration for Mrs Strong. I might have come forward by myself earlier had I ever received a response of any kind.”

“There never was any such letter, I swear! Had Mother or I received it, you can be sure we would have answered straight away- all these years and all you ever wrote were accounts of your men and the weather. We would have been delighted to hear you found happiness; did you really think we would have cared about the suitability of your fiancé? In case you have forgotten, I was the one on the receiving end of that sort of talk once myself.”

It was evident from Eliza’s grave face that she spoke the truth. So they had never known in the first place. The more things came to light, the evermore swiftly his life descended into a comical tragedy of sorts. Though it comforted him to have imparted his secret with a person he could trust, perhaps the only one he still had, Eliza could not alleviate him of his melancholy and heartache, but sometimes the presence of an understanding soul was enough to lighten the load.

Poor Eliza. Fate had not meant well with her either yet she had somehow found a way to walk through life with her head held high. She had buried two good men while the woman around whom
his thoughts revolved was still alive and (hopefully) well somewhere behind enemy lines an ocean away from him. How insignificant seemed his own sadness compared to the hardships his sister had successfully manoeuvred through and still maintained happiness. He admired her for that quality of steadfastness in adversity.

They wished each other good night around midnight and Eliza retreated to her room, taking her plate with her as she went. Edmund too felt for the first time in a while up to taste some food without feeling sick at the sight of it. When half of the generously cut piece of pie was gone, he drifted into a deep slumber. He could not say of himself that he was at peace now; his mind still in constant agitation caused by the tempestuous ill tidings that had befallen him in Setauket.

After having talked to his sister however, Edmund felt somewhat better. He was not alone- what a comforting thought.

The next day.

Not even a small strip of faint candlelight escaped through the small crack between Edmund’s door and the floorboards, which meant he had already gone to bed. Mother too had called it an early night and had an hour or so ago retired to her room with some needlework. Eliza had picked up her frame and threads as well and until now successfully pretended to continue her embroidery upstairs. The piece of midnight blue silk destined for the front of a new gown lay abandoned on her bed. The pattern she had chosen was somewhat unusual in that she had used a map of the night skies she had found among some of Edmund’s old things. Although she was initially quite excited to start such a truly different project, the meticulous work required to indicate all the major stars’ positions correctly had dampened her enthusiasm considerably.

Tonight, she had more urgent things to do than this. Quickly reaching for her candle and the old golden signet ring she had inherited from a long-dead ancestor on her nightstand, Eliza light-footedly slipped into the corridor. Not treading on a squeaking floorboard was a nearly impossible task in an old house such as this one, but Eliza somehow managed without drawing her mother’s attention to her or waking her little brother from his well-deserved sleep. The servants too had retired to their quarters, which meant Eliza was the only person awake on the first and second floor. Having known the house for longer than she could remember, wandering its rooms in the dark was nothing that scared her.

The sorry light of her small candle guided her to the study which had been left unused most of the time since her father’s death many years ago. With her brother, who was technically the new master of the house gone, Eliza had gradually taken up using the study as a place she could retire to when in the need of solitude or a hiding place from some of Mother’s visitors. She ignited another old candlestick for some additional light and reached into the desk’s drawer with an unerring hand, unearthing a few sheets of fine writing paper, a quill and ink from its depths.

What she was going to night was secret. Nobody could ever know what she was doing. The idea for her plan had come to her quite suddenly when Edmund had told her of his sorrows the previous evening.

The way things looked like (or rather the way Eliza interpreted Edmund’s view of what had happened) this Anna had never loved him, although she had lied to ensure his protection from the very same forces she worked for and been so ecstatic at his return from rebel captivity. Setauket was a more complicated place than she could ever have imagined, Eliza thought as she tried to recount the details of Edmund’s tale once more.
Apparently she had not been able to bring herself to speak the three magical words to his face when she had sought him out while on a mission in York City shortly after the wedding disaster. What her brother failed to recognise however was that she, on a mission for the enemy, had had the guts to step into a building stuffed to the brim with British officers just so she could talk to him. Nobody in possession of their wits would ever do such a thing- at least she wouldn’t if she were a rebel spy living in constant danger of being unmasked and subsequently tried to the full extent of British law.

If things had ended badly for Mrs Strong, she might have been arrested that day. It must have taken Anna a lot of bravery to visit him- a sort of foolhardy bravery that only love can lend to those most in need of it. Why would that woman want to gamble with her life if she saw no reason in reconciling with him? She would not have needed to stay and talk to him, her only task had been to speak to Edmund on the matter her superior had ordered her to, but she did. And on the matter of the three words that can either lighten or destroy a soul with equal force- well, she hadn’t been there personally but if Anna truly put Edmund before herself as it seemed, she would want him to leave the country for good so as to keep him out of further danger. Making him leave would of course be considerably easier if he did not maintain any emotional ties to the Colonies, such as a sweetheart or lover.

All of this was a wild guess of course- luckily, things in the dark can easily be illuminated with a little light. One only has to ask for flintstone.

And this, her plan would not remain a charming little candle flame or a tame Guy Fawkes Night spectacle, this would be a wild forest fire about to devour anyone who was foolish enough to step into her path.

Grinning with a girlish giddiness she hadn’t experienced since her teenage days, she determinedly penned three letters she had spent all day preparing in her head, word by word.

The first one went to an old friend who ran his father’s business outpost in the Colonies. As luck would have it, this friend had once been destined to be her brother-in-law. They still exchanged letters sometimes, which made writing to in this matter easier. The Lord be thanked for William Stretton.

**Dear William,**

*I know we have not exchanged letters in a while and I hope your family, yourself and your business are prospering. Please excuse my blunt question, but I desperately need to ask a favour of you: I have affairs to settle on American shores and am in need a business address, if you will, on your side of the ocean. Could I in my correspondence reference your warehouse as said address and would you be willing to forward my correspondence to Scotland? The matter is somewhat complicated, wherefore letters to me will be addressed to Simon I. O. Tamce, as my counterparts would, if they knew, by no means do trade with a woman. All I can do is assure you none of my doings are illegal, they demand secrecy for a set of different reasons.*

*Be thanked in advance,*

*Eliza*

She paused for a second. She could not write to anybody else as long as she didn’t know William’s answer. It would take her roughly six weeks if not more to obtain one.
Since she had the second and third letter ready in her head, writing them out now would prevent her from forgetting the exact wording later and she would be able to post them immediately once William’s answer arrived, she mused. Once the whole operation would be set to motion, she would not have any time to spare to compose letters anew.

The second one would be a surprise for someone she didn’t know. From all that Edmund had said about the cabbage-farming incarnation of strategic incompetence, scaring him into doing her bidding ought to be easy, especially since she was in the possession of intelligence not even the army in York City could boast to know, not after André’s death at least.

Strictly speaking, blackmailing Woodhull was not something Eliza did lightly- he was married with a little child to think of after all- but it had to be; no harm would come to him anyway. The only thing this letter did was threatening Woodhull with consequences she would never be able to deliver... Perhaps, if one day this conflict should come to a conclusion with either the one or the other side winning, she would write to Woodhull to say sorry. One day, perhaps, not now.

Mr Woodhull,

Could you envision being of service to a greater good?

Usually, requests like these are not forwarded in this manner but we are not looking for an ordinary recruit either.

Per the request of my superior officer, I am hereby informing you that cooperation will be rewarded,

Even more so if your missions are successful.

Read the instructions below and follow them to the letter; disobedience will not be tolerated.

Forward the enclosed letter to Mrs Anna Strong, wherever she may be and send her reply to Stretton’s warehouse in Brooklyn Harbour. You will act as a go-between for as long as We consider you of use to our cause.

NOT A WORD TO ANYONE.

Maj. Simon I. O. Tamce.

The threat concealed in the first few lines would hopefully be enough to convince this good for nothing to be a useful person for once in his life. As far as she had gathered from Edmund, Abraham Woodhull, master spy, was a great disgrace to an already disgraceful profession and not at all capable to do anything properly at all. Hopefully, sending a letter via his contacts was not too much to ask of Incompetence Incarnated.

The "major" in front of the name and the knowledge of the Culper alias would trick Woodhull into believing the British Army was after him. After all, his secret had been with her brother and
Woodhull had no way of determining how many people Edmund had talked to with regards to the identity of Washington’s most elusive spy.

In reality of course, Edmund had only ever disclosed this particular piece of information to John André who was dead and her, his sister. André could have traded the secret on as well, who knew. An old Irish proverb states that as soon as three people know of something, it is no longer a secret. Edmund, André and her humble self. Woodhull’s family might know as well. Viewed from this perspective it was fairly easy to contrive a scare for the cabbage farmer. He would have to ask himself who exactly knew what and how much of it and who in possession of such knowledge would have strong enough Tory leanings to sell him to the British.

Edmund might be a suspect in this ploy but who could really trace this bit of information back to him? Woodhull would likely be much too scared to make open accusations, judging from how his last ordeal in a British prison had turned out for him, he was likely to simply comply with her demands.

God, if only the letter would not get opened upon arrival. This was a risk she had to take; if no answer would arrive in the first two months after tonight, the little conspiracy she was trying to initiate would fail. Building a working organisation of men and women was a lot harder than as the broadsheet-printed tavern ballads of the day and age suggested in song and story of patriotic heroes such as Dick Turpin. In the worst case, the letter would be opened by the army and traced back to the warehouse and through them to William to her, which would then loosen an avalanche of an unpleasant investigation that would not spare her brother.

From whatever new angle Eliza looked at it, it became clear to her that the only way to get the letter safely across the sea was to conceal it somewhere. Concealing something, she mused, was easy as long as the receiving party was expecting to receive the ominous something and knew where to look. She figured she would have to buy a present for a certain Mr Culper; one that on the one hand concealed her letter well but on the other revealed it to the intended addressee. Before the rise of a new day’s dawn would open the doors of tradespeople up and down the country again, there were still enough nightly hours that could be spent productively and Eliza was much too agitated to sleep. Letter number three was by far the most important one. This was the letter intended for Anna Strong.

Dear Mrs Strong,

Praying my letter has been delivered safely, allow me to make myself known to you before I shall speedily come to the point of my letter. My name is Elizabeth Greenwood, née Hewlett, sister of Edmund Hewlett, your former fiancé. Having heard all about you from my brother after his return to Scotland, I have come to the conclusion that there is still unfinished business between the two of you that begs to be resolved. Do not misunderstand me; I do by no means wish you to apologise to my brother. You acted as best as you could in an environment hostile to you, your morals and loyalties. I was moved when I heard of your last stand at the harbour and hope you have not come to harm because of it. As a matter of fact, I do admire you for your courage in such perilous times. If it should be your wish to maintain contact with me or seek out my brother, my letters will be delivered through an agent in Setauket who will also take care that your letters are sent to me safely.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Greenwood
Satisfied, Eliza dribbled sealing wax on her finished letter and pressed her old signet ring, which she only ever used for special correspondence, into the cooling pool of red. White wax dripped from the candle stump onto the table as the clock struck two. Eliza locked her letters and writing utensils in the desk’s drawer and took the key with her. Still giddy with anticipation to see her own little network of semi-criminal affairs come to life, she went to bed only to rise early the next morning despite never having been a natural early riser before.

Edmund and Mother were still asleep, the staff by contrast were already up and ready to steer the house through another day. Just like in her childhood days, Elia sneaked into the kitchen, where the cook who was quite astonished to see the “young” lady of the house in the rooms usually only occupied by busy servants, quickly roasted and buttered her a delicious slice of homemade bread which she devoured while walking down the road to Duncleade. It was not London or Edinburgh, but big enough to have a seamstress, a smith and an ironmonger and a small shop selling everyday goods.

The latter sold what Eliza was looking for today: a nice box of tea. Absolutely nobody would suspect a letter hidden within a medium-sized box of tea leaves. They might open it, dig a bit about, but the odds for the letter being detected would turn significantly in her favour. After having spent a pretty penny on tea (that Woodhull better value her present), she submitted the letter to William to the capriciousness of the postal service. If only it would reach American shores safely, a lot would have been done already.

She was home again by mid-day. Entering the house via the servant’s entrance to smuggle her secret purchases to her room without being detected, she quickly slipped into a more appropriate dress, arranged her hair a little more neatly and hid the tea beneath her bed. All in all, things had gone to plan so far. Trying to act unsuspiciously, she was surprised to hear the piano was being played in the living room.

The servants were at work, her mother unable to play anymore due to her arthritic fingers, though she had been an accomplished musician in her youth. By process of elimination it could only be Edmund, the one who had inherited their mother’s musical talents. As always it was a joy to listen to him, fingers flying easily with soft strokes over the keys in Edmund’s own unique style that distinguished him from other amateur pianists due to his talent for expressing the greatest emotion with the gentlest brush of a key. Lord, he had been wasted as a soldier. She leaned against the frame of the door and listened. His back turned to her, he was investing himself in the andante of Mozart’s *Sonata in A Minor*. From Eliza’s, though admittedly limited experiences of great musicians, she was under the firm belief that not even the Maestro himself could play his own sonata with more feeling and beauty. Like waves, the music rushed through Eliza’s body, swept her off her feet despite the slow speed, wanted to make her cry and comfort her at the same time. If Edmund was half the man with women he was at the piano, Anna Strong was lucky to have been able to call him hers.

Against Eliza’s will (who was prepared to stand in the doorway for an eternity as long as the euphonious beauty of Edmund’s piano playing filled the room with the audible expression of Mozart-ian bitter-sweetness) Edmund’s fingers had reached the last note. Fearing she might be caught lurking, Eliza spontaneously decided to clap. “Bravo, maestro Hewlett! Encore!”

For the first time since his arrival, emotion cracked the odd thin line of her brother’s mouth into a small, yet very familiar toothy and somewhat insecure smile. Trying hard not to grin, Eliza noticed he still blushed after all these years when praised for his work.

“Thank you, Eliza. I had these notes delivered from London for me to… to offer me some distraction.”
And there it was again. Pining and lovesickness welled up from his broken heart and out of his mouth. Eliza’s plan to get her brother off his constant thoughts of America and pull him back into the land of the living was not going according to plan. All she had wanted to do was praise him, give him a positive review of his exceptional skills.

Surprise conquered Eliza’s face when she, buried deeply in her thoughts, heard what else her brother had to say on the same matter: “…some distraction. You know, there is not much I can occupy myself with here, safe my astronomical studies at night and occasionally looking after the horses or going for a ride through the countryside by day. I have been thinking after yesterday night I think it is time has come for me to apply for a position. I cannot perpetually linger in the shadows of this house and make you and Mother uncomfortable with my gloomy presence. Therefore, I might ride out in the afternoon and go to town. Perhaps they are in want of a clerk somewhere. It would not be the most fulfilling work, but it would offer some money and distraction, which would be for the best of us all.”

This was a vast improvement from refusing to eat and vegetating in his room like the ghost of some past ancestor whose wrongdoings tethered the restless soul to the living as punishment for past sins. Still pale and peaky, his cheeks had regained some colour. It seemed Edmund was slowly on the mend again, at least physically. As for his soul, who could say how long it would take for the wounds to heal? Perhaps Eliza could be of assistance here… To speed matters up, she would prepare the tea shipment tonight and post the letter to Mr Woodhull first thing next morning; screw William. No matter what William would say, he would have to help her now, her letter to him being a mere courtesy to let him know she now occupied the address of his warehouse.

All that was left for her to do now was post the letters and wait. She was heading directly for a sea of tedium and impatient waiting. How should she keep herself busy while her beautiful plan was unfolding on the other side of the ocean?

Chapter End Notes

The poem lacks a date of publication and/or writing which I couldn't find for some reason.

Of course Edmund always named his horses in honour of some creature or character from ancient mythology.
Gringolet is according to Arthurian legend Sir Gawain's horse.
"Youth must have some dalliance, of good or ill some pastance"- this poem has actually been written by Henry VIII and thanks to the king's bent for composing music, also been put to a catchy melody.
"Simon I. O. Tamce" is an anagram of "I am not Simcoe". I think Eliza enjoys such creative shenanigans as this one.
I am sure there are a few more things in there I have missed...

Last but not least, thank you all for reading this. I hope you will bear with me, because next time, Anna will be the focus of the action. Until then, I hope you enjoyed reading this somewhat lengthy chapter.
Decisions

Chapter Summary

Abraham receives mail, Sprout Woodhull finds something on the floor and Anna has conflicted feelings over an important decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


(Motto of Margaret of Austria (1480-1530), Princess of Asturias, Duchess of Savoy and Governor of the Habsburg Netherlands)

A box of tea sat on the table in Whitehall’s dining room; untouched so far. Abraham Woodhull stood in cautious distance to it a few steps away, almost as if it were a dangerous animal baring his fangs rather than an inanimate box, wondering what could be inside. He had not ordered any tea nor did he know anybody in England who would gift him anything at all. Maybe it was a trap and the box did not contain any tea but an unpleasant surprise. He wouldn’t open it. After all he had been through with the Culper Ring, he had inevitably made some enemies who would like to see him dead.

Two weeks earlier.

Ben had sent for her with the message to come speedily to his tent, he wanted to speak to her on a matter that could not be delayed. Either, Anna figured, the boys for once wanted to hear her opinion on their intelligence strategies or something was greatly in the wrong.

When she entered the tent, she could tell something awful had happened from the faces of Ben and Caleb who had obviously both awaited her coming.

Caleb beckoned her to sit on a chair and handed her a cup of tea that smelled suspiciously of whiskey.

“Trust me Annie, you’ll want this later”, Caleb answered in reaction to her quizzical facial expression, his face devoid of his usual mischievous smile.

The news the two were trying to break to her must indeed be grave, Anna thought and felt her heart clench at the same moment, when Caleb did not have a joke at hand to lighten the situation in his unique way. What could have happened?

She was alone, she had no family who could have-

*Edm-

“Selah is dead, Anna. I’m sorry. He died a fortnight ago in Philadelphia.”
Ben, who was visibly affected by Selah’s death as well, hugged her as tightly as the mug in her lap allowed without spilling its hot alcoholic content all over Anna’s skirts.

Of all things she had expected, Selah’s death was not among them. Truly, deeply shocked, Anna took a sip from Caleb’s special tea. It contained more whiskey than tea, that was for certain; not that she was complaining, she could use the biting warmth of the alcohol running down her throat to reassure herself she was indeed still alive and this all happening to her.

Selah, her husband in nothing but name had faded into nothing but the ghostly presence of someone perpetually absent, a collection of old memories kept alive by the distant possibility of his eventual return. He was always looming, or to be more precise, their marriage was. It had been a long time since she had last considered him her husband- he had been absent for too long. And in his absence, Edmund had shown her what love really meant. With his kindness, his respectfulness and his gentle, considerate nature he had shown her how much more there was to love than acting as the tavern owner’s aide de camp and putting on a brave smile for the public eye, telling them she and Selah were happy when in truth it was all just keeping up appearances.

Had they ever, truly loved each at any point in their marriage?

No, Anna found without great hesitation. She was not proud of having married Selah (whom she had considered the second prize, the next best future husband after her engagement to Abe was broken off) for primarily social and economic reasons and having told herself a merry little fairy tale how love would grow eventually.

Unsurprisingly, love could not be forced and all that remained of her dream of a stable future with a loving husband, a little money on the side and perhaps a few children running around in the garden was the ring on her finger which she didn’t even wear any more.

But he was not innocent with regards to the state of their marriage either, for he had wanted a wife primarily to fulfil the duties and chores around the house and the tavern. To him, she was “his Anna” as long as the customers were there to witness it and the ale was flowing freely; when they were alone, he became cold and curt in his manner of talking and often treated her like a piece of furniture- a moveable possession. Small wonder she had found comfort in the arms of another man, a decision which was not right either, but highlighted how much she had yearned for a little warmth and companionship in her life.

She had been his maid and housekeeper, he her second choice. They were never meant to be in the first place, ill-fated underneath an adverse star. And now, Selah Strong was dead.

Should she feel sad? Relieved, maybe?

Guilt welled up inside her stomach in hot bubbles and exited through her eyes. Guilt, because she might have contributed more to establishing a closer relationship with her estranged husband in the first place, guilt because when she had heard the news it was another man whom she had first thought of and feared for, guilt because she was not half as sad for her loss as a new widow ought to be- it was all too much for her to handle at once.

“Shhh, Annie, don’t cry.” Caleb, seated next to her on a ridiculously small and uncomfortable footstool, wrapped his arm around her gingerly.

“How?”, she demanded to know through a veil of tears Ben and Caleb mistook as grief over her dead husband.

“Sepsis. Cut himself accidentally in the hand some time ago and thought he was fine. He wasn’t,
obviously. The wound got infected somehow and then he-
Ben broke off there. Talking about the demise of another of his boyhood friends was equally difficult for him as it was for Anna to admit to her true feelings.

So Selah hadn’t died the heroic death of a frontiersman in the field. This much Anna knew about her late husband, after getting involved with the rebels and commanding his own unit at the Battle of Setauket he would not have wanted to die sick in his bed wasting away for some time like a wilting flower in a vase. He would have preferred to be among the fallen of an important battle, remembered for his courage rather than dying in bed.

He hadn’t even called for her to come to his bedside. Surely he could have written to Ben or have somebody do it for him. Again, should she be distraught her own husband didn’t wish her by his side in his final hours or relieved Fate had spared her the task of lying to a dying man of love and eternal remembrance in her thoughts and prayers?

They were never meant to be. Now, she was truly alone in this world, save for the small select circle of people she called her friends, of whom two were with her in these difficult hours.

Selah was dead, Edmund was gone- and she left behind in the muddy fields of the camp running a trading post and serving as an unofficial advisor to Ben and Caleb.

A thought, uncensored by the moral authority of her conscious shot through her mind like a defiant sunbeam pierces through the clouds on a windy day.

-Somehow, Scotland seemed farther away to her than the realms of the dead.

No, she mustn’t think of this, of him, not now when her husband’s corpse was barely cold and buried.

Despite her friends’ consolation, she felt alone, abandoned by this world into a state of almost hermitic loneliness despite the crowds of people that surrounded her every day, soldiers and camp followers, washerwomen and generals. She could not even feel Ben’s hand on her right shoulder. In the numb apathy of her conflicted feelings, everything slipped out of focus, her vision blurred, until all that was left was the taunting voice of her subconscious that devilishly pointed out every single mistake she had ever made that had paved her way to the very situation she found herself in now.

She should have never married Selah in the first place. She should have tried to talk to him, make things work out between them. She should never have allowed herself to fall in love with Edmund. She should never have kissed him. She should have been faster that day at the harbour when his ship sailed away, never to return to her, thinking she never loved him when she did more than she could ever put into words.

She was not meant to be happy. God had other plans for her.

Perhaps she was a modern Joan of Arc of sorts, a beacon of defiance against English rule-

No, not a beacon. The beacon was extinguished during her last conversation with- No. Not him again, not in her thoughts, not now. And after all, nobody ever considered her a great strategist or warrior either, even though she regularly made valuable contributions to Ben’s and Caleb’s military exploits. She was more like a little candle burnt down to the stump, ready to lose its flame any second.

Anna Strong, for some years wife to one man, mistress to another and cruel deceiver of a third, tavern wench and spy by trade- it all sounded most like the story of Moll Flanders, just with no
happy ending in sight.

How cruel fate could be.

He would open it. What if it was some important message from Washington or Ben, disguised as mail from England? That was a clever idea, the British would hardly suspect a box of tea from Britain to contain any material valuable to the so-called rebels. It was odd though that nobody had informed him about this new method…

Either it was from camp or it wasn’t. Although Abraham felt nauseous opening the box for fear of finding something unpleasant in there, perhaps something sharp or poisoned, he steadied his hands and cautiously lifted the lid.

Nothing happened. No swarm of deadly insects, no poisoned blade, no “warning” in the shape of a finger or toe of a captured friend. Just plain old tea leaves and not even the cheapest sort by the looks of it. No, this couldn’t be all. There was a catch somewhere. He had been a spy long enough to know when something was fishy. Carefully, Abraham emptied the box of its unsuspicious content almost leaf by leaf, still fearing the outwardly harmless shipping might conceal something less harmless underneath. When he reached the bottom, all he found were two sheets of paper, neatly folded and sealed. One was addressed to him, the other, to his surprise, to Anna. Who would write to him to get to Anna?

He broke the seal and read the letter addressed to him.

Mr Woodhull,

Could you envision being of service to a greater good?

Usually, requests like these are not forwarded in this manner but we are not looking for an ordinary recruit either.

Per the request of my superior officer, I am hereby informing you that cooperation will be rewarded,

Even more so if your missions are successful.

Read the instructions below and follow them to the letter; disobedience will not be tolerated.

Forward the enclosed letter to Mrs Anna Strong, wherever she may be and send her reply to Stretton’s warehouse in Brooklyn Harbour. You will act as a go-between for as long as We consider you of use to our cause.
Maj. Simon I. O. Tamce

Culper. Whoever this Major Tamce was knew he was Culper. There could be no other explanation, someone had sold him to the British, who else would have any interest in blackmailing him thus? And what was their business with Anna?

In his mind, Abraham begun to list every single person who knew about his secret identity as Samuel Culper.

Was it Anna who had betrayed him? The British had included a letter for her, too. After all that had happened in the past- No. Anna had perhaps been in love with the Scottish philosopher, but would she betray an old friend, or her country? It didn’t seem likely, though the possibility continued to haunt him. What would he do? He had no desire to hang once again, one near-death experience of this sort was enough for an entire lifetime. Yet collaborating and acting as a double agent would be tantamount to signing his own death warrant. One side always finds out, sometimes sooner, sometimes later.

After a few more minutes spent weighing his possibilities, Abraham decided to ignore the letter. For all that he knew it could be a trap. There was to his knowledge no man by this name in the British Army in York City or elsewhere. If, hypothetically speaking, someone had blown his cover one or another way, they would want him dead.

Maybe there was a British spy among the townspeople who kept an eye on him. Who? He had no idea, making the whole situation even more precarious. There was no one in the town he could trust. Those redcoats, they knew where he lived, they knew he had contacts in the Continental Army, they knew everything and if he didn’t do what they wanted, they would arrest and try him- and perhaps hang him a second time.

And what better way to kill a spy than on a secret mission, such as delivering a letter to the woman he was once set to marry? They might use Anna as a means to pressure him into doing their bidding, knowing of their relationship. Although things had cooled off significantly and Abraham found himself more and more drawn to his wife, whose persistence in standing by his side and long-time hidden capabilities he had come to admire and value greatly, his romantic entanglement with Anna Strong had been an open secret for so long that all of Setauket would probably agree that the best way to get to Abraham Woodhull was to threaten Anna Strong’s safety.

It sounded like something Simcoe would do. Threatening Anna, perhaps not even because he had finally found out who Culper really was (as far as he knew Simcoe was still under the impression it was Robert Rogers who hid behind this pseudonym), but because he wanted Anna for himself and thinking the two were still romantically linked in some way, the ginger menace was plotting to kill him. The very same man had beaten him up completely out of the blue in the middle of the night, tried to frame him for allegedly raping Anna in front of his father and Hewlett and subsequently duelled him to restore Anna’s honour. Not to forget their personal grudge, leaving Anna completely aside for a moment, had reached a peak not too long ago when he had joined forces with Wakefield to get rid of this human pestilence for good. Things had gone terribly wrong and had it not been for his father’s clever plotting behind everyone else’s back, Simcoe would have succeeded in seeing him hanged.
Chased out of Setauket in disgrace by Colonel Cook, Simcoe was certainly eager to get his revenge on the Woodhull family, father and son. If the man lived for anything, it was swift vengeance following the old an-eye-for-an-eye policy. *Has Simcoe nothing better to do than this*, Abraham thought somewhat annoyed and equally enraged. Ha. Simcoe would have to be cleverer than that to get to him. He collected the tea leaves and put them back into the box- it would be a shame to let them go to waste, especially because Simcoe had paid for them. When he was done, he tossed the letter addressed to him and the still unopened one for Anna into a corner of the room.

What had been more of an instinctive reaction to something as volatile as this latest attempt on his life revealed itself to have been unwise in the same instant: his father entered the dining room in the company of Aberdeen.

“…please prepare everything for a dinner with the Captain. Just the two of us, I want a decent meal, as decent as we can afford. And would you please use the good napkins and put some new candles up.”

His father mustn’t find out. How could he retrieve the letters swiftly without him noticing?

"Abraham-“ he continued, surprised to find his son in the room, “Can I help you?”

“No, father. I was- looking for Thomas.”

“Isn’t Thomas with Mary? She is upstairs, as far as I know, mending a dress.”

“Thank you, father.”

With Richard Woodhull in the room, there was no hope for Abraham to collect the letters behind his back. His father would find out and ask questions. The judge’s eyes were much too quick not to notice him crawling around and collecting letters from the floor. And even if his father were not to be in the room to witness him collecting the letters, who could assure him Aberdeen would remain silent and not immediately report to his father?

Praying that the letters were safe were they were, Abraham decided to return when Wakefield was gone and his father asleep. Hopefully, nobody would find them in the meantime.

Richard Woodhull knew his son’s smile only too well. It was too self-confident, too cheery to be genuine. Abraham was hiding something from him and it was nothing pleasant. And what in the name of the Almighty was he hiding in the little box behind his back?

Much as Richard would have liked to investigate this matter to the full extent of his curiosity, he was distracted by a knock at the front door. Aberdeen put the impeccably polished silver cutlery on the table and hurried to receive the visitor, Richard following after her in the more slowly pace of a dignified gentleman of great authority.

Distracted by a simple matter of little importance concerning two farmers in dispute over an apple tree with no regard for property borders, Richard forgot temporarily about Abraham’s odd behaviour. Eager to be rid of the men to prepare himself for his dinner with Wakefield which he wanted to use to further his advantageous business with the crown and secure himself peace and quiet from the remaining British troops at Fort St George, he ruled he would have to see for himself before he could be of any assistance in this matter and would do so the following day. Barely five minutes later, Wakefield arrived, as always a little too early and in a good mood, probably because he knew the quality of the food served at Whitehall was unrivalled all over Long Island.
After a few glasses of wine, the man, usually the personification of almost haughty cold, distant politeness and assiduous to do his duty to the crown to almost pre-Anna Strong Hewlett-ian levels, warmed up to almost joviality. Although his allegiances had shifted thanks to the now Lieutenant-Colonel then Captain Simcoe’s treatment of Setauket in general and his family in particular, Richard had to admit there was worse company than Captain Wakefield around.

Mid-second course (Richard was just about to address a most delicate matter involving payments the citizens of Setauket should have long received in return for the hay they supplied the army with), an unexpected visitor entered the room unannounced. Little Thomas stood in the doorway, a small wooden horse in one hand, a half-eaten apple in the other.

“Thomas, why don’t you go and see if Aberdeen has some cake for you in the kitchen, hm? I believe she made a big one for desert.”

Thomas looked crestfallen, obviously not after any sweets, but in search for his grandfather’s company.

“Hello Thomas”, Wakefield said in a tone Richard had never thought him capable of, “would you like to stay with your grandfather? If you are good and play with your horse, we will soon be finished here and then you’ll have your grandfather all for yourself again. How is that?”

Thomas nodded obediently and went off to a corner of the room to play with his horse.

In reaction to Richard’s somewhat amazed face at Wakefield’s ability to handle Thomas so easily, the Captain replied: “My wife’s brother’s eldest was much like your Thomas when he was his age. All grown up now, serving in the army as well. Sweet they are, at that age. Here’s to the young ones, may they grow up strong to carry on our legacy!”

Toasting the welfare of Britain was no longer Richard’s desire but since he did not wish to snub Wakefield, he lifted his glass to the Englishman’s toast.

A few minutes later, Richard had just seized an opportune moment to address the somewhat tenuous matter of the hay payments, Thomas waddled over to the table with something in his hand. As a father of two sons, Richard knew full well that it was better to check what the little one had picked up. Better safe than sorry, one could never know what a toddler was up to. He took the two pieces of paper from the beaming toddler’s hand and examined them. These letters were not his. And they, or at least the opened one, were nothing he wanted a British officer dining under his roof to see.

“What is it?”, Wakefield asked with unmistakeable interest between two bites of roast venison.

“Nothing at all”, Richard replied. It took him great composure to sound calm. “I threw some old letters away the other day and sent Aberdeen to dispose of them in the fireplace. She must have lost two of them.”

Wakefield eyed Richard curiously, prompting Richard to continue his tale: “Old letters, you know. Many of them sat in my desk for almost half a decade and kept cluttering the drawer unnecessarily. I have always found a good magistrate needs to organise his house with the same efficiency as his thoughts.”

His story seemed to sound plausible in the Captain’s ears, or at least he hoped so. To sweeten the tale (or to make Wakefield forget about the incident with the letters all together), Richard poured his guest another glass of red wine and directed their conversation back to the reimbursement of Setauket’s farmers.

From then on, nothing of the joviality of the earlier part of the evening seemed to linger in the dining
room and Wakefield excused himself fairly quickly under the pretence of needing to attend to some pressing business at Fort St George.

As soon as the door had shut behind the Captain, Richard called for his son.

“Abraham! What are these letters?”

His son, half-dressed in his shirt and breeches descended the staircase.

“What letters?” He asked lamely.

“You know bloody well which letters”, Richard answered sharply and held the evidence up, only one inch from Abraham’s face.

“These letters. And now you will tell me what you and Anna Strong have been up to lately.”

“Anna and I haven’t- Look, I don’t know who wrote these letters and I don’t know how they, whoever they are, found all these things out about the- the things that I do and Anna but I won’t do anything they want. I’m not turning a double agent father, or do you want to see me dead?”

“All I want is our peace and quiet, Abraham! And I cannot understand how you always manage to get yourself deeper into trouble than you already are in. And as far as that harlot Anna Strong is concerned.-“

“Don’t call her that-“

“Everyone knows you have had a soft spot for her in the past. It is no secret. Anybody in Setauket could have provided someone with this piece of information. Blackmailing you by subtly threatening your former mistress, I don’t have any words for this safe that you are going to deliver this letter to her.”

“Father I can’t. What if- I cannot possibly trade anything on that could incriminate me- we should at least open it before-“

“And anger those behind this letter when it arrives with its seal broken? Abraham, we are talking about a threat to you and your family! I would appreciate it if you would, for the sake of us all, just pass on that bloody letter to your contacts and deliver it. Do you really want to be shot for not passing on a piece of paper? Men have certainly died for less. You are foolhardy, Abraham. Sometimes, we need to pick our battles and as long as we don’t know the enemy, we cannot possibly agree to fight them. All I ask you to do is to play along as long as you do not know who you are dealing with”, Richard pleaded, hoping to appeal to his son’s sanity.

Though Abraham was unwilling to admit it, his father had a point. If the letter was genuine, disregarding an officer’s command could probably get him in great trouble, in more immediate, greater trouble than if someone on his own side would find out he had forwarded a letter under threat some indetermined time in the future.

Was it that what he wanted? Hanged again, this time to death? His last hanging was still fresh on his mind, the memory of such a brutal event was not as easily erased by time as many other things. He had a son, a wife. They needed him. Washington needed him. Dead, he would make none of them happy. It was alive that they needed him.

Reluctantly, Abraham was forced to acquaint himself with the unappealing idea of working as a
double agent.

He could pass the letter on to Anna via Caleb who had promised to visit to inform him about the latest developments at the camp. Caleb was scheduled for tomorrow night, so he would be rid of this thing very soon. If he was lucky, maybe this Tamce did not have much more work for him. As long as he was just middleman-ing what he hoped against hope would turn out to be desperate love letters from Hewlett to Anna (even if this theory was plainly ridiculous but at least in this scenario, he would probably emerge relatively unscathed for being merely the messenger of some sonnets of semi-literary quality), he should not be in too grave danger.

They couldn’t hang him for a stilted sonnet comparing Anna’s skin and lips to roses damask’d, red and white. Hewlett without a doubt wrote like that.

He could just open the letter and read for himself.

No, he couldn’t. If Anna found her personal correspondence opened, she would scream bloody murder and heaven knows what she was capable of if thus mistreated and disregarded. Angry Anna was probably more dangerous than all of the King’s Men combined.

To keep the peace, he did not touch the seal and directly forwarded the letter to Caleb the next night who took it with him across the sound, perplexed and a little surprised someone was sending letters to Anna and had even crafted a scheme to get the letters to her in camp. Although he was not interested in forwarding letters from unknown sources to camp, he would make an exception for Anna. Perhaps it was something important? If the letter contained anything unpleasant, she would come forward on her own, he was certain of that. She had been through so much lately, having lost Selah and then there was this business with that redcoat as well; hopefully this note would deliver happy news for a change.

The only thing that interested him personally concerning the letter (Anna aside for a moment) was that Abe had been very evasive about where the letter came from. Though keeping secrets was his trade, Abe was a clumsy liar. Something smelled fishy, and it wasn’t the waters of the sound or his old leather overcoat.

Something was wrong with this letter, though he didn’t know what.

Bound by friendship and duty, Caleb delivered the letter safely into Anna’s hands at his return to camp. After his dutiful report to his best friend who also happened to be the head of intelligence concerning the state of affairs in Setauket (after the tumultuous nearly-hanging, Judge Woodhull’s impressive scheme to get rid of Simcoe and Hewlett’s departure, not much was happening there anymore; the only thing Abe had provided him with were a few, not critically important details about the state of the local garrison), he quietly slipped the letter into Anna’s hand, who was waiting for him outside.

Outside Ben’s tent, Anna waited. Caleb had sent someone to go get her- what was it this time?

There was not much she could make out from their conversation with all the noises of a busy camp surrounding her, but every now and then she was lucky and caught a snippet of their conversation that was left for her to interpret.

It stung to hear the name of the place. Setauket was by no means the most beautiful town on earth
nor was it a picturesque place worthy of sophisticated admiration as Edmund had once told her the towns of Italy were, nor was life there exceptionally vibrant or the people a special kind of warm and welcoming- but it was home, her home, the only home she had ever known.

Life in Setauket was going on while she stagnated here with not much to do since her last trip to York City to see Edmund one last time. She tried to fit in with the other women at camp, she really did- but whenever she tried, she knew she never would. They thought she was being shown preferential treatment for having been assigned her own tent and was thus not easily accepted into their closely-knit community that drew its sense of camaraderie from experiences Anna did not share with them.

Ben and Caleb still talked; about what? She was slowly growing impatient why she had been summoned. The last time she had been sent for it was to hear of her late husband’s death. She was not yet ready for any more grim news.

There could be no really important developments in Setauket that warranted her attention, right? Abe was, to be honest, not a master spy. So even if something was going on, there was the distinct possibility Abe had either not yet discovered it or could not gain any meaningful information to substantiate any rumours or speculations.

Caleb turned to leave, laughing and jesting with his friend and superior. As soon as Ben, who was still chuckling, turned toward the table again where multiple encrypted papers, maps and books demanded his attention, and stood with his back to the entrance, his upper body darted through the opening in the tarps and quickly slipped Anna the letter.

Anna looked at her friend a million questions on her lips and her forehead creased, Caleb however, half in- half outside, raised his index finger to his lips and shrugged. Not a word to anyone, he was trying to tell her- for good reason, she realised with one quick glance at the seal. The letter came from Edmund.

The moment Caleb had passed the letter to her she had known whom it came from. Too often had she held the Major’s hand not to notice the signet ring he wore and never took off. Edmund’s hand formed like the vaporous manifestation of a strange dream in front of her eyes, detailed, so life-like it made her shudder. His hand was reaching for hers, his skin warm, almost hot, the polished metal of the ring alive with the warmth of its wearer. Just as Anna gave in to temptation and embraced the fantasy, the hand was gone from hers. Where only moments before strong fingers had wrapped themselves protectively around hers, now the cold wind mercilessly tugged at them.

She ordered herself to composure and reason. She must not be seen in possession of a letter from a redcoat, that much was clear.

There were few options open to Anna with regard to finding a spot with enough privacy to read the letter sans the danger of being disturbed by anyone, Ben, Caleb or anybody else. In the end she decided to walk towards the close-by treeline where she would hopefully blend into the browns of the forest floor and wood enough to not be too visible.

When she finally found a place she was content with, Anna almost dropped onto a nearby tree stump, her knees weak with agitation. There was no logical explanation why Edmund would want to write to her again and yet, he had apparently done so. Should she be happy? The only way to find out was to open the letter. Anna broke the seal with steady hands. Having unfolded the paper, she
closed her eyes for one moment, inhaled deeply, opened her eyes again, and finally read.

What she read made her heart both jolt with joy and wince in pain. Edmund was alive and well. And he had talked of her and apparently painted her in favourable colours to his sister! Why would he do that? Unless the letter was a fraud (which seemed unlikely, given it was sealed with the imprint of his family crest and the woman’s handwringing resembled Edmund’s in its characteristics to a certain degree which could be the product of a joint early education), he was still thinking of her. Perhaps farewell had not been their final goodbye yet?

No, she scolded herself, she must not think such a thing. She had given up everything for what she believed in - and now to destroy everything she had worked for on the basis of a letter? And she must think of Selah as well. He had been her husband, despite everything and she should at least observe a period of mourning, she owed him that much given they had shared a not insignificant amount of their lifetime, first as childhood companions, later as more or less happily married husband and wife.

Much as she valued Mrs Greenwood’s candid words, there was no way she would leave the camp like a thief in the night to board the next ship to Scotland. Her friends were here and after all, who could guarantee Edmund would be happy at all if he saw her? The message was his sister’s, not his. Maybe he would send her right back to where she came from as soon as he first laid his eyes upon her upon her purely hypothetical arrival in Scotland. She would not do what Elizabeth Greenwood was implying.

Gathering her skirts, she walked determinedly back to her tent to compose a reply Caleb would have to smuggle back for her.

The words didn’t come easy to her, it was a struggle that took several attempts and the life of a quill snapped in two by being gripped too tightly. Once she was done, she hid the letter beneath her pillow, and, rather unwittingly, fell asleep on it, failing on her mission to try and forget Edmund who returned in a shadowy dream she only half-remembered later.

Boots woke her in the early evening, the sound of heavy boots against the earthen ground of her tent.

“Oi, Anna. Annie? You awake?” Caleb’s bearded face appeared before her weary eyes, his expression visibly concerned.

Letting out a yawn, Anna set up in bed. “What is it, Caleb?” she asked, her voice still rough with shallow sleep.

“I was worrying about you, thought I’d come and check. The whole letter business didn’t seem right to me, that’s why. Are you all right?”

A question like this always indicated a person did not look “all right”. Her hair was probably beyond messy from sleeping on it, her eyes lined in black and surrounded by an air of general weariness, she doubtlessly looked far from right or acceptable or anything close to normal.

“It’s all right.” The reassuring smile she forced onto her mouth did not reach her eyes.

“Bollocks, it obviously isn’t. Do you need a glass of something, Annie? Look at you. I swear on the honour my beard, if this business is about that bloody redcoat, I’ll hire a ship and deal with him myself.”

Anna wanted to laugh at his comical pledge to deal with Edmund, especially because he had just confirmed his beard was dearer to him than the things most other man would have taken an oath upon - their family’s honour or money, their mother’s grave or even God- but despite Caleb’s comical
talent, the current situation was far from enjoyable for her. Carefully selecting her words, Anna raised her head to meet Caleb’s eyes. He deserved an honest answer for caring about her in these dark and difficult times.

“It’s not from him, it’s from his sister. He has told her everything about me, she says, and she wants us to reunite.”

Caleb was quick to interrupt her. “Reunite? What, she wants you to come to King Georgie’s shores? And this Edmund fella doesn’t even know? Doesn’t sound like much of a plan to me. Besides, we need you here.”

He pecked her affectionately on her cheek, his smile as radiant as ever.

“Then give me something to do. After that letter, I’m going to need some distraction.”

“You still love him, then?”

“I wish I didn’t. But what does that matter.”

Her eyes betrayed her to Caleb. Sometimes, it was just hard to keep up appearances, being the capable rebel spy in front of everybody when inside, Anna yearned for so much more than that.

She never regretted having chosen sides, having fought for her beliefs- the only thing she regretted was not having been able to tell Edmund the truth when it had mattered the most. It had to be done, for his safety; knowing him to be in reasonable safety far away at the price of a broken heart was worth more than keeping him by her side at the price of his life. How long would he have eluded Abe’s attempts on his life or Simcoe’s hate-fuelled murder sprees? One of them would have gotten Edmund in the end, and if not Abe or Simcoe, some fellow patriots. He had no friends here on either side.

Well, safe one.

“Give this letter to Abe, see that he posts it for me.”

“Aye. Still, I’m not sure it is such a good idea to become pen pals with a Brit- what if it’s a trap?”

“It isn’t. Her handwriting is similar to Edmund’s, the family crest is right, she even sounds a little like him-“

“What, pompous and stuffy?”

With that, Caleb stood a little more upright than usual, his right hand on his hip, chin raised, placing his left boot on a nearby chair. He looked comical with his eyes glowing full of impish delight, eager to coax a smile out of her. Anna couldn’t help it and laughed loudly. Caleb posing as the caricature of what he imagined British officers acted like was too comical to remain stern.

“I’m going to give Abe the letter, but don’t expect me to lie if Ben or Washington ask me about it. As long as they don’t ask, nobody knows. And, Annie, if you ever need someone to talk…”

He made a gesture with his hand towards his chest.

“Thank you, Caleb.”

“Looks like I’ll be going to Setauket for the, ahem, usual business, soon, which means I can forward Abe your letter, perhaps even in a few days. Can’t guarantee though he’s keen on sending your,
hum, correspondence with a Hewlett on, but I’ll do my best if he makes any noise.”

“Thank you. I don’t know what to say-“

“Ah, don’t mention it. Didn’t think I would become that cute, chubby little love angel from your books one day-“

“His name is Amor, Caleb. He’s a roman God who makes people fall in love with each other by shooting arrows at them. And it isn’t a love note.”

Caleb rolled his eyes in theatrical desperation to the heavens and whined “Jesus Mary Christ Annie have you read all the books your clever major owned? Though there wasn’t much about military tactics in them, as far as I can tell.”

“Caleb, stop.” Still somewhat amused by Caleb’s acting (he still remained in pose), Anna was willing to overlook this last utterance if he stopped immediately. Edmund was no soldier, he was much more than that damned red coat he wore on his back. He was kind, he was gentle, a man of intellect and reason, of love- pushed into a life that wasn’t his by cruel tricks of fate.

Weren’t they all? Nobody could really want such a war, nobody wanted the bloodshed. And yet it was happening and she, as well as Caleb, Ben, Abe and all the others had to play a part in it. This was bigger than her personal struggles, this was about the lives of more than just her and Edmund, America needed its freedom and she was glad to do her duty to her country.

“I wrote that I don’t want to hear from her again,” Anna said to Caleb, who readied himself to leave. He turned, surprised.

“Consider it your patriotic duty to deliver it. No more secret contact with the enemy on my part.”

“All right.” Caleb grinned, visibly relieved the secrecy was nipped in the bud within the first and only exchange of letters.

“Come back soon, Caleb. And- Your country thanks you for your service.”

As soon as she could be certain Caleb was gone far enough, Anna let herself fall onto her bed, still tired but even more upset now that the letter was on its way to Mrs Greenwood. The words were out, so to speak, never to be taken back.

Despite her steadfast belief in her convictions, a little, yet noticeable feeling of doubt remained.

-Had she made the right decision?

Chapter End Notes

The full title of "Moll Flanders", attributed to Daniel Defoe, is "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Years a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her brother) Twelve Years a Thief, Eight Years a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a Penitent (commonly known simply as Moll Flanders)". Anna plays with this title
(perhaps some of the lighter reads Edmund owns) when she recounts her life so far.

Other than that, thanks once again for reading yet another lengthy chapter. Comments, suggestions, critique etc. are always welcome!
Perseus and Andromeda

Chapter Summary

A ball, three letters, motherly misjudgement, a budding secret agent at work and a fateful decision.

Chapter Notes

While the show keeps us waiting for Edmund to re-turn (pun intended), here is a Scotland-centred chapter focussing on Edmund (and Eliza).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[...]

Oh come back my own true love
And stay a while with me
For if I had a friend all on this earth,
You've been a friend to me.

And fare thee well my own true love
And farewell for a while.
I'm going away, but I'll be back
If I go ten thousand miles.

(Fare Thee Well, also known as The Turtle Dove, English folk ballad, 18th century)

Duncleade, Scotland.

A day passed, followed suit by another until seven of them united to a week. The week waited for three others to come around to form a month. And thus the wheel of time spun on and on and on, ever repetitive in its rhythm of day and night, week and month.

The seasons changed slowly from the last remainders of winter cold to the first, gentle harbingers of early spring; snowdrops fearlessly lifted their heads to the first rays of warm sunlight and every now and then, a little bird in some hedgerow practiced its song for later in the year.

In the south, Eliza thought longingly, the first bright green leaves would already adorn the trees and more spring flowers dapple the meadows. But alas, time in Scotland passed a little more slowly when it came to the change of seasons; which did not deter the inhabitants of Duncleade from holding a spring ball.

Of course, the ball held by Mrs and Ms Stretton (mother and youngest sister of the late James and William Stretton), Duncleade’s leading ladies in wealth, elegance, manners and style (or so they said on the streets at least; Eliza would have liked to tell a different story based on her early experiences with the Stretton ladies shortly after her engagement to James was uncovered, but did not want to stir
old grudges and thus remained silent) was by no means a grand affair like the dances held during the
London Season, but big enough to include the more senior men from the local garrison, a few well-
to-do friends and neighbours from further afield and of course the more eligible families of
Duncleade.

The Hewletts being considered just eligible enough the years before (had it not been for the memory
of their former wealth and Eliza’s previous engagement to a son of the family, the invitation would
not have been extended), they, or rather one specific member of the family, were to be the focus of
attention this year, or so Eliza had heard.

Mother and daughter would this year surely be joined by the undoubtedly much more intriguing
Major Hewlett, the long-lost son of Duncleade, brave soldier and fighting hero of the Colonies. This
at least Eliza had overheard from a small group of women chit-chatting agitatedly and in low voices
one Sunday after Church.

And who could blame them? Nothing truly exciting ever happened around these parts, so someone
who had been to the Colonies and fought in the war inevitably came as a welcome distraction from
talk of livestock auctions, the last harvest and the usual gossip.

On a not so innocent note, a new arrival, especially an unmarried, reasonably high-ranking military
officer, was welcome news in the ears of Duncleade’s mothers of unmarried young women.

Objectively speaking, Edmund, the known embodiment of manners, politeness and intellect, was not
that old yet and looked, thanks to his army pay, dashing enough in a uniform to be considered a
suitable husband for one of the local daughters of better breeding. His general shyness and recent
reclusiveness, which some such as the flock of easily excitable geese Eliza had overheard misread as
the taciturn air of an intriguingly mysterious hero, were of no concern to any of them.

If, if, Edmund agreed to come along to the ball, they would try to make him dance with each and
every unwed girl in the area, something her brother was, as Eliza knew, not at all keen on.

Never a dancer despite having received years and years of dancing lessons prior to their father’s
bankruptcy, Edmund had always been quick to abandon the dance floor (and his usually disgruntled
partner’s ruined shoes) for the safety of the harpsichord or pianoforte where he and the strategically
invited spinster usually took turns providing music for those less inclined to dance in the drawing
room where he could sit and play without having to interact with boisterously drunk gentlemen and
flirtatious ladies.

Poor Edmund, while plots were forged to impress him, none of them knew his heart already
belonged to a woman who was so far away from him. She could not tell them of Anna Strong, much
as she wanted them to know about her. He still loved her and he would not so easily abandon the
memory of their happier times for a stranger, however beautiful, kind or charming she may be.

There was no mistake to be made; Edmund was in mourning. Not for the death of a person, but the
death of the future he once envisioned Mrs Anna and Major Edmund Hewlett to have.

If only…

-And there she was, back at the thought of her letters. Were they still on their way across the Atlantic
or had they already arrived? Had they been lost? Did the people in question bother to answer?

She found herself suffering from a certain restlessness because of them. These past weeks, all
attempts to distract herself by all means with even the most pointless of tasks such as drawing up an
inventory of the cutlery drawer, re-arranging the little library alphabetically and trying desperately not
to hate her current needlework project (the blue silk with the constellation embroidery she wanted to use for the front of a new dress) had been short-lived.

Busily re-thinking her decisions so far, she had lost count of the knifes and had to re-count them thrice to finally get the number right and the needle had pricked her finger more often than usual in movements she had once considered herself capable of doing in her sleep.

Despite everything, Eliza tried to carry on with her life the way it had been before she had uncovered Edmund’s never posted letter to Anna and taken it upon herself to reunite the star-crossed lovers somehow.

At least now, she could blame her excitement on the ball.

Much to her surprise, Edmund accepted coming along though Eliza knew Edmund’s surprising decision to attend was perhaps more of her mother’s doing than Edmund’s free will. In the end, it was always better to obey Mother to save one’s self weeks of trouble and admonishing speeches of torturous length.

On the big day, Mother, Edmund (dressed impeccably as usual in his uniform and freshly powdered wig) and Eliza walked the short way to the Strettons’ house, an imposing, yet inviting structure from the beginning of the century. Technically, a guest at a place such as the Strettons’ that constituted the pillars of countryside society should not arrive on foot, but as befitting their social station in a horse-drawn carriage, however all three deemed it ridiculous to lend a carriage for a short way of less than half a mile they all three were happy to walk.

Inside, the bustling warmth of more than seventy guests welcomed them even before the hosts were able to make their way through the crowds to greet the new arrivals.

“Ah, Mrs Hewlett! Mrs Greenwood! And of course, Major Hewlett! How good to see you! Come, Major, you must tell us everything about your time in the Colonies!”

And with that, Edmund was swiftly whisked away from his mother and sister by the esteemed Mr Stretton, who led a perplexed-looking Edmund towards the billiard room, one hand on his back in a manner that was supposed to signal familiarity and joviality but in truth screamed “you are my prisoner now”.

The evening proceeded rather eventlessly; while Edmund remained lost in action and Mother spent most of the night with a circle of friends her age observing the younger ones over a glass of this and a cup or two of that, Eliza was keen on dancing. The opportunities for her to do so were rare and besides, the music was rather good.

Sometime later in the evening, the wine had flowed freely among both guests and musicians, the dances became more and more less formal until finally, courtly minuets were abandoned altogether in favour of much more local Scottish dancing tunes.

Some guests not natively from this side of Hadrian’s Wall politely moved to the side lines while everybody else was happily moving their feet to traditional Scottish tunes.

Eliza, eager to have the next dance with whoever was available, the tune being one of her personal favourites, was only waiting for one of the men to ask her to join them on the dance floor. With Edmund probably suffocating among the smoke and whiskey of the billiard room and the other
dancers already lining up, there was little time for Eliza to find another partner.

A decision born more out of instinct than anything else, Eliza simply grabbed the sleeve of the man next to her and led him to the middle of the dance floor.

“I’m sorry, I-I- can’t dance-“ the man protested half-audibly as to avert an audience gathering around them.

“Nonsense. You just follow my lead and we’ll be fine.” For the first time, Eliza looked her partner in the eyes. To her surprise, her unceremonious catch was Captain Barnett, second in command at the garrison.

Before her hostage could say anything else, the dance begun and Eliza skilfully directed her partner across the dance floor.

Barnett fought bravely, though Eliza’s shoes suffered somewhat from toes more accustomed to marching than traditional Scottish melodies. His face, Eliza noticed, revealed great concentration and an almost pleading look in his greenish-brown eyes that wished himself far away. People started clapping along now, which didn’t help much to soothe the man’s uneasiness. Perhaps he was contemplating if being shot by a rebel ambush somewhere in the wilderness of Connecticut was a more merciful fate to meet than to face the ridicule of Scottish country society.

The song ended with more unceremonious clapping and laughter and Barnett's once so even golden braid almost dissolved.

“You did rather well, Captain”, Eliza lauded her visibly embarrassed dancing partner. She owed him that much.

Barnett’s face took the same colour as his uniform.

“Thank you Mrs Greenwood, I must- I must leave you now. Urgent business at the garrison.”

And with that, Barnett bowed and was gone.

Eliza did not have much time to think about what had just happened because in this very moment, Edmund, who had eventually managed to flee the billiard room and a host of (astonishingly many female) conversation partners on his way to his sister, arrived at her side, an empty glass of Madeira in his hand.

“Eliza would you mind… I would very much like to escape this general commotion, if you know what I mean. That is of course, only if you want to.”

Edmund’s weary face revealed how much he had been questioned and paraded in front of the other guests that night by the Strettons. He was no man who looked for the central stage. For a quietly spoken, pensive individual like him, events such as this were a special kind of torture.

“Let’s leave, then. If Mother wants to stay, let her. The McKinnons will surely take her home in their coach.”

They said goodbye to their mother and thanked the much surprised Strettons for the exquisite dance and entertainment and then went on their way.

The night was clear and cool, the stars shining brightly. Halfway home, Edmund’s tense shoulders started to relax and his equally forced facial expression melted into soft serenity. Under the stars, he felt much more at home than under the roof of any man made structure.
“Why don’t we stop here?” Eliza asked, knowing each second spent underneath the starry night skies soothed her brother’s bruised, battered soul more than anything.

Brother and sister sat down on the low stone wall by the roadside that marked the boundaries of some farmer’s territory and craned their necks upwards.

“Over there. Look, closely. This is Perseus.”

“I know”, Eliza chimed, eager to show her brother she was not completely unaware of his interests. Her recent embroidery project had at least paid off in one respect.

“The star there, that’s Algol, right? The demon star. Quite fitting, because Perseus slew a demon of sorts, the gorgon Medusa.”

Her knowledge of Greco-Roman antiquity exceeded her knowledge of astronomy by miles.

“If I recall correctly, he used the gorgon’s head to petrify his enemies on his wedding day when they had come to abduct his bride. What was her name again?”

Damn, this was not quite what she had aimed for. Forgetting a name of an important mythological figure in front of Edmund, an authority on antique mythology and literature. What was her name again? It would come to her in a moment, surely...

“A- Andromeda.”

For one brief moment, the tenth part of a second, Eliza was entirely certain Edmund was about to say “Anna”, but he caught himself quickly enough to pretend nothing had ever happened and continued explaining the constellations to her.

Edmund didn’t notice how Eliza slowly slipped into a state of mere physical presence as he went on naming and showing her a host of constellations and stars whose names she was barely familiar with; her thoughts were far away, thinking of how things would hopefully soon take a turn for the better if only her plan worked.

A week after the ball, Mary entered the dining room during dinner time, announcing two letters had arrived for Mrs Greenwood and one for Major Hewlett. Edmund and Mother first looked at each other before turning to her with the same facial expression; head slightly cocked to one side, eyebrows furrowed. If ever someone would commission a Hewlett family portrait, this would be it, the Hewletts in all their bemused, yet somewhat quizzical glory.

Normally, she didn’t receive many letters at all. Every now and then a letter from an old friend of days gone by or a relative but two at once- she should never have the letters directed to this address for Edmund and Mother to see. It seemed like there still were a lot of things to learn for her on her path to becoming a skilled secret agent. Gladly, she was an eager disciple in all arts associated with this ignoble craft. The way things looked like, today’s exercise would be “lying one’s way out of having been caught in the act without saying ‘this isn’t what it looks like’”.

“I… hum… expected correspondence from Amelia Digby, you know, the one I was close friends with as a girl”, she lied quickly.

“Two letters? I think your father and I have provided you with a thorough education that included,
among other equally insignificant things, basic arithmetic.” Mother’s eyebrows rose to impossible
heights.

“Oh, yes, I forgot. I was only recently renewing my acquaintance with… with Lieutenant Grimsby
from the garrison. We met a few days ago unexpectedly in town, he helped me with my heavy
basket and… and we walked a bit and then he said we should perhaps further our acquaintance.”

Grimsby’s was for some odd reason the first name that had come to her mind thinking of the men at
the local garrison.

But Mother was having none of it. “What happened to you, dear? Have you swapped your
intelligent literature for cheap broadsheets? To be frank, I believe not a word of what you’re saying,
it sounds like something you copied word by word from an immoral publication. ‘the handsome
lassie is graciously aided by the dashing soldier, purely per chance, and most selflessly of course’,
pah.” She snorted most unladylike.

“And Grimsby? He’s close on fifty, not half the romantic youth you try to make him out in your tale,
far from rich or handsome or good-looking and not even remotely as intelligent as our Edmund. I’ll
tell you what: a mother always knows when goings-on are going on and you, dearest daughter, have
been absent-minded for the past few weeks. I do indeed believe someone from the garrison has
catched your eye, but it isn’t this ghastly Grimsby. It’s Captain Barnett, is it?”

Mother was not that incorrect, Eliza had to admit. There were things going on, but by no means of
any romantic nature. A part of her wanted to protest, and justly so, another told her to let it go:
Mother had unwittingly created a cover story for Edmund and deceived herself, which would make
her dealings in town and secret letter-writing a lot easier.

It was a difficult decision and Eliza was not keen on either scenario: either Mother would pester her
incessantly with Barnett or she would continue digging into her private life and try to get behind her
daughter's odd recent behaviour, the reason for which she must never find out.

“I admit it is Barnett.” Eliza snapped in a voice she last used as a teenage girl and stared decidedly
into her peas while playing with a loose strand of hair with her right hand.

“Well, now you know. I am hardly new to this however, Mama. Though I must admit it feels
wonderful being courted again- and by a younger man at that!” Barnett was a two or three years her
junior and indeed a good-looking fellow of medium height and agreeable features, although
somewhat orgulous as she had discovered last week.

Perhaps Mother had seen them together, she had been there too, after all.

For the time being, he would have to play the part assigned to him- without his knowledge, of
course. She must remember to invite him for tea sometime. Eliza excused herself from the table to
open her correspondence, leaving her knowingly smiling mother and the quite shocked looking
Edmund at the table.

Two letters. Both had bothered writing back then. With trembling fingers, she opened the letter she
could tell was from William first. After a few mandatory pleasantries and some colonial gossip (this
Mrs Arnold did sound like an interesting character), he mentioned having already received a letter to
the ominous pseudonym posted to his address. He was willing to play the go-between but asked her
to be more considerate in the future especially when forwarding the address of a respectable business
that happened to be his to dubious strangers in the hinterland of Long Island.

And now, to the more interesting part. A piece of paper, folded, held together by an unbroken seal.
This was good news, so the contents of the second letter had not been read by anybody else. She read.

Dear Mrs Greenwood,

I cannot tell you how perplexed I was to receive a letter from my former fiancé’s sister. It is the truth; I was sorry to lose Edmund and still it pains me to think of him; though I believe he is happier and safer now across the ocean with his family and out of danger. I could never repay his love for me, however much I tried. He is a good man, kind, a gentleman- though I think as his sister you know all of this already. I had word my estranged husband has succumbed to an inflammation of a wound he took to the hand two weeks ago- how cruel fate can be.

Apart from all this, I am needed here and find solace in the justness of our cause and the work I can contribute to it.

Forgive me my ramblings. Take care of him. I request you not to write to me again, I neither want to inconvenience Edmund by secretly exchanging letters with you nor do I need a constant reminder of the loss I endured and that still hurts me badly.

Yours truly,

A. S.

Of all things she had hoped the answer to entail, this was not it. To cling to the thought Anna Strong’s answer would be nothing but an overjoyed couple of hastily scrawled lines informing her of the woman’s imminent departure for the next Britain-bound ship would have been foolish; realistically, she had of course considered a refusal of her services, but never thought it to actually happen.

Anna’s answer could not have stated her wishes any more clearly, but the woman struck by ill-fated love could not know the scope of the predicament Eliza found herself in: She was the only person who knew for certain of both parties that they still loved each other very much, while in in company of others both pretended not to be affected emotionally when in truth their hearts bled silently in yearning for their respective beloved. The real tragedy was that both were the type who chose to suffer silently and bravely continue with their lives, however broken they were in reality.

A silence that extended not only to their environment, but also to the respective other; in Eliza’s mind at least things between them could get settled if only they would exchange a single word with each other, be it written or spoken. With herself stuck in the middle of what was probably the most difficult relationship of the century, caught between redcoat and rebel, despair and dishonesty, love and lies, it was her time to make a decision. She had descended too deep into the intricate alleyways of this relationship already, she knew too much to remain a passive spectator any longer.

And now, with Selah Strong dead, who was still standing in their way except for Poseidon and his minions?

Anna would be contacted again, if she liked it or not and this time, she would offer her proof that Edmund’s love for her was still unfa ltering.

But what could such a piece of evidence be? Hm. There was only one way to obtain anything of that nature. Edmund was a prolific user (or rather waster) of paper after all; since his childhood there had
been mediocre drawings, hand-made maps of the heavens, little treatises on whatever he felt like writing about at the time, all written in the same self-assured and important tone of a seventy-year-old professor of astronomy in the hand-writing of a seven-year-old and diaries around the house. Among the stacks of paper on Edmund’s desk there had to be something, perhaps a page from a never finished diary or, she let her imagination wander, a Latin love poem in the style of Catullus. In that case, she was eager to revive the dead sparrow.

The lugubrious steps on the wooden floorboards in the corridor came at exactly the right time.

“Edmund! Would you be so kind as to check on Gaia? The foal should be due any day now. I would go to her myself, but I fear I have a slight cold and I wouldn’t want to pass it on to Gaia or the foal.”

In his recent state of monastic world-weary unworldliness, it had completely escaped him that life had gone on, for humans and horses alike. The excitement in his eyes as he processed this joyful news was truly endearing. Without saying much else except for scolding his sister briefly for not having told him earlier, Edmund rushed off to the stables. Once the sound of his footsteps faded into the distant clutter of boot heels on cobblestones, Eliza’s secret operation could begin.

The door to his room was, as always, unlocked, the key stuck in the keyhole on the inside of the door. Groaning with age, the door opened. Did the bloody door have to make noises now? The very, very last thing she needed was somebody, be it Mother or one of the servants to come and check. This rather unforeseen disruption of the unsuspicious quiet Eliza was keen to maintain as long as she was alone in Edmund’s room made her take more caution from then on. Once inside, she closed the door with great care, this time thankfully without a noise.

Edmund’s room was what Eliza called an organised chaos: books in threateningly instable piles that only waited to be brushed with the hem of a dress or dressing gown or a gust of wind from the window, a desk defying all laws of physics by not breaking under the weight of papers, charts, books and other assorted clutter on it and a tidily made bed, which was un-tidily scattered with even more supplies the amateur academic needed for his astronomical studies.

She took one moment to take it all in, the position of the papers on the desk, the order of the books on the most dangerously bending piles before she was ready to start. If she was going to dig through her brother’s belongings, she would not want him to know afterwards.

“So this is it what it’s like, being a spy”, Eliza said wryly to herself. “Poking your nose into other people’s business.”

Flipping through several books with notes on stars, planets and their movements, a leather binder containing his correspondence and unceremoniously checking the pockets of various garments, she found nothing.

How long had she been in here? Ten, fifteen minutes? Time was running out. Edmund could return any minute and if he did, she would have a hell of a lot of explaining to do and her secret mission would once and for all be foiled. Scanning the room quickly and for the last time, she spied the bin under the desk. More out of sheer despair to find anything worth mailing to Anna Strong than anything else, Eliza emptied the contents on the floor, unfolding one ball of crinkled paper after the other.

After about half the paper balls had been smoothened, skimmed for content (mostly half-finished letters to people he wanted to apply to for a position), re-balled and binned again, a neatly folded piece of paper that had until then been hidden underneath the pile of crinkled waste paper caught Eliza’s eye. Her interest rose considerably as she unfolded it.
The page bore two drawings, one in pencil and one in ink. The upper half of the page was occupied by a pencil drawing of two people, a man and a woman standing side by side bolt upright like a lord and lady in a representative portrait adorning the drawing room of a great house. The icy pose was broken by the man, whose hand held hers in a gesture of loving unity.

Although Edmund was by no means a skilled artist, the pose was rather cleverly chosen; one nearly had to look twice to catch the almost hidden little affectionate gesture. A good portrait-painter could surely transform these somewhat crooked, slightly out-of-perspective pencil lines into a striking artwork.

The woman who, judging by the intensity with which Edmund had pressed the pencil against the paper, was dark-haired wore a simple yet elegant dress. Her gentleman, wig, dress-uniform and all, was unmistakeably an officer.

It was then Eliza first remarked upon the weirdly crooked mouth and tell-tale jawline the gent in the drawing sported, the exact mouth and jawline that made her brother stand out of any crowd. Edmund and Anna, united and happy at least in black-and white pencil strokes on paper stared at her from the page. Behind them in the background, she noticed the rather crudely sketched outline of a grand house amidst pastoral farmlands with grazing horses in them.

A throbbing pain hit Eliza’s heart with full force, all of a sudden with the might of a storm tide. *He threw away his dream.*

Since their talk a few weeks ago she had been led to believe her brother was trying to get back on his feet, fight himself back from the twilight abode of his room into life, ready to do something, go out, *fight*—when in reality he had resigned to fate in obedient defeat and thus condemned himself to unhappiness.

While she did have a lot of sympathy for her brother, Eliza was almost infuriated by the fact that both parties in this tale could not have loved (and still loved) each other more obviously and now mourned for the loss of their sweetheart without doing anything about it.

Of course, *she* didn’t love him anymore, that’s exactly why she ran after the ship. Of course, *he* was happier in Scotland and recovering from his heartbreak, that’s why he shut himself up in his room for weeks with barely any food or drink.

They were stuck with a fate they never wanted but also incapable of so much as lifting a finger to change it. In this regard, the two star-crossed lovers obviously had a lot in common. Speaking of star-crossed love: The lower half of the paper featured a considerably smaller ink and quill drawing of a stylistically very different nature.

Stars in a night sky of blue ink seemed to transform fluidly into the face of a woman, the same woman who stood next to Edmund in the first drawing. A constellation, probably Coma Berenices, adorned her hair like the glittering nests of foam do the sea on a bright day.

There were of course more constellations that effortlessly played and intertwined with her facial features and replaced them so artfully the face was still recognisable while at the same time strange and unfamiliar, but Eliza was no expert in astronomy.

Besides, it was time she was on her way. With a quick motion of her hand, she slipped the folded piece of paper below the neckline of her dress, refilled the bin and was set to leave when the door opened with a sudden creak that echoed in Eliza’s ear like a desperate cry and Edmund entered, boots still dirty from the stable floor. Eliza stood, petrified like a biblical salt pillar in the middle of the
May I ask what you do in my room?” Edmund’s voice sounded more perplexed than angry, which was a welcome development in an unwelcome situation. Looking back at his moodiness throughout the past few weeks, Eliza was surprised Edmund was not already tying a noose around her neck. Seizing the opportunity, Eliza calmed herself with a deep breath and answered: “We need kindling for the fireplace downstairs, so I looked for some waste paper. Can I-?”

“Of course, of course. Forgive me, Eliza, my time abroad has made me somewhat suspicious even if I need not be. I consider this an unwelcome development at the very least, which I try hard to rid myself of. It is hard to learn to trust again when you have been bereft of it so harshly. Speaking of trust, in hope that I have yours, I would like to, ah, talk to you. Regarding Captain Barnett.”

Lying to Edmund hurt, a hurt muffled by the comforting thought that whatever she was saying or doing now she did in Edmund’s own interest. His sudden change of topic however was unusual and uncalled for. One folded edge of the paper prodded the soft flesh of her left breast rather unpleasantly, serving as a constant reminder of her deceit.

Running away from Edmund was impossible now, unless she wanted him to find out something was going on. Swallowing her impatience to escape the situation, Eliza tried her best at a pleasant face and asked “Oh. Why?” with feigned interest. Edmund seemed not to notice and, eager to share what was on his mind, began to talk.

“You see, I hope you understand what it is like being attached to a military man. You’ll be alone when he is stationed abroad and you’ll be forced to live under the constant fear your… your husband might not come back. Not to speak of the behaviour some men. When not guided by a steady hand and no longer under the watchful eyes of their wives or sweethearts, some of them turn to… to…”

Seeing Edmund struggle to state the obvious was almost endearingly amusing to watch.

Almost laughing, Eliza replied: “Are you trying not to offend my delicate ears? I promise you I won’t faint at the mentioning of ex-marital relationships between men of the military and professional ladies of a certain trade or the idea of men drinking their pay and their heads off in the cheapest tavern in town. And on a more serious note, what gives you the authority to slander Captain Barnett’s name thus?”

Ironically enough, Eliza had forgone the terms “whore” and “prostitute” herself knowing that in truth it was Edmund, not her, who blushed like a teenage girl at anything considered only mildly offensive. More importantly than this was it to maintain the air of an enamoured woman in front of her brother. Given the rather odd conversation topic between them, accusing him of making immoral charges against the supposed subject of her absent-minded pining was the most logical thing to do.

“No, no I did not mean… I was just talking about the general situation…” Lost for words and obviously caught implying what he tried to negate, Edmund turned an exceptionally rare and dark hue of pink, half of it stemming from a certain feeling of ashamedness for having been caught in his intentions, the other half being embarrassment for meddling in his sister’s private affairs.

“Forgive me, Eliza. I’m tired.” And with a faint smile (determined to cover up his embarrassment), he thankfully released her.

In her room, Eliza quickly pulled the piece of paper from her dress to lock it safely in the drawer of her nightstand, hiding the key among her shifts in her dresser. One could never know whose hungry eyes would eagerly devour an item such as this, family, servants- secret operations were best kept-
well, secret, especially since the information it gave away would affect not only her for being in possession of these drawings, but also Edmund whom she had unbeknownst to him entangled in her net of schemes.

So far, her plan was progressing well- William and Woodhull were working as her intermediaries and at least she had proof Anna Strong was not only alive and well, but also still in love with Edmund. The prospects were not entirely bleak - and with a bit of luck, the two lovers would unexpectedly find themselves together again.

On Saturday morning, Eliza decided to invite Captain Barnett for tea. It was a decision made on a mere whim; one day she would have to invite him around after all to keep up appearances, so why not today? Edmund and Mother were at home (which was the whole point of this charade) and Mrs O’Grady, unchallenged ruler over the kitchen, had baked a wonderful cake the other night, of which still plenty was left, alongside a few small sweet treats intended for Sunday’s tea of which she would doubtlessly surrender a few to Eliza if she told her what she needed them for.

Daniel, the cook’s son, was then bid to deliver a note to the garrison or wherever else the good Captain chose to spend his day to formally extend the invitation and ensure a quick reply. The boy was a fast runner and returned within the hour to announce the Captain’s visit for four o’clock.

Satisfied and somewhat giddy (should she not be ashamed to lead the poor man on only to divert her family’s attention from what she was actually doing?) Eliza dressed in her favourite gown, a flattering number of green silk and took great care in the choice of her accessories and hairstyle. Thanks to her late husband and the money she inherited from him, there was some money left to spend for her on the odd pair of earrings or a modest necklace every couple of years as long as she chose with prudence and care. While she could afford small luxuries every now and then, the Young Lady of the house, as the servants referred to her, the Old Lady being her mother, was also adamant to spend her money wisely. There was no longer a persistent income after all and if things remained as they were, she would have to live on her inheritance for the rest of her life.

Although she found she looked nothing like a lady of the court, Eliza felt regal. Occasions to wear her best dress and matching jewellery were few and now, with her hair curled and arranged carefully, she felt rejuvenated and invincible.

Ten more minutes- it was perhaps best to go downstairs and check if the table is set up correctly. Eliza was about to descend when she almost collided with her brother on the stairhead.

“Elizabeth, Queen of Scots”, he exclaimed, grinning with brotherly pride. “Although it is somewhat ironic with regards to your name I do believe this title suits you rather well.”

“Thank you, Edmund. I hope you will not be the only man who will compliment my looks today- and I also hope you did not just say it because you feel obliged to as my brother.”

She winked at him, knowing full well how much it unsettled him to see his sister so flirtatious and went downstairs, leaving the flabbergasted Edmund behind.

Eliza was just about to examine the spotlessness of the silverware on display more closely when Mary entered, announcing the Captain’s arrival.

“Oh, Captain, you are a bit early!” Eliza exclaimed, a little bit too surprised to sound sincere, turning around to greet him. Barnett, she noted, was dressed better than some of the other officers she had
made acquaintance with, his uniform clean, his hair braided neatly. Not all men at the garrison
looked as tidy as him. She motioned him to the table and called for Daniel to serve tea and cake.

After eating half a piece of cake in embarrassing silence, Barnett, she realised, was a man best
described as somewhat shy. To lighten the dead silence that made a funeral look like the theatre
audience at a comedy, Eliza tried coaxing the captain into talking a little bit about himself. It did not
take long until her prompt developed into a fully-fledged conversation before Barnett even knew
what was happening.

He was, she noticed, a gifted conversation partner. His green eyes speckled with warm honey-hued
browns smiled generously whenever she spoke and often he would pick up points she had made to
respond to them. All in all, things were going well. Never had she even have hoped to enjoy this
afternoon, but Barnett had proven interesting company and on top of that, Edmund, as she could spy
from the corner of her eye, was lurking idly in the corridor for a solid quarter of an hour now;
apparently his American spy lady had not taught him the art of subtly listening in on a conversation
before their ways had parted.

“I am, I must confess, even a less skilled dancer than the Marquis de Laffayette. And he was publicly
ridiculed by the Queen Marie Antoinette herself. I am afraid to even contemplate what fate she
would have intended for me.”

He grinned, a grin that coaxed Eliza away from her strict, almost scripted plan and into a
conversation completely devoid of theatrical “oh Captain” or “my, what a pleasant evening”-s. Nay,
the more they talked, the more she found herself to enjoy his company.

They continued talking about all the world and his wife until the clock struck seven, at which Barnett
bolted, almost stumbling over his repeated apologies but he had to get back to the garrison; time had
passed so fast he hadn't even noticed. Smiling, Eliza offered to accompany him for some of the way
(Edmund and Mother were now in earshot behind the door of the adjoining room, she noticed),
which he accepted under protest, not wishing to inconvenience her.

“I assure you, Captain, I cannot be inconvenienced by an evening walk in good company- especially
since I owe you an apology for having inconvenienced you at the ball. Consider it my formal
atonement by replacing this embarrassing memory with a more pleasant one.”

Suppressing a laugh at her dramatic phrasing, he offered her his arm as they left the house. Going on
a walk was ingenious- it opened the possibility for other people to see her in company of Barnett,
other people who would possibly, as it is custom in small places, talk to either Edmund or Mother
some time and, what was even better, now that she was out of sight and earshot, her endearingly
intrusive mother and brother were probably already dying to know what happened between two
adult people walking down one of the main roads in the early evening in what could still be
considered broad (enough) daylight.

At the edge of town, Eliza bade farewell to Barnett to return home before dinner was served. He
bowed and left her with a last “I hope to renew our acquaintance soon”.

On her way back, she reviewed the last couple of hours in her mind. Barnett (though she had
forgotten to enquire about his first name) was an amiable gentleman. And, his company was not as
unenjoyable as she had feared. Not unenjoyable at all; he enjoyed reading and according to what he
told her, was an accomplished violinist. The next invitation would be extended with more
anticipation of their meeting on her part, that was for sure. Humming a well-known melody, she
sauntered back home. Little did she realise the tune she was humming was the same tune she had
danced to only last week at the ball.
As soon as she entered, it was evident that her beloved family had been eagerly awaiting her return; Mother, in the fashion of a ghost of some poltergeist ancestor hiding behind wall-hangings and furniture, barged into the hallway the exact same second Eliza shut the door, wearing her dreaded “Mother Is Always Right” face.

“He’s a nice young man, isn’t he, dear”, she chimed innocently.

“Yes mother”, Eliza replied obediently, yet with a sharp undertone that would have warned anybody but her mother not to talk about the matter any further, reminding herself not to lose patience with her family and that all this was a scheme set up to disguise her cross-continental affairs. She could not bear Mother’s smugness. Next, she would start to plan the wedding.

Retreat was in order. Rushing upstairs, she noticed footsteps behind her. They were too heavy for a woman, especially an old one like Mother. It was surprising though because Edmund usually preferred more subtle entrées than this. She went to her room, leaving the door invitingly open to let her pursuer know he was expected.

Edmund entered, his face panic-stricken.

“Eliza, I- don’t… Good heavens.”

He sat down in a chair, his legs visibly shaking.

“Edmund, what’s the matter?”

“I think you noticed I was a little hesitant in my joy for your -courtship- of Captain Barnett.”

“I did. Indeed, you could not have expressed yourself more clearly.”

What was this going to be about?, she wondered with growing fears that something was gravely wrong.

“You may remember the day you received these letters from Barnett. There was mail for me, too. From America. General Arnold orders me back for questioning. He suspects I have information concerning rebel spies and I don't want you to be happy if you lost two men dear to your heart because they are in the same profession.”

“And do you have any information Arnold might want?” Let's start at the beginning, Eliza thought, trying to order her thoughts, omitting Barnett from the narrative. He had nothing to do with what actually troubled Edmund.

“I do. But if I were to give it up to him…”

“Anna, right? You told me about her brave confession to you.”

“I cannot tell them and I cannot tell them nothing and I cannot flee from my orders either. Look, I am in the middle of a terrible predicament, like Odysseus-“

“Oh to hell with the classics”, Eliza interrupted him impatiently. “This about you, not a dead Greek hero of days gone by. You must make a very real decision that might have consequences you cannot forsee. Do you flee to the continent or return to America? Nobody wants any of this, Edmund. This is your crossroads, your choice. I wouldn't know what I would do either. If it is of some help to you,
you always were the level-headed, judicious one. Mother never tired of telling me when we were children.”

Edmund wept, overcome by this evocation of childhood memories in combination with the desperate predicament he found himself in. He was helpless against Arnold, the traitor, against his fate, against the fact that he might not leave the Colonies alive (Simcoe would surely see to that; after having missed his departure, the despicable blood hound would surely track him down and welcome him back in his very own special, bayonet-orientated way).

For his distraught sister, there was nothing else she could do but hold her brother’s hand, assure him he was not alone.

"I must do my duty one last time”, Edmund managed to say in a brittle voice.

“I’ll go with you. I can’t let you do this on your own.” Her voice was sounded braver than she actually felt. In truth, she was afraid, but she could not sit idly by when she knew her brother was set to cross the ocean once more to enter enemy territory.

“You cannot. You have no orders and I would never risk your life. Think of mother. It will be hard enough for her to bury one child.”

“You mustn’t talk like this, Edmund! ‘If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell’, do you remember? I am coming with you.”

“No. Do you have any idea who wants me dead? Simcoe, the rebels, people I once considered to know-“

“Then why exactly have you decided to go back?”

“‘Lex. Jussum. Auctorita.’ Our family motto.” He he played with the signet ring he had worn ever since Father’s death in his hands.

“We are like stars, Eliza. God has allotted to each of us a course that we must follow; we cannot alter the divine order in which we are merely a single star in the universe that must follow its orders and mine are to return to the Colonies.”

“If you say so,” Eliza said doubtfully.

As always when Edmund was not telling the whole truth, he was not simply lying but omitting a significant part of his narrative. Sure, his belief in law, order and authority was strong and had always been, but how strong?

Strong. Anna Strong. And redemption for the wrongs he had suffered.

He could send Arnold on a false trail that would protect Anna and humiliate the new spy hunter and his lapdog, Colonel Simcoe. News travelled slowly across the Atlantic but Eliza had ensured she was always up to date with her gazettes to keep up with any developments in America that might influence her business.

Edmund wanted this to be his final charge, she realised, his brave last stand, the lonesome soldier against an onslaught of enemies. He was afraid to perish, but also determined to face his demons, his enemies one last time and give them what they deserve while simultaneously insuring the safety of
the woman he loved, even if they might never see each other again despite his return.

An almost impossible task, almost as impossible as slaying a-

A Gorgon.

“Edmund, I need to loosen my stays. These terrible news have left me a little short of breath." Eliza drew a few short breaths and leaned against the bedpost to illustrate her tale. Knowing Edmund, he would find it unacceptable to force his company on a woman in a dressing gown, even if he had seen her in worse state of dress as a child.

“Of course, Eliza, excuse me, I’ll- I’ll go then.”

“You are strong, Edmund. Never forget that.”

When he was far enough away, Eliza frantically rifled through the bottom drawer of her wardrobe until she found what she was looking for: pen, a few sheets of cheap writing paper and ink, not nearly as exquisite as the elegant pristinely white goose quill, more upmarket paper and midnight blue ink she kept in the study, but entirely sufficient for what she was about to do. From the inside of her nightstand, she recovered Edmund’s drawings. The double portrait sketch was of no use to her despite its heart-warming beauty.

The ink representation of the woman in the stars was exactly what she needed. Although it hurt her to do this, she cut the two drawings in half with her pen-knife, putting the upper half back into the nightstand’s drawer.

On the back of the lower half she wrote an encrypted message, hoping Anna would pick up all the hints- the woman in the stars, the myth of Perseus, the identity of Algol and Keto.

By God, she had to know. She had a right to know the man she was once ready to spend the rest of her life with was returning and fearing for her. First thing in the morning, this letter would, at double pay to the coachman (a distant cousin of the late Mr Greenwood) travel south and hopefully make it to America in time. Re-reading the letter, she deemed it ready to find its way to Anna. Hopefully, William and Woodhull would continue to play along and deliver it to Anna.

Dear Andromeda,

General Algol orders Perseus to return to A. and help weed out the snakes. Perseus very concerned for your safety. Stay away from Algol and Keto. Danger for both of you. Will tell you more as soon as I know.

Yours truly,

E. G.

She wrapped the letter in a short note with instructions to Woodhull and sealed the small parcel with the tell-tale Hewlett family crest.

Yes, she had wanted them to reunite- but never would have thought this would mean Edmund had to
travel back to America. It had never occurred to her this possibility even existed. All that was left for
her to do now was find a way to follow Edmund to York City. There was no way she would let him
go on this dangerous journey alone. Simcoe, Arnold and whoever else wanted to see Edmund dead
would have to get past her first.

Chapter End Notes

There are a couple of notes today:

In memory of the recently on-screen deceased Capt. Wakefield, Capt. Barnett received
his name from another battle of the War of the Roses, the Battle of Barnet on 14 April
1471, roughly ten years after the Battle of Wakefield.

Hewlett pretends to show Anna the constellation Perseus in the sky during his captivity,
which is partly why I chose to use it in the story. As far as my online research went,
Perseus would have been visible in April this year in the skies over Scotland, which
made me feel confident enough it was visible there in spring more than 200 years ago as
well.

Algol (meaning "demon" in Arabic) is not a figure from mythology but the name of the
second brightest star in the Perseus constellation. While Hewlett links it, due to the
meaning of its name, to Simcoe, I chose to pair Algol and Arnold and Keto (a sea
monster that threatens to devour Andromeda, Perseus' future wife) and Simcoe due to
the slight phonetic resemblances in each pairing. All the other figures, such as the snake-
haired Medusa, are taken from Greek mythology.

Barnett's musical skills are a slight, respectful nod to another deceased redcoat, John
André.

As for the Latin translation of the Hewlett family motto, my Latin has gone a little rusty
with respect to everything apart from translating. So if someone who is reading this
knows more Latin than I do, please comment or message me and I will fix this.

"If not to heaven then hand in hand to hell"- "Don't quote Shakespeare, that's my trick."
King, Queen and Joker

Chapter Summary

Edmund arrives at a conclusion, Barnett hatches a plot, Eliza temporarily assumes a new name, Anna receives mail and Simcoe is in his element.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

[...]

Her welcome, like her love for me,

Is from her heart within:

Her warm kiss is felicity

That knows no taint of sin.

And, when I stir my foot to go,

'Tis leaving Love and light

To feel the wind of longing blow

From out the dark of night.

Where Lagan stream sings lullaby

There blows a lily fair

The twilight gleam is in her eye

The night is on her hair

And like a love-sick lennan-shee

She has my heart in thrall

Nor life I owe nor liberty

For love is lord of all.

(My Lagan Love, traditional Irish air with English lyrics by Joseph Campbell)
Eventually, Edmund had even told his mother one evening after dinner, confessed to her that soon he would be gone once more, America-bound. She had cried and taken his hands in hers, begging him not to go.

“It is an order. There is nothing I can do. All I ask of you is not to mourn me if I should not return. I have travelled to Edinburgh to settle everything with my lawyer the other day. My possessions will be distributed equally among you and Eliza.”

He tried to smile confidently. “But do not worry Mother, this is just a precaution—“

Edmund stopped. It was a precaution, but one he deemed necessary. Not that he had the expressed wish never to leave the Colonies alive again but with Simcoe and Abraham Woodhull roaming free, his life was under threat. Both men had tried to kill him in the past, both men were eager to have him out of their way, be it for the safety of Woodhull’s fellow spies or Simcoe’s pointless, self-serving lust for revenge.

He had one week to prepare himself for his journey; according to Arnold, everything had to be done at double speed. The man was eager to redeem his tainted name by gaining some impressive victories that, unlike his most cited stroke of genius, Saratoga, would not be won on a battlefield, but through secretly passing on messages in dark alleyways, ambushes, threats and fear.

Thanks to Eliza’s hunger for any piece of news ("You can never know too much", she once said, barely looking at him from behind her gazette while sipping a cup of tea) and her generosity in letting him read her gazettes and pamphlets when she was done with them, he had learned that Simcoe was now directly collaborating with Arnold, the Rangers being pivotal in executing secret missions.

Arnold was not that stupid, Edmund mused. The detestable, ignominious and bloody work being done by the Queen’s Rangers, his name would not be directly linked to the cowardly practices of skulking through the woods at night and shooting unsuspecting victims, most likely the way he knew Simcoe civilians and rebels alike, in the back without questioning.

The only thing that surprised him was that Simcoe seemed to play along. Usually, the man was uncontrollable, harboured a hearty dislike (to put it mildly) against any kind of superiors and clever enough to see through Arnold’s plan to let others do the dirty work for him. Simcoe wouldn’t do this if he didn’t have a very good reason- which was concerning. If he had any good reason to more or less willingly play the part of Arnold’s bloodhound, there was a gain for him somewhere that he was working towards to.

It was concerning to think the war on patriot intelligence channels, however much one personally agreed or disagreed with this undertaking, was run by two calculating, passion driven, honourless individuals that were an insult to all officers on both sides of the conflict.

Ironic how fate had paired these two of all people on God’s green earth together. They surely made a handsome pair, he mused cynically. A pity Arnold was married. He and Simcoe would make a fine couple- who would be the bride and who the groom?

Ah. The solution was so obvious, coming to think of it.

Simcoe, with his frankly toenail-curling falsetto voice (which made Edmund wonder if there was a
more psychologically profound reason why Simcoe always felt the need to prove himself to others by exercising excessive violence and enjoyed relieving people of parts of their bodies with his bayonet) that made most women he knew sound like parade-ground accustomed drill sergeants in comparison and flaming orange curls would make a stunning bride, shoved in an improperly low-cut lace-laden dress and heeled shoes.

Mrs Arnold, the most beauteous woman in America (or so he had heard) would be best advised to watch out for her husband’s latest bedfellow.

Much as the picture of Simcoe in a lace gown tripping over the hem of his dress on the way to the altar brought Edmund a special kind of glee he had never thought himself capable of feeling, the danger emanating from the ginger who should have, for the benefit of the British Army, the Colonies and about every single human being under the sun, better considered a singing career in some third-rate Italian opera house in the hinterland of Tuscany than becoming an officer with the power to decide on matters of life and death, was still a very real threat.

Arnold had ordered him to come back. With Simcoe being his right hand now, he would, if not on some mission with his Rangers, be close by his new kennel master’s side, waiting to be unleashed, waiting for his enemies to come one step too close.

Knowing Simcoe, this time he would see to his enemy’s demise and make sure the Oyster Major would pay for all the wrongs he deemed he had suffered at his former superior’s hand, especially the loss of the woman he once indecently pursued against her wishes. What a consoling thought that now, with Anna in Washington’s camp, Simcoe had no chance whatsoever to get anywhere close to her.

Anna. Soon, he would be close to her again, at least in terms of spatiality. What would she say if she knew he was returning? Would she care? Or was she by now reunited with her husband or had become the wife of another continental gentleman? Was she safe? Were her eyes still as bright and dark as they shone all these months ago?

His eyes shut instinctively at the memory of their first kiss. For one brief moment, he was once again in Whitehall’s drawing room, amidst the pools of soft golden candlelight. While she was without a doubt no novice in the art of kissing thanks to her previous romantic entanglements, it had been a first for him- apart from one rather embarrassing incident with his sister and her friends in the garden one summer day in his youth when one young lady of a particularly coquettish and experimental nature had, out of the blue, kissed him straight on the mouth under the jeering “oh”s and “ah”s of half a dozen amused girls. He could still hear their voices as clear as day.

“A tongue like a dead fish. “ Her verdict intensified their laughter.

“Don’t take it personally, Edmund, but I don’t think I shall require your… services again.”

As if he had asked her to kiss him.

Even though Eliza had apologised on behalf of the frivolous girl and given said specimen of loose morals a good talking-to that, and he would never forget this, included the sentence “If you ever touch my brother again I will bake you into a pie and serve you at a dinner party” (a youthful Eliza had been particularly fond of all things with a certain macabre air- *Titus Andronicus* being no exception), the damage had been done. Awkward and insecure as he was, he had never contemplated subjecting himself to humiliation by kiss again, knowing now that he lacked- well, everything- until this wonderful night at Whitehall.

With Anna, things had been different. It had all come so naturally to him, to them; it was as if her
mouth was made to compliment his and vice versa, their faces destined to touch while closed eyelids fluttered with excessive, inexpressible love and longing.

A part of him wanted to seek her out and felt more hopeful towards his return to America; another advised him not to, disillusioned with the British cause across the ocean and in fear of his enemies on either side.

In his state of deep pensiveness, a scrap of Shakespeare exited the dark depths of his memory and stepped into the light.

\[
\text{All the world’s a stage,}
\]
\[
\text{And all the men and women merely players;}
\]
\[
\text{They have their exits and their entrances,}
\]
\[
\text{And one man in his time plays many parts...}
\]

In this moment, he realised how sick and tired he was of his previous life, of the saluting and officering, the wig and sash, the sound of *The British Grenadiers* on fife and drum, the self-chosen apathetic confinement to his room at home that had followed, everything.

He felt as if he had almost drowned at sea, but in the last moment before certain suffocation made it to the sweet, fresh, sun-ripened air on the surface, leaving all the monstrous creatures of the deep where they belonged.

Now, he was supposed to go back to America. Life had dealt him a role in this travesty and he had to play it, but he was no longer accepting the lines given to him. He would write them himself. Once more, he would slip into the costume of Major Hewlett and give the world the dutiful officer they expected to see, at least on the outside. For a costume was all the uniform was to him now. Not too long ago, he had believed in firm circles of right and wrong, just and unjust, that law and order triumph over chaos and anarchy. In fact, life was far more complicated than that, black and white separated from one another by a palette of greys in different nuances.

It was true, the war had changed him. If for the better, he knew not. Not yet. This realisation did not make him happier, but he felt a little wiser, something he could feel at least a little grateful for. Time would tell what he was, what he would become.

All he knew was he would no longer let himself be pushed around by other players on the chessboard of life, a mere pawn in the game of others, readily sacrificed for a greater good, a victory, the capture of the opponent’s rook or queen.

-No, if he could help it, no one would capture the queen in this game, not while he was playing.

Mother had gone to put some fresh roses from the garden on Father’s grave (the yellow ones that smelled like ripe apricots he had planted himself many years ago and always liked best) and would later join Mrs McKinnon for tea and Edmund had excused himself too to go on a long walk, which meant Eliza had the house for herself.

To fight the silence, she sent little Daniel to the garrison with an invitation for the Captain. If she was lucky, he would be free this afternoon and help her fight the gloomy silence the house seemed to
ooze from every little crevice and crack between floorboards now that bad news had once more come to their home.

Not that long ago, Barnett had unwittingly been coaxed into a play staged by Eliza with freshly curled hair, jewellery and studied conversation cues taken from novels or plays. They had come some way since then and although he had been invited again a few days later with Mother and Edmund present in the house, she found now that the ice of his somewhat reserved ways was broken by growing familiarity, Barnett had grown into an interesting conversation partner.

Lately, he had taken up calling on her unexpectedly and they’d share a short talk at the door, much to Mother’s displeasure at her daughter’s evident lack of manners. On other occasions, they would meet in town while running an errant and stop for a while to converse.

Slowly and without consciously noticing it, Eliza became partial to the Captain’s company.

Barnett indeed followed the invitation. When a knock at the front door mercifully disrupted the tomb-like silence of the house, Eliza, despite Mary’s intuitive reaction to go and open the door for her employer, beckoned the girl to stay behind, fetch some tea and pastries from the kitchen while she would open the door herself. Outside stood Captain Barnett, little Daniel on his arm.

“The boy was tired”, he smiled, looking at Daniel, putting the boy back on his own two feet.

“Thank you, Captain!”, the boy chimed and his voice grew even more excited when Eliza slipped him a sixpence for his troubles.

Barely able to calm the boy’s cascade of excited thank you-s, Eliza fondly ruffled his tawny hair.

“There’s a good lad. Now go to the kitchen, as far as I know your mother has some delicious pastries there waiting for you. She has baked so many the good Captain and I can’t eat them all alone! We need you to help us with them before they go to waste.”

She blinked conspiratorially.

“But- Major Hewlett and Mrs Hewlett, what about them?”

It was heart-warming how true-hearted and compassionate the boy was. Other children (including a young Eliza) would not have waited any second longer and darted to the kitchen, leaving not even a crumb of the promised pastries behind for anyone else to taste.

“But worry about them. They won’t even know we had any. It’s our little secret, eh?”

Daniel, unable to process his good fortune and seemingly fully recuperated from the strains of his afternoon adventure (or simply giddy with delight), bowed to the adults and leapt across the hallway in the prancing step of a spring lamb.

They waited until the boy was gone until they retired to the drawing room where Mary had set up everything for tea in the meantime.

Today, it was hard for Eliza to follow Barnett’s talk of music, literature or whatever he was on about. The reason why she had invited him was not to engage in a philosophical dispute or yet another ploy to play pretend to Edmund and Mother or even to talk to her invitee- she simply needed someone to be around. Someone who would do the talking, his voice and physical presence assuring her she was not alone.

Barnett recounted an anecdote, grinning as he concluded, confident Eliza’s lips would part into a
broad smile any second, but her face remained stony and absent-minded. Worried something was amiss, he asked, gently as to not intrude her private life too rudely:

“Mrs Greenwood, you seem absent today.”

It was more a statement than the question he would have liked to ask, but it was an invitation nevertheless. If she would accept it, as he had hers earlier, he would listen to whatever burdened her.

“It’s Edmund, my brother. He’s going back to America again, he received his orders a few days ago. But it’s not that alone- there are people who want to harm him there, he has made enemies on his last post. I need to go with him, someone needs to protect him.”

How much lighter her heart felt now that the words were out, though she had the nagging suspicion that Edmund would not have wanted her to tell anybody about his orders nor about his previous command there.

“Can you elaborate?”

His creased forehead spoke of the seriousness with which he took her situation, obviously willing to help.

“I cannot. I don’t even know if Edmund would have wanted me to tell you all this. You know too much already.”

“I understand”, he nodded, his face grave. It was the Major’s tale to tell, not hers. He was more worried about Mrs Greenwood’s distress than the Major’s business in faraway America.

“And you want to follow him? How?”

He was dying to hear what plan she had come up with. For all he had heard about her (and in a small place such as Duncleade, people had long memories), she was never short of one, and never had been.

“Perhaps I try to follow him and board his ship- somehow.” The “somehow” came a little too late to achieve the confidence she tried to uphold.

“Though I cannot say much about your motifs and will not judge for their absence, as you do not see yourself in the position to disclose them to me respecting your brother’s privacy, I think your decision is rash, foolhardy-“

“Don’t try to tell me I’m distressed and hysterical.” Eliza’s voice was calm, but dangerously so, almost like the sea, whose colour was mirrored in her irises, before a storm. With growing concern Barnett noticed how Eliza’s fingers brushed the knife that had until then reposed undisturbed next to her plate.

“No, Mrs Greenwood, you mistake me in my intentions-“

“Which would be…?” Her right eyebrow rose.

“You. Your safety.”

She looked at him, puzzled, curious and astonished at the same time, her head slightly tilted to the side.

“Why would you care about me, Captain?”
The question was uttered in an almost neutral voice that did not reveal anything but a general interest in hearing an answer.

“Because I…” Barnett paused, a pause Eliza mistook for dramatic effect, “might have the solution to your predicament.”

Eliza looked up. A pair of green-and-brown eyes found hers, eager to explain.

His mind was made up; a voice inside him, an untraceable feeling told him Elizabeth Greenwood was not a woman easily put in a mood like this, strong-willed and strong-minded that she was. Her love for her brother gave her great credit and he was in no doubt she spoke the truth, at least with regard to what little information she had trusted him with. He did not know how she would save her brother from his enemies once they disembarked on the other side of the ocean, but this would be her plan to make. He could only help with the transport. Knowing what he was about to propose could go terribly wrong for both of them, he continued. Excitement took the better of him, an excitement he blamed on the fact that he was about to break the law and play with the dangerous flame of demotion if he was caught in this scheme, a flame that beckoned him to continue his tale at the sight of Elizabeth Greenwood’s attentive eyes.

“The ship your brother will most likely board is the HMS Norwich, bound to leave with provisions on Monday in three weeks’ time.”

“How would you know?”

“I have a cousin, a frère de lait of sorts, who serves as Lieutenant on that ship who wrote to me to inform me of his welfare. Given the time your brother needs to travel from Duncleade to Southampton, he might reach the Norwich just in time. Thanks to my cousin, I am quite well-informed when it comes to the navy, or better at least then most easily seasick landsmen. And I know the ship, which has on its way to England some weeks ago transported invalids from the War in America, falls under the command of the man holding the command of the North American Station—a certain Admiral Richard Howe.”

*And how is this going to help me*, Eliza thought. Her patience was short, given he had promised a solution to her problem he hadn’t yet offered.

“And how is this going to be of any assistance to me?” There. The words were out, though frased a little more diplomatically.

“Bear with me”, her guest instructed her, his face now visibly glowing with anticipation of her reaction to what he had in mind.

“Howe, perchance, has served as captain under the renowned Admiral Samuel Graves, one of the heroes of Quiberon Bay, if you fancy calling him that, and Howe’s predecessor on his post.”

The battle in which the English fleet had reduced the French Navy to plywood during the Seven Year’s War was universally well-known.

“Graves might no longer be an active commander, but his reputation and his good name remain unforgotten and Howe (or the man acting on his command) will surely do his old comrade in arms a favour. All we need to do is disguise you as someone important enough to warrant a quick passage on a ship of the Royal Navy and outfit you with a letter from Graves.”

“This is your plan?” Eliza laughed mirthlessly. Had he just wasted five minutes of her precious lifetime on drawing up a sketchy at best, plan that was doomed to fail?
“It is.”

“And how, or should I say, Howe, exactly, are we,” mirroring his choice of the word earlier, “hypothetically speaking of course, going to obtain the letter from Admiral Graves?”

“We will write it ourselves.”

“Do you think they won’t see through this?” Angry, Eliza tried to compose herself by taking another sip of her now significantly cooled tea, her knuckles whitening dangerously as she held the cup, so dangerously in fact, that Barnett was somewhat concerned she would snap the porcelain. To end her suffering, he continued his tale:

“You see, navy service is a dynastic requirement in my family. My father, my uncles, my grandfather, his father- they all served aboard ships bound to uphold the flag and name of Britain at home and abroad. The family connections have therefore been rather limited to other members of the navy and their families, one of them being the admiral in question. Graves was sometimes invited to our home, together with his wife Margaret and their ward, Elizabeth Gwillim, Mrs Graves’ orphaned niece. A nice couple, the Admiral and his wife, and their little ward a veritable ray of sunshine. Sometimes however, they did bring his godson as well. A horrible boy.”

He frowned disdainfully.

“John was, well, special. We all realised he was a little odd, but he grew worse over the years. I’d say he was gloomy and timid at ten, pouting all the time, and a seasoned criminal at fourteen. It would of course be intriguing to find out what drove him, but I guess that shall remain a mystery. He split my lip once for asking if his father had also served in the navy, but I am digressing. Anyway, Johnny, a fox, and not only by the colour of his hair, spent most of his three years in Eton lording over the school as he pleased, using a simple, yet effective method. He had trained himself in the handwriting of his eminent godfather, meaning that whenever he was in trouble for cudgelling another boy to almost invalidity or if he, bored, perhaps, decided to dislike the food, the Admiral would send the right letters to the school, threatening, demanding, whatever was required. Dear Johnny always walked free, never punished and with considerably better food than the others. How he did it, is a mystery.”

Never had Eliza heard anything like it. Edmund’s experiences at school were of a different kind, having been the outsider most of the time with his very specific interests and a shy personality that did not exactly aid making many friends and she herself had never been to any such educational institution, but committing a felony like this over again seemed not only out of the ordinary, but a downright criminal enterprise. The moral considerations of young John’s misdeeds were of no interest to her however, it was the fact that it had worked, and worked more than once. She was, she had to admit, hooked, ready to find out where the story was going with regard to her problem.

Eager to hear more, she asked: “How do you know of this?”

“He was quite boastful when it came to his” he coughed meaningfully, “Achievements. As long as my parents and his godfather were out of earshot, at least. I told him I didn’t believe him and he demonstrated it. When the Graves’ and the ginger pestilence left that night, I went to my father’s study, where I knew he kept his letters and compared Johnny’s fake to a real signature of Admiral Graves’. I could barely tell them apart. Over the years, I kept the page bearing the young counterfeiter’s work as some sort of amusing memento. With a little bit of practice, I think I could make an attempt at doing the same. Who knew having had the dubious pleasure of being acquainted to a young John Graves Simcoe would one day be of use to me?”

His smile had grown into a wide grin. Clearly, he also followed the news through the gazettes and
was aware of Simcoe’s deeds and misdeeds over yonder.

With a shiver down her spine, Eliza noticed the familiar name but decided not to tell Barnett anything. He needn’t know about Edmund’s relationship with this particularly nasty piece of work, although she would have liked to say something corroborative to show she shared the Captain’s sentiment. Instead, she focussed on the sheer insanity of the situation that needed urgent clarification.

“You would do that?”

Barnett had until now not seemed like the sort of man who would contemplate forging a senior officer’s signature. Law abiding, somewhat cold around strangers and very levelled and warm to those he knew, she would have considered him anything but a petty criminal.

“I would do that for you. Give me until tomorrow, and the Admiral will have a letter that begs Admiral Howe, or whatever subordinate on his ship is his representative aboard the Norwich, to please grant”, he searched his memory for a name of a suitable officer, “Mrs… Mrs… Mrs Cooke, wife of Colonel Cook of York City, passage to America. You miss your husband rather badly and cannot wait to be reunited with him. As a favour to you, the Admiral, a long-standing friend of your family, offered you his help in this matter. What do you say, Mrs Cooke?”

Mrs Cooke considered the plan rather adventurous and somewhat reckless, but nevertheless, it was a plan. Had she anything better to offer? No.

Reluctantly, Eliza agreed. Business-like, the two shook hands firmly.

“Until tomorrow!”, the Captain exclaimed on his way out of the door, waving back at the still quite perplexed Eliza.

The next day, the amateur forger returned in the early evening. His duties had not permitted him to come any earlier and so, as bad luck would have it, Edmund and Mother were both at home to witness the exchange.

“I couldn’t forge a seal, but this being a letter to ‘Mrs Cooke’ I think we can assume the Admiral might not have used a military one for his correspondence. I have, quite uncouthly permitted myself to open Admiral Graves’ letter in such a way that the seal is only barely recognisable, the wax crumbling slightly. Seeing as the signature looks almost genuine-“ here, he pulled another piece of paper from his pocket, folded and worn with age, Colonel Simcoe’s youthful criminal endeavours forever imprinted on it in black ink, and showed it to her.

Trusting that Simcoe’s forgery was as good as Barnett claimed it to be, his own came very close.

Nodding with approval, the letter passed from Barnett’s hands to hers in the same moment Mother and Edmund happened to saunter down the hallway.

A firm believer in the strategy of attack being the most effective form of defence, Eliza looked her brother straight in the eye and slipped the letter provocatively up her sleeve, grinning broad and openly.

A love letter it was, then.

Edmund’s last day at home approached swiftly; until now, even the little side-action of forging
Admiral Graves’ handwriting had been some sort of game, some exciting past-time that would in the morning turn into something very real with unforeseeable consequences.

Edmund had informed them he was to depart at nine in the morning and was indeed intending to board the Norwich, much to Eliza’s delight.

Eliza, after having made her calculations, had come to the conclusion that it would be wise not to follow him too closely- in the end, they might end up in the same stagecoach, which would ruin everything and give him enough time to send her back home. Not that she would abide of course, but it would make things unnecessarily difficult. Therefore, she would give her brother a day’s head start.

The morning after his departure, her late husband’s distant cousin’s carriage would come and to take her to Dumfries, from where she would somehow find her way south. Her things were already packed and Mary sworn to a vow of silence. It pained her to force the girl to lie on her behalf, but there was no other way. If mother knew, she would do everything to make her stay and she couldn’t risk that.

Mother would receive a farewell-note explaining what had driven her. Eliza had so far only told her mother she was going to visit Amelia Digby, the childhood friend she had pretended to have exchanged letters with in front of her and Edmund. They would say goodbye, and mother would until next week, when she would receive a farewell letter Eliza would post somewhere on her way, not be fearing for her daughter. Mother, though she had a right to know, should not suffer unnecessarily.

She loved her, and loving hurt sometimes, especially when one had to decide between two loved ones. But now, Edmund was in more imminent danger and Mother safe under Mary’s expert care.

Sometime in the afternoon, Eliza tried to distract herself with a novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Edmund entered, a question on his lips.

“Eliza?” He asked carefully, as not to startle her.

“What can I do for you, brother mine?” she replied, trying to be as cheery as possible to give her brother a last evening of family idyll.

“I have come to ask you if you would come along with me to the stables and… and race. One last time.”

*One last time.* One last time had been the day Father had died. There was little cause to celebrate and horserace in the following months and when her betrothed’s horse had slipped and crushed its rider in a similar race not too long after the first tragedy, they had never repeated the challenge ever again.

“Allow me to go and change, I meet you at the stable”, she answered him, an answer she deemed more suitable than asking him what on earth had moved him to this decision.

At first, Eliza interpreted it as recklessness, but as she descended the stairs twenty minutes later in an outfit more comfortable for a race than a dress, it dawned on her what it truly meant:

Life.

Doing something dangerous, attempting to test fate, galloping freely through the fields and down the road, being childish-foolish again, if only for a brief moment-
Edmund wanted to live.

And so did she.

Dressed in breeches, Eliza greeted Edmund, who was already busy saddling the horses, with the mischievous grin of the young Ms Eliza Hewlett of days gone by. Edmund looked up from his work.

“Are you going to wear this?”

“I am. Otherwise you would have an unfair advantage, sitting astride and me barely able to cling onto the saddle in full gallop in a pretty dress. And God as my witness, I detest losing a race, especially to my little brother.”

He gave her an awkward toothy smile, not as broad as in their youth, but it was the gentle first spring bud after a long winter of sadness.

“They were father’s”, she went on, gesturing towards her riding outfit, “I’ve taken the seams in.”

“I knew I have seen these clothes somewhere before. And they do suit you. Not that they will help you win, of course- are we taking the old route again?”

“Starting at MacPherson’s barn and back to the house. You won’t win.”

“You do remember I have always been a rather skilled rider.”

“So am I.”

Silently, they rode to MacPherson’s barn from where they started on Eliza’s command; the feeling of wind in their hair felt liberating and for one brief, eternal moment, their world was whole again, the riders thrown back in time to their last race, younger again and not yet marked by life’s hardships.

For one moment, Father was alive, James was alive, Eliza still Eliza Hewlett, not Widow Greenwood and Edmund still the dreamy boy with high hopes for an academic career in Oxford, never to cross the Atlantic with the army and endure the hardships of capture, war and lost love.

Their horses were nowhere near as fine as the costly steeds they had owned as youths, but they were perennial, plucky creatures that seemed to share their respective rider’s desire to win.

As they crossed the finish line, a small cry of victory escaped Edmund’s mouth, overjoyed to have won, even if only by four inches.

“My most heartfelt congratulations, brother”, Eliza snarled, but not without a note of playful jest in her voice.

“Next time, I win again.”

“I am sorry to say so, Eliza, but I must free you of your delusion: you won’t.”

Next time. Edmund would return home. And she would make sure of that.

The next morning, Eliza and Mrs Hewlett saw Edmund off. All three were grave, solemn, and tears, though forcefully suppressed, found their way from three exerted pairs of eyes onto their cheeks.

“Take good care, Edmund.”
“I will, Eliza.”

Although she knew they would be reunited in less than two weeks, Eliza could not help but cry a little into her sleeve. She hated goodbyes.

When Edmund, after making many promises to Mother that he would take care of himself, eat and drink well, etc., etc., finally mounted the carriage, Eliza felt like something was already missing.

All these years during his absence, be it during her marriage and afterwards back once more in her girlhood home when Edmund was away in the Colonies, it had never occurred to her how much she actually missed her brother. The long time periods of their separation interspersed with the daily routines of being a wife and later helping manage Mother’s household had distracted her to a certain degree and dulled the pain of separation.

With the memory of their time together freshly on her mind however, things were different.

They stood by the roadside waving until the carriage was out of sight; inside the much emptier house again, Eliza vowed to spend the day with Mother, read to her or even play on the piano to her, if she so wished, although she was not even half as skilled as Edmund.

That night, they both fell asleep on the same settee, holding hands, comforting each other even in their sleep, knowing the next parting of ways would follow in the morning.

It pained Eliza more than she could say to leave Mother, but Edmund needed her more at the moment. Mary would care for her splendidly, Mrs O’Grady would cater in the usual, delicious way to her appetite and little Daniel would keep her company when she felt lonely (the boy, who had started accompanying his mother as a toddler before he attended Duncleade’s small school in the mornings, had grown into some sort of family member to all of them), not to speak of her countless friends who regularly called on her and invited her for tea or dinner to their homes, invitations she later returned.

When Eliza embraced her mother tightly as the coachman fastened her luggage to the back of the carriage, she wondered if she would ever see her mother again. Her worst fear was not necessarily that mother could die, her worst fear was it could happen to her first, the ship could capsize, she could contract a severe illness, the scenarios were plenty -leaving mother sorrowful and distressed.

No more thoughts like this. Edmund will live, and so will I. We are just going on a little adventure before we return home, it’s not so much different from when we were children and played all day outside in the fields, just a little longer and a little further away...

Turning around once more, Eliza waved one last time before closing the carriage door.

“Enjoy your time with Amelia!” Mother exclaimed and Eliza could only answer a falsely cheery “I will!” before the horses fell into an almost light-footed trot, not yet tired from a day’s journey.

She was just about to lean into the soft upholstery when suddenly, a voice addressed her.

Eliza gave a yelp of horror and surprise, not knowing what was happening.

And then, she realised she was not alone. Next to her sat a man in a red uniform. He turned his head away from the opposite window and revealed his countenance to the startled Eliza.

“What are you doing here?”, she hissed.
“I decided to keep you company, see if our plan works”, Barnett replied. “Major Sears does well enough without me here in the uneventfulness of the Scottish countryside and allowed me to visit some ailing, elderly relation in Oxfordshire.”

“You lied again,” Eliza pointed out.

“I did. Because I had to. I can, if you so wish, that is, still get out.”

“How you happen to occupy my carriage in the first place interests me greatly. Do tell.”

“Duncleade is small, Mrs Greenwood. It was no great feat to find out when the carriage would collect you and pay the driver for a second passenger.”

“Well, now that we are here and it looks like we are going to spend some time together, I propose you call me Elizabeth, or Eliza, whichever you prefer, at least when we’re alone. In front of people, I shall be Mrs Cooke, as you well know.”

“I am overjoyed to make your acquaintance, Eliza. Please call me Alexander.”

It was nice, Eliza had to admit, to have a companion on her travels; Barnett, or Alexander as she was to call him from now on, was pleasant company and distracted her from her conflicted feelings over leaving Mother behind and following Edmund to America.

“Say, why did you not join the navy like all your other relations? You said your entire family has been in navy services for generations.”

The question had just sprung to Eliza’s mind and she meant no harm in asking, it was all mere curiosity, yet Barnett’s swiftly darkening features told her she had touched a subject he was not happy to talk about.

“They tried hard to have me follow their example. In the end, my unusually violent seasickness prevented me from a career in the navy, which is why I joined the infinitely less glorious, at least in the eyes of my family, lily-livered land forces. I might be a soldier, but my true occupation is that of the family disappointment,” he concluded gloomily.

“We can’t all be admirals,” she tried to console him somewhat clumsily, patting his hand, and Alexander answered, “But we can pretend to be one.”, at which both of them burst into laughter that lasted until they reached Dumfries where they were to change to the southbound stagecoach.

Southampton, two weeks later.

Edmund was already below deck and out of earshot when some commotion arose at the gangway.

“Excuse me, I am the wife of Colonel Cooke! I have a letter from Admiral Graves! You can’t-”

Eliza was playing her part as the entitled, authoritative wife of a military commander well, even if it fell on deaf ears with the men who tried to bar her from setting foot on the ship. The last night at the inn, they had rehearsed and talked everything through. It would work, it had to work.

“I demand to see the captain of this vessel”, she snapped, knowing the more attention she drew to herself, the more likely it was that someone would eventually summon the captain, if only to deal
with the mad woman and send her away.

To double the upheaval, Alexander decided to join the fray and started to argue with the sailors as well, threatening with disciplinary charges and his connections to the admiralty and how they would be discharged in disgrace if they didn’t comply with his demands.

Next to her, Eliza could hear Alexander argue in her defence, his voice suddenly that of a command-accustomed officer, loud and demanding, so completely and utterly different from the almost shy man she had first come to know. Acting seemed to be another of his plenty not quite so socially acceptable talents, she mused admiringly while shouting a most unladylike curse in the face of a red-faced man who tried to rip Admiral Graves’ letter from her hands.

Finally (Eliza’s throat itched in protest of constant shouting already), the captain of the vessel arrived, demanding to know what caused this commotion.

“It’s the lady over there, Captain! Wants to board, says she has a letter from Admiral Graves”, one man reported to his commander.

“Careful, she’s rabid!”, another one interjected, only brave enough to do so because he stood at the very back of the crowd.

“And you are…?” The Captain asked, unimpressed by the chaotic brawl of his men that only ebbed thanks to his presence.

“Mrs Olivia Cooke, Sir. Wife of Colonel Cooke of York City. The Admiral was so kind as to-“

“Yes, I can read myself”, the Captain interrupted her warily, taking the letter from her hands.

He studied the document, brows knitted for a while, before he spoke again. He was visibly at loss what to do. On the one hand, an admiral of the blue and friend of his superior was asking the same for a favour, on the other hand did the hastiness of this entire business perplex him.

Personally, he had not much to do with the officers of the army serving on land, but during their last stay in Brooklyn Harbour he had made acquaintances and heard things. He had heard of Cooke, who, unlike Arnold the Turncoat was not living in the company of a wife, but instead merrily enjoying the supply of ladies of perpetual availability whenever he felt like it.

Poor Mrs Cooke, actually. While she was passionately arguing her way onto his ship, her husband was perhaps enjoying the company of a woman at least ten years younger than her. He pitied her, which softened his heart towards her cause. Maybe the couple would find back together once she was there and who could tell if her husband didn’t love her? Maybe he did, but the long absence of a wife could make a man- well, he knew what he talked about, being at sea for long periods of time without even the whiff of a skirt on deck.

“It’s not customary. Not at all. Knowing the Admirals Howe and Graves, I shall make an exception. In fact, we were expecting dear Lieutenant Barnett with us today, who was reported indisposed with an ailment to me this morning. Man is too sick to travel, so we have a free cabin. Otherwise I could not permit it. Get Mrs Cooke’s luggage,” he ordered the two men closest to him.
“So this is goodbye”, Eliza breathed, almost unable to say anything at all. It had worked. In a few weeks, she would be in America with Edmund.

“Goodbye, Mrs Cooke”, Alexander bowed.

“One thing before we part: your cousin? What is he up to? Did you know?”

Discreetly, Alexander whispered into her ear: “Told you he was my frère de lait. As much a born sailor like me, only he was not half as lucky and was forced to join the navy. Although I think he has found a way out now.” He blinked knowingly.

“So you knew all along he wouldn’t board and didn’t tell me?”

“I did. I could not guarantee it would work, but I knew it would increase our chances. I didn’t want to raise false hopes.”

“Thank you, Captain”, she ended their hushed conversation with all the men looking on in mind who might later try and twist their conversation in a less than appropriate direction. She held her hand out for Alexander to take and kiss, as a gentleman should, and, walking away from him, turned one last time on the gangway.

She had almost forgotten there was something she wanted him to know before they parted: “You didn’t disappoint me, Captain.”

Although Eliza was able to tell he was smiling, the distance was too great for her to see the tears pooling in his eyes. He waited to see the ship sailing away, out of the port and into the wild waters of the Atlantic.

As he stood there watching the ship leave the harbour, he wondered when the Hewlett siblings would return. Edmund Hewlett’s return had shown a new side to Eliza, whom he had before only known as Mrs or Widow Greenwood. Somehow, he couldn’t help but feel these two brought simultaneously the best and word out of each other.

Smiling absent-mindedly, he recalled Eliza’s face when he had told her of his plan. Hopefully, she would soon return, safe and sound, and with the Major as well. Only being able to guess what drove her to follow him to America, he decided that it didn’t matter now. She would have enough time to explain everything over a cup of tea (or several) when she returned. A cup he eagerly awaited.

Below deck, Eliza was shown to her cabin. It was not nice or very spacious and the furnishings were far from luxurious, yet all these things did not matter to her: She was on board the ship with Edmund.

“If you want to see how we sail out of the harbour, you should go on deck”, the second lieutenant, who was now replacing the tragically incapacitated Lieutenant Barnett and had shown her to her quarters, advised her.

Curious, Eliza joined the busy hustle and bustle on deck; the HMS Norwich was by no means one of the biggest ships in the British fleet, but among all the busy sailors and on board the ship, she felt invincible, like a pirate queen, a Grace O’Malley of the English Channel.

A few feet away, she spied a familiar figure: Slowly, she approached Edmund from behind and whispered, disguising her voice, “What a beautiful day, isn’t it, Major?”
Edmund turned around and froze, his eyes widened in shock.

“Eliza-“ he managed to say, lost for words, “what on earth are you doing here?”

“Hush, Major. And you will address me properly. I am Olivia Cooke, wife of Colonel Cooke, and I am about to be reunited with my husband in York City.”

She looked at him, unable to hide her smugness. Edmund had turned paper white and was close to either fainting or losing his composure, but he caught himself quickly and replied

“Welcome on board, Mrs Cooke. I would be glad if you would join me later for a glass of wine. I am sure you have an interesting story to tell.”

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Washington’s Camp, two weeks later.

When Caleb had come to seek her out at the trading post, Anna had known something had happened- again, and she was not eager to hear what had come her way this time.

“Annie, you’ve got to stop this.”

“Stop what?” Anna looked around, at the goods, at her little stall, as if to ask what on earth she was doing wrong or differently than on the other days. Frowning, she went on.

“Is there something wrong here? If it’s about the whiskey rations, I-“

“Not the whiskey. Can you come with me for a moment?”

Quickly, Anna called a scrawny teenage girl who with a blonde braid under a worn-out bonnet who was examining a brown woollen scarf on display to her side and instructed her to hold her post while she was gone.

“Katie, could you keep an eye on the post? I will be back soon.”

The girl nodded and switched the front of the makeshift stall for the rickety counter.

Meanwhile, Caleb directed Anna to a less crowded area of the camp followers’ encampment. Most women here were at work, washing, sewing and only a few inhabited their sorry tents at this hour, mostly those with very small children in need to be fed.

Pulling her behind the tarps of a deserted tent-homestead, Caleb produced a letter from the depths of his leather coat’s pockets.

“Here. There’s another one. You said it would stop-“

“I did, I told her not to”, Anna defended herself. Why was this woman writing her again?

“Look, Annie, I need you to put an end to all this. I can only do so much to keep this business secret. God, if someone finds out- I don’t want you to get in trouble for a stupid old English gobernouch!”

“She isn’t English, she’s Scottish”, Anna heard herself defend Mrs Greenwood.

“Oh, aye? So she’s that Lady Macbeth you’ve been talking about the other day? Manipulative shite.”
The other day, one of the men had come to trade a battered copy of Macbeth for something to eat. While event trying to swap an old, battered book he had found God know where, for something to eat bore witness to the destitute state of the army and the perpetual pennilessness of the soldiers, most of whom had not seen a single dollar of their pay in two years, Anna had, eager to finally get her hands on something to read again, agreed to give him three apples for it.

Setauket had not been a place in which a young woman’s education was valued much, nor given much attention beyond the usual household duties, manners and religious instruction. People on Long Island had no need for women who could recite text passages from Xenophon’s *Anabasis* in ancient Greek; they needed a pair of hands that could wash, sow, bake, cook and fulfill household chores while their husbands worked in their fields, businesses or workshops and even their education was often worlds apart from that of the learned classes of the cities. Some of them could not even read.

It had been Edmund who had shown her the end of Setauket’s narrow horizon and introduced her to what lay beyond. The marvels of science and scholarship offered themselves readily to those willing to comprehend them and Anna had been instantly fascinated. So fascinated in fact, that she had read a good deal of Edmund’s books. Some she had borrowed with his consent, others she had snatched from his room during his captivity when the Woodhulls were not looking (she would not let Richard Woodhull accuse her of stealing) and returned them a few days later.

In the beginning, especially the scientific publications (she was an omnivore when it came to reading and in these early stages of discovering her new passion, she devoured whatever her hands could find) had proven difficult and she did not always understand everything, but the more she read, the more familiar she grew to specific terms, allusions to classical literature and the often unnecessarily boastful style of writing of some authors.

Now, the battered copy of *Macbeth* offered her some kind of solace, a memory of those days when she would sit in her room (or secretly, as some sort of consolation during his abduction, in Edmund’s; not that she had ever told him) and read the Iliad or whatever other work of literature she and Edmund were currently discussing.

“The Scottish Play”, one was not supposed to speak the name of the play for fear of a curse of some sort that would rebound to those foolish enough to utter it, was truly gripping. Books were not only for learning, they were for escaping as well. It was a feeling of greatest freedom and liberation to delve into a story that was not one’s on, to suffer and laugh, lose one’s self in the protagonist’s happiness and woes and weather their storms with them and then, after a chapter or two, be able to close the book, leave the hero, saint, sinner, good and bad behind. *Macbeth* had provided her with this escapism until she had subconsciously drawn a parallel between the place of the action and her own world. Scotland. From then on, she could not enjoy her read as much as she had anticipated anymore.

Speaking of Scotland, the letter was still in her hands, unopened.

“Caleb, would you mind? I need to read this on my own.”

“I don’t. But be careful, Annie. You know when you need me I’ll be there for you”, he said, lightly brushing her shoulder in a gesture of compassion and comfort as he left the tent.

He knew full well that whatever was written in this letter meant a lot to his friend, even if she denied it. This did not dilute his dislike for the secrecy and letter-exchanging he had hoped was over already, but when something was important to Anna, it was important to him, too. The only thing he
kept wondering about was how long the two of them could keep it secret from Ben, and, following the chain of command, Washington. Perhaps this was the last letter, he hoped against hope.

This Mrs Greenwood, Lady Macbeth or not, seemed persistent and steadfast in her endeavours, a quality not even some (former) generals of this army possessed.

Once the painfully familiar seal was broken, Anna found herself looking at an ink drawing of a woman merging with the starry night sky. Even though the hand that had drawn it was not very skilled or practiced, there was a lot of artistic merit to it.

At closer inspection of the drawing, the tent around her began to spin. She stumbled over to a wooden bowl of water on a makeshift washstand, and glanced at the reflection of her face in the still surface of the water. It was her, she was the woman in the picture; the lines of her face were not always correct and some perspectival errors were made, but the eyes and mouth and hair brushed any remaining doubts away.

It was a likeness of her, signed in neat handwriting in the lower right corner. E.H., his E a little more squiggled than his sister’s, his H a little shapelier than hers. But there was more. The message was short and encrypted to a certain extent. Familiar with the story of Perseus and Andromeda (thanks to Edmund and his books), she read.

*Perseus to return to A. and help weed out the snakes. Perseus very concerned for your safety.*

“What are you doing, Edmund?” she heard herself ask, her voice brittle and afraid.

The room around her began to spin with even more force. He was coming back. And he was concerned for her. Despite everything she had done to him, purposefully, to save his life, to never make him come back again, he was coming back, ordered to help catch patriot spies.

Should she tell Ben? She was in possession of important intelligence now, and knowing Edmund knew of Abe and the Ring and her own involvement, *Major Tallmadge* should be informed.

Much as she would have liked to solve this predicament immediately, her head brushed the dilemma aside.

Edmund was on his way back to America. And he was thinking of her and worried for her safety.

-She was worried for him, too.

*Perseus very concerned for your safety.*

Confused, she let herself sink on the small bedstead, a sack filled with wet, rotting straw, not knowing what to feel, whether to be joyous, sad, afraid, hopeful, leaving her with a thousand different feelings over the following sentence:
Edmund would return.

**York City, the same day.**

“Studying the history of the four kings, I see”, Simcoe mocked the two Queen’s Rangers seated at a table of an establishment in one of the less reputable areas of York City close to the Holy Ground, from whence he had just come.

Even a man like him needed to tend to his carnal needs that had been so grossly neglected in Setauket (at the thought of the place, a faint needle-prick-like sensation irritated him somewhere to the left of his chest beneath his ribs. What was it?) from time to time. And she had been rather skilled with his bayonet as well.

He knew he would find them here, the tavern being exceptionally cheap and the ale (or whatever unspeakable mix of horse-piss and the contents of York City’s chamber pots they served under this denomination here) arrived in generous mugs.

The men abandoned their card game and stared at their commander in shock.

“Colonel, we-, we’re off duty-“

“Do not trouble yourself, Motlow. Continue.” He gestured towards the abandoned card game on the table.

Slowly, the men picked up their cards again, not knowing what to make of the Colonel’s sudden affability. He pulled a chair over to their table, positioning himself between the two players.

They had only played the second hand when out of nowhere, the Colonel reached with impressive speed for Motlow’s sleeve. Both Rangers once more fell into the almost apathetic shock of a rabbit at the sight of a large snake, fearing the hour of death was neigh.

In one swift movement, Simcoe pulled an additional set of aces from Motlow’s sleeve and playfully declared “I win”, before rigorously taking the remaining cards from both men’s hands.

“You two will go on a mission for me”, he said slowly, now that he had their full attention, his voice dangerously pitched with a certain excitement he could barely bridle, “plain-clothed. In about a week’s time, a man will disembark from a ship from England. A man I need to be watched day and night. Where he lives, where he goes, whom he sees.”

“And who would that be, sir?”, the second Ranger asked.

“A man who would be better advised not to cross my path again. An old friend from Setauket.”

His eyes shot darts of ice and fire at the same time, twice dangerous, twice deadly. Not even the devil in Dante’s seven-circled hell was capable of commanding such strong elemental forces at will.

“His name is Edmund Hewlett.” At the mention of his name, his hand found its way to his bayonet in a subconscious movement.

“You are not to harm him unless I expressly indicate otherwise. You are only tasked to watch him. Undetected, of course.”
The men nodded.

“Good. Gentlemen”, he said, leaving the two thunderstruck Rangers to themselves and their half-empty mugs of warm ale.

*Splendid*, he thought, smiling complacently, soon he would have his revenge. It was almost like eagerly awaiting Christmas as a child (or at least that was what he remembered the few real Christmases he had been allowed to experience once felt like). He would only have to wait a little longer...

Hewlett would not return to Scotland a second time. The Oyster Major was a dead man walking.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, many, many thanks to you all! Since the last chapter, this fic has reached more than 1,000 hits! I never thought this would happen and therefore give my heartfelt thanks to all those who comment, recommend and read this story- thank you so much to you all!

Now, notes:

Barnett's first name: there is a reason for his name other than I liked it at the time of writing and I invite you to find it. Hint: it has to do with ancient history and Edmund...

The pie incident: Yes, this really features in Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus" (written most likely in 1581/92, published in 1594). Someone gets made into a pie. Perhaps also the source of inspiration for the fate of Lothar and Black Walder Frey on "Game of Thrones".

"All the world’s a stage...": Perhaps the most famous quote from "As You Like It" (written in 1599, published in 1623) by William Shakespeare. I can't leave that one alone, it seems.

"The British Grenadiers": I have chosen this particular piece for a very obvious reason as an allusion to the musical preferences of a certain Colonel.

The Admiral Graves-subplot: Admiral Samuel Graves was indeed Simcoe's godfather and he and Sir Richard (Admiral) Howe did exist in real life, as did Margaret Graves and her niece Elizabeth Gwillim (we might meet the latter again at a later point in the story, so mark her name). While I have left most information in this sub-plot historically accurate, the Barnett family are an entirely fictional family, so everything that happened in their house, the punching and forging signatures, is the fruit of my imagination. There is, to my knowledge, no evidence Simcoe did ever do that in real life.

You may also have noticed that I forego Simcoe's backstory as told on the show and revert to a more historically and geographically accurate version, still embellished with a lot of things I make up, of course. I have written a separate story about his childhood in England that explores his upbringing and possible first steps in the direction of the man we get to see on screen.

The ship mentioned, the HMS Norwich, did exist as well, only she was sold in 1768.
Here, she, or a new ship by the same name, is still in use by the Royal Navy.

Frère de lait: French for “milk brother”, someone a person has grown up with all their life and been breastfed alongside with by the same wet nurse. Barnett uses this term more loosely to refer to a cousin he is particularly close with since childhood, perhaps because he lacked relationships of this kind and intensity within his own family.

"The Vicar of Wakefield" (published 1766), by Oliver Goldsmith tells the story of the eponymous Vicar of Wakefield, who, together with his family suffers from a streak of misfortunes. In the end of course, everything ends well. The boy gets his girl, the money is recovered, etc. etc. Aside from the indication that Eliza and the Hewletts in general could do with a happy end, the name of the publication was another reason to use it with a nod to the late Captain Wakefield.

Grace O'Malley (or in Irish Gráinne Ní Mháille) (c. 1530 – c. 1603) was a chieftain from the west of Ireland most famous for, alongside being very well-educated, fighting for independence from England and being a business-woman in her own right, her career as a pirate and meeting Elizabeth I in London. I can only recommend reading up on her!

A gobermouch is an antiquated term for a person who finds too much joy in poking their nose into other people's business.

The "Anabasis" is the most notable work of the Greek historian Xenophon (c. 430 BC – 354 BC).

“Studying the history of the four kings” was a (quite obvious) euphemism for playing cards.

Plus, as always, some little lines and allusions here and there lifted from the show.

Thanks for reading!
A Good Man Goes to War

Chapter Summary

Edmund and Eliza arrive in York City, Eliza gets lost in York City, Peggy makes a new friend and Arnold and Simcoe interrogate Edmund.

Bonus: How the wig came off.

Chapter Notes

So this chapter is only half of what was originally supposed to be one chapter. Instead of serving you one mega-chapter, I have decided to split the plot up into two smaller, more easily digestible chapters of around the usual word count, which was quite difficult, but which will hopefully work. Please bear that in mind while reading- many things that are only touched upon in this chapter will be resolved or feature again in the next.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[...]

So hopeless is the world without;
The world within I doubly prize;
Thy world, where guile, and hate, and doubt,
And cold suspicion never rise;
Where thou, and I, and Liberty,
Have undisputed sovereignty.

[...]

(Emily Brontë, To Imagination, 1846)
On board the HMS Norwich.

Eliza spent most of her days on board, when she was not enjoying the company of her brother or walking on deck (she had eventually acquired sea-legs and no longer needed the help of one of the crew to support her), thinking about all that would await her on the other side of the ocean.

On their first evening on board, Edmund had invited “Mrs Cooke” to share a glass of wine with him in private after dinner. Although any such intimacy would on shore have been perceived as horrendously unseemly, in the absence of suitable lady companions on the ship, nobody frowned when Mrs Cooke sought the company of a fellow landsman.

“Tell me, Eliza, how did you get on board?” Edmund could hardly conceal the curiosity that had driven him to ask her this question.

“Shh”, Eliza hissed, “You know we can’t use my real name here. You call me Mrs Cooke until we reach York City, have you forgotten? And if you absolutely have to use my first name, call me Olivia.”

Edmund rolled his eyes and sighed. “Well then, Mrs Cooke, how have you invited yourself aboard the ship?”

Proudly and with all the mischief Edmund recognised from their childhood days in her eyes, Eliza reported how Alexander, inspired by the youthful transgressions of one John Graves Simcoe, had forged the letter by Admiral Samuel Graves and the subsequent journey to Southampton to him.

Wide-eyed at the sight of the fake letter, Edmund could not hold back a certain pride. Although he did not usually condone the use of such methods, Captain Barnett and Eliza had successfully managed to get Eliza on board without raising any suspicions. The secret agents he had come to know, Abraham Woodhull in particular, could learn a lesson from these two.

“Give it here, I am going to dispose of it in a manner untraceable”, Edmund said when he snatched the piece of paper from his sister’s hand, folded it, and put it into his pocket.

Eliza let him take the letter from her. She knew her brother. The way he folded it meant he was going to keep it. He was a bad liar. At any rate, it would be interesting to see what exactly he intended to keep it for.

“And this was only the beginning”, Eliza had promised, finishing her tale. “Once we arrive in America, we are going to have to come up with a plan how to proceed.”

Whenever she tried to talk about devising a plan together, Edmund grew tight-lipped as if not talking about the problem would make it go away. Edmund seemed to genuinely believe that not sparing a thought on the troubles and snares in wait for him in York City could make them less real, less dangerous.

Eliza on the other hand, as so often in disagreement with her brother, thought otherwise, and so she had begun trying to draw up a basic scheme that would at least provide minimal protection in a town full of snakes and spies on her own, based on what little knowledge of the town and Edmund’s enemies she had.

Crafting such a plan was hard work, especially since there was so much she had to take into
consideration, so many factors to be observed that could spoil everything, so many people (only to speak of those that she knew of) who could pose a threat to her brother and through him, to herself.

And then there was the question of Anna that needed resolving, to which she had still not found a suitable solution.

Once safely arrived in York City, should she write to her? Should she tell Edmund first? How would he react? Since his return, she was no longer sure how he would react, this new Edmund that had come home from America with a broken heart. She was his sister and she loved him just as much as she had once loved the shy teenage boy who only ever seemed to overcome his shyness when in the company of the family’s horses and it hurt her to see him hurt.

His love for Anna was not dead as he had revealed to her, more or less directly on that night in his room at home that now seemed like a memory from decades ago. The tables had turned since then—could they be turned again, this time in favour of the star-crossed lovers? Perhaps; but the most pressing issue at the moment was to deal with Arnold, who would likely ask questions Edmund would be unwilling to answer, be it to protect Anna or himself from prosecution by the Crown, and Simcoe, the cold murdering bastard who would not let an opportunity to kill Edmund pass a second time.

Despite the seriousness and possible danger of the situation she was about to enter willingly, excitement pooled in her guts when she thought about York City. She had never travelled much, London was the farthest she had come so far and now, she would soon be in the Colonies, or America, as the rebels called their country.

Rebels? Maybe she should refrain from calling them that. Edmund’s tales had sensitised her for a great deal of things she had not been aware of so far. To her, the matter of the governance of what the British called the Colonies was no longer as black and white (or blue and red) as it once had been. The war reports that reached British shores only spoke of victory and defeat, numbers of men dead or captured; the names of Generals and commanders either victorious or defeated—yet nobody ever talked about the hearts and minds below the uniforms, be they blue or red.

Edmund had done that for her, he had opened her eyes to the fact that war was not only some abstract concept only observed through the coverage granted to it in gazettes and pamphlets, but a harsh reality that involved real people. Real people on both sides, real people who laughed, cried, had feelings—real people who fell in love regardless of their allegiance, real people who deliberately disregarded their supposed allies to further their own goals and thousands of real people who died regularly on the battlefields of this war, not to speak of all those others, women, children, civilians, also affected and whose sufferings were so often forgotten in favour of the memory of some grand commander or decisive victory for one or the other side that would in a hundred years’ time maybe be marked by a stone in some remote field, saying “General So-and-So has camped on this site before the Battle of...” with a brief note (in much smaller letters, of course) thanking those soldiers of the victorious party who lost their lives for the Good Cause.

Did all these young men who enlisted know what they signed up for? Did their hearts race at the sight of an enemy onslaught? Did they think of their families when they fell, lethally wounded, knowing their time on earth was up?

And did they think, in their last moment, their last breath or blink of an eye, that they, not the army they fought for, they personally, Tom, Dick or Harry from a farm in Lincolnshire or a workshop in Philadelphia, had made a difference in all this? Their names would never be remembered in the way those of Cornwallis or Washington would likely one day resound in the halls of history, gentlemen with stern facial expressions and powdered wigs or hair, their portraits enshrined forever in golden
Maybe a mother, wife or sweetheart would mourn for them—and equally likely some of them would be forgotten the instant they closed their eyes forever with no one at home waiting for their return.

Hopefully, this whole ordeal would be over soon. Though technically British, Eliza, born to an English mother who had been adamant her children should be raised with the respect-inducing accent of the English upper classes, and a Scottish father felt closer to the land she had grown up in than England or indeed Britain as an entity of several countries reigned by the same monarch, which set her naturally somewhat apart from those staunchly believing in the infallibility of the Crown in all matters (and the war in America), although traditionally, the Hewlett family had always maintained a good relationship with the Crown.

In the past, the Hewletts had sided with the British rather than their fellow Scots and several members of the more extended family had fought under British banners at Culloden in 1746, one of them James Hewlett, Eliza's favourite relation since she could remember and the elder brother of her father.

The tales of Uncle James had captivated a young Eliza particularly. When she was very little (she remembered Edmund could not have been more than two or three years old at the time) she had heard him tell the story to a few distant cousins for the first time, listening in on their conversation from behind a half-open door, knowing they would send her away for being too young if she entered. When she was older, she had begged him to tell the story to her, too, and he had kindly obliged, re-enacting particular feats of his bravery on the field seated in an armchair.

Edmund was also familiar with Uncle James' stories, but his interest in history had always been trumped by his passion for astronomy and so her eighteen-year-old self had been close to bursting with indignation when Uncle James had presented Edmund with the dagger he had taken as a souvenir from some unfortunate Jacobite at Culloden, a big, almost sword-like thing Eliza had admired greatly with the morbid fascination of the young so many times before, on his sixteenth birthday.

How times had changed; now, her uncle’s tale no longer sang the same song of bravery and victory to her as they had when she had been young. Although she would never go so far as to sympathise with the Stuarts in general or Bonnie Prince Charlie and his men in particular, she could understand why they had chosen to fight at the side of the young pretender, fighting for what they believed was right, not unlike the Americans now.

But would they lose like the Jacobites in 1746?

On deck, the wind was changing and brought smells Eliza hadn’t smelled since her departure from Southampton. The air was heavy with the scent of grass, of wet earth and on its gentle gusts glided birds.

“We’re close! Land ho!” A cry resounded on deck and all the men gave a cheer. It couldn’t be long anymore now. A day, perhaps. A day until Eliza Greenwood would enter the foray of the American War, another soldier to join the ranks, filling the place of one fallen in battle. Or was she?

She was no member of either army. Her ultimate goal was to bring Edmund home safely and, if Anna wished so and Edmund agreed, Anna Strong. Protecting her brother meant not only shielding him from Washington’s men who naturally harboured a great dislike for any man in a red coat, it also meant protecting him from men who were supposed to stand with him, not against him.
Viewed from that perspective, she was an entirely new player on the board, a player the others could not yet place anywhere with definitive certainty, whose allegiances, potential power and motifs were still in the dark. Edmund was known in these parts, had a reputation and enemies.

She, on the contrary, was rogue; not bound to any obligation coming with the colour of a coat, a woman (whom did these military types, and most men in general, underestimate more than women?), and not afraid to do things Edmund, or at least the Edmund she used to know, would shy away from doing.

In the same moment, Edmund stepped up behind her.

“We’re almost there, Mrs Cooke”, he murmured warily, as if he was unsure what to think of it all.

“Major Hewlett, I would be delighted to further our acquaintance on land then”, Eliza smiled and winked.

York City.

The next day, the ship anchored in Brooklyn Harbour. After three weeks at sea, having non see-sawing ground underneath her feet felt glorious to Eliza, who was far less accustomed to journeys at sea than her brother.

“Won’t your husband come for you?”, the now first Second Lieutenant and the Captain had asked her, which was a valid question- any caring husband would do everything in his might to greet his wife upon her arrival or at least send a servant with a carriage to collect her.

“No”, she replied lightly, “the Colonel is such a hard-working man- he is surely brooding over his papers as we speak and has forgotten what day it is! Well, it is no easy job, being the quartermaster. All the responsibility! But that’s what he has me for. Making sure he eats and drinks on time and doesn’t overwork himself.”

“Ah, all right then, madam. If you should wish us to accompany you-“

“Thank you, but the Major has already volunteered to take me home”, Eliza cut the slightly perplexed Captain off, “I am sure he will be good company.”

Thankfully, their escape was swift and unremarked upon. They found themselves a carriage that was able to transport the combined load of their luggage and instructed the driver to drive them to an inn or tavern or boarding house of good repute. They stopped outside The Harp and Shamrock, a clean-looking establishment run by an Irishman called O’Driscoll and his Cornish wife.

The O’Driscolls were of a hard-working, amiable sort, always a smile on their lips and very polite, their rooms equally friendly as their proprietors, the bedsheets clean and the floor freshly swept. Here, they posed as traveling acquaintances because Edmund was hesitant to give Eliza away as his sister in a city that was almost hostile enemy territory to him.

If someone wanted to harm him and if the O’Driscolls were not as amiable a couple as they seemed to be, someone wanting to harm him might try to use Eliza to get to him. Whatever could be done to keep Eliza safe, he would do- knowing however that his sister had never had much regard for the safety of her person. Thinking of some of the foolhardy and at times daring things she had done in her youth, keeping Eliza out of trouble and in relative safety was a lost cause. All he could do was...
pray the state of relative safety they were in for now would prevail for some two or three days, hopefully longer.

Eliza however, burning for action after a long time at sea, had different plans. After a short night and wakened in the early hours of the morning with the giddy desire to do something, anything tingling in every fibre of her body, she rose. Wrapping a woollen shawl around her shoulder, she quietly tiptoed to her brother’s room.

Edmund was still fast asleep (and who could blame him? It was only five in the morning) and did not notice how a shadow quietly slipped through a minimal crack in the door, grabbed a fresh shirt, neckcloth and stockings from the opened chest of drawers and returned a short time later to collect his coat, tricorn breeches and boots and last but not least, his sabre and wig.

To Eliza’s advantage, she and Edmund were of almost the same height, which made his clothes not look too ridiculously out of place on her back. In fact, the coat fitted quite well, and the epaulettes added some broadness to her considerably smaller shoulders. The hardest part of her enterprise had been pressing her chest into a less feminine form by means of clean strips of linen. It was uncomfortable, but could not be helped if she wanted to pose as an officer. And who had heard of a female officer? It had to be done, and she was not planning on wearing Edmund’s clothes all day, anyway.

To her great surprise, the wig and tricorn added greatly to her new attire and gave her a bigger air of credibility than she had anticipated. She could flatten her chest temporarily and slip in her brother’s coat, but her face would always be her own, unchangeably that of a woman.

Underneath the powdered monstrosity, tricorn half-occluding her face and her head held low, nobody expected a woman beneath the garments of a military man and the white of the wig expertly altered the shape of her face (it did not flatter her at all- neither had it ever flattered Edmund, in her opinion) rather impressively. On the streets, nobody would look at her twice. Just another redcoat on the streets of York City.

In this uniform, people would feel much more obliged to answer her questions than in her civilian clothing. As far as her knowledge of the military went, she might even be allowed to go to places in these she wouldn’t be allowed to go otherwise. In addition to this, not having his uniform for the day meant Edmund would likely not leave the house, especially not because he had to assume that she on her way out, would have posed as him in front of the inn-keepers.

One last quick glance at the mirror, and Eliza left her room and descended into the taproom area of the Harp and Shamrock, where Mrs O’Driscoll was already readying the house for the day.

“Major- up so early after a long journey? Good morning!”

She had barely looked up from her sweeping, but not having been found out immediately gave Eliza hope.

“Thank you, Mrs O’Driscoll. There is nothing more becoming than a brisk morning walk. Helps me putting my thoughts in order.”

“If you say so”, she replied pleasantly, obviously either too busy to care what Eliza had said and trying to be polite or genuinely confounded by Eliza’s disguised voice. At any rate, this would have to do. With a last goodbye, she quietly slipped into the street.
As good luck would have it, it was market day and the city abuzz with people from York City and farther afield, which granted Eliza even greater anonymity.

She turned left at the next corner and followed the street, leading her deeper and deeper into an area of the town that was clearly reserved to less honourable trades, alehouses and cheap brothels and tents lining the streets. So this was the famed Holy Ground.

Unsure how to feel about having wandered into York City’s most notorious district, Eliza considered it best to keep walking, not looking at anybody and anything and keeping her head down. At about seven in the morning, the Holy Ground was a quiet place, its business mainly taking place at night. A few dead drunk men, some in Hessian, some in British uniforms and some in civilian clothing lined the fronts of some alehouses and from a few tents came the first noises of early morning preparations, water being poured from a jug into a basin, footsteps pacing back and forth or the occasional low hum of a little melody.

“He! Where are you going?” a voice suddenly addressed Eliza who spun around on her heel, taken completely aback. A young woman in a faded dusky pink dress smiled at her. Her black curls were held back by a shawl in the same colour and the way she smiled and playfully put her hand on Eliza’s shoulder indicated her trade more than clearly. When their eyes met, however, the smile vanished from the younger woman’s face and her mouth and eyes widened in astonishment.

“You- you are-”

“Shh”, Eliza hissed quickly.

“I mean, there is someone for everything here, if you search for company?”

“No.”

“Oh, so it’s a customer who makes you dress up like this?”

“Yes.”

“You are a bad liar, you know? You are clearly new to this place. It’s obvious from the way you walk, looking left and right. So, what are you looking for?”

“I got lost.” Eliza considered it best not to relay too much information to the stranger.

“That I believe you. But you are still looking for something. Or someone”, she added knowingly.

At loss what to answer in order to rid herself of this curious, though friendly specimen, Eliza was aided by a momentary distraction. From one of the nearby tents, a man emerged. He was an impressive sight to behold even from afar, tall with tousled hair that gleamed like copper in the early morning sun that was complimented advantageously by his fair skin and green coat. Had it not been for his sullen facial expression and the curiously shaped scar where most people had a left ear, he might have been called handsome.

The young lady in the faded dress turned and met the man’s eye, who bowed with the faintest hint of a curt smile on his lips. Instantly, the girl pushed Eliza away to an arm’s length, as if to indicate she (or as it had to look like to him, he) was of no interest to her.

Clearly, the pink dress was an adept reader of people’s body language and face, something that doubtlessly came in handy in her profession, but she was not exempt from being read in the same fashion either. If Eliza, twice engaged, once wed, could read anything in her eyes, it was a fond softness that flickered across these black orbs for a moment before she caught herself again and gave
him a less intimate coquettish wave as if to wipe away the flicker of actual softness Eliza had observed in both of them.

For a second, Eliza thought the man had looked at her, too, his biting blue eyes resting on her face, but she might have been wrong. At this distance, it was hard to tell and since he too seemed rather taken with the looks of last night’s bedfellow, she was most likely mistaken.

Intrigued, she had followed the scene, when the lady in pink started to talk to her again. Her eyes must have followed the tall man a little too long, because the Pink Lady whispered, half-joking, yet with a pinch of danger in her voice that told Eliza to indeed take the words of this woman to heart, “John’s mine. If you want to start your business here, be sure not to steal other women’s customers. We don’t like that much.”

“I wasn’t-“ Eliza begun, but was again interrupted by the Pink Lady, who gave her another of her warm smiles and said “It’s all right. I understand. He is kind. And he pays well. Rare among the officers.”

In this moment, Eliza’s brain connected several pieces of information at once.

Green uniform. So he was a Queen’s Ranger. The lady had mentioned his first name was John. The hair, the eyes- just like Edmund had described him and the fact that he was an officer-

**Simcoe.**

So this was the man who had tried to get her brother killed and loosened the shackles of war on Setauket. She had to follow him. Another opportunity like this would not present itself so easily.

“I- I have to go. Thank you-“

“Lola”, the Pink Lady completed the sentence for Eliza.

“Nice to have made your acquaintance, Lola.”

“And you are?”

“Malvina”, Eliza lied lightly, remembering one of the characters from *The Works of Ossian.*

This time, Lola appeared either not to spot the lie or not care. Perhaps her real name was not Lola either; who knew?

“You are a curious woman, Malvina”, she said instead of a more conventional goodbye.

“The same goes for you, Lola”, Eliza retorted before she went into the same direction Simcoe had vanished in.

Gladly, the man was tall, even taller in his hat and easy to spot among the crowds that gave her anonymity. It took her less than five minutes and a bit of luck to set herself on his trail. She followed him to a considerably more respectable area of York City where he knocked at the door of a house guarded by a sentry. A servant opened the door and stared at Simcoe, her face somewhat alarmed at the sight of him.

“What can I do for you, Sir?”
“Tell General Arnold I accept his invitation for tonight.”

“I will, Colonel Simcoe.”

“Thank you, Abigail.”

It told her a great deal about the man that even when he was at his friendliest and politest (especially to a servant- Eliza had seen men of lesser standing talk to servants in a far less friendly manner), people shrank back from him.

Maybe she should come back here in the evening… For now, she better returned to Edmund to report back the latest developments and get that bloody wig off her head- her scalp had begun to itch unpleasantly under the nightmare made of horsehair on her head.

Having made her way back by asking for directions on every street corner and memorising the way for later in the evening, Edmund awaited her, dressed in his banyan and in a sour mood.

“Where have you been, Eliza? And why in God’s name are you wearing my clothes?”

“Gathering intelligence.”

“And why couldn’t you do that in your own garments?”

“Because, one, in a city full of British soldiers, nobody looks twice at a man in a red coat. Or a woman for that matter, if she disguises herself well. And two, because I wanted to keep you from leaving the house. Since you would probably not have listened even if I implored you not to go, stealing your uniform seemed quite effective to me. In addition to this, had you decided to leave the house, you would have done so in civilian clothing (which you didn’t do because you knew I would have posed as you in front of the innkeepers and two Major Hewletts leaving the house within an hour or two would have raised a few questions). Since your enemies only know you in your uniform, they would perhaps not have recognised you without the wig and coat. Believe me, it’s all for our safety.”

“Our safety?” Edmund spat back. “You have just endangered your life and you speak of safety?”

“I do, and I have some information you might want to hear. Let me speak plain, in a language you understand: William Herschel, the astronomer you regularly correspond with and who built your telescope, does not work alone: he is assisted by his sister, Caroline Herschel. Perhaps she even worked on the very lenses you use to observe the heavens at night. Let me help you too, Edmund. And now, listen: General Arnold has invited Simcoe to join him tonight at his home. If we-“

“No, that is out of the question. I will not let you anywhere near that man. Heavens, I don’t even want to know how you acquired this piece of information, but you stay away from this man- look, he is dangerous and he has harmed many, I would not want him to lay his hands on you, Eliza.”

“Who says I let him get his hands on me?”, Eliza replied stubbornly.

Edmund sighed, knowing that talking to his sister in her current mood would come to no fruition. Later perhaps, when she had cooled off a little, he might dare a second attempt at talking some sense into her.

“Just give me my uniform back, Eliza. I need to send word of my safe arrival to General Arnold. We cannot postpone that forever.”
Eliza went to her room across the hallway and re-emerged ten minutes later in a dressing-gown with Edmund’s uniform under her arm.

Counting all the items, Edmund realised something was missing.

“I need my wig back.”

His sister however, had other plans.

“You’re not getting it back, brother mine. I find I have taken quite a fancy to it. After our morning together, we two have formed a close bond and it would be so painful for us both to part again. You do know The Wig is a better conversation partner than you? Actually listens, does not try to keep me from doing what I wish to protect us both from your enemies and won’t go into raptures about Homer or Thucydides at ungodly hours in the early morning or late evening.”

“I need-“

“Edmund”, Eliza rolled her eyes, “my jesting aside, look in the mirror. What do you see? You look so much better without the wig. You always reminded me of a foppish poodle with it. The white does not suit you, whereas the colour of your natural hair compliments your features. You haven’t worn the wig at home anyway, save for the ball at the Stretton’s. I am keeping it to, ah, encourage you not to wear it in the future until you realise how blessed you are with your natural hair.”

With that, she closed the door of her room in his face to reinforce her point.

Against his sister’s antics Edmund considered himself powerless. He let her have the momentary triumph of the last word and shutting her door in his face to go back to his own room and get dressed.

Back in the uniform he had long hoped to be rid of for good, he looked in the small mirror on the wall opposite the bed. Indeed, perhaps Eliza was right; he didn’t know much about fashions or looks but perhaps his sister was for once correct; he could not tell exactly what it was, perhaps the healthier tone of his skin or the fact that his hair and his eyes looked more striking in combination of another, but perhaps Eliza was indeed right. About that, at least. Never, never would he allow her to cross paths with Simcoe if he could help it.

In the evening, Eliza readied herself to go a second time, this time dressed in a modest and somewhat worn dress and matching cap. She slipped out of the house when Edmund was talking to their patrons, unremarked upon in a room full of drinking evening guests.

Retracing the way to General Arnold’s house, she found herself crouching underneath one of the windows from which she could observe the guests in one of the rooms, drinking and talking in small groups. Simcoe was nowhere to be seen.

Swiftly, she moved on to the next window, eager to see what was happening in the neighbouring room and there he sat, by the fireplace with a glass of sherry, sipping quietly under the incessant beat of his right index finger against the glass as he, not unlike Eliza, watched the other guests through the open doors connecting the two rooms.

Simcoe rose and turned to the window, prompting Eliza to duck. Trying to move away from the window on all fours, she must have made too much noise, for instantly, she was seized by two pairs
“What have we here, eh?”

“Let’s see what the General’s going to say about that one!”

Frantically, Eliza turned her head to the window. Simcoe had gone.

“General! We found that one lurking outside!”

Eliza, busy trying to struggle herself free from her captors, was dragged into the middle of a big drawing room filled with dozens of well-to-do party guests, mostly men in uniform and fashionably dressed women. She must stick out like a sore thumb, in a dress with a visibly threadbare hem and dirt on her shoes. But then she had dressed for pursuing her target, not for mixing with polite society.

A man in a general’s uniform, tall and dark-haired, approached the scene. A little taller than Simcoe and almost as dangerous to Edmund, though in a different way, General Arnold towered over her.

Caught on her first mission by the Spy-Hunter General’s men lurking outside his window. She had no reason to delude herself, they would likely assume she was a spy, making the most pressing question presently on her mind what Arnold would do with someone he considered a spy.

“I’m not a patriot spy”, she heard herself say before she could think.

_Eliza, what have you done now? Your loose mouth will one day cost you your life, remember what Mother always said? Maybe the time has come more swiftly than-

“I think this is up to our judgement”, Arnold replied coldly, obviously somewhat annoyed his splendid party was being interrupted by an intruder.

Before her mind’s eye, images of prison cells flew past. If Arnold were to incarcerate her now, how great were the odds she would survive and would they try her as a spy? Once again, the fate of John André and Nathan Hale loomed above her head, only this time, the situation was far more serious than being caught digging through Edmund’s waste paper.

Only divine intervention could save her now-

“It’s all right. Leave her be.” A calm, yet determined voice ordered her captors to release her. Judging from the ease with which the woman commanded the men, she was not only a woman of self-confidence, but self-assured, conscious of being a person of great respect.

After a quick glance to either side to make sure her would-be jailors had indeed retreated, Eliza finally looked at the woman in front of her. She was _angelic_; there was no other word for it. Cleverly arranged golden curls cascaded over her left shoulder and the blue of her elaborately decorated dress matched the colour of her eyes perfectly. The vision addressed her.

“Come, my dear. I hope the men have not mistreated you too grossly. But you see, Benedict is very protective of the house and me and given the many threats we face- you can never be too watchful. Now, you must tell me everything, darling. Everything.”

There were a number of things that struck Eliza: firstly, why would Margaret Arnold, better-known under the combination of her nickname and maiden name as Peggy Shippen, side with her? Secondly: What sort of man was Arnold that his wife had basically asserted he was more concerned
about his property than her? And thirdly, what was “everything”? What should she tell them?

As good luck would have it, General Arnold, equally perplexed as the captured Eliza, interrupted his wife:

“[You know this… this woman?]” Manners were apparently not his forte.

“Yes, my love. She is a friend.”

“Since when do you find your friends among the street-roaming townsfolk, Margaret darling?”

“Oh, we met perchance. Mrs-“

“Elizabeth Greenwood”, Eliza interjected.

“Mrs Greenwood is a veritable expert on the topic of-“

The break was a little too long for Arnold not to notice, so Eliza took initiative to distract the General a little.

“Shakespeare. Literature.” Eliza tried to smile confidently, dropping a small courtesy in the General’s direction.

Alas, the General, whose eyes narrowed threateningly, was not so easily persuaded by his wife’s judgement. But there also was a warning gleam in Mrs Arnold’s eye- something about the two reminded her of two dogs in a fighting pit, circling their respective opponent, growling, in wait for the right time to bite.

However well the two tried to play at loving wife and caring husband, even an outsider like Eliza could see through the feeble façade of supposed domestic bliss in an instant. It was truly sad to think that the couple were stuck in this marriage for the rest of their lives, secretly loathing each other but pretending otherwise as to not damage their public image, exchanging terms of endearment that in truth were poisoned with all the things they wished to say to another but couldn’t, at least not in public.

“I have found, Benedict, that we must not judge all our acquaintances solely by birth. Surely you must agree with me, in a world like this, where an apothecary’s son can become a general, I must be allowed to extend my friendship to those who merit it, regardless of their birth or station. Don’t you agree, darling?”

The General’s face turned to stone in a foreboding facial expression that did not even hide his ire and signalled to his wife that he was not done with her for tonight. Everyone in the room was aware how Margaret, her voice still as cheerful and friendly and a smile on her lips, had snubbed her husband most scandalously in front of their guests.

Shivering, it dawned on Eliza that Mrs Arnold was infinitely more dangerous than her husband, the vainglorious turncoat. Many might regard her as the pretty doll they had read or heard about who attended balls and always dressed most elegantly, but in truth, Margaret Arnold wielded more power than most men. And she was aware of that.

Without another word, Arnold, with only the slightest bow towards his wife and her guest turned on one heel and retreated to a group of men drinking whiskey with whom he intended to spend the rest of the evening discussing his brand-new American Legion.

Taking her by the hand, Margaret offered Eliza the chair by the fire in the adjoining room that had
until recently been occupied by Simcoe’s imposing figure.

*It’s just a chair,* she tried to calm herself, yet the uneasy feeling caused by sitting in the same spot as the Colonel persisted. From here, he had watched the room, not quite part of the party and yet close enough to see and hear everything over his glass of claret. What had he seen? Which conclusions had he drawn? What would his next move on the chessboard of military intelligence be?

After an hour, in which Mrs Arnold frequently came to Eliza’s side to talk to her as if to validate the claims of their friendship, Eliza decided it was time to leave before she could get into even hotter water.

*Hotter waters in the company of lobsters, how fitting,* she thought drily.

Saying her goodbyes to her hosts, Eliza intended to slip into the streets unmolested under the pretence of a severe headache. As the door was opened for her by a friendly-faced servant, the voice of her saviour called her back.

“Elizabeth?”

This time, Mrs Arnold’s voice was devoid of the saccharine friendliness she sported in company. She approached Eliza until there was less than an inch of air left between them. The smell of Margaret Arnold’s strong, yet elegant perfume occupied the narrow space between the two women.

“I don’t know who you are. Blame it on my condition”, she absent-mindedly brushed over her stomach with a perfectly manicured hand, “but I am interested in what you wanted here tonight. Don you think I didn’t notice you much earlier, lurking under my windows? Come back on Friday afternoon. The General won’t be at home.”

Sensing the other guests were watching her, Peggy planted a soft kiss on the other woman’s cheek. “Goodbye, Elizabeth!” she said, this time once more in the sweet, bell-like voice of Margaret Arnold.

Peggy Shippen (or Peggy André?) however, was busy contemplating her newfound “friend”.

Something inside her, perhaps an instinct sharpened by her time with John, told her there was more to Elizabeth Greenwood than a bookish lady of humble origins who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Eliza returned sometime around ten in the evening, eagerly awaited by her brother.

“You know you cannot tell me what to do, Edmund,” she announced herself to him.

“And where have you been this time?”

"The theatre around the corner. They played an enjoyable little comedy- you wouldn’t have liked it, though, it was not particularly intellectually challenging, though some of the actors were quite good. Do you believe me?"

“Not a bit.”

“Good. Good night, Edmund.”
The house of General Arnold, the next day.

Benedict Arnold sat in his study, almost buried in the accounts of John André he caught his wife filing through suspiciously often and other assorted letters, dispatches and anything else that could be of any significance to his goal of breaking the rebel intelligence channels in York City and elsewhere down.

He was in a foul mood this morning and things did not look as if they would change much for the better; Margaret (he had ceased to call her by the more affectionate moniker Peggy, which she preferred) and her newly-appointed maid, Abigail or whatever her name was, had made opposition to the appointment of Abigail’s son as his body servant.

First, the woman had fired the old housemaid to install the boy’s mother, formerly a servant to John André in the same house, which did not exactly make her trustworthy in his eyes, and now, both women seemed to be uneasy with the fact that the boy should also work for a living. Womenfolk.

In addition to the scandalous affair of the previous night, this was the last straw. Sometimes, he wondered how long it would take that woman to drive him mad, and he was no longer talking about mad with love.

He needed some fresh air. Putting his latest piece of correspondence aside, a short letter telling him the man he had ordered back from Scotland had arrived, he penned a few short lines in answer to them, instructing Hewitt to see him tomorrow in his office at the barracks.

“Cicero!” he called the boy with unnecessary anger in his voice, or at least anger that he knew he must not direct against the boy but did so anyway.

“Get that posted.”

Rising from his chair, he slipped into his coat and left the house for Rivington’s, banging the door with the same misguided ire he had first directed against Cicero.

He was in desperate need of a drink and male company not under the influence of the vapours or a woman’s monthly change in disposition.

Rivington’s was the ideal address for him to go to; most other officers, who would never be reconciled with the fact that he had changed sides, excluded him from their card games and talk, something that usually hurt his pride, but he desired for today. He longed for a glass of Madeira enjoyed in solitude with only Townsley talking to him and only when his glass was empty and only to ask if he wanted another one.

With these expectations in mind, he was rather surprised to find Simcoe, the commander of the Queen’s Rangers, who had recently been subordinated to the American Legion, at the billiard table, playing a game for two against himself.

“Good day, General”, the man greeted him, leaning on his cue.

“Is it? Madeira”, he said, turning to Townsends, unwilling to have the somewhat unsettling man force his company on him.

“Forgive me, but it seems something is troubling you”, the mincingly polite falsetto that was unmistakeably Simcoe’s followed him to his table.

The man was not easy to get rid of, and since he had sought out his company in the first place, he had just unwittingly volunteered for the position of audience to his troubles.
“Do you have a wife, Simcoe?”

“No, but one day, I hope”, the Queen’s Ranger answered, still cheerful- or as cheerful as Simcoe could get. Frankly, his smile unsettled him greatly.

“You hope because you lack experience of it. Wives are wonderful creatures to be sure, but they sometimes-” he broke off there, hearing himself talk and realising that he did not want Simcoe to know everything about his private life, even if he presently seemed like the only one willing to listen to his woes with Margaret.

“Never mind. Tomorrow, I will have the man over you told me would hold crucial information. He has finally arrived from Scotland. Hopefully, he will prove as valuable as you advertised him to me”, Arnold said, hoping to shift their conversation away from his somewhat embarrassing incapability to keep his own wife in line towards business.

“Do you mind if I sit in?” Simcoe sounded genuinely interested now, the false cheeriness almost gone from his voice.

“Not at all, not at all”, he dismissed the obnoxious ginger wearily, not wanting to further their little conversation. Personally, he cared less about what this Heely or Hulbrit or Hewitt had to say than he did when he first sent the letter- the war had shifted since then and new sources had opened themselves. At present, he was not sure if the man would give him any new information anyway.

Perhaps Simcoe’s talent to frighten people with his mere presence might even come in useful and make this interview worth his time.

“Thank you, General.” Thankfully, Simcoe had decided to leave him to his Madeira and returned to his billiard game.

Taking another swig from his second glass, he tried to forget Margaret and her servant-turned-bosom-friend.

Hopefully, this Hewlett would prove more forthcoming regarding his knowledge of rebel intelligence than his wife was about her relationship to John André.

The Harp and Shamrock, the following day.

“He wants to see me in an hour”, Edmund said, barely able to conceal the nervousness in his voice.

“We knew this moment would come. All you can do is- not much, I’m afraid.”

“I am afraid so, too.” His face looked gloomy.

“Stick to the truth best as you can- we both know you can’t tell him about your conspiracy with Woodhull, especially now that Simcoe works together with Arnold under the American Legion. And there is also Anna you have to think about, the story of your”, she had to pause for an instant to find a word that would not hurt Edmund more than necessary, “you almost-wedding will likely have spread. And the way you told me Simcoe is like, he will pick that up and hold it against you, especially when he can use your story to further his own reputation in front of Arnold.”

“Anna?” Edmund replied softly, surprised Eliza had thought of her. “Anna is safe- I hop- I trust she is.”
“Yes, for now. If you give Culper up to Arnold, he will start a hunt for the rest of the spy ring. I think you can be glad the whole Woodhull-Culper thing met a dead end with John André’s death. We would have heard, even in Scotland, if one of the most wanted spies in all of America had been caught. Now think what would happen if you give his name to Arnold: you will not only have given up the man who is responsible for having ruined your wedding, but the other men, Tallmadge and Brewster, and likely Anna Strong, too. Arnold is power-hungry and will not stop with Culper, he will want more, them all. What if Woodhull were caught and confessed the names of those aiding and abetting him? Arnold is not the kind of man to show mercy, not even to a woman and most certainly not Anna Strong should he capture her.”

“Can you not talk of Mrs Strong? I am trying to think.”

The bitterness in his voice was unmistakeable and he did not even make an effort to look his sister in the eye when he talked to her but instead fixated his on the embers in the fireplace of his room, as if this would prevent Eliza from seeing the tears gathering in them.

“Forgive me, I think I must go”, Edmund rose quickly from the side of the bed and left the room, knowing Eliza knew he went on his way far too early.

She let him do as he wished, hoping he would come back safe and sound.

Spontaneously, Edmund decided to take a drink at Rivington’s to calm his nerves. He went up to the bar, where Robert Townsend was busy polishing wine glasses.

Looking up from his work, Robert signalled the new customer that he was ready to serve him.

“What can I offer you, major?”

“A glass of wine, please, red.”

The man had a slightly discomposed air. Robert wondered what could bother the Major. Perhaps it was even of interest. And if he remembered correctly, he had even met him before.

“Excuse me, but have we not met before? If I remember correctly, you departed for Scotland a few months ago.”

“Yes”, his guest replied, “and now I have returned.”

“May I ask what brings you back? You seemed rather final about your decision never to return when we last met.”

If he was honest, he had pitied the man a little when he had last dwelt in York City. Always alone at a table with an air of sadness surrounding him. In these days, Robert had merely suspected that not all officers could be as full of themselves as most of the redcoat commanders were and that the man was merely a little melancholic– he had had more pressing business, be it as bartender or as Culper Junior than a man who always paid his bills on time and never talked much. And then, he had disappeared to Scotland—and recently returned.

“General Arnold has summoned me. A matter regarding my previous post on Long Island.”
“Long Island?”, Robert repeated innocently, “I have family there. Where on Long Island? Perhaps I know the place.”

“Oh, I do not suspect you will have heard of it. Setauket.”

“No, indeed I have not”, Robert answered.

For the remainder of his glass, the Major drank silently, before he paid and left with a stiff nod in Robert’s direction. Robert reciprocated the gesture and made the mental note to report to camp as soon as possible.

Thanks to his extremely quick eye and ready mind, he also made note of the two men following the Major as he walked to wherever he was headed.

**General Arnold’s office.**

Thirty minutes into what was supposed to be an interrogation in all but name, the door to Arnold’s office opened again. So far, Edmund had managed to keep the conversation, if one could call it that, in a very general direction, talking about his military career before he came to America and assuring Arnold of the long-standing loyalty of the Hewlett family to the British crown, mentioning his uncle’s brave stand at Culloden Moor with the British as one of their finest hours.

This was not about his true convictions, this was about saving his own head. If Arnold found out he knew the true identity of Culper, an information he had passed to John André months earlier but that somehow vanished and followed the man to the grave, he would at the very least be court-martialed and what they would find him guilty of he was hesitant even to think about.

There was no way he could prove he had passed his knowledge on to André, they would simply accuse him of lying and convict him anyway, probably for conspiring with the enemy.

To save Culper meant to save himself.

*And Anna,* a voice in the back of his head added.

With a creak, the door opened and heavy boots entered. Seated with his back to the door, Edmund could see the man first when it was already too late: Simcoe walked around the desk to take his place on the vacant chair next to Arnold.

“Good morning, General, Major”, he chimed, his voice even higher than usual (something Edmund had observed in the past to be an indicator for either agitation or anticipation of something in Simcoe) and leant back causally in his chair.

“I thought I would skip the tedious preliminaries and come in time for the action”, he commented his (doubtlessly calculated) tardiness.

Arnold tried to maintain an indifferent facial expression although it was clear to Edmund that he too was not entirely comfortable in Simcoe’s presence.

Suddenly, most likely to prove himself in front of Simcoe and thus validate his position as general, Arnold turned all business-like and delved straight into the area of the already uncomfortable topic that worried Edmund the most.

“I need to know the name of the woman you wooed for information.”
Wooed for information? What was that supposed to mean? Who had informed Arnold? It sounded almost as if someone had deliberately misinterpreted everything, or had Setauket hearsay born this monstrosity of a tale? He had never, never wooed Anna for information- all his intentions had always been pure. He hadn’t even known of her involvement in Abraham’s schemes until she had revealed herself to him after- after-

His brave Anna- Anna who had saved his life, even if she never loved him. He owed that much to her.

Edmund looked up to Arnold, who even when seated was considerably taller than him, and remained silent.

“Her name, man!” Arnold’s voice increased dangerously in volume, “her name! I don’t have all day for this. Oh please, no”, he spat, a man disillusioned by the magic of love, “don’t tell me you have developed feelings for her.”

He rolled his eyes, burying his head in his hands for a moment. “I need a name. Now. If she has indeed escaped to Canada or if she still roams free here- her name and a description of her person, if you please.”

What should he do? If he didn’t give a name to Arnold, the man would interpret this as conspiring with the enemy, a serious charge that had the potential to end in his death by execution. If he would give up her name-

No. that was out of the question.

He had changed, the world had changed, his convictions were no longer those the Oyster Major, commander of Setauket, had once entertained, but one principle remained: *every subject’s duty is the king’s but every subject’s soul is his.*

While stuck in his uniform, he was obliged to uphold the first part, but whatever his duties, his soul nobody could read nor own.

He was no Doctor Faustus, ready to sell his soul, or give it up in the face of peril embodied by the man who had tried to kill him and his new superior, the turncoat, his soul and his integrity were the only thing these men could not take from him.

While law, order and authority, the three pillars of his life so far from the first time his Latin tutor had instructed him to translate the Hewlett family motto, were crumbling beneath the weight of doubts nurtured by the experiences of his first stay in America, his integrity was unchanged. Nobody could take that from him.

Silence.

Arnold’s eyes, overflowing with impatience, were fixed on Edmund’s. Trying to avert his stare, Edmund let his eyes wander, only to make the mistake to catch Simcoe’s attention, who, to his astonishment, did not look half as satisfied as he would have imagined him to look like at the sight of his self-chosen nemesis in peril of being convicted for conspiring with the enemy.

“The name, Major. Now.”
“No, no, I am sorry, I can’t—” Edmund felt his pulse race and despair take over his every fibre.

And then, to his horror, Simcoe opened his mouth to speak.

Chapter End Notes

Eliza’s musings about war: I was inspired by the well-known anti-war song "Green Fields of France" by Eric Bogle. Although the song talks about World War One and I am hesitant to liken the reasons to enlist young men in the late 1700s may have had to those of 1914, I felt it fits nicely in its message. If you know the song, you might have found one or two direct allusions to it.

The "Harp and Shamrock" is a traditional Irish hornpipe that sounded like a good name for a pub or inn with an Irish proprietor.

Malvina: The name of a character from James Macpherson's "The Works of Ossian" (1765). The authenticity of his work, which he claimed to be a collection of ancient Scottish poetry, was highly debated and today it is assumed that, while he may have used genuine Scottish and Irish sources, most of the work his the fruit of his imagination.

Wilhelm (anglicised "William") Herschel was indeed aided by his sister Caroline, who would later make astronomic discoveries in her own right. One of the things she helped her brother with was working on the lenses and mirrors for the telescopes he built. It would thus be quite likely that she has also worked on Edmund's Herschel-built reflecting telescope.

As always, additional dialogue kindly provided by the show.

When I came up with the title, I had the weird suspicion I had heard it somewhere before. Google then told me "A Good Man Goes to War" is the title of a "Doctor Who" episode with the 11th Doctor. Just so you know.

I hope you enjoyed this latest chapter and thank you so much for reading!
Cold Blood

Chapter Summary

Simcoe's scheme takes shape, Mary does a brave thing, Abe comes to York City and Edmund and Eliza's quiet evening at the theatre turns into a nightmare.

Chapter Notes

First of all, I'd like to thank you all- I know I've done this a few times now but recently, the, your, praise for this little story has overwhelmed me. I don't do Tumblr myself, but the fic recs and the lovely moodboard for Eliza have not escaped my attention. And of course, I am always overjoyed to find your lovely comments in my inbox.

-thank you so, so much.

So, things have gotten a little more complicated than I anticipated plot-wise, hence the late update. I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Deep in the soul there throbs the secret pain

Of one homesick for dear familiar things,

When Spring winds rock the waves of sunlit rain

And on the grass there falls the shadow of wings.

How should one bend one’s dreams to the dark clay

Where carven beauty mixed with madness dwells?

And men who fear to die fear not to slay,

And Life has built herself ten thousand hells.

No wave that breaks in music on the shore

Can purify the tiger’s bloodstained den,

The worms that crawl about the dark world’s core

Cry out aloud against the deeds of men.

[...]
General Arnold’s office.

“You must forgive the poor Major, General.”

A pair of almost inhumanly colourless eyes, unblinking, shot darts of ice across the table. Obviously, Simcoe communicated him to keep his mouth shut.

Simcoe had a distinct liking for the grand stage, perfidiously planned violence both of the physical and the emotional kind was an art form to him that could be most likened to stage acting, and John Graves Simcoe, the thespian of woe, required the entire stage, leaving no room for any unimportant minor characters such as the pathetic little major.

“Major Hewlett has always had a soft heart for those under his care, and who could blame him at the sight of a beauteous creature in need? Although he ought of course not have done so, what an utterly imprudent-“

“Thank you, Colonel”, Arnold interrupted Simcoe, clearly not interested in prolonging the hearing for longer than necessary. He wanted to go back to Rivington’s and drown this entire day in another glass of Madeira or perhaps something stronger and Simcoe’s zest for the dramatic did not exactly add to his patience.

“Since your memory of your service in Setauket seems to be more intact than the Major’s, I am sure you can make an effort and try to remember the name.”

Simcoe’s face did not reveal any emotion as his unsettlingly pale eyes met Arnold’s. Edmund’s blood rushed through his veins at dangerous speed. It felt as if his heart would combust from pounding any second.

This was the moment Simcoe must have waited for for so long. He could punish Anna for rebuking his unwanted advances and him for the court-martial and, as his ragingly jealous and possessive mind probably misconstrued and perhaps weighed even heavier than the punishment he received for the murder and havoc he had caused in Setauket, stealing the woman of his dreams away from under his nose.

“I am sorry, General, I cannot. As I may have told you on a previous occasion, I did not pay much attention to town politics the few times I was not occupied on vital missions with my Rangers elsewhere. Though I think I do recall the lady in question has in the past been seen with a local man called Abraham Woodhull, an outspoken supporter of the rebel cause with known liberal tendencies whose involvement in the death of a captain in His Majesty’s army some years ago has until this day not been fully investigated. They seemed to be quite fond of each other. Perhaps he can assist in finding her, should she still roam these parts.”

Abraham? Edmund knew Simcoe was up to something. He could not quite yet fathom what it was, but there was more to it than protecting Anna from prosecution by providing momentary distraction by offering Arnold someone in her stead.

It was no secret Simcoe had courted Anna and had continued to do so against her wishes for a long time. Was he still so much in love with her that he did not even consider revenge?
Simcoe might have spared Anna, but he was by no means dispensing mercy. He was a man who lived after the principle of an eye for an eye; everything was a trade to him, a trade of life and death. Anna’s debt to him would be paid by Abraham, whom the Queen’s Ranger despised as much as his former superior.

Something was afoot, a new game, a new ploy, a new trap set by Simcoe. This time, for Abraham Woodhull. Edmund did not harbour much love for the cabbage-farmer with a side line in patriot intelligence, but never even to his worst enemy (he noted the irony of this phrase as soon as the thought crossed his mind, given that said individual was presently with him and could not even by means of modern science reduplicate himself, which was reassuring) would he wish an encounter with Simcoe.

“Well”, Arnold interrupted Edmund’s train of thought, “then we shall have to question Mr Woodhull. Sadly, I do not have any men to spare to send to Long Island for this task-“

Simcoe’s eyes lit up. “I could offer you the assistance of my men for this mission. Brant, Cavil and Ingram should be suitable. I will dispatch them post-haste- that is, if you wish me to do it, General.”

“Thank you, Colonel. Send your men to Setauket. I want this Woodhull checked as thoroughly as possible, he seems to be an insurrectionist in his own right. We must investigate dangerous individuals and eradicate the root of the evil that has befallen these colonies, am I right, Simcoe?”

“Quite right, Sir.” Simcoe’s voice had risen another octave. “I will give them their orders right away.”

Edmund couldn’t help but remember the ginger tabby cat owned by their neighbour Jeanie McKinnon when he was a boy. Miss Grace had been a vicious thing- spoilt by her owner and never trained to respect anything other than her own whims, people had armed themselves with whatever was at hand, a broom, chamber pot or ladle when the cat had decided to invite herself to their houses, which she did frequently, biting and scratching anybody who dared to question her spontaneous takeover of the household. So many had been scratched or bitten by her that nobody questioned the circumstances when Miss Grace was found dead one day, accidentally overrun by the mighty wheels of a hay wagon. This particular specimen was the reason Edmund had never sought the company of Miss Grace’s fellow felines (horses were so much kinder and rewarding to interact with than these hissy creatures with their sharp claws and teeth). One thing he particularly remembered about the reigning pest of Duncleade was her face- whoever said animals did not have emotions and corresponding facial expressions was terribly mistaken. Whenever she had been particularly pleased with herself, be it for striking a particularly impressive blow against the face of a young Edmund Hewlett or for having caught a rather large mouse, her eyes, though green, not pale blue but no less unnerving, had had the same wild, untameable gleam as Simcoe’s now.

The Queen’s Ranger rose, aware of his striking height, and looked down on Edmund.

“I promise you, General, there will be no more threat emanating from this backwater village in the future.”

He raised the corners of his mouth until his lips distorted into his unnatural, threatening smile and left. As he did so, he, oh-so-inadvertently, brushed past Edmund.

What must have looked to General Arnold like an accident was in reality a silent threat. No, not a threat, a warning: Simcoe might presently hunt after Abraham Woodhull, but he was not through with him yet, either.

Having confirmation of his long-held suspicion that Simcoe was vengeful enough to still want to
settle scores for the wrongs of yesteryears made Edmund shiver despite the warmth of the office. A storm was looming on the horizon, ready to cover the stars in grey clouds, wind and rain.

“And you, Hewlett, keep yourself available for further questioning. I believe we might further our conversation once the investigation in Setauket has been carried out.”

“Of course, General.”

“Dismissed.”

Of all the things he had hoped would not happen, his worst nightmare had come true in its most fearsome facets: Simcoe’s sudden interest in the matter, Arnold’s interest in Anna-

And his own to stay alive and protect the woman who had once done the same for him, even if she would never know.

Fate seemed to favour him at present. He had twisted the General’s plans to serve his own interests. Arnold’s selfishness had proven useful to him- he, the turncoat general in need to prove himself to be accepted by his fellow officers, needed to present results of his work more than anybody else.

With his new reputation of spy-hunter general, it would be useful for him to actually catch a real spy for once instead of spending his time drilling his third-rate runt of the litter soldiers- a collection of the last America had to offer in terms of men able to serve in the military, the workshy and lazy, mainly, who had only donned the uniform for the eight pence per day and the prospect of never having to see real combat- and for good reason.

No commander in the right mind would want this conglomerate of the least finest men this land had grown who had until a fortnight or so ago not even once in their lives held let alone shot a musket on a battlefield, even less so when under the command of the infamous Benedict Arnold. The rebels, themselves well-trained by their Prussian ally, Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, would laugh at this sorry ragtag and bobtail fighting unit.

It was not only insulting to the British Army, it was an insult to the enemy as well- there was no warrior’s respect for one another in letting this weakling musket fodder loose into open battle.

Gladly, he wielded enough power (over Arnold) to keep the Rangers despite their subordination to the Legion relatively independent from the General and his usually unwise and rash decisions.

The only reason why he had not objected to being assigned to serve under Arnold’s command had been to one day find use for the man who was so full of himself that manipulating him was so ridiculously easy a child of three could do it. Today, the moment had come.

If everything went according to plan, Woodhull and Hewlett would not live another week or two, depending how fast news travelled to Sodom-on-the-Sea and back.

It had all begun with the sudden pang in his heart when Anna Strong became the focus of Arnold’s interest: it had been his fault in the first place that Arnold had come to develop an interest in her, now he must safeguard her from the same man he had unleashed.

A gentleman would never sell a lady to her enemy. Manners aside, he had loved her far too long to be able to set Arnold to her heels. He was honourless, greedy and deceitful- no company for a
woman like Anna, and his sorry pile of unpolished peasants-turned-soldiers even less so.

Over the past few months, he had tried to rid himself of her, knowing he would never see her again, now that she had run away to the enemy for all that he knew. “Out of sight, out of mind”, they said—he could not vouch for this principle, for the memory of Anna Strong still conjured itself up in his mind during lonely nights or at random when he saw a woman bearing a slight resemblance to her on the street.

He couldn’t get rid of her presence on his mind, at least not in full. He had tried the company of other women, only to find that the short time spent in a tent in Holy Ground could not wash the memory of Anna away entirely. On the same note, he had contemplated throwing all the poetry he had written in her name away, sacrifice it to the hungry flames of his fireplace, but yet again he had shied away from doing so at the last moment. The last poem he had written in her memory, a rather long and not entirely polished piece, had only come into being a few weeks ago— it was a farewell, of sorts.

’T was at the closing of the day the blessed angel came

    Her dark hair soft as eider down and comely was her frame.

    Her footsteps light, Her eyes they shone like diamonds so bright-

    Yet now She’s gone my heart is sore; the world has lost its light.

    Down in the tavern of the town She served them food and drink,

    However when I joined Her there of no such things could think.

    No rum or ale could slake the thirst that burned my tortured heart;

    The only remedy was She who did from me depart.

    I tried to conquer worlds for Her, laid my bare soul at Her feet,

    -She point-blankly refused my gift and left my heart to bleed.

        But when the lady did require a warrior to free

    Her own true love from imprisonment she to my arms did flee.

        Tried to play me for a wanton fool and offered me herself

    For my red travail her soft embrace, oh my wrongful little elf!

    I could not touch the dark-eyed nymph for She lacked love for me

        And demanded one chaste kiss instead-my brief eternity.
Only once more I held Her close, when her true love was deemed dead-

I brought the tearful news to Her and held Her distraught head,

Told Her She was not alone, in Her arms a second became a day,

But Her half-dead prince returned from death and again stole Her away.

She left that unkind town and fled; I trust She’s happy now-

She has forgot me; yet I not Her; for when sleep conquers my brow,

In rose-thorny dreams She laughs at me and gently takes my hand-

My cruel queen, my lovely queen, who dwells in enemy-held land.

My days are grey, my nights are pale since She has gone from me,

My life devoid of meaning since Her lips set my soul free

No other I will ever love like the woman who did me wrong

For on this earth will never dwell another like Anna Strong.

Admittedly, he had used a lot of poetic license writing it- and he was not solely talking about the representation of actual events. Actual events had, by the way, turned considerably in his favour on another frontline of life as well.

The rather overblown defeatism that stood out so markedly especially in the last stanza had somewhat subsided since the Lady Lola had rather fortuitously entered his life. At first, he had regarded her as nothing more than the prostitute she was, paid to oblige his wishes, but somehow, he had come to see something more in her in one or the other way.

Perhaps it was her willingness (though she admittedly received money in return) to engage in the sins of the flesh Anna had denied him, perhaps her ignorance of his reputation- or her lack of fear of it. Nevertheless, she did never flinch nor falter in his presence as so many people, both military and civilian, did and he liked the thitherto unknown nonchalance of it all that stood in great contrast to the chaste purgatorial unrequited love Anna Strong had inspired in him.

Maybe he should stop thinking about Anna altogether, given that his much less formal and rather loose arrangement with Lola provided him with much more satisfaction both of the carnal and the emotional kind, but old habits die hard- even in a disciplined elite warrior.

And so he found himself shielding Anna Strong from harm when he directed General Arnold’s attention toward Abraham Woodhull today.

However romantic it sounded, his willingness to lie (to a certain extent) to protect the former tavern maid from Arnold was not an act of sheer selflessness based on the eternal flame of love, the doubtlessly universal yearning in which all humankind was united, regardless of rebel or redcoat, friend or foe, provided him with a prime opportunity to serve himself to two heads on the figurative
He could rid himself of both Hewlett and Abraham Woodhull.

It was so simple, a child’s play—sending his men in the disguise of members of the American Legion (the Woodhulls would be clever enough to know who wished them ill if they saw the uniform of the Rangers in Setauket again) to investigate Whitehall (with instructions not to handle Woodhull or his property with velvet gloves) in search for potentially incriminating material linking Woodhull conclusively to the Rebels, they would, purely by chance, of course, mention Hewlett’s return to America in front of the midget.

Even Woodhull would be bright enough to put two and two together— even if he was slow and would probably need both hands to count to four, but eventually, he would draw the obvious connection and likely come to York City to “deal” with the Oyster Major— whatever that meant in the realms of the chicken-breasted and short, thinking Hewlett was bearing a grudge against him— after all, Hewlett’s wedding at Whitehall had been called off when the Magistrate had revealed Anna Strong’s divorce papers were false— he wondered what role Woodhull the Younger had played in this game— he had once been with the same woman who was to wed the garrison commander once, too— any man of a certain self-respect would object the union. Having kept his healthy ear out for the talk of the town was now paying off.

With both Hewlett and Woodhull in York City, playing one against the other would be easy. Woodhull, though perhaps angry enough to proclaim wanting to kill Hewlett to his wife and father before his immediate departure (even better— the more witnesses, the shorter the trial, the quicker the execution), would likely reconsider— he was no warrior, not even when engaged in a fight for his own survival.

The Queen’s Rangers would oversee Brooklyn Ferry (a few threats here, and some bribes there and most men in the King’s service were willing to talk) and report to him of Woodhull’s coming. As soon as Woodhull entered the city, the trap was to be set. They would kill Hewlett and leave his body somewhere public. The death of an officer would surely be investigated.

He would find a way to point out the coincidence of Woodhull’s arrival in York City and Hewlett’s tragic murder and matters would be investigated and the difficult relationship between Hewlett and the Woodhull family come to light. From then on, it was only a question of time for Woodhull to be condemned for murder.

He would have the last laugh— triumph over both Woodhulls, as it were. This time, the Magistrate would not be able to save his son. This time, he would see Woodhull swing by the neck.

A pity he would not be able to perform the acts himself, but certain sacrifices had to be made in order to achieve one’s goal. Sacrifices he was gladly willing to make to see his old enemies traverse the Styx in due time. At least he could pride himself with having thrown the stone that would kill the two birds.

Whitehall, Setauket four days later.

The knock at the door had come unexpected in the early hours of the morning three days ago. Mary, as the mother of a young child never fully off-duty or off-guard, was the first to wake to the forceful rapping that made her wonder why the door had not broken under the incessant onslaught of fists.
With an uneasy feeling in her gut, she had opened the door to find three soldiers standing outside.

At first, she thought she was still dreaming, drowsy that she was; the men informed her that they had come to search Whitehall for material linking Abe to the rebels. This could not be true.

Fear almost left her trembling, but Mary braved herself, biting on her lower lip and remained composed, even if she wanted to yell for help underneath her calm and matter-of-factly façade. Obediently, she had gone to wake Abe at the demand of the men and also alerted Richard.

Half dressed, her husband and father-in-law had tried to reason with the intruders but to no avail. Together, the soldiers had burrowed through their possessions like moles with no regard for privacy. She had tried to stop them, talk to them, sometimes, a woman’s influence, a little friendliness and gentle words could work wonders—nothing. They continued to smash porcelain and throw books about with no regard to the actual ownership of these items. They weren’t searching for anything, they were carrying out orders of destruction.

“This is illegal!”, Richard had exclaimed helplessly, threatening legal action against them if they didn’t stop momentarily; not that the soldiers would have been impressed by that. They kept ransacking the house, tearing drawers open and emptying their contents on the floor, rifling through cupboards and paper work, rummaging through Richard’s desk. It was terrifying to see the sanctuary of one’s home thus destroyed. Mary wondered if she would ever be able to sleep soundly again at Whitehall after this morning.

Eventually, the sound of the chaos had woken Thomas who came downstairs, his eyes wide with shock to see what was happening.

A quiet, thoughtful child, he did not cry— with his little mouth open and his blue eyes wide with shock, he had taken her hand and whispered “Why, Mummy?”.

In this moment, an idea crossed her mind: Wakefield. Get Wakefield. He could bring some of his men who, though low in number, would still outnumber these three brutes, who would hopefully be sensible enough not to let the affair descend into bloodshed and leave.

But how was this to be achieved? No one could leave the house without them noticing. For a moment, she contemplated sending Aberdeen, yet her absence would likely be noted, too. The only one insignificant and small enough was Thomas.

Much as the idea of Thomas running around unsupervised in the early morning made her uneasy, it was the only possibility and besides, what—or whoever was outside on the streets of Setauket at this hour could not be more dangerous than three soldiers dismembering the furniture.

Busy stripping the windows of their hangings, they did not notice Mary bending down to her son and passing hushed instructions to him.

“Get Wakefield, Thomas. You know, Grandfather’s friend with the red jacket, Uncle Wakefield. At the garrison. It is very important, do you think you can do that?”

“Uh-uhm”, the little boy nodded inertly, not knowing what to make of the entire situation but trusting his mother in her judgement.

Quickly, Mary, half-hiding her son under the shawl she had draped herself in, brought Thomas to the door and let him out into the cold morning air, barely dressed appropriately enough in his nightshirt and woollen jacket. At least he had been so clever as to put his shoes on before coming downstairs.
Mary did not know if she should be concerned or relieved when Thomas was gone. It had to work and Thomas would be all right, she kept telling herself as she was forced to helplessly watch how the destruction of Whitehall proceeded in the dining room.

“Where’s Thomas?” Abe whispered into her ear, concerned for the welfare of his son as she joined him and Richard to oversee the carnage done in and to the dining room.

“He’s asleep”, she lied, knowing she could presently not trust her husband with the vital information of Thomas’ true whereabouts.

“Have you found anything yet?” one of the soldiers asked the others in an almost conversational tone as if they were at the dinner table discussing the taste of French meringues.

“No. But I am sure General Arnold said Major Hewlett, recently back from Scotland, had told him Woodhull is a rebel and we need to investigate him.”

Hewlett. His name resounded in the room like the tolling of a churchyard bell. Hewlett, the slightly awkward, bookish man who had never looked fully comfortable (nor convincing) in his role as military commander had sold them to Arnold? Why was he back at all? The couple exchanged glances, their eyes full of astonishment and fear. No more hiding. No more lying. It would all be over soon now that Arnold was at their heels and the consequences would be fatal.

In the same moment, the front door was opened and Wakefield, a visibly exhausted Thomas on his arm, entered, eight men, each with their Brown Bess at the ready behind him. They looked as if they had dressed quickly, too quickly to pass a uniform inspection, but what did that matter. They were here and they could help Mary save this house from torching or what other form of destruction General Arnold had in mind.

“What is going on here?”

“We have orders from General Arnold to search the house for any proof of collaboration with the rebels by certain members of the household”, one of the soldiers said, dangling a negligently crumpled piece of paper in front of Captain Wakefield’s nose.

“I see. I do not think however, that your orders encompass unnecessary violence and the destruction of property- crimes you are very likely to answer to should charges be brought against you. If you would leave now, gentlemen?” The hands of Wakefield’s men tightened simultaneously around their weapons.

For a moment, it looked as if Arnold’s men were contemplating if talking back to Wakefield and disobeying him would be worth it, yet in the face of eight regulars and four civilians it seemed unwise to do so. They needed to return to York City alive to report to Colonel Simcoe and had fulfilled their task anyway.

Shaking, Mary had broken down on the sofa once everyone had left the house, Abe beside her. She had sent Wakefield away, thanking him for his help. He had understood and left the family in the remainders of their once so stately dining room, saying that if they needed help he would gladly aid them in any way he could, since the perpetrators had been members of the British Army- he could see what he could do to have these men court-martialled for their misbehaviour.

They would not accept Wakefield's offer, of course. Wakefield must never know Hewlett had returned and wanted to see the Woodhull family punished. He would ask too many questions and the risk of having to tell him of Culper and Abe’s secret activities was too great; the perpetually correct and dutiful Wakefield would turn Abe in, without question.
They couldn’t risk that.

In order to keep his cover intact, Abe had decided to travel to York City to find Hewlett and “deal with him”- whatever he meant by it. When she had asked if Washington or at least his fellow associates knew, he had shaken his head.

“No. I’m going to do this alone. I can deal with Hewlett, Hewlett is not Simcoe. I’m going to see this done before Ben or Washington need to intervene.”

His idea was to tell the guards at the checkpoints that he was a volunteer for the American Legion in order to be let into the city and then make inquiries after the whereabouts of Hewlett, find him and- kill him, she supposed.

Mary had begged Abe not to go, not alone, not like this, not without telling the other members of the Ring who might be able to help him- but as always, Abe Woodhull was more stubborn than a donkey.

No, Hewlett was his responsibility from the beginning and he would see to him. It was his fault Hewlett got involved in the first place. The entire situation was his fault and he would resolve it on his own terms.

With that, he had saddled a horse and ridden off under the protest of his father, wife and young son- all three who were worried for his safety.

“You are a fool Abraham! Let us talk to Captain Wakefield perhaps he can-“

“No father. This is about more than Whitehall. This is about more than us. This is about more than me getting arrested, possibly. I’ve chosen my side, and I am going to fight for it. And right now, my friends and the thing we all work for are in danger because of a man I have let loose on all of us. Accept my decision.”

“You still are a fool, Abraham.” Richard had looked defeated when Abraham rode off, almost as if he slowly tried to acquaint himself to the thought never to see his son alive again.

Richard may sit and watch, Mary had told herself as her eyes followed the horseman disappear in the distance, but she wouldn’t.

Benjamin Tallmadge should know. He could send Caleb Brewster or some other of his men to help Abe. Richard was right, Abe was a massive fool from time to time and one of his major flaws was always wanting to do things on his own, no matter how ill-advised dealing with certain scenarios on one’s own might be. As she would not leave Thomas alone with Richard at Whitehall, which seemed no longer safe enough, she could not join and help him in York City. But Tallmadge could.

She decided to write a letter to him, explaining everything, in the process of which she scolded herself for having burned the old code book years ago before having studied it properly. If the message was intercepted, everything would be in plain sight. Nevertheless, something had to be done and since nobody else was able to offer a better idea, she decided to take the risk of an unencrypted letter.

Tonight, this letter would travel across enemy lines with the London Trade, the black market Caleb Brewster used as cover for his intelligence operations. She had first come into contact with the demi-monde of the licensed and not-so-licensed privateers patrolling the sound at night when Anna Strong had pointed them out as business-partners for the charity she had been thinking of founding. How much time had passed since then, how times had changed. If they could smuggle goods from one
side to the other, they could also get a letter to Brewster, who could in turn give the letter to Tallmadge. This was the best hope she had apart from praying for Abe and his safe return.

**York City, the same day.**

Passing the checkpoint had been easier than expected—apparently, recruits for Arnold’s new legion were more than welcome. But instead to the barracks, Abe had taken directly to Rivington’s. If anybody knew where to locate a British officer, it was Robert Townsend, Culper Junior, and partner in Rivington’s coffee house, frequented by virtually all redcoats of rank.

He couldn’t just walk in and talk to Townsend. They wouldn’t let him in anyway (commissioned officers only) and the risk of both Culpers in the same room under the noses of fifty redcoats was too great.

What he could do however was stand some distance away from the building and hope Robert would look in his direction whenever the door opened and catch his meaning.

One hour into awkwardly standing and watching the door open and close for redcoats to enter or leave, he was in luck. The barman recognised him, not without shock as he noted, and gestured towards where Abe knew the back entrance was located with his head.

“What is the matter? What are you doing here?”

“Do you know the name Hewlett, Major Hewlett?”

“I believe I do. Recently returned from England. Why?” His calm stood in almost ridiculous contrast to Abraham’s agitation.

“Because he knows I’m Culper. He found out, we struck a pact to kill Simcoe back in Setauket and then he quit his post after my father blocked his marriage to Anna Strong. Now he has returned and he’s given my name to Arnold, who’s sent people to search Whitehall for proof that I’m a rebel. If I can find him and get him to revoke his statements—”

“How have I never heard of this person?” Now it was Robert’s time to lose his composedness.

It was all too much for him, too much to wrap his head around—how had nobody ever told him of Hewlett before?

“Does he know about me, too, should I run?”

“No, I’m going to deal with him before he deals with us. Do you know where—”

“He lives?” Robert completed Abraham’s sentence, a strangely reluctant undertone in his voice.

“Wait here.”

After three excruciatingly long minutes, Townsend returned with a slip of paper in his hand which upon closer inspection revealed itself to be an old receipt.

“I know where he lives. Pays his bill on time.”
The Arnolds’ house, York City, two days later.

“Sit.” Margaret Arnold’s orders were not to be disobeyed. She called for Abigail, her servant, who poured them a cup of tea into cups of the finest china Eliza had ever seen. This time, she had dressed considerably more nicely, although she would never match Mrs Arnold’s striking beauty, even if she wore a gown borrowed from the Queen of France.

“You know who I am, now tell me who you are.” After all the talk Eliza had heard about her husband, the General, she was more concerned about the interrogation techniques of his wife.

Friday afternoon had come around unexpectedly quick- but then, with Edmund’s disastrous hearing and the threat from Simcoe there had been a lot to think and talk about.

Despite these worrisome developments however, Eliza had tried to distract Edmund by taking him to plays in the evening or going for a walk- in plain clothes, of course, to minimise the chance of him being recognised by any ill-wishers. He definitively needed some cheering up.

This afternoon however, she had left the house alone to follow Mrs Arnold’s invitation, partially out of curiosity, partly because Mrs Arnold too, was a spy of sorts- after all, she had spied Eliza lurking in her flowerbeds below the windows before the soldiers had done.

“My name is Elizabeth Greenwood, as you already know”, she began, “and I am indeed quite well-versed in the world of literature. But that’s not what I was here for that night.”

“Then what did you come for?”, Mrs Arnold asked, her eyes fixed, unblinking, on Eliza’s.

“To keep an eye on Colonel Simcoe.”

“Simcoe?”, Mrs Arnold whispered disbelievingly. “What business do you have with him? Whose side are you on?”

“I don’t have any business with him, but my brother has. And I am on my own side entirely.”

“Tell me more.”

“He is an old enemy of my brother’s who has tried to kill him before.”

“And why would he do that?”

“Their… disagreement involved a woman, a plot by Simcoe to have my brother assassinated and several other matters as well, as far as I am informed. He was summoned back to America by your husband, the General, to give information on rebel activities in Setauket, where he was stationed before.”

Mrs Arnold turned to face Abigail, her servant. “Is that not where you worked prior to joining the household of Major André?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Abigail looked afraid.

“I’d rather not talk about Setauket, Miss Peggy.”
“As you wish, Abigail. You are dismissed.”

When Abigail had gone, Mrs Arnold continued: “If you could please elaborate, Mrs Greenwood. Your story sounds very interesting.”

Peggy listened, wearing her usual sympathetic smile which she knew prompted people to talk to her openly. Sometimes, being the most beautiful woman in America, or so they said, was helpful. It did not work as easily on Mrs Greenwood as on other people, but slowly and steadily even the cautious woman in front of her was drawn in by the charms of Mrs Arnold.

Her account sounded like something straight from the pages of a novel- the evil Captain and the good Major fighting for the love of the same woman who kept not one, but two horrible secrets- yet deep inside her, Peggy felt how the story of Major Hewlett and Mrs Strong struck a chord; it was familiar to her in a very painful way. Had not she herself lost the British Major she loved and ended up on the arm of a rebel officer?

Very well, he had jumped ship, but in essence, it was the same, she and Anna Strong had a lot in common even though their respective backgrounds could not be more different.

They had both fought for what they believed was right, in their own way perhaps and for vastly different reasons, but they had chosen a side- that was more convictions than some generals had- and fallen in love with the wrong man.

Wrong in the sense that their love had been doomed by the fortunes of war that did not allow their love to find a happy conclusion; and she could understand Mrs Greenwood for wanting to help her brother, be by his side in these dark hours the man found himself in.

It must be so comforting for him to know he was not alone- sometimes, she felt alone and would wish for her old friends from Philadelphia or even her sisters to be by her side, if only to spend an afternoon with her talking, taking a walk- it wouldn’t matter, their company would suffice to make her a little bit happier and help her forget the solitude of her married life, if only for a day.

In conclusion, she had gone from pretending to actually feeling sympathetic for Mrs Greenwood and Anna Strong, of course.

As far as Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe was concerned, she would no longer willingly extend invitations to her home to him, whatever Benedict would say. If he could permit himself to disinvite Freddy (was he really so blinded by his raging jealousy that he did not notice Freddy would never be any threat to him?) as he had done once, she could just as well object to having Simcoe in the house.

After hearing of his wrongdoings, he was no person she wanted to be around the house and her unborn child- and the same went for Cicero and Abigail. They knew him for much longer than she did- God knows what they had had to endure in Setauket.

“You know, Mrs Arnold, it is hard for me to tell you all this- after all, it is your husband at whose mercy my brother finds himself.”

Mrs Greenwood nervously traced the flower ornaments on the porcelain with one finger.
Peggy leant closer, touching the nervous hand almost conspiratorially.

““The same could be said of me.”

“Then why don’t you-“

“I bear his child. And I must think of my station and the reputation of my family. You however have all options still open to you.”

“This is not about me-“

“It is. You are the key to the fate of your brother and his former intended. And if I can assist, I would be willing to help you within the boundaries of my means.”

“Why would you do that?”

“So at least not all of us have suffered. It is always the women who pay the real price for all this- this war, the fighting, the complots.”

“How selfless of you- are you certain you would not do it to best your husband, at least in one respect? And who says I am going to do anything?”

Even though Mrs Arnold had been friendly to her so far, Eliza was still watchful. One could never know.

“You are right. My resentment for Benedict Arnold is part of why I wished to see you again. His instant dislike told me there was something more to you. To answer your second question- if you do not want to shield your brother from harm and possibly bring the woman you told me about back into his life, why then are you here, in America?”

Mrs Arnold was right, Eliza had to admit.

“I guess I will, at one point- but how do I know I can trust you?”

“How do I know I can trust you?”, Mrs Arnold echoed.

“I just laid my cards open to you”, Eliza answered defensively.

“And how do I know you did not lie before offering you my help? You see, trust goes both ways. I have granted you a generous advancement.”

Peggy Arnold was good, Eliza admitted without envy. Talking with her was like a game of chess, just without the pieces- strategic and enticing.

“Nothing comes without a price, not even an advancement on something as materially unmeasurable as trust.”

“Then let my price be that you would do the same for me if I should ask it of you.”

Eliza nodded.

“Good.”

Peggy Arnold rose and returned with two small glasses of sherry she had poured from the carafe
across the room. Normally, Eliza assumed, the General offered the same sherry from the same carafe to seal arrangements with his brother officers.

“To our friendship.”

“To our friendship.”

They drank in silence.

“Please call me Peggy.”

“Then may I ask you to call me Eliza? I am glad to have made your acquaintance, Peggy.”

An inn, York City, the same day.

News of Woodhull’s arrival in town had reached Simcoe quickly; his men knew who to intimidate, pay or blackmail for relevant information.

“We will proceed as planned tonight. Plain clothes, ready yourselves and the cart now. Wait until after darkness.”

“Yes, Colonel.”

“Good. If you can, bring him to me alive. If not, dump his body on a street corner directly and leave it there. Somebody will find him, eventually.”

Hewlett had not another day to live. With Woodhull in the city, he could finally finish his business. The Oyster Major would be found stabbed on a random street in the early hours of the morning and Abraham Woodhull would be framed for his murder and hanged.

He had bested them both, Simcoe thought smugly, and this time, for good.

The Harp and Shamrock, York City, the same day.

There was not much time for Eliza to think about her afternoon with Peggy, as she was now allowed to call Mrs Arnold, because she had sworn to drag Edmund out to yet another play tonight, something cheery or bawdy to get his mind off the investigation. He had been disappointed enough she had left the house alone (without telling him she was to meet the wife of the man on whom quite a lot of his future depended), so spending the evening with him was the least she could do.

She wondered if having relayed so much information to Peggy had been the right decision- she had observed only a few nights ago how charming and equally dangerous Mrs Arnold could be.

But she was running late to meet Edmund in front of the Harp and Shamrock and had no time to worry- she was better advised watching her step in a busy town like this to prevent any accidents from tripping over someone’s feet or stepping into horse manure to happen.

“You are somewhat late, Eliza”, Edmund pointed out, his eyebrows raised, when she arrived a little
short of breath from hurrying through the packed streets.

“Terribly sorry. I was at a book shop and had forgotten about the time. They had a copy of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but then I wasn’t sure if you might not own it already- in which case of course, you would selflessly lend it to your sister, I trust?”

She had become very skilled in lying to Edmund of late. If it was a good thing or not, she didn’t dare to ponder on and instead diverted her attention to the play they were supposed to watch, the Drury Lane hit *The Camp*, starring the renowned Philomena Cheer (whose real surname, Hallam, sounded much less intriguing than her stage name) as Nancy.

The play itself was quite enjoyable, shallow satire intersperse with a few musical numbers, but even Edmund seemed to have found some joy in it (that could never rival his more scholarly interests of course as he was adamant to explain to Eliza on their way back to their lodgings), and as they walked home, he chatted a little livelier about his most recent exchange of letters with William Herschel and the possibility of ordering an even better, bigger telescope once they returned to Scotland, which he hoped would be soon.

So far, Arnold had not called upon him again. If it was a good sign or not, he didn’t know, but he hoped the General would do so soon and dismiss him so he could return home and devote the rest of his days to the pursuit of the sciences.

Back at the Harp and Shamrock, the lights were already burning low; except for three habitués playing cards at a faraway table, no other guests filled the taproom.

Mrs O’Driscoll stood behind the bar, reading a pamphlet, only occasionally looking up to check on her guests.

“Ah, Mrs Greenwood, Major Hewlett, good evening! Returned from the theatre I presume?”

“Yes, we watched *The Camp*. It was quite enjoyable, I must say.”

While the two women grew increasingly engrossed in their conversation, Edmund decided it was time for him to go to bed and excused himself to Eliza and Mrs O’Driscoll.

After some thirty minutes and a glass of wine offered to her with the best wishes of her landlady, Eliza too excused herself from her amiable conversation partner and was ready to retire to bed herself when she heard thudding and cries from Edmund’s room from halfway up the staircase.

“Turn him!”

That was Edmund’s voice. Panicking, Eliza flew up the remaining stairs, taking two or three steps at a time. Tearing the door of Edmund’s room open, a gruesome sight awaited her: Edmund, his cuff stained with blood and Uncle James’ dagger in his hand, sat with his back against the wall beneath the window while another man cowered in a similar pose next to him.

And on the floor lay the body of a man in his own blood.

“Edmund! Edmund, what is happening? Who- what-“

It was not Eliza’s first body. She had seen father, James Stretton, Jeremiah Greenwood and a number of other people near and dear to her dead or had even accompanied them in the hour of their death, but all their deaths had been accidental or natural- none was a murder with her brother holding the blood-dripping murder weapon.
“He’s proof of Simcoe’s plot to murder me.” Edmund’s voice trembled agitatedly, gesturing towards the dead man on the floor.

“And who is this?”

“Abraham Woodhull. We know each other from Setauket.”

“And what do you do here, Mr Woodhull?”

“Who are you?”, the other man replied distrustfully.

“Eliza is my sister”, Edmund panted with what little breath was left in his lungs.

Abe narrowed his eyes. There definitively was a distinct similarity in the shape of their faces, the colour of their hair and even in their manner of speech. What had he gotten himself into?

If he was honest, he hadn’t been keen on murdering Hewlett if it could be avoided. Killing was not his natural inclination and sometimes he still thought about Ensign Baker. If he could avoid it, no man would die from his hand.

With Hewlett still holding a very impressive, very dangerous weapon and the lady looming over them as a witness, the only prudent thing he could do was tell the truth.

“I have come for your brother.”

“To murder him?” Her lips thinned dangerously. The other Hewlett, although she was the one he had not just witnessed stabbing a man to death, seemed even more dangerous than her brother.

“No-, yes-, I mean- Your brother here, Major Hewlett, has-“ he broke off.

“I don’t keep secrets from my sister”, Edmund said to Abraham. “She knows everything.”

Sighing, he continued, asking himself once again what he had done to deserve having had to see Whitehall ransacked; his family frightened and how in the name of the Almighty he had somehow ended in the same room with a dead body and two Hewletts who both knew everything about him.

Abraham Woodhull- in her moment of initial panic, she had not realised the name was familiar to her, Samuel Culper, the spy and former lover of Anna Strong Edmund had told her of.

“You are Samuel Culper?”

“I am. Your brother is not that secretive I take it, having given my alias up to not only his sister but to General Arnold as well.”

Edmund’s mouth twitched at the bitterness in Woodhull’s voice, showing his uneasiness. “Arnold? No- that was Simcoe.”
“Simcoe?” Abraham repeated.

“Simcoe. He attended my interview with Arnold, who is keen on uncovering information about rebel spies, and is under the impression that I have gathered such information in Setauket. Not from or about you”, he added, turning once more towards Abraham Woodhull, “but apparently Mrs Strong is of interest to him. Your name only came into play when Simcoe mentioned it.”

“What’s Anna got to do with all this?”

“If only I knew I would tell you.”

“So you want to tell me you never turned me in and it is all Simcoe’s fault?”

Abraham couldn’t quite believe it was supposed to be all that simple.

“I turned you in, Abraham. Before I left, I turned you in to André. And when I returned to England, I found that he had met his doom. Benedict Arnold had been awarded a regiment and there was nary a mention of a spy named Woodhull.”

Abraham gulped visibly.

“So why didn’t you warn me? You were there, you know where I live.”

“What could I have done? My message would not have arrived in time to warn you and even if it had and Simcoe’s henchmen had found it in your possession we both-“

“Mr Woodhull, Edmund- this is of no importance right now, I believe there is another man still outside”, Eliza interrupted the discussion of right and wrong, spy and no spy between Abraham Woodhull and her brother.

The room was still dark, Edmund had not had a chance to light a candle before he was ambushed, but in the faint glimmer of light on the street coming from other people’s lighted windows and some lanterns, the outline of a horse-drawn cart was visible underneath the window.

“Help me.”

Edmund rose, gesturing for Woodhull and Eliza to help him move the body towards the window. With their combined might, they managed to shove the assailant’s body out of the window, from where it fell right into the cart with a crushing thud.

“Curtesy of Major Edmund Hewlett”, Edmund growled, standing alone in the window frame, wanting to be seen by his almost-murderer’s accomplice. The driver set off without even looking at his load.

“What was that?”

“Simcoe will understand.”
For now, Eliza was content with that answer. There were more pressing issues to be discussed. For one moment, none of them spoke a word, deeply inhaling the cold night air that suddenly flooded the room through the open window.

“If Simcoe is behind all this he wanted us to-“

“To prove each other’s end. My hypothesis is Simcoe saw an opportunity to be done with us at the same time- having lured you to York City, he would have killed me and blamed my violent passing on you”, Edmund finished Woodhull’s sentence.

“That’s why the soldiers coming to Whitehall mentioned your name so openly.”

“They were no ordinary soldiers, Abraham, they were Queen’s Rangers.”

“Rangers? How do you know? They wore the uniform of the Legion.”

“Simcoe offered Arnold three of his men to send to Whitehall. He must have outfitted them with other uniforms knowing you would instantly see through his ploy if three Queen’s Rangers appeared on your doorstep.”

He didn’t like Hewlett much as a person, but the man was right. Now, it all made sense. It did not yet explain the connection between Simcoe and Anna apart from their shared history in Setauket, but slowly, a picture started to develop. Simcoe wanted him and Hewlett dead. He was a clever man, he had to give Simcoe that.

Hewlett still sat where he had collapsed on the floor, one hand at his temples, the other still firmly clenching the bloodstained monstrosity of a knife. The other Hewlett had sat down next to him and draped her arms around her brother’s shoulders, trying to comfort him.

“All I ever wanted was-“ he paused, looking for words, “not this. No, nothing remotely like this.”

“You always wanted to be an astronomer, I know that”, she replied softly.

“Yes. A small estate, with enough room for a library and my telescopes and my-“

“You know Anna’s already had that life”, Woodhull interjected all of a sudden.

Edmund was visibly taken aback by the younger man’s assumption which was mirrored in his voice that grew tender and vulnerable as he answered.


His voice trailed off, the pain too much to bear.

Eliza’s heart felt as if it had been impaled by the bloody dagger in Edmund’s hands. To see Edmund like this, having had to stab a man in self-defence and being reminded of the woman he had loved and so tragically lost to war and adverse circumstances within mere minutes had taken a toll on him. For a moment, he looked like the pale shadow once more that had descended from the carriage in Duncleade a few months ago.
“Mr Woodhull, please. Let’s don’t talk about that. What are we going to do? I mean, we three obviously cannot stay here now that we know Simcoe knows our whereabouts and we desperately need to deal with the blood before our proprietors think somebody has been murdered here.”

“It would be best if no murder ever took place in here, if you know what I am saying.”

Woodhull was right. Gladly, the pool of blood had not been spilled over the carpet and was not yet dry, either. There was still a good chance to clean it up fairly decently.

“Wait. I will be back soon.”

From her room, she fetched her least best petticoat and the soap and basin from her washstand.

When she returned, Edmund got up, wanting to take the basin from her hands.

“No, leave that to me, Edmund. I know how to clean up a mess.”

“My wife says the same, Major, and she’s usually right”, Woodhull tried to reassure Edmund with a strange undertone that revealed there was more to Mrs Woodhull’s bon mot than he was ready to reveal. Although it would have interested her greatly in what context these words had been previously uttered in the Woodhull household, Eliza decided that concentrating on her current mission was more important. If the blood was given the chance to dry, it would be even harder and messier to get rid of.

Never in her entire life would Eliza forget soaking the blood up with her petticoat, how her fingers smelt of iron for the coming days, how the blood dyed her hands a bright crimson hue and left tell-tale brownish lines below her fingernails. She forced herself not to think of it as blood, blood that still was faintly warm and had not long ago circulated through the veins of a living and breathing person who was no more. It was red liquid, nothing more and nothing less. Red liquid.

Nobody spoke a word until she was done.

“And now?”

Woodhull was the first to talk again. Eliza cleaned her fingers in the basin, trying to rid herself of as much of the stranger’s blood as was possible before emptying the pinkish water into the street. Some bloodstains had found their way onto her dress while cleaning; from the way things looked like, any person entering the room in this very minute would have held her for the culprit, had not Edmund still clutched the Culloden dagger. She hadn’t even known Edmund had packed it, but she was glad he had. Without it, he might have been the one lying in a pool of his own blood.

The stain was almost invisible thanks to Eliza’s quick removal.

“They will have heard the commotion downstairs, no doubt”, Edmund begun. “The O’Driscolls don’t know about you being here, Abraham, and Eliza was still downstairs when I was ambushed, so I suggest I had an accident in the dark, tripping over a chair and hurting myself. That explains the cries and the sound of furniture falling.”

“Wait. I think I have an idea.”

From Edmund’s trunk, Eliza took one of her brother’s neck cloths and wrapped it around his head like a bandage.

“There, now it’s perfect. As for leaving- Mr Woodhull, you must take the window, I’m afraid. Given that you have accessed my brother’s quarters in the same manner, I am quite confident you’ll find your
way down again. While you leave, I’m going to pack the bare necessities for me and my brother and throw them down to you wrapped up in a bedsheet. Then you wait for us, we will come through the front door.”

“Where are we going?”

“Trust me, I know where. There is nowhere safer in York City for us at the moment.”

Some clean clothes and the few items of her jewellery she had taken with her across the ocean were packed in no time. Woodhull caught the rather large parcel with ease and signalled Eliza that he was ready to depart whenever they were.

On a quick afterthought, Eliza also threw Woodhull the bloodied petticoat. If it was found, nobody would believe she had only mopped up the blood from a little everyday accident with a chair in the night with it.

Eliza took Edmund by the arm and motioned him to lean on her as if he was weak from his supposed accident.

“Act a little stunned and let me do the talking. Agreed?”

“Keep your words to a bare minimum, Eliza. Every word too much and we might be sent to Bridewell before dawn.”

“I won’t give us away.”

She squeezed his hand affectionately. We’ve been through worse together Edmund, courage.”

Washington’s Camp, the same day.

Life had slowed down a bit since Mrs Greenwood’s last letter, if one could call it that- for Anna was still busy juggling her life as an ordinary camp follower supervising the trading post and her secret occupation as an unofficial advisor to Washington’s Chief of Intelligence and member of the Culper Ring.

Even if news from Culper Sr. had grown scarce since Hewlett and Simcoe had left, there was still enough work to be done.

The new man in charge of Setauket, Captain Wakefield, was more interested in keeping what remained of the British military presence in the town together and orderly, which did not provide them with much more information other than the fact that the military might of the British forces on Long Island was slowly waning.

No threats, no murders, no hunt for Robert Rogers or any other presumed rebel disturbed the little town in need of some peace after the tumultuous times of power struggle between the Rangers and the Regulars, Hewlett’s departure and Simcoe’s reign of terror.

*Edmund*, her mind corrected her. *He told you to call him Edmund.* An absent-minded smile crept onto her lips when she thought of that night beneath the starry heavens and died just as quickly at the realisation how much time has passed since then and what these times had brought.

At least her friends were happy, she tried to console herself. Of the little she had heard from Abe of
late, he and Mary were growing closer and even Richard seemed to have found some respect and
distanced interest in his son’s life. Caleb, who visited Setauket every now and then when dealing
with the London Trade, had told her and Ben the good news. The Woodhulls were growing back
into a family again. After all that had happened to them, Anna wished them happiness with all her
heart - the same heart that stung at the thought of the little family, Mary, Abe, Thomas and perhaps
even Richard, grandfatherly and more lenient with the little boy than he had ever been with Abe.

It was nothing short of a gift, a small miracle, to have that, to be allowed to have that. Not all were
that lucky.

It just wasn’t meant to be. With the indistinct echo of a painfully familiar voice telling her to forego
his proper title and instead call him by his Christian name in her head, Anna tried to concentrate on
her work and re-arranged a few dangerously stacked pots and pans threatening to fall over and
scatter in all directions before any such mishap could happen.

When she arrived at the second to last pan, the sound of hoof beat prompted her to look up from her
work. A sturdy brown mare with a somewhat ragged looking rider in a brown coat almost passed her
by before she could call after him, prompting the rider to stop abruptly. The horse, its mouth
foaming, seemed thankful for the sudden rest and hung its head, panting.

“Caleb! Good to see you. Where are you coming from?”

“Woody’s in trouble, Annie”, Caleb whispered, bending down to Anna.

The joyous smile she had sported at the sight of her friend was instantly wiped away from her
features.

“What?”

“Woody’s in trouble”, he repeated.

“What has happened, Caleb, tell me!”

“Not here. We meet at the barn in half an hour. I’ll bring Ben, he’s going to want to hear that, too.”

Clicking with his tongue, Caleb spurred his horse to hurry again, likely to find Ben as quickly as
possible.

Never had she closed the trading post in more haste and sent grumbling customers in search for some
food in exchange for a thrice-mended pair of stockings or what little coin they had left away.

-But never before had a friend been in such grave danger, either. Without knowing the exact
circumstances of what happened, knowing Abe Anna’s guesses revolved around a possible capture.
Setauket was still governed by the British, what if Wakefield or any other attentive soldier had taken
note of Abe’s frequent absences to his root cellar and had had a look around? Underneath the
scorched ruin of what once was the Woodhull farm was where all the important things were hidden,
things that would raise questions in Whitehall to say the very least. Had they captured him on a
mission she had not been aware of? Ben sometimes did that, not telling her everything.

She arrived at the barn weak-kneed and out of breath. Ben and Caleb were already there. As soon as
the barn door closed behind her with a low thud, the circumstances of Abe’s predicament sputtered
from Caleb’s mouth like a waterfall after a long winter’s snowmelt.

Whitehall had been searched by soldiers sent by the turncoat Arnold. Well, searched was, according
to Caleb, a mild way of putting it. The house was apparently still standing, but its interior had been
almost completely destroyed by Arnold’s men.

“What did they want?”, Anna asked breathlessly, knowing that there was more to Whitehall’s destruction than mindless violence unleashed for the sheer sport of it.

“What they wanted”, Caleb said gloomily, “is to tie a noose around Abe’s neck. Apparently, they had orders to look for incriminating papers or objects linking Abe to a network of spies.”

“You haven’t heard the worst part yet”, Ben interjected, addressing Anna. Evidently, he had urged Caleb to tell him more already on their joint way to the barn. Not yet having heard about “the worst part” made Anna’s insides curl into one tight knot.

“Your, your-“ breaking off, Ben searched for the right word, evidently fighting back the urge to use a derogatory phrase to denote the person he was yet to name, “your former fiancé has returned to America and given the information to Arnold. Hewlett sold Abe to the British, Anna. And now, we can’t find Abe- it was Mary who wrote us this letter, sent it to Caleb through the London Trade, saying that Abe’s gone to York City to deal with Hewlett, begging us to intervene.”

Intervene- whatever this could possibly entail- no. Edmund? No, no. Not Edmund. Faster than her brain could think, Anna heard herself speak: “Edmund wouldn’t do such a thing, I am sure of it.”

“I am sorry, Anna.” Ben’s clumsy pat on her shoulder did nothing to ease the feeling of having received a blow to the chest with a blunt weapon, emptying her lungs from air.

Perhaps due to surprise and instinct trumping her prudence, Anna continued: “I am sure of it. He hasn’t come alone. His sister is with him and he’s been summoned here against his wishes by Arnold-“

“How do you know that?” With two bold steps, Ben had her against the wall. His eyes, usually so warm and friendly, had in one instant transformed to the exact opposite, widened menacingly with wild ire.

“He is a kind and decent man. Whatever has been done in the past, he would never-“

“No, I mean how do you know.”

Her slip up had already provided Ben with too much information on its own. The time was up and, if she was honest to herself, she had seen this coming. One day or another, perhaps with the third, fourth letter, somebody would have taken notice and reported to Ben. At least the damage had been done by herself and not some innocent third party.

“She’s written to me. His sister”, Anna replied truthfully, sensing her silence regarding Edmund had to come to an end here.

Ben’s head, now the unhealthy colour of a prune, was only inches from hers. “When?”

“She has written to me twice. I begged her to stop after the first one, but then the second one arrived a few weeks ago. I am sorry, Ben. I was as unprepared for this as you are now. I didn’t know what to do-“

“How did not one, nay, two letters written by a British officer’s sister get into camp undetected? I will need the letters, now.”

“I don’t have them anymore and I don’t know how she did it”, Anna replied despondently. “I burnt them, knowing that if they would be found with me, I would-“ the words did not come easy. “I
would have been considered a traitor, perhaps.”

Anna’s eyes filled with tears. She could not help it, it was all too much to bear for her. At this point, not only was her own life under threat, the figurative sword of treason looming over her head, but Abe’s and Edmund’s as well. And Caleb’s. If Ben found out Caleb had been the secret currier for Mrs Greenwood and Abe too (though Abe’s involvement was of an entirely different nature and built on the not-so-solid foundation of secrets and lies), they would all suffer the consequences. Admittedly, the thought that Ben, who had had to suffer the loss of his own brother, his close friend Nathan and even Selah, another childhood friend, would execute either of them on charges of treason was unlikely to say the very least, but some sort of punishment would be administered. And all this was by no means Caleb’s fault. His only flaw was having cared for a friend. Nobody should have to pay for helping one’s friends.

Ben’s voice cut the brief silence that had spread throughout the barn a second time. “All right, I have no care for this Hewlett, just so you know, Anna. What I know and what I care about is Abe, Culper Senior. I’ll go back to my tent, try to find some peace and quiet to think and devise a plan to get Abe out of York City. We can’t have him wandering around and going rogue. We’ll find some way to get into the city, get Abe and go. As for that officer, we’ll see what we’re going to do with him.”

“See?”

“Yes, see. If he has given Abe up to the British or-“

“You plan to kill him?” Her voice had risen inadvertently.

“Ben”, Caleb tried to intervene, hoping to reconcile his friends somehow and knowing perhaps better than anyone how Anna was feeling, but it did not help either party to draw breath and think things through.

“If needs be I will do everything to protect my country, and Abe”, Ben hissed through gritted teeth, thus averting saying what he knew was best not said in front of Anna. “And it’s time you decide which side you stand on. You know I could have you court-martialled for this. And I might.”

That was the final straw. Ben’s ignorance of her feelings, of which he was well enough informed, and his downright inept threat to court-martial her were too much. Anna was ready to make sacrifices for the cause so that others would in the future not have to do the same, but the indifference with which Ben had repeatedly dismissed her feelings within less than ten minutes was taking a toll on her and she was no longer willing to nod obediently and suffer silently. Ben had known she was heartbroken after the wedding when he had asked her to complete a mission to York City through obtaining a pass from Edmund, rubbing additional salt in both their open wounds, Edmund’s and hers.

She could not blame him for personally not caring about the welfare of a British officer- God knew she would like to be rid of them, too, but not everyone under a red (or a blue, for that matter) coat was the same. The very man Ben was contemplating to kill, if necessary, had taught her that.

“Maybe I have made my decision already.”

With that, Anna walked out of the barn, leaving a shocked Ben and petrified Caleb behind.

Chapter End Notes
The incident at Whitehall: Historically, Simcoe did have his men search the Woodhull family home once, but Abraham, the target of his search was not at home and the only one present was his father. If I remember correctly, I read somewhere that Abraham was more than livid when he returned home and found his father had been subjected to rough treatment at Simcoe's hands, prompting him to voice his desire to murder Simcoe.

"The Camp": A light-hearted play about the organisation of home defences in Britain during the American War of Independence, written in 1778 by Richard Brinsley Sheridan in collaboration with John Burgoyne and David Garrick.

Philomena's surname: In season 1, episode 2, Philomena is credited as "Philomena Hallam" on a poster advertising the Guy Fawkes play John André and Robert Rogers attend.

Next up: The plot to murder Edmund and Abe begets even more gunpowder, treason and plot...
To Love and to Be Loved

Chapter Summary

Love, in whatever shape or form, can make people do extraordinary things. Some brave, some not-so-brave, some good or right, some downright wrong.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the abscence- this fic isn't dead, sometimes, things just get in the way or writing a specific chapter proves especially difficult. Even more so when one is served with a final episode like the one we got in between times. Perhaps that's why this chapter's POVs are almost exclusively reserved for two strong (pardon the pun) ladies doing their thing.

So, among some hopefully unexpected developments, I promise you'll learn some German (even a very regionally specific no-no word!) and you'll be tortured with some more allusions to Shakespeare. Don't worry, I'll include translations for the German in the end notes!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

(Robert Frost, Fire and Ice, 1920)

The sound of three pairs of feet on cobblestones ripped the tense nightly silence of York City apart.

It was hard for Eliza to keep up with her brother and Abraham Woodhull with her dress getting in the way and her stays restricting her breathing, but she forced herself to go on, lead them to where she hoped they would find refuge.

“Where are we going?”
“Edmund, trust me. You must, for once. Please”, she pressed through her teeth with what little air was left in her lungs and allowed herself a deep breath before falling back into as fast a run as she was capable of given her sartorial restrictions.

He wanted to say something, so much she could tell even in the darkness, though she was unable to tell if it was her sisterly instinct or the faint light from only a very few illuminated windows that revealed this vague inkling to her, he however decided against saying anything at all and followed her, probably sensing that discord between brother and sister was not only unnecessary but dangerous given the situation they were in.

The Arnolds’ house lay dark before them on a quiet street. Slowing their steps to avoid noise, they tip-toed past the two soundly sleeping sentries to the door. Praying the two sleeping privates would not be wakened from her knocks, Eliza found the courage to bring her hand to meet the solid wood of the door.

For a good long minute, nothing happened and Eliza was already frantically trying to come up with other possible places to stay for the remainder of the night (which proved unsuccessful; she did not know York City well enough yet), when the door was opened by a sleepy figure in a nightshirt.

Abigail, her hair undone and eyes veiled by sleep, stared back at her, the sleepiness wiped clean off her face when she recognised who had knocked and whom she had brought along.

It was impossible, it couldn’t be. No, not Woodhull, not Major Hewlett and certainly not Miss Peggy’s new friend, the Major’s sister. What could they possibly want at such an ungodly hour? And more importantly, how had they come to meet?

On the one hand, she wanted to know what had happened to them out of sheer curiosity and on the other, she didn’t the fewer things she knew about their doubtlessly hair-raising tale, the better. The blood on the Major’s uniform and his sister’s dress raised the hairs at the base of her neck. Whatever they had done, they were in danger- or dangerous. Obviously, her shock had not gone unnoticed in the light of the candle she carried.

“I know and I am sorry. But please, Abigail, let us in. Peggy promised me whenever I should need help- I need it now.”

Mrs Greenwood’s eyes told the truth, but this was not solely about her, her current predicament, whatever it would turn out to be, her brother or Woodhull. This was about her, too- after all, she was employed by General Arnold whose dislike of her on grounds of her service to Major André and being on good terms with his wife was no secret, and who was only waiting to dismiss her for any misstep he could find her guilty of that would justify releasing her and her son Cicero into the streets, which gave her a say in the matter, too.

“No. No, I can’t.”

“Abigail”, Abraham Woodhull interrupted her imploringly, “We need your help. Please, let us in.”

“I-can’t, please, leave.”

“What is the matter?”, a familiar cool and composed voice enquired from the darkness of the hallway behind Abigail. The sheen of a candle drew closer and the outline of a woman became more and more visible to Edmund, Eliza and Abraham as she approached.

Peggy Arnold looked at the three unexpected guests in well-bridled surprise.
“What are you doing here at my house in the middle of the night?”

Her voice, Eliza noted, was not half as friendly as only this afternoon. Shock and drowsiness had deposed of the saccharine familiarity with which Mrs Arnold usually treated people.

“It is a long story, Peggy, and it involves my brother”, she gestured to Edmund who bowed at being more or less formally introduced to the renowned Mrs Arnold, “almost being murdered by Colonel Simcoe’s men. As for the other gentleman, Mr Woodhull, he is a- a friend without whom my brother would not be alive.”

Peppy looked at her in disbelief.

“You said that if ever needed your help, I could turn to you. I never thought I would make use of your offer- but circumstances force me to. Please help me, Peggy.”

Eliza’s voice trembled.

“Please help me, Peggy.”

Looking at the three sorry figures outside her door that was still blocked by a resolute Abigail, she had compassion for them: Major Hewlett, whose eyes seemed far away from the present, perhaps still caught in the same moment in which his cuff had been dyed red with what was likely the blood of his attacker, Eliza, pleading, tell-tale red stains on her dress as well and Mr Woodhull, uneasily shifting from one foot to the other.

“You can come in. No-” she beckoned Eliza, who had already made it half through the door, “not now. You must wait until midnight. Benedict always visits the- he relieves himself every day at midnight in the back garden. When he is outside, Abigail will let you in. We can discuss the details later. For now, go around the corner of the house in case the sentries wake up and quietly wait for the bell to strike twelve.”

She looked piercingly at Eliza, who nodded.

“Thank you, Peggy.”

“My pleasure. I am a woman of my word- which is more than can be said about my husband.”

Although Eliza doubted Peggy Arnold did truly consider finding three strangers begging for entry at her door in the middle of the night a “pleasure”, there was no doubt about the honesty in her voice when she said she was a woman of her word.

If she didn’t help them for the sake of charity, be it by letting them in or at least telling them where else to go, as any good Christian or generally decent human being should (granted, the circumstances were more than curious), she did it to maintain moral high ground over her traitor husband.

Their friendship, as Peggy had called it, was scarcely a few hours old and testing it thusly had never been Eliza’s intention. She prayed Peggy would not be too disgruntled with her- after all, she was in possession of Edmund’s secret and could do with it as she pleased.

A gamble. The entire war, from the generals’ battle plans down to the dealings of the insignificant
sister of a down-on-luck major was a gamble living off information. The stakes were high and every player ready to win everything by risking loosing even more. It was more than a gamble, a trade even.

Nothing in this merciless climate came without a price and Peggy’s had been, even if she had not directly asked for it, the information on Edmund’s quandary. Edmund’s story had bought her Peggy’s help but Peggy could, now that this piece of information was rightfully hers, trade it on-

This was how the game was played, the bloody, horrid game of keeping the Colonies in line to further British interests on North American soil.

And as always, the fate of thousands of people was decided by former public school boys in crisply starched shirts, forcing everybody else to follow their fashion and learn to play the game- not for pleasure, not for boredom, not for significant financial betterment of either country or one’s own person-

To survive.

Finally, the faint striking of a church bell announced the midnight hour. Two minutes later, the front door creaked, prompting Eliza, who had inadvertently dozed off leaning on her brother’s shoulder to jump up and wake Woodhull, who too had fallen victim to sweet sleep’s temptations.

“Come in, come in!” Abigail ushered them inside, urging them to follow her.

For her, flying up the stairs without even looking at the individual steps was easy; she had lived and worked in this place for years and her feet were accustomed to every tiny crack and dent in the floorboards. The same could not be said nor expected of the three new houseguests, much to her dismay; if the General returned earlier than usual, Miss Peggy’s friends would not be the only ones in trouble.

“Hurry, now!” she called out impatiently and led them to the upmost floor of the house, where a very narrow staircase led to a tiny door.

“Left side is the servant’s quarters, that’s where my boy and I live. Right side, the attic. You’ll stay there for the time being.”

Nodding in agreement, the trio followed her into the small room below the roof that served as an attic. It was not that the Arnolds had so many possessions they could not fit anywhere else in the house; they had, in fact, been forced to give up on most of the furniture they had had in Philadelphia (due to, as far as Abigail could gather from the arguments she was witnessing almost daily, some dubious dealings of the General’s), so what filled the attic had once belonged to the previous owner and had, with his untimely death, moved into the hands of General Arnold when he had been, ironically enough, assigned the house as his new abode after his defection from the Continental Army that stood in direct connection with the death of Major André.

Poor Major André if only she- No.

Some of the things that did not show the strains of age, such as a beautiful settee and matching table that were left to dust and rot upstairs, would have looked perfectly fine in the representative downstairs rooms, but the General had forbidden moving any of the furniture back to their old places around the house (an interdict that was specifically addressed to his wife and through Peggy, to her). It was not that the General did not like Major André’s taste for interior decoration; it was what Peggy
had angrily called a “damnatio memoriae”, an attempt to erase the memory of John André.

Knowing about Peggy’s unfaltering love for Major André and her ardent disdain for her husband, she could understand why the latter didn’t want to live in the previous owner’s old furnishings that surely reminded his wife of her former lover.

They had kept some of the more expensive pieces (while he was very generous spending money to further his own ends, namely on anything at all that promised him success and standing among his fellow officers, the General was a penny-pincher and a scrooge in all other aspects of life and had no interest in outfitting the house completely anew) but the majority of Major André’s former possessions had been banished to the attic, where they would now come to good use. At least the three unexpected houseguests would enjoy some level of comfort in the small, draughty room.

“Thank you, Abigail. Please know that I- we’re eternally grateful.”

Abigail nodded stiffly and forced a smile onto her lips before she closed the door. She had been forced into whatever this situation would develop into in the long run and was clearly not keen on it. And Eliza could understand her; Abigail was a mother and whatever fate would befall her would automatically have an effect on her son and his welfare. Her obvious objection to keeping three people in the attic under the nose of General Arnold was more than understandable. The secret-keeping aside, she would not want to be caught between Peggy and Benedict Arnold, either.

“I suggest we get some rest. We can discuss everything else tomorrow”, Eliza said, yearning for a few hours of dreamless sleep. The run had exhausted her and she was keen to forget about the image of a man lying in a puddle of his own blood and the feeling of still warm blood on her hands.

Before either Edmund or Woodhull could answer, the door opened again. Edmund instinctively reached for his Culloden heirloom, Woodhull bolted to his feet and Eliza’s eyes frantically searched the room for a suitable weapon of any kind.

“It’s just me”, a calm voice said into the darkness. “Tell me, why exactly are you here? Make it quick, my husband might notice I’m gone.”

Eliza briefly summed up everything once again, glossing over a few things here and there (such as the nature of Woodhull’s reason to be in York City and his occupation when he was not farming cabbage on Long Island).

For a moment, the room was quiet when Eliza had ended her tale until Peggy, who had doubtlessly needed the time to process the jumble of events and information that had been presented to her in a condensed fashion, spoke again.

“You stay here. I’ll send Cicero up with some food in the morning. Not a noise, or my husband might find you and then Abigail and I will have to deny we ever saw you come in. That’s all I can do for you, I’m afraid. Good night.”

From below, an angry voice could be heard shouting indistinctively, muffled by the bricks, doors and paperhangings separating the floors.

“I’m coming, darling” Peggy chimed and carefully closed the door in order to make no noise.
When Peggy returned to the bedroom, Benedict sat upright in bed, a candle burning on his nightstand. He did not use its light for reading; the only thing he needed the light for was to see when his wife would come back to bed.

“Where have you been?”, he barked accusatorily.

“My dear, the baby was kicking. I could not rest and decided it would be best to cradle him to sleep, if you will.”

Although it disgusted her greatly, she took her husband’s hand and placed it on her swollen belly.

“See? He’s calm now.” She smiled, not because she took note of the softened, almost gentle expression on her husband’s face that she had never seen again after their courtship, but because of the thought of her son, who would be born soon. It would certainly be a son; the more vigorously a baby kicked, it was said, the greater the chances it was a boy.

Despite having lied about the baby’s assault on her sleep to her husband on this occasion, their little son (or daughter, the possibility still remained) was already a very active child, kicking and moving a lot, day and night. Ironically, the little one had been unusually tranquil until she had been forced to answer the door in the middle of the night to admit three curious people into her home.

Wondering if she had done the right thing, what Benedict would do if he happened to find out by pure mischance and what she would do if she was ever forced to host Colonel Simcoe under her roof again, she fell asleep only to be wakened by the lively movements of her unborn child two hours later.

Even if the baby was Benedict’s and not John’s as she had always imagined, she looked forward to holding the little prince or princess in her arms. Contemplating possible baby names, she was granted some sleep again as the cock crew in the morning and Benedict (whose incessant snoring had not helped) rose to assume his duties or more possibly go to Rivington’s for breakfast and an early morning swig of Madeira.

**Washington’s camp, the day before.**

So far, Ben had omitted everything hinting to Abe’s rogue mission from his report to General Washington, his love and feeling of duty to his friends stronger than that for his superiors. Anna admired him for taking this risk and protecting Abe despite his recklessness, despite the fact that his short-sighted actions might cause heavy repercussions for all members of the Culper Ring, from Robert Townsend in York City to his father, wife and son in Setauket and of course them, Caleb, Ben and herself here in camp.

If Abe would succeed in killing Ed- Hewlett, they would all be in danger and Ben could consider himself lucky if he was discharged dishonourably.

And it was not just Abe she was worried for. Yet again, the two men she had loved were to collide on the basis of their convictions, the side they had chosen to position themselves on.

Abe was trying to do what was right from his perspective, but as always he had failed to take a look at the larger circles the consequences of his actions might draw. He was no bad man, he was a man
caught up in a web of lying and spying with different forces pulling the different wires that held him in place.

Edmund on the other hand- Why did he do this? Was it spite, hate, revenge? Edmund, a gentle soul so much more at home around his horses and the starry heavens than in his uniform and wig-

*He had tried to kill Simcoe once.*

But when had he resorted to collaborating with Caleb? Only when Simcoe had made a much more grievous attempt on his own life, which had led to weeks of imprisonment and torture before he had luckily been able to escape.

He was not like Simcoe who placed his personal grudges and displeasures above the law and the rules of gentlemanly warfare that both sides claimed to value and honour.

Simcoe, if her were in possession of any information linking Abe conclusively to the Culper alias would certainly relay this piece of information to Arnold without thinking twice about it and then come for him in person, but not Edmund. He was a man of honour, of kindness, of decency who had far too often turned the other cheek in order to protect order and reason.

Edmund Hewlett was a man of principles, of justice, not of chaotic passions and vengefulness. She remembered the day he had threatened to shoot Abe in front of her and all the Woodhulls. He wouldn’t have done it. Even if she had not intervened and tried to talk him out of it, he would not have shot. Edmund’s finger had rested too long on the trigger, giving his mind too much time to think about the kill, about the righteousness in killing a man in general, killing a father in front of his child, if he was doing right killing an unarmed adversary-

Edmund Hewlett was a man of reason, not of violence.

And reason, given his involvement with her, the rebels in their botched attempt to kill Simcoe and his dealings with Abe would tell him not to reveal any of this to the military authorities in York City. Even if he should have lost his almost innocent believe in chivalric nobleness, disillusioned and broken as he was at their last meeting at Rivington’s (the memory of his face caused her to feel a sudden pang in her heart), *reason* would have kept him from selling Abe to the British.

Someone had to stop Abe (if it wasn’t too late already) and someone had to save Edmund.

For a moment, she considered writing to Mrs Greenwood, who was with Edmund and could surely keep an eye on him, but could she trust her entirely? Besides, she was new to America and did not know all the parties involved. Someone would have to go to York City in person.

Ben was possibly thinking of sending Caleb first thing the next morning, as letting someone new in on Abe’s “mission” was too dangerous, this, however, would be contested by her.

She wanted to go to York City herself. She knew both men well and, being a woman, had it much easier maintaining her cover on a mission. She could save her friends, the ring, the cause-

And the man she still loved.

Anna was tired of denying it, her heart, despite being rocked by the news of Selah’s death was steadfast in its ongoing love and adoration for Edmund.

Selah’s demise in faraway Philadelphia had shamed her into thinking that as his wife, she should have been at his side. She should have cared for him, or at least should have written a letter. She should have, she should have, she should have.
Shouldn’t he have informed her of his illness in the first place?

She was tired of accusing herself and letting herself be accused by others for the choices she had made, among them loving Edmund.

At the time, marrying Selah had seemed like the right thing to do, but lives change, especially during a war, fortunes rise and fall, people are torn apart or united in unlikely circumstances, who could blame anyone during this tumultuous times on grounds of morals and what would be perceived as right and proper in the ballrooms of the London Season?

Had the war not billeted Edmund in Setauket, they would never have met; and yet they had, and for the better, had they not been forced to part ways.

They had shown each other the importance of love and humanity when around them, muskets were fired and men died of horrific fates; they had learned to recognise goodness and honour in someone who should have been an enemy- without all this, her world would have been a lot darker.

Darker- wasn’t it darker now that they had shared this epiphany and were separated, possibly forever?

The day she had nearly been arrested at the harbour, she thought she had lost him forever. Now, he was back- was it a sign? A small hint of fate to take matters into her own hands and try a second time? Was life handing her a second chance and if so, should she take it, if only to say goodbye to him properly, not like the last time?

Loving Edmund did not mean he still loved her, too and it did not mean she was ready to give up all she had ever known and fought for either, all the people she still cared for a lot, the childhood friends that had been her family for as long as she could remember.

If she could travel to York City, get Abe and persuade Edmund to go home to Scotland and never speak of Culper to anyone, she would at least have had the chance to say goodbye to him and tell him what she should have said the first time he asked her.

Who would have thought three little words could mean so much? Words that all too often rushed over lips greedy with momentary pleasure on a rose-tinted whim, promising more than one could give.

She had said “I love you” to two men so far and what had become of it? Whispered it into Abe’s ear when they had been mere teenagers and meeting in secret, said it to Selah, hiding her resignation to fate from her voice and accepting settling for the “second best” with the hope that saying what she never truly meant might ignite the spark their relationship was lacking.

For the first time, she meant these three little words with all her heart and had not been able to speak them in order to protect and send Edmund to safety.

Now that he was back, what would it matter if she told him? Besides, Mrs Greenwood’s letters, much as rational thought easily dismissed them as either fake, a trap or made up to torture her, had given her more hope than she dared to admit to herself.

What if…

No, she could not permit herself to dream of what would never be, she had to save Abe from doing something very stupid.

And Edmund, who, she was certain, was not to blame and had yet again fallen victim to evil
Ben was surprised when he heard Anna’s voice over his shoulder. Engrossed in his work (drawing up a plan to save Abe Woodhull from the redoats and himself), he had not heard her coming.

“Anna, what can I do for you?”, he asked and put the map of York City he was studying aside.

“It’s about- about Abe”, she managed, obviously unsure how to phrase what was to come next, “I volunteer. I am sure you want to send Caleb to York City, but I know them both, better than you or Caleb and I might be able to talk them out of it. Besides, I don’t think Hewlett” (her tongue, so accustomed to using his Christian name, almost stumbled over the aspirated consonant of his surname, expecting to savour the taste of the much more familiar “Edmund”), “did it. If you trust me with this-“

“Listen, Anna”, Ben replied calmly, “I won’t send you to York City. This is dangerous. Caleb will do it, he’ll disguise himself in a British uniform we have… obtained the other day, march straight into the city, find Abe and do whatever is necessary with regards to Hewlett. You’ll stay here, with me.”

He didn’t want her to go. It was dangerous, but that was not even the main point. Being a spy was more often dangerous than not. It worried him that she had volunteered for a mission that involved her childhood sweetheart and the man she had almost married in Setauket. She had never told him much about the true nature of her relationship with Major Hewlett, but Ben sensed there was more to it than met the eye.

“Please. I could accompany Caleb, I’ve been to York City before, I know the places where all the officers stay-“

“Out of the question. We need you here, at the trading post. You have to look out for spies among the camp followers, if I may remember you of your duties.”

With that, Major Tallmadge considered the conversation to be over and Ben returned to study the map.

The silence between him and one of his oldest friends lasted no more than the entirety of three seconds: “What about Sarah Livingston?”

The sheer mention of her name almost brought tears to his eyes; the story had made its rounds around camp and it was not surprising Anna had heard of it by now, too.

He could see her lifeless form in front of him as clear as day and Randall’s odious visage, torn apart in vain by her desperate fingernails. He was angry his men had wrenched him away from Randall’s crouching figure, in this moment, the reverend’s son he still was had felt the burning desire to kill Randall, crack his skull with his bare hands, make him suffer- he had to hold back a tear and lowered his eyes on the map so Anna wouldn’t see.

“If you could turn time back, you would save her, I know you, Ben. You would, because you are kind and full of compassion. We don’t have that luxury, though I wish we could- so many terrible things could have been prevented. But now, I have the chance to save another innocent life- someone I care for deeply, the same way you cared for Sarah. And Abe, too- he’ll listen to me, I promise. Please. You must understand.”

Silence ensued between them.
“Go. But you will go with Caleb. He’ll bring you, a young, loyalist widow who has lost her husband to a band of rebel militia to stay with your relatives in York City. In his captain’s uniform, you’re likely to be let through without the right papers. I might write you a letter from your ‘relatives’ to add to your credibility.”

“Thank you, Ben”, Anna was bordering on tears as well and hugged him.

“So this is goodbye? You’re going to join the enemy?” Ben did his best to sound indifferent, but failed. “I could arrest you for attempted desertion.”

“I am not deserting, I will return, I promise. Caleb’s going with me. You think I’d leave you two, just like that?”

Anna was hurt Ben apparently had such a low opinion of her.

“If you truly love him? Yes. –Perhaps”, he added quickly to weaken his statement when he saw the disbelief in her eyes.

“No. I promise I will return. All I want is- closure.”

She knew she was not only lying to Ben, but to herself as well. Closure sounded like the right thing, like the most logical and rational thing to do, but logic was not how the heart worked.

She would return- to her country, her duties, her friends, but she would not let the chance to see Edmund slip through her fingers a second time, either.

The Arnolds’ house, the attic, a day later.

“I wouldn’t leave powder on the glass.”

Edmund sounded almost insulted. Of course he wouldn’t, he was too meticulous for that- only Woodhull couldn’t know, of course. Another ploy to kill Simcoe ended in a cul-de-sac before it could ever be put into action.

So far, Eliza had silently observed the conversation between her brother and the supposedly most wanted patriot spy in all of the Thirteen Colonies.

As soon as the sun had risen and wakened them from a few hours of more or less restless sleep on dusty pieces of furniture that were not designed to keep a human body comfortable for the length of a night, the two had almost immediately gone on to discuss how they would sent Simcoe to heaven (or much rather to hell).

She couldn’t blame them. Until the previous night, all she had known of Simcoe were the stories Edmund had told her about him, that were, to her, mere stories, not memories as they were to him. She hadn’t been there, hadn’t seen him shoot an old, frail man in cold blood, hadn’t seen him delight in inflicting pain on others, hadn’t seen him looming over Edmund in his makeshift rebel prison cell with glee in his eyes.
And all she had seen of him had thus far painted another picture of Simcoe, not entirely good, but certainly not of a bad man per se; his interest in “Lady” Lola did not exactly indicate the cruelties he was capable of.

Last night had changed everything. Even though he had not been at the Harp and Shamrock in person, his assassin was all the proof Eliza had needed to be convinced of the danger this man posed to Edmund and through him, to herself to a certain extent, although that was only secondary to her. He had almost killed Edmund several times and committed so many other atrocities that she considered it only fair if he were to take a taste of his own medicine- perhaps (or hopefully) not a taste, but an overdose.

Most of the conversation between the two men followed the same pattern; one of them had an idea (“What about poison?” “I’d shoot him in the back.”) that was subsequently embellished into an elaborate tableau worthy of being converted into a gory street ballad or best-selling broadsheet before it was abandoned again.

“And Simcoe wouldn’t drink first.”

“Perhaps not, but your scenario is- they wouldn’t execute me on the spot.”

“No, no, you’d get the whole firing line after they traced the poison back to you.”

Woodhull pensively pinched the bridge of his nose. Edmund, seated a few feet away on an old chair losing its stuffing onto the dusty floor, gloomily stared into the void. She decided the frustrated silence was the right time to add her opinion to the gory mêlée of half-baked assassination attempts.

“You need to approach this differently. Much as I am sympathetic to your cause and motifs, you won’t kill Simcoe by imagining how dramatically he is going to collapse in the street or suffocate with his neck swelling, his mouth foaming, his whole body trembling and his eyes widened in helplessness and shock. There is another way if I may be of assist-“

“No, Eliza, this is entirely out of the question.”

Edmund shook his head. His voice was still calm, gentle and affectionate, but it was clear to Eliza that her brother’s mind was made up. He sounded almost like Father had done when he had forbidden a young Eliza to take walks alone with James without Edmund or one of James’ sisters as a chaperone.

“You will not endanger yourself on this mission. You have no business with Simcoe, wherefore I intend to keep you out of his firing line. He mustn’t come to consider you as an enemy as well- as soon as he discovers you and I are related, he will use this information against us. It is out of the question. You will stay here with Mrs Arnold and Abigail.”

“No business'? May I remind you who cleaned the room of the assassin’s blood? I can assure you, this memory is not going to leave me any time soon. And maybe I do not want to be kept safe. Maybe I want to make my own decisions. It does you great credit, Edmund, that you want to ensure my safety and fret for me- but I do the same for you, too. Don’t you think I am worried sick when I hear you and Mr Culper here plotting? Let me help.”

“You don’t know Simcoe”, Abraham intervened, annoyed the Major’s sister was using his not-so-secret alias. Another thing that bothered him was that she was probably right.

“So you keep telling me. But what you, gentlemen, fail to see is, that sometimes an outsider’s
perspective might prove rather insightful. And as opposed to some, I have successfully used and maintained an alias and passed as Colonel Cooke’s wife for the entire voyage from England to York City without my cover being blown. I would call that successful.”

Mrs Greenwood was right. Still, she would not interfere with his plan; killing Simcoe was his prime objective, his vengeance. After all, Simcoe had attempted to kill him on several occasions in the past, shot his father, who had only narrowly survived, and most recently almost destructed Whitehall, so it was only fair he should be allowed to return the favour. He needed Hewlett, who had also some good reasons for wanting the man done away with. Combining their forces, they might actually stand a chance against this monster in human disguise.

This was his and Hewlett’s business, not hers and Hewlett was right in that no other lives than theirs should be endangered. The only casualty should and would be Simcoe.

For the moment, she seemed to have run out of either fighting spirit or interest in their discussion and instead picked up a book from a dusty box and retired to her settee to read.

At night, when Woodhull was snoring peacefully leaned against an old traveling chest and Edmund was equally fast asleep in his chair, his head resting on one shoulder, Eliza was still wide awake- and one step ahead of the resting would-be assassins.

Edmund was intelligent, perhaps more so than most people and Woodhull, though a bad spy, was no fool either, but both men failed to identify one crucial aspect of Simcoe that might give them the edge over him.

She had never met Simcoe in person save for their brief encounter in the Holy Ground, but Edmund had told her enough of his former subordinate to piece a basic picture of the man together: Simcoe was a man who enjoyed violence, who lived to inflict it on others, especially people he bore a personal grudge against. He had years and years of experience of fighting in man-to-man combat on various battlefields and would doubtlessly enjoy taking on either of the two men who presently planned his undoing.

Given his physical advantages, being considerably taller and more muscular in build than Edmund and Abraham Woodhull, he would, combined with his close-combat fighting skills and natural inclination to violence, likely kill them in a matter of seconds.

Fighting open, blunt violence with violence or something as vague as poison that could potentially endanger other people ad well, would not work. Even if he seemed invincible, more than six foot tall, relishing in combat, every man had an Achilles’ heel, a weakness.

A weakness Eliza had identified.

It was not that she hadn’t tried to tell them, but they just didn’t want to listen, self-absorbed in their detailed stage-worthy fantasies of how gratifying it would be to watch Simcoe die as they had been. Simcoe was no monster. He was a man.

He had planned to kill Edmund to win Anna Strong, among other things.

The man had obviously also yearned for retribution for having been court-martialled, but Anna was an important point of orientation for finding Simcoe’s weak spot. A man who was prepared to
murder to gain the love of a woman and got himself stabbed in the process, who pursued her against her wishes for years- Simcoe was by no means the romantic hero any woman would want to be courted by, but despite the cruelty he regularly inflicted, he possessed the capability to feel other things than hate and disdain-

Somewhere deep inside him, Simcoe loved, however unconventionally to say the very least it showed- and wanted to be loved in return.

She had seen him taking his leave from Lola. She had seen the look on Lola’s face when he mock-bowed in her direction, obviously a joke the two shared with each other that nobody else could understand, and she had seen his face as well, at a distance, maybe, but close enough to observe how the lines of his face had softened momentarily at the sight of Lola’s smile.

The way Lola had pushed her away at the sight of him, how she indicated to him, despite her trade, that she was his only, her warning not to steal him from her, the kindness she had spoken of-

It all need not mean anything more than his capability to behave decently enough at least when in company of the prostitute he paid to attend to his desires, but something in their gestures had told Eliza there was more to it than a customer seeking out the lady of easy virtue of his choice.

Someone like Simcoe, more feared than anything else and yet in constant pursuit of love, almost puppyishly blind in his endeavour to win or impress the woman his heart was set on, ready to do horrible things to achieve this goal, was likely to absorb any kind of affection, physical or otherwise like a dry sponge.

It probably didn’t even matter to him that he paid Lola to oblige his wishes and make him feel loved, wanted. He was likely blind to reality, blind to anything else but a certain pair of brown eyes. It didn’t matter if Lola reciprocated his feelings or if she was just a gifted actress adept at keeping her customers happy- the important thing was that Simcoe believed she liked him. Since Anna was out of his reach and by now probably out of his mind as well, Lola likely received his full attention.

*Love* was the key to Simcoe’s undoing, *not* hate.

And thus, a plan, different from the elaborate scenarios devised by Edmund and Abraham Woodhull, was born in the small hours of a cool spring morning in the attic of General Arnold’s house.

All it would take was finding out when Simcoe would meet Lola. Perhaps there was regularity to their meetings, perhaps he even liked to fix dates in advance. In either way, this information would permit her to set up a trap.

Luring an unsuspecting Simcoe, ready to get a stab with his bayonet, into Lola’s tent, she would blindfold him from behind, take his weapons away, pretend to be Lola and kill him instantly.

Lola meanwhile would be sent to an inn across the city under the pretence that Simcoe wanted to meet her there for a change- maybe he craved a more upmarket bedstead for whatever he envisioned doing with her.

While Lola would venture across the city, where at the counter of said establishment a sum of money would be waiting for her as compensation for her troubles, Simcoe would be done away with in the relative safety of her tent.

A stab with Uncle James’ Culloden dagger or his own bayonet and it would be over.

A lone cry in the Holy Ground would not alarm anybody, especially not when coming from the tent of a prostitute. She would leave the tent through the back and vanish before Lola’s return. With Lola
at a safe distance and many witnesses to cover her alibi, nobody would be able to tell who had occupied her tent in her absence or murdered Simcoe, although his murder would likely not surprise many.

The army would likely settle on a rogue attempt by one man (for surely, such an odious murder involving the tent of a prostitute as a crime scene could never have been devised by a woman) and call it a day. Recent news from Virginia indicated there were other priorities for the Messrs. Generals than the murder of an almost universally disliked individual.

The most important part about her plan however was that neither Edmund nor Woodhull would be involved in it. Justice would be served and Edmund would be safe. After Simcoe’s latest attempt at murdering her brother that could have cost her her own life as well, she had a reason to demand retribution, too. Simcoe would not survive the week.

So she sat and smiled as they spent the entire next day listening to their rather overcomplicated and elaborate ideas that would never come to fruition.

Last she heard before excusing herself to take a quick walk was about drowning Simcoe in a butt of wine in Rivington’s cellar (which was vetoed by Woodhull) and luring Simcoe to the stables where the Queens Rangers’ horses were kept, letting the animals loose and subsequently frightening them with a gunshot into trampling Simcoe to death (vetoed by Edmund for fearing for the health and safety of the horses).

While they were about to spend their day competing who could dream up the most elaborate and satisfying way they would like to see their nemesis exit this world, she would be out doing some real work.

Thankfully, Abigail, who had brought them some food when Cicero was busy running an errant for the General had, recognising her need to go outside, indicated the whereabouts of the servant’s entrance and a loose latch in the garden fence to her which could be used to leave the house unseen; at her own risk, of course.

Promenading the streets of the Holy Ground, Eliza kept both eyes and ears open for news of the odious Colonel or his lady.

Having taken Lola’s advice to heart, she concentrated on keeping her head down and acting unsuspiciously. In the same faded dress she had worn to spy on Simcoe at the Arnolds’ party, she still looked reasonably well-dressed for the area, but not necessarily entirely out of place- and with many more interesting distractions from a hard day’s work lining the streets, no man (or woman) looked twice or took interest in the dark-haired woman with the somewhat dishevelled hair (Eliza preferred to call it ‘strategically arranged’, a most effective method to hide her face).

Keeping her head down however did have the not insignificant disadvantage of not seeing the road in front of her too well and all of a sudden, she would almost have bumped into two Hessians, had they not stopped abruptly for no apparent reason.

“Der schon wieder!” The stockier of the two men froze mid-walk. Startled, his companion stopped also.

“Was ist denn, Müller?”

“Jakob, siehst du den großen rothaarigen Engländer da drüben? Hat mir gestern gehörig den Abend
verdrossen.”

“Ist das nicht dieser Simcoe? Was hatte der den mit dir zu schaffen?”

Indeed, there he was—Simcoe alive and well, walking down the street. The other man spat the familiar name, the vowels slightly distorted by a tongue unaccustomed to the English language, like an insult.

Eliza’s German was restricted to “Guten Tag” and “Wie geht es Euch?” and “Georg Friedrich Händel”, but that did not matter much. The disdain in the man’s voice was universal. Obviously, Simcoe’s reputation preceded him even among the ranks of the Hessians.


“Gehen wir besser. Wird schon noch andere Mädchen in York City für dich geben, Müller.”

They quickly walked away in the exact opposite direction.

Carefully, Eliza approached Simcoe who in turn approached Lola. The objective was to get as close as possible, ideally into earshot, without being recognised. Lola knew her face, after all.

“Lord Simcoe.”

“Lady Lola.”

Simcoe wore a grin that, although it would not achieve the same effect on any other man, could in his case be read as an almost boyish foolishness.

She gave the hint of a curtsey, smiling enticingly, he the faintest of bows in return.

“Care to see my castle tonight?”

“No, not tonight. Tomorrow. All night if you can keep it free.”

“Well, now”, Lola replied coyly.

“Pretty please?”

He produced a weighty purse from his coat which Lola accepted, instructing Simcoe to come see her at six the following evening.

This was it then. Her ambush was about to be set. Six o’clock tomorrow night would be the hour of Simcoe’s death. Eliza had seen enough. With the quick and determined stride of a woman with her mind made up, she returned to Peggy Arnold’s home in no time, sneaking in through the back entrance reserved to the servants.

Edmund and Woodhull were still engrossed in their plotting (“We could poison his food. Serve him a dish of seemingly harmless mushrooms. The poison of the death cap, and this is the important thing, does not kill instantly—indeed, the victim will experience a period of seeming improvement of their condition before the deceitful fungus strikes its killing blow in four to six days after the initial indigestion. It is said to have been used for the murder of Emperor Claudius. What was good enough for a roman emperor will be good enough for Simcoe. With such a long time between the dish of mushrooms and Simcoe’s death, nobody would suspect—“ “Pity they don’t grow in America.””) and
did not pay her much attention when she quietly sat down and quickly scrawled a few lines for Lola with ink and paper she had found in Major André’s old desk.

*Tomorrow, six o’clock, The Maiden’s Head. Go to the bar and order “whiskey, not sherry.”*

*J. G. S.*

*The Maiden’s Head,* a boarding house frequented by couples in search for an undisturbed hour or two, was an address far enough from the heart of the Holy Ground where Lola’s tent stood, chosen to keep the tent owner away until the deed was done. She had overheard some men talk about it on her walk through Holy Ground and thought it sounded convincing.

All she could do now was waiting for Cicero to return with some dinner, where the exchange of plates and cutlery might allow her a chance to slip the boy the note and a small purse containing the money for Lola.

The wait was long and dull, elongated by the incessant talk of poison, daggers and gunshots or tragic accidents that did not permit her to think clearly. How she longed for her room at home, or the study she had come to occupy after Father’s death. Peace and quiet. If only she had someone to help her further develop her plan.

Eventually, Cicero arrived with cold chicken and potatoes around noon. Eliza waited until both Woodhull and Edmund had relieved Cicero of his load- in the present state of this temporary living arrangement that was restricted in its possibilities to act according to the principles and unspoken rules of a well-run household, given the lack of decent table, cutlery and other paraphernalia of civilisation, her brother and Woodhull had already retreated with their spoils back to their corner, where they continued to talk about the same topic they had wasted the entire day on.

Shooting a glance across the room to ensure her companions weren’t listening, Eliza handed Cicero the note and the silver intended for Lola. His face gave away a mixture of curiosity and startled suspicion as he took it, tucking it inside his coat.

“What do I do with this, Madam?”

“Just get it delivered. You must know other boys, right? Someone you trust. This is very important: The money must be delivered to *The Maiden’s Head* with the instruction to keep it for a woman called Lola who will ask for “whiskey, not sherry”. And the letter must go to said Lola in the Holy Ground. I trust you can find me someone who is both discreet and knows his way around. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, I can.”

“Not a word to anyone, Cicero. Especially not these two,” she whispered, tilting her head in the direction of Edmund and Woodhull.

He nodded and went on his way again.

She had to put trust in Cicero. That the letter and the money would be delivered. This was the very weak point in her own plan, but it was still better than anything Edmund and Mr Culper had come up with so far. It would actually take Simcoe by surprise, which was gravely needed to extinguish someone so battle-ready as the Queen’s Ranger, and most importantly, Edmund and Woodhull would play no part in it.
Apart from the fact that neither of them had the skill with any weapon nor the sheer strength to overpower Simcoe, they would become prime suspects in any of the scenarios they had dreamed up. Both had motifs to want Simcoe dead and neither of them was a particularly good liar. They would be caught, even if they succeeded. Caught and hanged.

Murdering Simcoe in the Holy Ground however, his body laying sprawled on the floor of a prostitute’s tent, would add enough context to any would-be investigators to dismiss his death as a crime of either passion or for the want of his purse (a false trail that could easily be laid). Soldiers would perhaps comb through the narrow alleyways for the following two days and, if she was unlucky, someone would describe a woman not regular to the area, but how far would that lead take them? They couldn’t imprison all dark-haired women with dark blue eyes in their mid-thirties to mid-forties in York City.

The plan was as good as a plan to murder the most dangerous man in the the length and breadth of the Thirteen Colonies could get. It had many flaws but there was a good chance that, with a bit of luck and a sure hand when delivering the mortal blow, she would succeed.

Eliza barely slept that night. She was about to kill a man, how could she sleep? She better sleep, her plan required her to be fresh and sharp in the morning.

In her dreams, images of the murder of Simcoe’s hitman, dead on the floor of Edmund’s room merged with pictures of James’ poor body crushed to death underneath his favourite steed, of Jeremiah in his coffin and more curiously, the ginger tabby cat owned by Jeanie McKinnon when she had been a girl, overrun by a hay wagon in what was officially proclaimed a terrible accident.

These pictures evolved, swirling, into one another, creating a fascinatingly morbid scenery of death and dying or all the experiences Eliza had with it. Tomorrow, her hands would be steeped in blood. Are they not already?, she thought drily, once again remembering how her fingers had been red with another man’s blood not long ago.

Never in her life would she have thought that one day, she would come to murder a person.

God had mercifully granted her full three hours of sleep from which she awoke somewhat refreshed. With every hour the clock approached to six p.m., her restlessness increased and pacing up and down, both Edmund and Woodhull had voiced their dislike of it, considering it an annoying distraction from their work.

In the morning, Cicero had brought them a few slices of buttered bread and with Eliza’s plate came the hushed whispered information that everything had been delivered as she had wished.

Tonight was set, then.

The hours crept past sluggishly and Eliza’s vivid imagination was no help to her in trying to distract herself from the evening’s objective. Her mind was occupied with knives, bayonets, strangulation, what it would feel like to kill a person- these were not exactly things she liked to think about. And yet it had to be done, killing Simcoe.

If she would not do it, Edmund would be in even more terrible danger, for Simcoe would never stop pursuing his ultimate goal of seeing his old enemy dead. America, or indeed the world, was not big enough for both of them. While one lived, the other could not survive, it was as easy as that. Good would conquer evil tonight, for good.
She was doing right, she kept telling herself, four o’clock barely through, and, to distract herself from the rather vivid mental image of a certain copper-haired man perishing at her hand in a pool of his own blood and gore, Eliza asked Edmund to partake in a game of chess on the battered chess board they had found in one of the chests storing the unwanted remainders of John André’s property.

“You are absent-minded today, Eliza. Check mate. If you had kept your bishop there”, he pointed at a square far away from the king, “My queen could not have- ah, no matter. You look as if something is bothering you. May I ask what it is?”

“I’m all right, Edmund”, Eliza replied, forcing herself to smile. “Nothing is wrong. I have simply slept very badly and the air in this room is not what one would call beneficiary to my health. I think I shall go on another walk, I am, I think, only minutes away from suffocation.”

“But won’t the General-”

“I will be using the back entrance. At this time, he will surely be in either his study attempting to catch some rebels with ink and paper or playing at married life in the drawing room with Mrs Arnold. He’s not going to see me.”

She rose, adjusting the cap on the back of her head more out of nervousness than anything else. Thus prepared for battle, she was ready to leave. Five o’clock was through.

“I won’t be long. Take care, Edmund.”

Not looking back at either Edmund or Woodhull, she left the attic, undetected by the General, whose raised voice was easily located in the ground floor area of the house (Peggy had, apparently, dared to disagree with him on the need of purchasing more costly advertisements for the American Legion in the Royal Gazette, while he held her spending money on replacing a broken mirror in the representative rooms of the house against her, saying she was unreasonably costly in her maintenance and that she’d better start obeying him as a wife should her husband) and made her way into the street undetected through the loose latch in the fence of the back garden that Abigail had indicated to her.

Her own heartbeat was all Eliza took notice of as she walked to the Holy Ground, her feet moving mechanically, her head empty. For her own safety, she had slid her own dagger up her sleeve when Edmund and Woodhull hadn’t looked, a gift from Uncle James to her to alleviate himself of feeling guilty for having given the impressive Culloden dagger to Edmund.

It was a dainty little thing, a woman’s weapon, light and small- nothing that would likely proof fatal to a man like Simcoe who had been stabbed and shot with more lethal weapons than this, but at least useful as a means of self-defence should it come to an unforeseen situation of any kind.

Eventually, she arrived at Lola’s tent. And waited. By now, it should be five thirty. Half-hiding in the shadows, she observed how Lola left not her, but a neighbouring tent, thanked its inhabitant for helping her and went on her way. When she was out of view, Eliza quietly slipped into Lola’s tent.

It was spacious with a comparatively large bedstead that, on one end, touched one of the poles holding the canopy in place. There was no question of its use to Miss Lola’s trade, and a fortunate turn of events for Eliza. Tied up, he would be easier to kill.

So far, her plan was to wait for Simcoe, blindfold him from behind with her shawl, pretend to be Lola and stab him with his own bayonet when he lost his caution believing to be engaging in some sort of game with Lola. Getting him tied to the pole would ease the stabbing part considerably, given that he would not be able to move.
Rifling through Lola’s few possessions, Eliza found what she was looking for at the bottom of a basket filled with old, yet relatively clean clothing. Placing the rope on the bed within arm’s reach of the pole, she retreated to her hiding place behind some of the hangings covering the tent’s drapes and waited, blindfold at the ready.

Why were her hands trembling?

She never came to answer her question; in the same moment, the sound of boots approaching announced the advent of the corpse-to-be.

And so it begins, Eliza thought, taking a deep breath.

“Finally, John”, she breathed in her best interpretation of Lola’s voice. Simcoe stepped into the tent, looking left and right, obviously puzzled the woman he had probably eagerly awaited to meet all day was nowhere to be seen.

Eliza quietly walked up behind Simcoe from her hideout and blindfolded him in one swift motion. To her surprise, he seemed not at all opposed to the idea of being robbed of his sight, on the contrary, the way he inhaled sharply pointed in the exactly opposite direction.

“Shh”, she instructed him when he tried to say something to her, “trust me.”

He did, Eliza had to admit, not even look half as revolting as she had imagined from Edmund’s tales now that she saw him up close for the first time. (Human) monsters were not supposed to look almost attractive in an impeccably clean uniform with untameable red curls adorning their head and scars that added a certain air of mystery and battle-hardened bravery.

No. He was a monster, however deceiving his looks, Eliza reminded herself. It was he who had nearly murdered her brother and posed a threat to her and Woodhull as well. Instant disgust washed away any sympathetic feelings towards the man.

It took her all her composure to act according to her plan, play the seductress to a man who had done so many horrible things to someone she was close to, closer than anybody else.

As little talk as possible, she reminded herself, because it was her voice she was most worried about would give her away and as many promising gestures as she could bear.

Everything would be over soon. In a desperate attempt to ease her disgust, she tried to remember romantic encounters with James and Jeremiah, heaven rest their souls. But both of them were long gone and thus any memory of tender nights with either of the two men had faded and was almost powerless against the abhorrence and repulsiveness of Simcoe.

It was not that he was unclean, dirty or louse-ridden, no, on the contrary, he seemed to have prepared himself in anticipation of meeting Lola, judging from his freshly shaven face and the odour of scented soap that encompassed his broad, muscular frame -somebody had left his barracks trying to impress- and yet, he reeked of bloodthirstiness, mercilessness and his lust for revenge. No man, not even the poorest soul begging outside church doors with no roof over their head and no means to wash or change clothes could be half as repulsive as the copper-haired harbinger of the apocalypse she was about to extinguish.

With a deep breath, she set to work, forcing herself to pretend she was not about to kill a man and definitively not pretending to seduce Simcoe.

Try harder and think of somebody else, it’ll make it easier, she attempted to force herself to think of somebody else again.
She unbuckled his baldric and helped him out of his coat, constantly reminding herself to strategically brush his shoulders and arms with her fingertips as she eased the green off his back, to be promising, distract him as to not make him suspicious of her true intentions.

Deceitful as the mind often is in situations requiring utmost clarity and presence of mind, the deliberately conjured memories of James Stretton and Jeremiah Greenwood, heaven rest their souls, faded. Instead, for the blink of an eye, the unruly auburn braid between Simcoe’s shoulder blades transformed into the momentary fata morgana of sleek, neatly pleated hair of a warm blond hue.

Embarrassed, Eliza brushed her mind’s deceitful fabrication aside and focussed on what she was about to do.

His weapons. She had almost forgotten he was armed. Wrapping her arms suggestively around his hips, she first relieved him of his pistol, then of his bayonet, putting them carefully on the ground. As long as he was not yet pinioned, he was dangerous- and even more so when in possession of the tools of his ignoble art, of which he was a true master.

Now unarmed and blindfolded, Eliza felt at a slight advantage and braved herself to go through with the next step of her plan, slipping her hand in Simcoe’s. It was warm, alive and would she not have known it belonged to a murderer, she could not have guessed it.

Willingly, his breath heavy with anticipation of what he thought was to come, the man, so much taller and stronger than her, allowed Eliza to lead him to the pole, the slender trunk of a young pine holding up the tent’s canopy, where she gently pushed him down on the doubtlessly strategically placed bedstead and bound his hands tightly with several knots.

Simcoe had survived for too long. Edmund had sadly missed any organs when he had stabbed him in self-defence and whoever had relieved him of his left ear had, although close, not finished the deed either.

Tonight, his imminent demise would not be spoilt by a piece of rope not tied tightly enough.

Assuring herself for a second time he would not be able to move his hands, the last preparations for his execution were to be made now. It would not be long before John Graves Simcoe would be choking on his own blood as so many of his victims before.

She undid his necktie and opened the first two buttons of his shirt and waistcoat until his neck lay exposed at her mercy.

Slowly and with trembling hands, she walked back to the spot where the pistol and bayonet lay abandoned on the floor. She took the bayonet. A shot would be too loud, too noticeable and would likely alert all sorts of people to the tent, among them a number of off-duty soldiers, likely armed.

In addition to this, Eliza’s gunmanship was restricted to very narrow boundaries; Uncle James had once demonstrated firing a pistol to her as a child with an unloaded weapon in the garden of his house, but that was about it.

The bayonet, a serrated blade, equally disgusting as its owner, would be a lot easier to handle. Kept in prime condition by the man it was supposed to undo, it would be easy and quick to sever the main blood vessels on the side of his neck.

And if he would cry out, nobody would care- as opposed to a gunshot, nobody would stop and wonder about cries in the Holy Ground.

Her knees where shaking when she returned to Simcoe. Silently, and with horror in her face she was
glad her blindfolded victim could not see, she brought the blade to rest against his neck.

Eliza breathed. This was her chance, Simcoe did not expect anything yet and he would die quickly and surprised by the suddenness of it, which was merciful compared to being shot on some battlefield and dying slowly, messily from taking a shot to the wrong body part.

Merciful?

Was killing ever merciful? Clearly, all those who bore a grudge against Simcoe on grounds of his violent behaviour would say so, but was this the truth? Was it right to kill a man to end or avenge the suffering he had brought by the same means?

He had attempted to kill Edmund.

-Could one kill ever be better than the other?

“You are not Lola.”

She had taken too long, he had noticed. By now, he could already be dead had she acted more determinedly. His voice was calm, too calm for somebody helplessly tied up and blindfolded at the mercy of his captor.

“Where is she?” He asked, this time with more urgency in his voice.

“Lola is safe”, Eliza answered, hoping to sound conversational, “and will not be back until this is over.”

“Over? You mean your ploy to kill me? Which I am certain is your objective, given the circumstances.”

“Fear me, John Graves Simcoe. After all you have done, you deserve no mercy.”

She pressed the blade more firmly against his skin, causing the sharp weapon to draw a rivulet of blood that ran down his neck and stained his shirt collar.

Secretly, she scolded herself for sounding exactly like a second-rate character from a cheap novel; but then, this was where most of her knowledge of murdering and murderers originated from.

“And what have I done to offend you, madam?”

His voice was oddly calm.

Eliza didn’t dare to mention Edmund specifically, the tarps were thin and if someone was listening in, she was not ready to give them any information linking her or her brother to Simcoe’s demise.

“Quite a lot, actually. And here are many others who would like to be in my place right now, Colonel. But despite that, it would do you good to eat some humble pie, or, if you prefer, apple pie. I can, however, not guarantee for the ingredients. Or that you don’t end up in a pie yourself when I’m through with you, for that matter.”

Of all crimes committed by Simcoe, save Edmund’s ordeal of course, Eliza found the murder of the innocent Bucephalus most unnecessary and cruel. Bucephalus had had no part in any design by either party; the poor steed had been murdered solely to aggrieve his master and prompt Edmund to unwittingly aid Simcoe’s ploy to get revenge on the families of his former captors.

“Perhaps I might cut off some toes first, or a finger or two. Or the other ear. Or something else.”
The bayonet travelled according to the directions given by Eliza across his body. For the first time, Simcoe’s muscles tightened uneasily as she came to rest on the last part of his anatomy Eliza contemplated relieving him of.

Emboldened by this sudden show of nerves, however little it was, she traced his jawline with the serrated edge of the blade.

“I’m a warrior. I am prepared to die by more than Indian torture. Do not think you’ll find extinguishing me gratifying.”

His unsettling falsetto that might have sounded almost ridiculous under other circumstances, had gained an acid undertone, yet remained oddly composed.

“It doesn’t matter what you fancy yourself to be. You have done too much harm to too many people; in killing you I will do many a great favour. And nobody will care when they find you because nobody is going to miss you. They’ll replace you as head of the Queen’s Rangers with some other arriviste brutish enough to step into your shoes and that’s that. I would say you have no heart, but you have. It’s still beating and it’s full of hate.”

She laid one hand on his chest. His heartbeat had doubtlessly increased, even though he remained outwardly composed.

He chuckled mirthlessly. “Your speech is truly impressive, where do you work, a playhouse? Shakespeare is not going to undo me. Perhaps Lady Macbeth should have sent her husband to fulfil—”

Simcoe’s insolence in the face of death and his infuriating way of insulting her when she had hoped, nay expected to find some gratification in this exercise, took hold of Eliza’s mind.

Blood rushing furiously through her ears and filled with rage and the love for her brother that had first prompted her to go this far, she yearned to make Simcoe suffer as he had made Edmund suffer and her, indirectly, too.

Suffering a sudden bout of sadistic creativity inspired by her rage, she took a small candle burning in a cheap pewter candlestick on the nearby washstand and held it close to his unharmed right ear, close enough for him to feel the heat of the flame, yet far enough away to not burn his skin. Deliberately and as a warning, Eliza allowed the flame to taste a strand of copper hair, watching composedly and with morbid interest how the brightly orange flame devoured something so similar in colour.

Permitting the flame to take some more nourishment from the intolerably luscious head of auburn locks (what a waste on someone as repulsive as Simcoe), he inhaled through his nose, his breath quivering slightly at the smell of his own burnt hair, unable to know when or if she would stop at all. Clearly, he was not prepared for this. He may have been prepared to die on a battlefield, by bayonet or musket ball, but fire was a different matter altogether.

Savouring the moment, Eliza noticed the cackling sound coming from the neighbouring tents and the cries on the street too late. The candlestick cluttered to the ground; the flame was extinguished upon impact.

Petrified, she watched as suddenly the drape separating Lola’s tent from the adjoining one fell down, allowing the black smoke and flames of a much larger fire to blur her vision.

She was afraid and didn’t know what to do. The bayonet was still there within arm’s reach, she could kill Simcoe and then let the fire devour his body until there was nothing more left of him than a
pile of scorched bones or she could run and let the fumes choke him - if the flames weren’t faster.

The heat increased and to her horror, the flames had already taken possession of a good portion of the tent’s canvas drapes - the past few days had been dry, which eased the flames’ path considerably - the canopy would collapse within a matter of moments and bury her in flames if she didn’t run.

_Run_, her instincts told her, _run_. Eliza made it to the entrance, which was not yet affected by the fire, when she turned to take a look at Simcoe.

Coughing, he tried to struggle himself free, but the ties that bound him were too tight.

Probably thinking his captor had left, a few desperate whimpers escaped him when he realised he had no hope of freeing himself.

Almost as if a wave of cold sea water had swept over her, Eliza’s mind, clouded by her own vengefulness, was cleared of the ash-laden smoke of the fire and hurried back, picking the bayonet up on her way.

She loosened his blindfold and cut the rope. Simcoe jumped up immediately and fearing he would now take his revenge on her, Eliza made one instinctive step backwards.

Instead of hurling her into the flames or wrenching the bayonet from her hand and stabbing her, he only stood and stared at her, his face a mixture of surprise, confusion, anger and fear of the fate that had almost befallen him.

“Get out. What are you waiting for, run!” she instructed him when he lunged forward and grabbed her upper arm.

For one moment, Eliza fearfully thought that death was imminent and he about to break her neck or choke her - but where she had stood only seconds before, a burning tarp had fallen down.

Barely able to breathe plagued by a wheezing cough, Simcoe half-managed to stumble outside.

As soon as they were in the open air, Eliza first realised the whole scale of the fire: the entire area around Trinity Church, the whole Holy Ground, was ablaze. Still in shock, she stood and stared at the sea of flames in front of her. The other side of the street was as yet unaffected, an escape possible.

“You’ll never see me again.”

She shot a warning glance at Simcoe who stood still next to her, apparently as shocked at the sight of a good portion of York City ablaze as herself, unable to say all the things she wanted to tell him, unable to hurt him with words where she had failed to hurt him with weapons.

“You…” he began, but a hand on his shoulder caused him to spin around.

Lola had returned, fear engraved on her face. In absolute horror, she stared at the flames, realising her home, her livelihood had gone up in flames.

“I thought - I thought you were dead -“ she began, tearing her eyes away from the fire, her overall demeanour as far away from the coquettish lady of the night she usually showed to the world imaginable and studied him from head to toe as if to reassure herself that he indeed was unharmed.

Eliza took this opportunity to run and made her way through the rows of houses and tents as yet not devoured by the fire towards the Arnolds’ back garden.
York City was in general upheaval thanks to the fire and nobody asked questions when a dishevelled woman with scorch marks on her dress came running away from the general direction of the Holy Ground.

At a street corner not far away from her destination, she broke down in tears, her knees giving away underneath her weight.

What had she become, what had she done? Had she really plotted to kill a man and gone as far as to almost put a bayonet in his neck?

That wasn’t the worst part of it all. She had *enjoyed* torturing Simcoe, enjoyed when he had writhed and tried to evade the little candle’s flame.

Simcoe wasn’t the monster. She was.

And what if she had died in the fire? She didn’t even say goodbye to Edmund properly and she had never told him about the letters. There wouldn’t even have been a body to bury for him and Mother to know conclusively she had died, perhaps he would have thought she’d run away because she’d had enough of him and-

She had been selfish and a sadistic brute. And she hated herself for that.

Sobbing, she did not hear the footsteps approaching.

“Mrs Greenwood?” a familiar voice asked carefully.

“Cicero?”

“We’ve been looking for you everywhere when we heard of the fire and Miss Peggy and your brother are beside themselves. Come, we’ll go home. The General’s away, his men have been commanded to help put out the fire. What’s wrong?”

“When we get back, I—“ she broke off to draw breath and allowed the boy to help her up, “I think I have a lot to confess to.”

“There are some news Miss Peggy wants to tell you, too”, Cicero replied warily.

Chapter End Notes

As always, a few lines here and there have been taken directly from the show. In the same vein, the chapter title refers to the scene between Anna and Simcoe in his room in season 2 episode 6.

The two Hessians: Jakob (J) and Müller (M):

M: (Not) That one again!
J: What's going on, Müller?
M: Jakob, do you see the tall red-haired Englishman over there? He ruined yesterday night for me.
J: Isn't that this Simcoe(-guy)? What did he (of all people) have to do with you?
M: Hit me in the face, that (instead of "Säuknoche", which is very specific for the dialect of German spoken in today’s federal state of Hesse, one could use anything that denotes a despicable, unsympathetic, unfriendly etc. person, you know what I mean. It's
fairly offensive and I wouldn't advise to use it in conversation with people from Hesse or other parts of Germany.), because I wanted to have some fun with that one over there.

J: I think we better go. There'll surely be other girls in York City (waiting) for you, Müller.

While I'm fluent in both languages, I find translating from one into the other quite difficult and have taken a few liberties in order to make the conversation sound good/at least not stilted in English (see the brackets).

The lethal dish of deathcap: A quick shout out to my dear friend Liseth who is an awesome research buddy and helped a lot with researching into poisonous plants and fungi- she suggested deathcap to kill Simcoe off (until now, he has survived, though...). Deathcap was apparently not introduced to America in the 18th century yet, as Abe helpfully points out to Hewlett.

Lola thanks her neighbour because she has read the letter from Eliza to her, who, having grown up in the relative secludedness of a Scottish country estate, didn't consider not everybody is taught to read.

The apple pie: Firstly, I wanted an apple-inspired comeuppance for Simcoe even before episode nine aired. When I watched the episode, I changed my mind and went for this- not because I didn't like the scene, but because I wanted to do something original. But I couldn't resist the "Titus Andronicus" (which we already know Eliza enjoys)-inspired reference to apple pie.

"[...] die by more than Indian torture": A quote by the historical John Graves Simcoe. Simplified a little for brevity, what he said in the original statement is that he was ready to "die by more than Indian torture" (so: ready to give his all) to bring the US back to the rule of the Crown.

Historically, the Holy Ground burnt down in 1776- but since TURN took its fair share of liberties with history as well, I moved the date to spring 1781. Alternatively, it could be a second blaze- the Holy Ground with its crowded little places and tents seems like a health and safety nightmare prone to accidents like a candle falling and igniting some bedding or a stove getting out of control; the possibilities are endless.

Thanks again for reading!
Brothers and Sisters

Chapter Summary

"Ensign Rooster" and the "Widow Long", his sister, arrive in the city, the Hewlett-siblings are separated, Arnold doesn't recognise a familiar face, a new trio forms and Simcoe becomes a literary critic and expert in interior decoration.

Chapter Notes

I'm back! I am sorry it took me so long, but somehow, I needed a hiatus from this story. Now I am back and while I am re-thinking many of the plot-lines I have drawn up aeons ago (some of them entirely new ones of new characters who haven't made an appearance yet), I hope to bring this story to a close in a timely fashion.

In case someone is still reading this, I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Warnings: sweary Caleb, ugly wallpaper

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“…Thought Jack to himself, "Now what can this be?

But the finest of whiskey from far Germany

Smuggled up in a basket and sold on the sly

And the name that it goes by is

quare bungle rye roddy rye?

Fol the diddle rye roddy rye roddy rye”

Jack gave her a pound and he thought nothing strange

Said she, "Hold the basket till I get you your change"

Jack looked in the basket and a baby did spy

Oh, Begorrah, said Jack, this is

quare bungle rye roddy rye?

Fol the diddle rye roddy rye roddy-“

“Caleb”, Anna half-snorted half-admonished her travelling companion, “do you think it’s wise?”
“What, singing?” Caleb replied.

“Yes, what if we draw the attention of some of our own men to us? They won’t be able to tell we aren’t—”

She made a gesture towards Caleb’s attire, almost as if she did not want to speak the word.

“British?” Caleb asked, amused, looking down the front of his spotless scarlet uniform, “What do you think Bennyboy’s doing all day in his tent? Our side is in on the plan, Benny sent some of his men out last night as soon as we knew we’d be off—well, up to a certain point, that is. No Continental within the next five miles or so will look twice at us.”

“But robbers, rogues, we must be careful.”

Her voice and her concerned facial expression did not escape Caleb.

“You really want our mission to succeed, do you?”, he replied in a considerably lower voice, mindful that Anna could be right and someone hostile to them, be they from one or the other side, was listening in from a safe hideout in the thicket to the left and right of the road.

“I do”, was all that she said and Caleb, having known his friend since childhood, knew she spoke the truth.

But what the truth was, he could not tell. Did she want the mission to succeed because she wanted to save Abe? They had been in love when they were young and their affair later on when both of them, thanks to a few cruel twists of fate, had been married to other partners, probably was Setauket’s worst kept secret.

Or was it Hewlett? Anna loved him, loved him still, even if she was reluctant to say so. In the barn with Ben, she had left them with no doubt she still cared for him a lot.

But still, she had known Abe since childhood and at one point in their lives, they’d almost married and later been lovers.

However much Caleb tried to convince himself Anna was doing this for Abe, at least a little bit, his mind kept stumbling over Hewlett’s name.

He didn’t like the man for several reasons, the most prominent of them being perhaps the fact that if Hewlett had had his then-subordinate Simcoe, that bloody son of a Covent Garden bunter, under control, his Uncle Lucas would never have died.

Besides, the stuffy, pompous little man that reminded him more of a parody of a British major he would expect to see at a cheap playhouse hardly seemed like the sort of man women like Anna would fall for.

Granted, Abe wasn’t exactly the most stunning sight in all the land either (and neither was he), but he could understand why two people who had known each other all their lives would eventually think about sharing their lives and a bed with one another while Hewlett, as far as his judgement could be trusted in such matters, didn’t look much like a ladies’ favourite, perhaps even less so than Abe because of his weirdly wide mouth and his age (he guessed he must be Anna’s and Abe’s senior by perhaps as much as more than a decade) and lastly, because he was a redcoat and thus a believer in all the British Empire stood for and that he despised.

That’d put him off, frankly, in a man or woman. Seriously, how had Anna been able to stand him? He’d surely voiced his opinions in front of her every now and then and then and Anna was as staunch a
patriot as ever there had been—how had these two even gotten along for more than a few seconds in the same room?

Why had things to be so complicated? Jesus, why could Anna not have developed a thing for Bennyboy? That would have made matters so much easier. Ben was smart, he was Washington’s intelligence man after all, handsome from a female perspective he supposed with his kind eyes, warm smile, not un-stately built (in every aspect, as Caleb had come to know from living in the rough and confined camp where there was little privacy between the men) and even shared her opinions.

Heck, why even bother with someone like that little British major? His family was of Irish origins, perhaps that aggravated his dislike for Hewlett, whose prim and proper appearance did nothing to prove his picture of British administrators wrong, but all he had seen of Hewlett, which, granted, wasn’t much, didn’t indicate there was too much to expect from him once the wig and coat were removed.

And yet, Anna had given her heart to this man, even if she denied it.

Coming to think of it, perhaps Ben and Anna weren’t so well suited after all. He’d both known them as children and even then, Ben and Anna had sometimes clashed, fought a little, for Ben always thought girls shouldn’t do certain things or needed help because they were girls and Anna had only snorted at him, pulled a face, and climbed a nearby tree only to prove him wrong.

-If Hewlett was the man who made Annie happy, he had no reason to stand between them. He wouldn’t make his friend unhappy, never, even if standing by and watching her lose herself in secret hopes and dreams for a pompous little shite of a British officer filled him with concern.

A part of him hoped they’d find Hewlett so Anna could talk to him with whatever outcome. If he didn’t want her back, and that would be perfectly understandable after all the vague stuff he had heard about the wedding-incident, she’d have closure for good.

If by some miracle the two would fall into each other’s arms and elope to the shores of merry Mother Britannia, he’d watch, hurt at the separation from someone he had basically known and loved all his life as if she was the sister he never had, but would be happy for her as well, because leaving with Hewlett meant she wouldn’t have to live in camp any longer or clean tables in Setauket under Simcoe’s long, impertinent nose.

Also, in that case, he’d gladly pay money to be the one who bring that bastard the news Annie and Hewlett had reunited and left for Britain. He’d have to pay a portraitist as well to tag along, because that face he’d love to have preserved for all eternity as a trophy for his one-day parlour wall to keep as a memento to show to friends and occasionally aim a shot with his pistol at.

Chuckling at the thought, he turned to Anna, who seemed lost in thoughts.

“Just to make things clear: You’re--”

“Your sister. But I don’t see how that will work yet.”

Thinking she was talking of their lack of family resemblance, he answered: “Ha. Who says our ma always reserved herself for our dad alone?” He flashed her a grin. Anna smiled back weakly, somewhat amused but still concerned.

“I was talking more about your accent, and mine.”

“I’ll teach ye: Say ‘whale, oil, beef, hooked’ very fast and you’ll speak like a real Irishman in no time.”
Apparently, he had made this joke before in the long years they’d known each other because Anna made a face that was supposed to convey disapproval, but her mouth betrayed her until she couldn’t suppress a snort anymore that reminded him of the more careless days of their youth.

If only he could make her laugh a little on their way to York City, he was happy.

“Let me do the talking, then”, he suggested. “I can be as polite an English gentleman as they say these bastards are.”

He’d done it before, when he tried to get Abe out of prison. In another life, in which there wasn’t enough work for him to do for Washington, he’d perhaps be an actor.

“Mrs- Long, my sister here, and I are bound for York City. I have obtained permission from General Howe himself to escort her to safety. Her homestead was overrun by rebels and her property looted-”

“Caleb!” Anna exclaimed, visibly surprised at this new side of his that had just revealed itself to her.

“We’ve had enough of them high-up redcoats sticking around for me to pick up a trick or two from them, don’t you think?”, he retorted contentedly, happy to have made such an expression on his friend.

“And now, Mrs Long, no more talkin’”, he continued in his usual voice falling and rising with the sing-song lilt of the Old Country that had after two generations of his family remained as one of the few heirlooms they had once brought with them as he drove the pair closer and closer to the city.

York City, the Arnolds’ house, the same day.

They were back at the house. Cicero had picked her up and helped her along the rest of the way, not really certain what to say or what to do.

At last, he had spoken to her, halting at the last street corner before the Arnolds’ house would come into view.

“I did something, Mrs Greenwood”, the boy said slowly.

Whatever he meant by it, it could not be worse than what she had done just now, Eliza thought, not really caring for whatever he had to say and replied mechanically:

“What is it?”

“Miss Peggy. She asked where I’ve been and I can’t lie to her or my mother and I will both be in trouble. So I told her I’ve been running errands for you-“

Eliza lifted her head.

“What did you tell her?”

Within seconds, everything that had so far perturbed her, the image of Simcoe, bound, whimpering and almost burning to death, migrated to the back of her mind, leaving her fully alert.

“Everything.”

He cast his eyes to the tips of his shoes and bit his lips, visibly uncomfortable to have broken his promise to her.
She wanted to rage at him, angry because he had broken his promise but remembering what she was capable of, she hated herself instantly for just having thought of letting her anger get the better of her a second time this day and instead sighed with defeat.

Cicero was in a worse spot than her after all. At least she had no one she had to answer to –except her conscience.

Peggy would be livid, as would Edmund and Woodhull.

Cicero led her inside through the backdoor and informed her the General was gone, overseeing the rabble and the damage that had been done to the town.

In the living room, Eliza, weak-kneed, found her brother, Woodhull, Peggy and Abigail awaiting her. Peggy sat on one of the elegant sofas, her hand laying on the front of her elegant powder blue and white maternity gown as if she was trying to calm the babe, who had probably been affected by the agitation that had befallen their mother with Edmund sitting close by on the edge of an armchair, head in his hands. Woodhull stood somewhat awkwardly behind Peggy and Aberdeen, formally a co-conspirator but by social standing under no circumstances allowed to sit in the presence of Peggy or any of her guests, stood stiffly by a small table with a tea tray on it, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

When she entered in the company of Cicero, who was immediately greeted by his mother flying at him and embracing him tightly, happy her son had come home safely after all she had probably already heard about the fire, all eyes fixed on her.

“Where have you been?”

Behind the sweet-sounding moniker “Peggy”, an ice-queen Margaret hid, Eliza noticed, shivering from the coldness in Peggy’s voice.

Wondering if her still new friend’s cold, blue-eyed stare that seemed to try to penetrate her flesh and bones could give her soul frostbite, Peggy repeated her question, this time with even more urgency in her voice.

Not that it hadn’t been obvious already, her dirty dress and shocked facial expression gave her past whereabouts away already, but it always was something different to hear it spoken out loud by the person in question.

“The Holy Ground.”

“And what did you do there?”

“It’s a long story.”

“My husband won’t be home early tonight, I think. We have time. Isn’t it so?”

Peggy Arnold looked at Edmund, who nodded gravely, his fingers nervously occupied with a loose thread on his cuff.

“I tried to kill Simcoe.”

There. It was out.

Edmund mumbled something under her breath she couldn’t understand and buried his head even deeper in his palms and Abigail made the sign of the cross, while Woodhull cursed a few times in a
manner that one would usually avoid in the company of ladies of Peggy Arnold’s standing and
groaned, while Peggy’s face remained unreadable and unmoving, like carefully chiselled marble.

The farmer from Setauket was the first to find his speech again.

“You did what? You know how stupid this is, right? Better tell us he’s dead otherwise-“

“He’s alive”, she said simply, without any emotion in her voice.

Woodhull reacted by groaning even louder and hitting his forehead with his hand.

“But I came close”, Eliza defended herself, as if it suddenly was a worthwhile or noble thing to do,
attempting to kill a man.

“So then the fire happened and I- he would have burnt to death and I couldn’t- I let him walk free. He
would have burnt to death. Surely I couldn’t have-”

In no more words than necessary she relayed the full story to them, mindful of the shocked faces
staring at her.

When she had ended, Eliza’s conscience felt lighter for having shared her experiences, her deeds
with them, but her heart was considerably heavier than before.

“Is there anything else you must tell us?”

Peggy’s voice had hardened even more, if this was even possible. A slight flush had risen to her
cheeks as well, and only these two tiny details truly gave away she was fighting hard within herself
to retain composure.

As far as Eliza could tell from knowing Peggy for such a short while, her looks were deceiving. She
was not the pretty porcelain doll clad in costly dresses and jewels, not just- if the situation required it,
she was certain Peggy would fight ten battle-hardened soldiers in the backroom of a dubious tavern
armed with only a hairpin and emerge as the victor, unharmed and her immaculate coiffure of angelic
blonde curls still intact.

She looked at the other woman, standing before her like a convict before the judge. The time had
come for honesty, she figured, there was no use in holding anything back any longer.

Just when she thought she would finally be truthful, she could not bring the words to fall from her
lips. Her tongue went numb, a useless, unmoving slab of meat and instead, her body began to
tremble.

Quickly, she shook her head, fully aware she was lying again now, to signal that there was nothing
else she had to confess to.

“Very well. I cannot keep you in my house, Elizabeth. You will understand. I must think of my child
and myself. My husband is not a kind man, and if he were to catch you in the act in whatever
reckless folly you are engaged in next, slipping in and out of this house as you please, I could not
promise to save you if that meant any of your guilt would reflect on myself. I cannot keep you here.
You have broken my conditions and misused my goodwill. You will leave now, Abigail will go and
gather your things. Your brother and his friend-“ she still seemed to be somewhat suspicious of
Woodhull, “will have two days’ notice before they follow you. And don’t you dare appeal to my
goodwill ever again.”

The verdict was spoken.
Eliza caught Edmund’s stare, who looked at her, visibly pitying her, but ready to stand up for her also, regardless of the fact she was in the wrong, and was just about to open his mouth when she, knowing what he was about to say, cut him short.

“No, Edmund. You will do no such thing and stay here. We must keep you safe, from Simcoe. I’m your big sister, it’s an order.”

She gave him a sad smile and took her few belongings, neatly folded by Abigail and put into a small bag that likely was among the remnants of the André-household General Arnold had decided to banish to the attic, said her farewells and slipped into the street.

Where would she go?

She could go to William’s house, her childhood friend and almost-brother-in-law would help her, but hadn’t she used his friendship and patience already?

For the first time, the full scope of her actions became apparent to Eliza.

She had tried her childhood friend’s patience and relied on his favours,

She had blackmailed a man who had a wife and child based on knowledge she was not supposed to have,

She had dug through her brother’s room at home and meddled in his affairs,

And she had made a man believe she was quite smitten with him in order to use him to further her goals as well.

God, she was pathetic and no better than Simcoe.

What if he was still out there somewhere, lurking, searching for her? He couldn’t have seen her face long enough to remember it, could he?

With no idea where she could go, no fixed address where she would be welcomed, she figured she would walk aimlessly through the streets until she found a suitably cheap tavern or boarding house for the night.

“I cannot leave my sister-“

Woodhull sighed and took him by the shoulders, beckoning to sit back down again on the dusty sofa in their attic abode.

“Your sister has brought this on herself. Now, we need to kill Simcoe-“

“Do you think I care about the man now? My sister-“

“Will you stop it? He’s still alive and out there, isn’t he? We could use her as bait, find her, he’ll know her now-“

“That is out of the question.”

Edmund didn’t like this situation at all. He could only hope Eliza had been sensible enough not to
come anywhere too close to the barracks where the American Legion and the Queen’s Rangers were quartered. With Simcoe still out and about and Eliza, his almost-murderess still roaming the town, he was certain he would not sleep that night. And perhaps that was even for the best, for the last night, he had dreamt of Anna again. The details of it had not survived the transition back to consciousness, but her face had, smiling at him, promising him all the things he had once dreamt about.

Apparently, dark-haired women who brought trouble and tribulations wherever they went were his designated fate.

Now thinking of his sister once more, he tried simply not to listen to Abraham’s tiresome talk of ending Simcoe and prayed he would see her again. But while his sister's name was on his lips when he spoke this silent prayer, before his mind’s eye was the face of another woman, smiling at him, her dark hair tied to a rather untidy bun.

Wiping the image away, somewhat ashamed even that in this hour, when his thoughts were supposed to be with Eliza, they wandered to her, he called himself back to attention. After all, he was still a soldier, so he should probably bear his misfortunes and burdens of the soul like one.

Sitting up straight, he did his best not to say anything that could stir dissent between him and his already unlikely ally. Perhaps they would need each other- no, they did need each other. Simcoe still walked free and now, he did not only want to kill him and Abraham, he wanted Eliza, whom he hopefully didn’t know was the Oyster Major’s sister, dead as well. If he knew they were related, he would pursue his act of vengeance with even more zeal. He knew the man, and although Eliza was clever and had always taken care of herself, a seasoned fighter like Simcoe posed a serious threat to her.

Maybe he should listen to Woodhull after all and killing Simcoe in order to end the constant threat Eliza was under now that she roamed the streets alone, was not such a bad idea after all.

“And here we are, Widow Long, sister mine. I hope you had a pleasant journey!” Anna still marvelled how Caleb could still look like Caleb but didn’t look like Caleb at the same time with the red uniform coat, clean-shaven cheeks that had apart from once in all these years not too long ago, last been so smooth when they had been children.

As far as she could recall, he had grown a beard as soon as he was able to, much to his mother’s dismay who had eventually given up on “civilising” her son.

He played his part as “Ensign Rooster” admirably; not one of the British posts on the way had suspected a thing when he had shown the papers and permits Ben had forged for them in a long night of incessant work and experimenting with Mr Sackett’s, heaven rest his soul, weird and fascinating contraptions.

Unhindered, they had made it into town, where Caleb steered them to a somewhat run down looking establishment that revealed itself to be somewhat cleaner on the inside than the façade and narrow alleyway would have suggested; but after living in camp and having seen the conditions especially the camp followers, women and children all, had to suffer, a pigsty would have seemed like a palace to Anna and she would have accepted to sleep there with gladness.

The owner was an old business-associate of Caleb’s, a fellow Long Islander with patriot sympathies who had done business on the London Trade, made a pretty penny and then moved to York City to
open a tavern.

He had offered them rooms at a special price as a thank-you to Caleb who had at one point in their lives helped him out a great deal, likely on one of their smuggling missions.

Later in the evening, they had conferred their next steps in the busy tap room. A secret was best kept when out in the open after all, and the sound of men shouting for more ale, singing or being lost in conversations with suggestively-dressed ladies or fellow tavern-goes drowned out their hushed whispers.

Among the guests, the recent fire was the most discussed theme. On their way to the part of the city the tavern was located in, they had seen some of the scorched ash pile from afar, wondering what had happened until someone, a man passing them by with a basket of turnips under his arm, had told them.

Since then, Anna had felt uneasy. What if Edmund had come to harm? Or Abe? They were here to rescue him after all, but burnt to a crisp, they wouldn’t have any chance of finding him and their mission would have been in vain.

The same was true for Edmund. While she wanted to find Abe, get him out of danger, she had not come to York City with him occupying the greatest part of her mind, no: this mission would perhaps allow her to set things right, to heal an old wound she still suffered from.

On the one hand, she wanted to see him again, on the other, she didn’t- he had been safe with his family in Scotland and if he had indeed returned, there was not only the fire to think about as potential dangers that could have come his way. She hadn’t had any news from his sister after the letter that had informed her of Edmund’s departure for America many weeks ago, but now, the first time she really thought of it, it could mean everything and nothing- he could be here, walk among the townsfolk, or he could still be in Scotland, struck with an illness too weak to travel any further than he had come, or robbed by highwaymen on his way to the harbour, beaten and left for dead in a roadside ditch- the possibilities how one could come to harm on a long journey were cruel and endless.

Caleb took a hearty swig of whiskey and cleared his throat:

“How are we going to find Abe?”

“I don’t know. You could go to see Robert Townsend? Maybe he knows something we don’t know yet.”

“Good idea, but the place he works at is full of redcoats.”

“You forget you’re one of them now as well, ensign.”

“I might look like one of these bastards, but they’re not going to let me in- that place serves only the higher-ups, the likes of Arnold, who’d better not see my face around these parts, that steaming pile of treasonous shite, and Simcoe-“

“Simcoe?”, Anna echoed, her eyes widening in horror, almost hoping there were two of this name, the menacing harbinger of death she had come to know in Setauket and another one, a cousin perhaps, a quiet, gentlemanly person who did not enjoy violence and instead, preferred intellectual pursuits over killing. Within seconds, she realised, she had described Edmund.

“Yeah. Got promoted, the dirty fecker. Setauket might’ve been good enough for a stinky little captain, but the lieutenant-colonel needs the grand stage. Probably lazily sittin’ on his entitled arse
right now that-“

But Anna wasn’t listening anymore. Simcoe was here. What if he would recognise them? Caleb, even unfamiliarly clean and in a British uniform, still was Caleb and she, he would recognise her right away, she was sure of that. There just had been too much between them- or rather, and even worse from his point of view, hadn’t been.

Fear took hold of Anna. Why hadn’t they told her in advance? Not that Simcoe would have deterred her from coming to York City, nothing, not even Beelzebub Himself could have, but clearly, they wouldn’t have needed yet another obstacle.

When, as if to prove her fears, two Queen’s Rangers settled at a nearby table (luckily Anna did not recognise any of their faces from Setauket, meaning they had to be quite new and couldn’t know her), Anna and Caleb agreed to call it a night, go to sleep to recover their strength and go to Rivington’s first thing in the morning.

Anna recalled from the time that he had been billeted at Strong Manor, Simcoe might have been a natural early riser, earlier than most by at least one or two hours, but spent a copious amount of time on his morning ablutions, shaving, and sometimes (when he had still worn a wig) curling the damn thing himself when he found it had not been done to his liking.

Sometimes, he had lured her to his room as well, asking her to do it for him or helping him powder it. Quickly, she had learned how to rid herself of this unwanted duty, namely by “accidentally” powdering not only his wig, but also his coat, which vexed him to no end until, after the sixth or seventh time, he had not asked her to do it again. He was fastidious when it came to proper dress also and Anna suspected that even without the wig, he would have some special, time-consuming treatment he afforded his natural hair in order to make it look the way it did, shiny and seemingly effortlessly, naturally curling.

For once, his slight vanity, fastidiousness or whatever one wanted to call it would be a blessing, for he likely wouldn’t roam the town until later in the morning, which she and Caleb could use in order to visit Townsend, who would hopefully be already at Rivington’s at this time of day, preparing the taproom for the day, cleaning glasses or making an inventory.

Before she drifted off into dreamless, deep sleep that was a few hours later disrupted by a half-dressed, stubbly-chinned Ensign Rooster, she got up again, knelt before the bed, folded her hands and prayed. She hadn’t done that in a long time, but presently, she needed all help, divine and earthly, she could get and hoped the Lord would be well-disposed toward her plea.

Please, oh Lord, let Edmund be safe. Let us find Abe and please- let everything be well, one day, in the end, just well, not even happy, but well, for all of us.

The streets of York City, the next morning.

York City, or the part of it that had been devoured by the blaze, lay in ashes. The disaster that had not only devoured the Holy Ground, but other areas of the town as well, had left behind nothing but occasional skeletal remains of houses and a wasteland of ash and debris.

Eliza had spent the night in the taproom of a cheap, run-down in, hiding in the darkest corner when the owner had closed up for the night sometime in the small hours of the morning.
When daylight had begun to seep through the dirty window hangings, Eliza had quietly turned the key the owner had left in the lock, and slipped into the streets, wandering aimlessly about, thinking what she would, what she could do now.

At least moving around would increase her chances of not being found by Simcoe, should he look for her, she figured, because a moving target was as everyone knew harder to catch than the proverbial sitting duck.

The grey and black of the scorched plain that had once been one of the most densely populated areas of the city was interspersed with spots of red and dark green; Arnold’s men, as well as the Queen’s Rangers under the command of the man who likely was Simcoe’s deputy (where was the ginger?), had been instructed to do the most immediate clean up works, unblocking the roads from fallen debris and knocking down the remainders of buildings that were deemed unsafe and a threat to even more lives and property.

While the man giving the soldiers clad in green their orders dwelt among his troops, aiding himself where he could, the commander of the American Legion sat high on top of his horse and surveyed the men, whose breeches and faces in particular bore the greyish-black marks of hard labour, from his vantage point.

Occasionally, he would change his position to gain new views of what he apparently perceived as a battle field of some sort and shouted orders at the men below him, who had not had a droplet of water within the last couple of hours and worked with fearful zeal under the threat of his riding crop if they would stop.

Eliza watched the scene from a distance; despite her fallout with both Peggy Arnold and her brother, she felt sorry for the woman who had spat such hurtful words into her face when she eyed her pompous husband who behaved at the scene of tragic disaster and high loss of life like Louis XIV at court.

She asked herself if the man noticed how out of place and downright distasteful he must come across as to the small crowd of spectators watching as the Legion and the Rangers aided to restore some basic sense of normality to the town in the aftermath of such a tragic event.

Arnold, she figured, could easily have won the hearts that had long turned against him on both sides by showing kindness, getting off his horse and helping his men, or, since such behaviour would certainly classify as unsuitable for an officer, showing kindness to his overworked and strained men while showing humbleness and empathy in the eyes of those who sat in the streets, weeping and faced with the knowledge that all they had ever owned had been robbed by the orange ire of a rampant blaze.

But Arnold did no such thing, considering himself almost royalty-like in station above everyone else and instead raised only more eyebrows when he imitated the posture of the famous equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius.

Following his horse with her eyes, Eliza observed how he, suddenly more determined than before, directed his horse toward a man and woman, he in the uniform of the British Army, she in an unassuming day dress of not very remarkable quality or colour.

“You!” He exclaimed, as if he had the right to judge other men, “why are you not at work? Come here, you lazy fool and get your hands dirty like the rest of them!”

-Shouted the man whose breeches and stockings were pristinely white, while his men were covered in ashes, soot and dust from head to toe.
Arnold’s tirade was far from over. The poor chap looked alarmed and mumbled an apology, but never let go of the dark-haired woman, who had lowered her head and probably prayed the arrogant mounted popinjay would leave them alone.

“…You go whoring around while the rest of us are working? You come here now, or I’ll have you whipped, by God I swear, I’ll have you flogged until your skin peels off as nicely as a boiled potato’s!”

To Eliza, it had been clear from the beginning this was a task too big for Arnold to organise and accomplish.

Would he have had to deal with a group of armed patriots, he would have, from all the accounts she had read and heard about him, doubtlessly made a good commander organising a swift and successful counter-attack, but the labours of peace did not come easy to him. She was also sure he could feel the icy glares of the townsfolk penetrating his back like daggers.

As the man still refused to let go of his companion, Arnold was just about to descend, erratically brandishing his riding crop as he attempted to dismount on his own.

Regardless of the fact that this would cost him a little more time than it would other men given his injured leg did not permit him free movement in every direction, Arnold with an object that could be used as a weapon was not a reassuring sight and enough for Eliza to suspect he might make use of it.

Not so much in order to prevent Arnold from committing a crime in front of the town in broad daylight rather than fearing for the safety of those about to bear the brunt of this assault, she approached the man he was talking to and exclaimed cheerfully

“My dears! Good God, how happy I am to see you!”

And without greater ceremony, she flung her arms around the woman’s neck and kissed the startled creature on the cheek.

“And you are?”, Arnold hissed even before he could look her in the face.

When he deigned to bow his head toward those not sitting on a high horse, his brows furrowed.

“Are you not- You are that woman Peggy let into the house!”, he exclaimed angrily, “Nothing but trouble, both of you! Whoever you are, don’t come anywhere near my house or my wife again!”

For the moment, she was obviously more interesting to the general than the ensign and the lady walking at his arm.

Knowing Arnold was as vain as he was impulsive, Eliza smiled affably at him with a patience she normally did not reserve for anyone except very small children.

“Good morning to you, General”, she chimed as if he had not just insulted her, “Allow me to thank you for the splendid party you held once more.”

Her friendliness seemed to genuinely confuse him (perhaps coupled with the fact that he was visibly struggling to remember the name she had given him during their unpleasant first personal encounter, for he started to sound somewhat confused, though still very much on his guard). He was impulsive, too self-assured, petty and vain in the extreme, but while all these unfavourable character traits made him appear like a ridiculous, puffed-up popinjay, he was none. He was clever, a field strategist of the finest sort, one only had to look at his stroke of genius at Saratoga, fearless and doubtlessly enduring, even under the constant onslaught of physical pain.
Although he was in possession of a plethora of unfavourable traits for a military man (on that note, Edmund was not a natural in the field either, though in a very different way), he was not stupid, no very clever even if he allowed his mind precedence over his ego, which made him dangerous.

She had to be a similarly adept strategist if she wanted to be rid of him. A little flattery would not be enough.

As she was still contemplating what she would do now, the woman spoke:

“Sister mine! Finally! I didn’t think we’d see each other again!” Deciding to go along with this, she took hold of the younger woman’s shoulders and held her at an arm’s length, as one does with a close friend or relation one hasn’t seen in a while, and looked her over, pretending Arnold was not towering over them.

From the corner of her eye, Eliza noticed, the man who had accompanied the woman had pushed his tricorn farther down his forehead, making it so one could not see his face, especially not from high up on a horse.

In the back of her mind, Eliza wondered why the ensign did not want Arnold to see his face, but was distracted keeping the amateur theatre play going.

“We were separated-“

“During the rebel ambush”, the other woman filled in, “good God, our brother and I thought you were dead!”

“No, I fled rebel captivity at night and swam across-“ “The Long Island sound, all by yourself?”

“Yes, no, I mean, I was picked up by a boat halfway across and brought to the other side by a fisherman to a place called Setauket, where a good man named Major Hewlett granted me protection for a while, until I was strong enough and had earned enough money by working in-“

The names of the town and her brother had escaped her before she could even think about it properly being the only place in the Colonies she knew (at least from Edmund's tales) to a certain extent, but her counterpart did not leave her any time to think about any possible consequences her slip-up (for Arnold knew Edmund)might have.

“The tavern”, her wide-eyed, dark-haired counterpart filled her in. “I know the place, in passing. What was the name of the woman fetching the drinks again?”

“A Mrs Strong, if I recall correctly. A very kind woman.”

The strange, green-eyed woman knew about Setauket, about Edmund, even about her, how could she know? She was none of the townspeople, Anna would have known her otherwise. Perhaps she was a relation to someone in the town she had never met?

Word about her, Abraham and the unfortunate business regarding Simcoe’s advances and later the wedding that hadn’t been meant to be with Edmund had probably spread across the length and breadth of Long Island and even in camp some rumours about her life prior to joining Washington’s army had circulated, vague allusions to whatever they deemed her to be with one man had even calling her a “redcoat hussy” when she had passed him by.

Asking her new acquaintance for the name of the tavern-wench, the position to which she had been
degraded when she had been forced to give up all that once had been Selah’s following the attainder, heaven rest his eternal soul, had been a test. She wanted to know what else the woman knew and why, but she could not continue to ask her these things in front of General Arnold, especially not with Caleb nearby, whom the traitor to their cause might recognise.

“Hewlett?”, Arnold joined in, “Major Edmund Hewlett? And Anna Strong? That must have been a while ago.”

He looked the green-eyed woman straight in the eyes, studying her.

“Yes”, she said simply, obviously not knowing where to go from there, “it took some time before I had earned enough to move away from Long Island to come to York City, where it is safer.”

“And… You don’t happen to know what became of Hewitt and Mrs Strong?”

“No. There was talk in the town, you know, about Mrs Strong and the Major, but I’m not one to pay much mind to gossip.” The curious stranger started to shift uneasily from her left foot to the right, visibly uneasy being cross-examined by Arnold who had trouble to keep his likely bored steed under control, which probably was a blessing, given he could not focus his attention entirely on the three people standing below him.

Anna’s assessment proved right.

Arnold’s horse bucked, no longer willing to stand still with its heavy load weighing its back down, causing the rider to almost tumble to the ground under a suppressed stream of curses.

“Anyway, I am so happy we’ve found each other again after such a long time,” the curious stranger closed, apparently knowing that every good theatre-play needed a satisfactory conclusion, while already turning her back on the general who was still trying to get his horse back under control with the help of two privates who had rushed to his side.

“Adieu, General”, she said, and, leaving a stunned Arnold behind who did not seem as if he was through with this curious and frankly quite implausible sibling-reunion, walked off in the direction of a small, dark street, into which she disappeared, Anna’s hand firmly in hers.

Caleb followed them as their rear guard, in case one of Arnold’s men would follow them.

As soon as they were out of sight of Arnold and the crowd, they sped up until they, half-running for a good five minutes, stopped as they reached the market, which could not be stopped from being held even by the fire, disappearing among the masses of busy clients and sellers.

“We really were lucky”, Anna started, when Caleb, turning to her and still panting somewhat, shot her a mischievous grin:

“Luck? Providence, that’s what Reverend Tallmadge always called it. ‘Twas divine providence that I was standing close enough to that horse to tweak it a little in the arse.”

Laughing with the light-headedness Eliza remembered from being young and having gotten away with a particularly hair-raising jape in the moment one was able to realise that the immediate danger of being caught or reprimanded had subsided, she caught herself, suppressing a few more snorts and tried to regulate her breathing. In case someone had followed them, she would not want to be caught in such a state, but rather have her senses together enough to at least try and escape.
Her companions too calmed somewhat, when the other woman asked, “what else do you know about Setauket?”

“Yes, who are ye?”, her companion, sporting a surprisingly marked Irish accent, added.

**Simcoe’s boarding house, the same day.**

One of them had to go, either him or the hideous wallpaper, and he was, despite being in ill health, not willing to surrender to the garish patterns on the wall of his lodgings.

How anybody could consider this downright hideous floral design in the most unfortunately gaudy colours appealing or pleasing to the eye was beyond him.

If he was honest to himself, his hate of his surroundings made him feel somewhat better. While other people would doubtlessly claim *omnia vincit amor*, he had come to find that *odium* could inspire a flame equal to *amor*, especially when it came to conquering his present illness.

Much as he craved a gentle hand feeling his pulse or dab his forehead and a concerned voice enquiring after his wellbeing, in the absence of anyone thus concerned for him, he had reverted to imagining how gratifying burning this entire boarding-house to the ground and the wallpaper with it would be.

Slowly drifting off into a phase of shallow feverish dreams again, he found himself back once more in the burning tent with that woman.

Having had much time to think about it, being confined to bed, he had come to the conclusion that based on what she had said, what she knew, his captor must be known to Hewlett. But how? Why? He wished his memory of the ordeal was more precise but given he had been robbed of his sight and bound for most of the time; he had only a vague notion of her face. He didn’t like faceless enemies.

At least, he had memorised her voice. If he were ever to hear that voice again, she would be in trouble, he vowed. But how likely would that be? If she was clever, she was far away from York City by now, and she was clever, he had to give her that. How many men had tried to kill him one or the other way? With the exception of Robert Rogers whose shot had cost him half of his left ear, she had come closest.

Sighing, he tried to turn his attention back to more pleasant things. Knowing the reason for being bed-ridden was not solely physical, he tried to pass the time reading in hope to find distraction among the letters of a story or another.

After a week and having re-read most of the books he had once brought with him from England, he had sent Falkoff, his second, to find him new ones to read. He should have known the man could not be trusted with this task, but since there was no more learned or trustworthy man at hand, he had had to make do with him.

Falkoff had scoured the local booksellers for new ones and come back with a most curious assortment ranging from cheap broadsheets, a few old issues of *The London Magazine* to a battered copy of *Fanny Hill* and a heavy comprehensive publication of Molière’s plays in French.

*Le Malade Imaginaire.*

Had he not known better, he would have accused Falkoff of a deliberate slight against his person and have him punished accordingly, probably by bludgeoning this insolent imbecile with said book.
until… until his rage was satisfied.

No, he was not in the mood nor the constitution to do so.

Rolling from his right side onto his back in order to shift his weight after several hours of remaining in the same position, his eyes scanned the text again.

His current read was a print of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s Drury Lane sensation *St Patrick’s Day* or *The Scheming Lieutenant* and he had already decided he didn’t like it, but read on anyway, if only to pass the time.

Lauretta: Psha! you know, mamma, I hate militia officers; a set of dunghill cocks with spurs on—heroes scratched off a church door—clowns in military masquerade, wearing the dress without supporting the character.

“Provincial forces, not militia”, he angrily murmured to himself as if Miss Lauretta Credulous could hear him or as if it mattered at all. The damsel was much to his dislike.

Bridget: [Reads.] Revenge is sweet.

Justice: It begins so, does it? I'm glad of that; I'll let the dog know I'm of his opinion.

Bridget: [Reads.] And though disappointed of my designs upon your daughter, I have still the satisfaction of knowing I am revenged on her unnatural father; for this morning, in your chocolate, I had the pleasure to administer to you a dose of poison! —Mercy on us!

He shut the small booklet and tossed it, best as his faiblesse allowed, across the room and turned to the wall. Even the questionable wall décor was better than this.

His fever was conquering him again. He felt the flush in his cheeks rise and his body beneath the covers grow uncomfortably hot. Just as he was about to drift into merciful sleep, a knock at the door, urgent and determined, prompted his eyes to fly open again.

Sitting up against the headboard best as he could and arranging the covers around him, he gave his permission for the visitor to enter.

Half-hoping against his better knowledge that it would be Lola, Falkoff stood in the doorframe.

“Sir, news from headquarters, sir.” Falkoff extended a letter sealed in red tape to him.

Although his eyes were clouded by the drowsiness of his illness that made it particularly troublesome to decipher the quickly-scrawled instructions beneath the waxen seal, the words on the page echoed loud as church bells in his head:
“Marching orders. We’re going to Virginia soon. Ready the men for inspection”, he ordered, trying to sound like the commander his men were accustomed to and not like the languishing shadow of the man he considered himself to be, “and find my uniform jacket. We’ll march at dawn.”

Groaning, he dragged himself out of bed and emptied the contents of his washbasin in his face hoping to cool the raging heat that cooked him from within. It was almost as hot as the fire that had almost extinguished him, had not his captor had a change of heart.

He scolded himself when despite his fever, a shiver ran down his spine at the thought of his ordeal.

No, he had to be strong. Next week, he would lead his men to campaign, against these rebels and the way things seemed, there would be a battle. Not a skirmish, not a fight with a few badly armed misguided farmers who would wince for mercy once their hay or barn was burnt down to the ground, but a real battle, with many men, all the soldiers both sides could muster.

He was no foolish man; he would have to get better than his present state to participate, but, oddly anticipating the fight to come and the orders given to him, he felt he would be quite all right again in a week’s time.

In fact, he felt better already. For now, he would inspect his men and see what improvements could be done. He wanted his men to be at the cusp of their powers, efficient and lethal, granting no mercy to any rebel.

Smirking, despite himself, he wondered if, on the battlefield, he would meet some old acquaintances from Setauket. It was unlikely, yes, but in case it would happen, he would cherish this particular encounter.

And with Hewlett back in the colonies and the army likely needing every able man in their service, who could, once the battle had commenced, tell which knife belonged to whom? Which gun?

The day of reckoning was coming, and coming fast.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: I'm following some of TURN's not quite right representations of events, namely the weird way the British Army seems to promote their officers (no one could jump from captain to lieut.-col. just like that by magic) and the altered timeline.

The song Caleb is singing in the beginning is an old folk song called "Quare Bungle Rye", here in the version as sung by "The Dubliners".

The real Caleb Brewster was, as far as I know, not of Irish origins, but to fit his show representation he is within the realms of this fic.

"Whale, oil, beef, hooked": Try and say it very quickly in your best imitation of an Irish accent. To all Irish people reading this, I am sorry to have included such an awful stereotype, but it's just for the craic, I swear. By the way, saying it aloud comes at your own risk. Probably avoid doing it while there are people listening.

Wig-curling: so that was a bit of a puzzler for me, who curls the wigs of the Setauket garrison? We never get to find out if there is a perruquier or a specially-trained servant
(or servants, given the amount of wig-wearing soldiers in Setauket). In the absence of a manservant with the required training, I could imagine Anna and Abigail might have been tasked to learn and later do it for the British stationed at Strong Manor, or have at least in this fic. In case you are interested, the wig curler is heated, the hair wrapped in slightly wet rags or paper and then wrapped around the wig curler, much like a modern curling iron combined with the technique of makeshift paper towel hair curlers some of you might still know from your childhood.

Regarding powdering the wig, look at the 1790s portrait of Simcoe, apparently Anna still powders his hair...

The two Simcoes: When Anna hopes there is a second officer by that name and imagines him to be like Edmund, this is my hint at the fact that the show has basically taken all positive qualities from the historical Simcoe and transferred them to the fictional Hewlett, thus creating two characters out of one. Yes, even Hewlett's love for his ungulate friends is based on Simcoe.

Simcoe's illness was in reality neither due to being shot by Caleb Brewster and thrown over a bannister by Abe Woodhull or being almost burnt alive by the sister of his rival; he was extremely ill at the time of the Yorktown-campaign and at Yorktown itself. In his account of the war based on the diary he kept at the time, which he published back in England six years later, he wrote:

“The health of Lt. Col. Simcoe began now totally to fail under the incessant fatigues, both of body and mind, which for years he had undergone.”, indicating he suffered from psychological issues, perhaps PTSD, as well as physical illness. Other instances hinting at this can be found in his poetry, in which he speaks of "dark mental night" which is contrasted by "thou source of day", meaning his wife Elizabeth, whom he fell in love with during his convalescence and married in only a matter of months.

The hideous wallpaper is borrowed from the anecdote frequently told about Oscar Wilde's death, who is said to have remarked that either he or the wallpaper (in some renditions of the story, it's the curtains instead) would have to go. On 30th November 1900, Wilde went and the wallpaper stayed.

"Le Malade imaginaire" ("The Imaginary Invalid") is a play by famous French playwright Molière (1622-1673), which premiered the year of his death. Argan, a man who constantly is ill with all sorts of imaginary ailments, pretty much annoys everyone around him and even forbids his daughter to marry the man she loves because he wants her to marry a doctor. The people around him then try to cure the hypochondriac- with surprising results. In the end, they trick him into a mock-ceremony in which he is made a "real" doctor.

Here, I chose the play because it would certainly trouble the genuinely unwell Simcoe to be called an "Imaginary Invalid".

"St Patrick's Day, or, The Scheming Lieutenant" is a 1775 play by the Irish poet and playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816). It's a comedy about a young woman falling in love with the eponymous Lieutenant O'Connor, an Irishman, but her father does everything to prevent them from meeting. Following are a host of shenanigans involving dress-up, extortion and a mock-up poison plot. In the end, the Judge is tricked into giving O'Connor 10,000 pounds and the permission to ask for Lauretta's hand.

If I recall correctly (it's been long since I've read the play in full) a soldier mentions a tavern called the "White Horse" or something similar, which I, together with the mention of annoying judges and poison thought would speak very much to Simcoe,

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who himself was a "Scheming Lieutenant" at the beginning of season 1.

Edit: Sorry for the bad formatting of the excerpt from the play, but no matter how much I try to change it, it won't come out right.
Chapter Summary

Anna, Caleb and Eliza make a discovery, Abigail hides Cicero in the attic, Sick-coe is still bedridden, Arnold receives orders, Peggy's pregnancy is not going as planned and two people who never thought they'd meet again do exactly that in rather adverse circumstances.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it has taken me so long to update, there's a scene in this chapter you and I have long awaited and that took me quite a while to figure out... Happy Easter to all of you who celebrate and if you don't, have a happy Sunday/Monday, depending when and where you read these lines.

I promise, something major (no (well, yes) pun intended) is happening in this chapter. That being said, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Yes, who are ye?”, the Irishman asked.

Now that was a good question Eliza could not quite answer. Of course she was Mrs Elizabeth Greenwood, but given her journey and the several times she had put on a mask, pretended to be somebody else and thinking of the circumstances (did she know these people? Could they, even if they did not seem to do so, pose a threat to her?), was it perhaps wiser not to be herself?

“Given that I rescued you from Arnold, should not I be granted the first question?”, she shot back, not entirely unfriendly, but sharp enough to make the man notice she considered herself in command, which was underlined by her straight, upright pose.

The other two did not seem to appreciate this and the woman’s forehead creased with cautious mistrust.

“Well, one must start”, she replied at last in a seemingly friendly tone that betrayed her unwillingness to do so: “his is my brother, I am his sister. My homestead was overrun by rebels and my property looted and when word of my misfortune reached my brother, he obtained permission from General Howe himself to come and escort me to York City.”

The ensign nodded and, as if to prove they were siblings, woodenly laid one arm around his supposed sister's shoulder.

Something was not quite right with the two of them. Yes, both had dark eyes, though of different colour- which didn’t necessarily need to mean a lot, given the fact that her eyes did not match Edmund’s either, and from what little could be judged based on the colour of his eyebrows and eyelashes, the ensign appeared to be as dark-haired as his supposed sister, but that again needed not
to mean anything, for theirs was a common hair-colour shared by many strangers.

There was nothing in their features that indicated any relationship by blood, at least none so close as that of a brother and sister—maybe their father or mother had died and the other parent remarried, causing them to be half-siblings?

And then there was the question of the accent the ensign sported. It did not sound as if he and his “sister” had grown up in the same environment or even on the same continent.

Why then had they been so reluctant to tell her their story? Was it not a noble thing to rescue one’s sister, something one would rather want to tell people about without reluctance? And since the ensign supposedly had a permit of sorts issued by General Howe, there was no reason whatsoever for them to be reluctant about telling her this. It was no very personal information, nothing a perfect stranger could use against them—unless they had something else to hide.

From Edmund she had heard that the Colonies were teeming with spies and other snakes in the garden of the Empire quietly working in the dark and twilight as Washington’s non-military backbone to bring about the fall of the Army by means of information, not the musket.

Were they continental spies? What was she to do then, turn them in to the military authorities to deal with them as they saw fit? After all, these people posed a danger to the integrity of the empire and their useless war and mongering of strife had it been that had seen Edmund leave his native home for foreign shores and had changed him to such a terrible degree, made her brother a stranger to her she had barely recognised on the day of his return.

And yet, had it not been a continental spy who had broken Edmund’s heart? Could she turn in someone—

Eliza squinted, her gaze resting on the woman’s face. Edmund had been very reluctant talking about his Mrs Anna Strong of Setauket—

No, there were probably a host of women fitting Edmund’s rather general and rough description of her—no.

Anna was somewhat uncomfortable with the stranger looking her over so obviously. Was she a spy for the British? Her accent, the same clear, articulate upper class twang that reminded her of somebody she used to know—that was how all the higher-ups spoke probably, but why then did she wear an, albeit clean, quite worn old dress? That could well be a disguise. Had to be.

Lately, she had learned from Ben and through some talk among the camp followers that the British had started recruiting female spies now to infiltrate the ranks of the women at camp for nobody would suspect a woman since women were not deemed versed in military affairs and thus of no greater consequence in the larger designs of the army, listed on their inventories just like chattel and cattle. Nobody would mind a woman overhear them talking, for she, bound by nature, had no mind for all things military.

What a silly misconception, Anna thought, for taking her time at camp into account, she had learned a fair share about things that apparently did not need to concern women, but there were enough men (like Ben even sometimes) who believed women could and should not be involved in the war, which meant the British plan to place women spies in Washington’s camp would likely succeed as long as
the spy was quick-witted and did not give herself away through an accidental slip of the tongue.

Speaking of tongues, the manner of speech of the woman before them would have given her away almost instantly. She did not speak like an American and even for a lady having come to America a while ago she sounded too British, to well-bred to belong among the rank and file of the army mending coats and stockings with holes as big as a hen’s egg in them.

She was not a woman accustomed to rough labour and sleeping in squalid condition under a canvas cover that let more cold and humidity in than it kept out. Her fingernails were clean and obviously filed with precision and her hands looked soft and she also lacked the gaunt lines on her face of one having not eaten well for days and kept busy day and night caring for a host of little children running around camp barefooted and going wherever they were not supposed to.

This woman obviously was one of good breeding, of standing and name. Perhaps she had fallen from grace at home and relocated to America in hopes of a better life, but had been dealt a bad hand by fate, having caused her to fall on bad times?

She looked not too sad, either.

With a sentiment bordering on bitterness, Anna remarked that years of lying and spying had made her alert to such details. On a more upbeat note, perhaps these observations might save Caleb’s and her own life, should the lady turn out to be a spy of the opposite side indeed.

“Now it’s your turn”, she said with as much self-assuredness she could muster, intending these words to sound like a conversational invitation and not like a challenge, but failed in this design.

“I have a brother in the army, just like you”, Eliza began, thinking this part of information not too personal to relay to her curious companions. Besides, she wanted to prod a little deeper into the ensign’s tale. With Edmund in the house and his letters of troop movements, colonels, companies and cannons arriving with meticulous frequency provided the postal service did run on time, she had acquired a certain knowledge about the Royal Army.

If, if the ensign was genuine, he might be able to answer her a few questions.

Her words had the desired effect: although he was quite the actor, he could not hide a hint of unpleasant surprise that blew across his face for less than a second like a gust of wind.

“Ah, I might know him then, perhaps, that’s if he’s stationed in York City.” Ensign O’Sham seemed to consider attack the best form of defence.

“He is”, Eliza chirped jovially, “one of the officers. A major, no less.”

In Anna’s head, cogs seemed to get into motion that had not been connected before.

“What’s his name?”

“Whose name?”
“Your brother—"

“Why would you be interested in my brother’s name?”

“Edmund Hewlett, is his name Edmund Hewlett?”

She should have seen it straight away. The woman’s face—her manner of speech, the line of her mouth (though somewhat less wide and thin than Edmund’s, it looked so very much like his), the face she made while listening to something she did not quite believe was true, how she had cocked her head when she had listened to the mock-up tale of her and Caleb’s arrival in York City—she had known Elizabeth Greenwood was crossing the ocean, but had not heard of her again and assumed that perhaps her plans had changed and besides, she had asked her a while ago not to write to her again.

What if she truly was Mrs Greenwood, Edmund’s sister?

The other woman’s mouth fell open with shock and sudden realisation.

“You are—Are you Anna Strong?”

“Jaysus, someone’s going to tell me what’s happenin’?” Caleb interjected.

“That’s not—that’s not the woman who was sendin’ ye letters, right?”

“I think I am”, the woman said and extended her hand for her to take.

“Elizabeth Greenwood.”

“Anna Strong.”

“And he is—”, Mrs Greenwood wanted to know.

“Caleb Brewster. A friend from Setauket. We can’t talk here, come with us.”

He would have bet his whaleboat something like that was impossible. So here was that woman, that Major Hewlett’s matchmaking sister, who wanted to bring Anna and him back together. She’d held true to her promise and come to America with her brother.

If she was here, that meant the Major had to be somewhere close, too. Asking himself if Anna had come to the same conclusion, he led the two women to the tavern belonging to his old associate, where they surely could talk more freely among the more anti-British drinkers this place attracted and which only seldom had a redcoat or two, mostly of the fresh cannon fodder they kept bringing in and new to the city, sitting at a table playing cards and trying to fit in with the sailors, smugglers and other assorted members of the local underworld.

He ordered tea for the ladies and when the barman asked if he wanted one, too, his face betraying this place didn’t very often sell tea, it wasn’t one of them fancy tea-rooms after all the likes of Mrs Arnold frequented, he had declined, opting for some whiskey instead. He sure needed some uisce beatha to revive his senses.

“So, what’s the story?”, he asked when Mrs Greenwood had taken her first sip of tea.
She talked for a long while, spoke of her journey, trying to protect Hewlett from Simcoe and everything else that had happened to her in the meantime. While he didn’t agree with some of her opinions which shone through the fabric of her tale, he could not deny she was a woman of courage and action, much like Anna, the perhaps most valuable member of the ring.

They should give Anna a pseudonym and name the ring after her, because she’d done the most spy work up until she’d been forced to flee for camp after the wedding gone wrong and Abe, that little shite (though he still loved his friend, there was no doubt about that) hadn’t been half as good as her and still wasn’t.

Mrs G. continued with how they’d landed in York City, her brother’s interview with Arnold and Simcoe and then came to the most interesting bit.

“...One night, I came upstairs to the sound of commotion. I opened the door to Edmund’s room and there was a struggle going on, there were three men, Edmund and two others. One of them came to his aid and helped him kill the third. It was horrible.”

Her voice had reduced to a whisper. Recounting this incident, he could only imagine, must be horrible for her and also, she might not want everybody else to listen in on their conversation, which was unlikely, though: several girls had entered, scantily clad, and were looking for customers among the more than willing tavern-goers, the alcohol flowed freely and many a song was sung. Nobody would pay them any mind.

“Edmund-“ Anna half-exclaimed but caught herself and brought her hands to her mouth as if she could physically stop his name from falling from her lips.

“He is safe”, Mrs G. assured her and, a little too friendly for a stranger.

“Who was the third man?”, he wanted to know.

“One you might know- Abraham Woodhull?”

“Woodie? What was Woodie- Christ on a pony, the dumb bastard tried to kill him, didn’t he?”

“But was then surprised by Simcoe’s hitman who was waiting for Edmund”, Mrs G. closed, nodding.

“I take it from your reaction he shouldn’t have done that?”

“Christ, no! He’s going rogue, that’s why we’re here. If he’s getting into trouble, this might mean we all, Washington, the Ring, will get into trouble, too. Got a letter from his wife. Someone, a British intelligence agent, is blackmailing him and he figures the man who sold him out is your brother, and now he wants revenge, and that sets us all at risk.”

Mrs G. made a face and inhaled deeply before she spoke again, looking him directly in the eyes.

“He got a letter from a ‘Major Tamce’ sent in a shipment of tea, am I correct?”

“How d’you know that?”

His voice had risen at least two octaves with a bout of perplexed surprise and made him almost sound like an Irish version of Simcoe.

“That’s quite easy. I am Tamce. I invented him and blackmailed Woodhull in order to get him to deliver my letters to Mrs Strong. Nobody is looking for him, nobody will harm him. I thought he..."
would be afraid and figured he would do as I said. How could I know he would embark on a rogue mission in order to assassinate my brother? My views might not be the same as yours, Mr Brewster, but I certainly have no personal desire or the impoliteness to meddle in your affairs. I have no interest in how you earn your pay or what you are doing here. I shall return to Scotland as soon as possible, to a warm hearth and a home, I have no stakes in this war that is not mine to fight. All I fight for is my family. My brother.”

“Abe’s my family, you know.”

After that dirty English fecker had shot his uncle Lucas five years ago when he and Benny Boy had tried to take over Setauket, there was no living family of his left. His Ma had long passed, as had his father, a sailor on a merchant vessel who never came home. There was a sister who’d gone back to Ireland with her staunchly tory husband, but he hadn’t heard anything of her or her family since the war had broken out and he figured she, in service to some high and mighty official at Dublin Castle, didn’t want to be in contact with a known rebel. He wasn’t bitter about that; Biddy had to own her pay like everyone else and in a system dominated by the English, one had to take what one could. Another brother had died young of smallpox and a second sister had been still-born. He was the last of the Brewsters of Setauket, so to speak and Abe, Anna and Ben, the friends he had grown up with, were all the family he had left.

They had always considered them more siblings than friends, even when they had been children.

Thus, hearing that Mrs G. was the reason Abe was getting himself into hot water and only to live out some dream of hers to bring Annie and Hewlett back together made him angry, but he swallowed his anger. They couldn’t afford a fall-out now. Mrs G. might now where Abe was, then they could get him and get the hell out of this bloody redcoat-infested place and back to camp.

-And Anna? Annie would have to make her choice. At the moment, she looked pretty overwhelmed and was just like him visibly struggling to process the words she had just heard.

Unlike him though, she remained quiet for a moment and appeared to be a little more composed, thinking what to say next before she directed her gaze to Hewlett’s sister.

“Do you know where he is? Abe”, she added quickly and lowered her eyes.

“I know where Mr Woodhull presently dwells, but we will have to be quick.”

Telling two strangers about how she had come to know Mrs Margaret Shippen Arnold and how she had been evicted from her home was not done lightly; despite her continued dislike of Simcoe and her strong belief that life would be much improved for everyone dwelling in these colonies, she was not exactly proud of her doings and somewhat dreaded the reaction her tale might provoke.

“What?”, Brewster asked dumbly.

“It is true. I almost killed Simcoe.”

“I’d have seen it done”, he replied bluntly, “but that doesn’t matter how.”

While he seemed disappointed the ginger nuisance was still alive, there was also a hint of admiration in his voice- not everybody had the reckless bravado to pose as Simcoe’s whore, tie him up and press his own bayonet to his throat, she guessed.
“If we are quick, for as I told you, Mr Woodhull will be evicted from the Arnold household tomorrow, we can still find him there tonight and he can return with you to wherever you are headed.”

“His wife, his family. That’s where he’s going.”

Brewster gave her a stern look. It seemed that their political views did not make a favourable basis for a firm friendship. Friendship was not the reason she had come here anyway.

It was revenge.

Putting a few odd coins on the table (the barman would be happy to find she had laid out more for him than the beverages had cost or was worth for that matter), Eliza rose.

“What are you waiting for?”

The Arnolds' House, at the same time.

“Benedict, you must tell me what is going on”, Peggy implored, nay ordered her husband. In whatever commotion had arisen with her husband’s early return from wherever he chose to spend his day when he was done with earning his pay ordering his men around, there was no room or need for pretend-friendliness-or for that matter had been between them for a long, long time.

The situation was affecting the child, which made her even angrier, which in turn prompted the child to rest uneasy within her womb, kicking and protesting against whatever the little person could not yet understand was happening.

Not that she understood. Benedict had stopped telling her things long ago. Now, he deemed it sufficient to inform her of matters fait accompli, and only at the last moment and only if he considered it worthy of note or remembered he had a wife, which, sometimes, was a hard thing to break to him when he came home in a drunken rage and fury.

“Marching orders”, he replied brusquely, almost shoving her out of the way as he grabbed a few personal items of importance from the desk in the study, whence she had followed him, “to Virginia. We leave tonight.”

“But Benedict-“ the way he looked at her, glared at her with a hateful gaze smarted her. Perhaps it was a softness brought on with the changes of mind and body accompanying her pregnancy, but she felt that at least for the sake of their child, whom he might never come to know should he die on campaign, he owed her more answers than he chose to give her.

A part of her realised that this was her doing; they had played their cards at the gambling-table of politics, she and John, and lost it all and with his death, John had settled the debts they had accrued playing round after round, oblivious to the fact that the other players were playing too, some better than they had, some simply luckier with their cards.

She had led Benedict on making him believe she was flattered by his attentions to secure him for John and turn him against Washington for good. When all had failed, she had wed a traitor and John they had hanged by the neck, and after that, they had let their true colours shone through, her so-called husband and she, and on neither side were they either red or blue, their mutual colour was one of dread and dreariness, a bleak fog-grey of tristesse, helplessness and anger.
“What is it, wife? You see I don’t have any time either for packing or for your nagging now. Where’s Cicero? Cicero!”

Upon hearing her son’s name being called, Abigail rushed into the room.

“Where’s that son of yours?”, Benedict snapped at her, quite unnecessarily so for she had not done any wrong.

“I don’t know sir. He was polishin’ your boots an hour ago and I was running errands for Mrs Arnold."

“Get him, he’s coming with me!”

A quick glance was exchanged between Abigail and herself. The servant’s eyes were wide with fear.

In the shadows behind her maid in the corridor, Peggy could espy movement. Cicero was in the house, but kept from answering Benedict’s calls by his mother, who had thrown herself into the raging beast’s path in his stead.

“Benedict, I demand to know what exactly is going on. If you are taking my servants away with you, I have a right to know, too. Marching orders, now? Why so suddenly? What is happening?”

“My servants. You forget this is my house, wife. But if you must know, we shall triumph over Washington at Yorktown. It’s the final battle.”

He smiled, that awful, syrup-like vainglorious smile she had so detested about him right from the start.

“Now where is the boy?”

Abigail shrunk back as he made two steps towards her.

“I- I don’t know, we- you know how boys this age can be- I apologise for my son-“

“Get him! Get him! I don’t care how you do it but I won’t leave without my page to wait on me!”

What a lioness Abigail was. Although afeard, she remained calm, as calm at least as she could be in this situation, with Benedict Arnold angrily towering over her.

It was his right to take Cicero wherever he pleased but the fear in Abigail’s eyes stirred a hitherto unknown feeling in Peggy’s gut.

As her eyes found that of her maid and perhaps only person she could consider somewhat close to a confidante far away from her home in Philadelphia, where Becky, Freddie and all the other companions of her youth dwelt, her right hand found the rotundness of her belly.

The baby kicked and suddenly, Peggy knew.

“You can and you will.”

Her composure restored, she looked coldly at her husband, so coldly in fact she was half-convinced she could freeze the decanter of Madeira on the desk solid if she wanted to.

“If you wait for Cicero, you will be late. I will have him punished when he returns, he has misbehaved. But you will risk your chance at glory for a boy? Pay a private instead, I suppose they come cheaper, too.”
How was there even so much sang-froid left in her to face this man? It wasn’t exactly pure altruism to shield Cicero from being taken on campaign with Benedict, for she was happy about every minute Benedict would leave rather sooner than later and in their dislike for her husband, Abigail and she stood united.

A knock at the door had her husband standing at attention.

“Sir, we must go now”, a soldier, sent to inform the General pleaded with him, “it is about time we leave.”

“And the Rangers?”, her husband inquired.

“Colonel Simcoe has taken ill. They’ll follow on land as soon as he is recovered.”

Benedict snorted like an angry bull.

“We shall have to do then.”

He turned in the doorway, to where she had followed him into the corridor. She could only hope Cicero was safely hidden away in one of the adjoining rooms.

“Goodbye, Margaret.”

“Farewell, Benedict.”

There was an unsuspected tenderness in his tone, awkward and almost touching, but there could never be such a thing like this between them, they had ensured that all by themselves.

With nothing left to say, he looked at her one last time before disappearing into the darkness.

Her heart beat like it had never beaten before. He had wanted to take Cicero away, Arnold had planned on taking him with her on a mission, to war- she’d never let this happen to her boy. He was paid to wait on the General, he didn’t get paid to go to war and as long as she would live, she would protect him.

Cicero was a good boy, he had his whole life still ahead of him- she would have offered herself in his stead if only to preserve his life, because he was what was dearest to her on this earth, her world, her little boy whom she loved like nothing and nobody else in this world.

From the day he had come into this world a screeching little bundle which the midwife who had been called to assist her during the painful and in her case, had it not been for the woman’s skill and experience, almost certainly deadly experience, had laid into her arms, she had vowed to safeguard him, to love him and care for him.

Never before or after had she seen anything so beautiful as the eyes of her son opening and looking at her for the first time, dark eyes that today belonged to a boy slowly growing into a man.

And thanks to Peggy, he would continue to grow up and not be struck by a bayonet or ball on some battlefield in Virginia.

Peggy had walked towards the parlour but stopped in the doorframe to steady herself with one hand while the other clutched her swollen belly. She appeared to be cooing to the baby, little words, terms
of endearment to lull it back to sleep. Seeing Peggy like this was very touching; she'd never seen her talk to her baby before and it only assured her in her judgement of the woman she had first come to know as Peggy Shippen: she might be a doll in a pretty dress to the eyes of the world, but that was only the thinly-frozen surface of a deep lake in winter, bottomless in its depths.

The evening’s troubles certainly had not done either of them any good, both mothers and their children.

“Hush now, shhh—”

“Miss Peggy?”

She looked at her, still holding her stomach.

“Thank you for saving Cicero.”

“He is not saved yet. Bring him upstairs where the other two are. Make sure he isn’t seen in the coming one or two days.”

Her voice was cool, haughty and distanced, but her eyes revealed how tired and uneasy she was. They looked dull, as did her hair that had once shone like gold.

“You must rest. Lie down—”

Without asking for permission or being asked to do so, perhaps because in matters of childbirth, Abigail was the more experienced of the two and in the position to give assistance to a woman who had never been pregnant before, she pried Peggy’s arm from the doorframe and put it around her shoulders, inviting her to let her weight be supported by Abigail.

The two slowly walked to the settee, where Abigail helped her to sit down, brought a cushion and assisted Peggy putting her feet up and removing her shoes.

“Thank you, Abigail.” “I thank you. You saved my boy—”

“Cicero isn’t safe here. You must send him away, wherever—” she sharply drew breath through her teeth and began stroking her belly again to calm the child within.

“Promise me”, she added, visibly fatigued, a shadow of the Peggy Shippen she had come to know.

“I will.”

She gave the blonde fallen angel who had once been the dream of so many men, all of whom would have treated her more kindly than the General, a smile, even if she truly wanted to cry. Separation from her son. Had they not been separated long enough in the past?

Anna was the second to rise and followed Mrs Greenwood. All of them remained mute on their journey through York City’s busy streets which slowly emptied in the waning daylight.

They had sat and talked for very long it seemed. It had been necessary and knowing now where Abe was meant a lot- it meant he had not got himself into something again, it meant that she and Caleb would be successful on their mission to bring him back to camp, safe and unharmed.
To think he could have run into Simcoe—she shuddered at the mere thought of the man and her mind produced, not even one of him snarling at an enemy or coldly staring at Edmund, in her mind she could see him smiling down at her, as if she were a pretty little collectible, a porcelain doll he had spotted to add to his collection or a delicate, rare butterfly ready to be impaled on a pin and put into a glass display.

—these even sounded like hobbies he might enjoy, as both would require a certain degree of hunting in some sense, and _taking_ things he liked for himself, just as he had done with Strong Manor and had attempted to do with her, too.

The thought was somewhat out of place given their present situation, a captain-lieutenant of the Continental Army dressed up as a British Army ensign, a Scottish lady of supposedly good breeding who did not shrink back from questionable methods to conduct what she called her “business” and an American spy who had fallen in love with the man she had been supposed to spy on. They made for a comical set, she mused, the likes one only encountered in such plays as she knew were put on as entertainment for the soldiers at York City’s playhouses.

But even more comical was the thought of Simcoe, in a previous life before the war or after it perhaps, sitting in a study of a genteel home somewhere across the sea to where she’d never been and counting dried-up insects, admiring them through a glass and holding them against the sunlight to better examine them. He did not look like the scientific type and would, unlike Edmund, whom she had watched in his efforts to understand the universe the night they had first been alone together under the stars in an encounter that had been a lot more proper than it sounded from that description, and likely had no mind for improving a theory, discovering something or the like. Rather, in this mental theatre-play of hers, she could see his triumphant smile as a net lowered itself quickly over an unsuspecting butterfly reclining on a flower and watched on as he impaled it with a silver pin straight through the little creature’s heart, its wings quivering desperately in its last struggle before he would add the poor thing to a wall of others of the same species and many others, smiling almost serenely.

Wiping these disturbing images off her mind, she prayed they would be lucky if they would not meet him and she was hesitant to even think about how he would react if he found them like this, his former jailor in rebel captivity, the woman he had tried to woo and failed and his second captor who had almost given his body over to the flames of a raging blaze that had devoured a good part of the city.

Abe would be with them, too, and that would make it even worse. Abe and Simcoe had never gotten on well, even if they hadn’t talked much prior to the duel brought on by Simcoe’s wrong assumption Abe had forced himself on her that Christmas four years ago. He had thought Abe a weakling, a failed laughing stock (even though, as rumour had had it in Setauket, not unlike Abe he had, when a youth, abandoned his legal studies and joined the army instead, an act which did not quite sit well with the cool hauteur of the well-bred and –educated gentleman he liked to think he displayed to the public) and from then on, things had only grown worse, far worse.

He’d kill them all without waiting for any orders.

—Abe? There would not only be Abe to worry about. Edmund would die, too.

Throughout Elizabeth Greenwood’s tale and their discussion of how to proceed, never had the name of her brother been mentioned. Caleb probably simply didn’t care as Edmund was no priority of his; he was the man who hadn’t stopped Simcoe from shooting his uncle Lucas (how could he have, she asked herself, but at the same time had compassion for Caleb’s resentment of _Major Hewlett_) and at no point in time had he had anything to do with their plan to go and get Abe.

Now that they were with his sister however, they would inevitably meet him. Mrs Greenwood hadn’t
mentioned her brother, nor had Anna enquired after him, his name however had constantly hung between them like the air just before a thunderstorm.

She would probably see him again now.

Did she want to?

No. Yes. Maybe—how was she supposed to tell? He had every right to despise her after the wedding, the pain and public humiliation she had caused him. And then, she had, acting on Ben’s orders, used him to gain permission to come to York City.

If she were him, she would never want to see her again. Did it matter at all? What was done was done. The past could not be erased, the future lay ahead of them and given the threat of being an American spy in a city abuzz with redcoats, there were other things she ought keep an eye on or think about than a British Major who had won himself a derogatory nickname for guarding a sleepy conglomerate of houses on Long Island rather than partaking in battle.

Had those who had coined this term known what had happened in Setauket under his watch, they would have remained silent, she thought bitterly.

The closer they came to the Arnold residence, the more she felt her belly being filled with a sensation of dread coupled with anticipation.

On the one hand, she did not want to see Edmund again to spare them both a world of pain mourning the past, the what-ifs and could-have-been-s had he not been a British officer and she a patriot intelligencer.

On the other, she wanted to see him, wanted only to lay her eyes on him for a few passing seconds to assure herself that he was well, as well at least as he could be, given the circumstances of his dwelling in York City.

She didn’t expect him to be happy; no, not after what his sister had told them had happened since his arrival in America, but was it too much to hope he was healthy and safe?

Edmund. How long had it been she had last used his name, spoken it out loud? Having prohibited herself to speak of him and on the few occasions she had been forced to, had reverted to calling him “Major Hewlett” as if a mere change from Christian- to surname could change anything that had been between them, Edmund had become her secret, the weight she bore on her heart.

At the time, it had been the wisest thing to do, saving him and saving the cause, saving the Ring, keeping Abe from doing something very stupid he might later regret and Edmund from being the subject of Abe’s foolishness.

This was no climate for love, nor had it ever been, especially not between two so fundamentally different people. He had believed in the righteousness of what he was doing, and she had done the same.

She had fought for a higher goal that made her personal woes and worries seem insubstantial in comparison. It simply had never been meant to be, right from the start.

At first, she had only seen the wig and the uniform, had even plotted to have him killed, just as they had planned to be rid of Simcoe, but when she had seen there was a man hiding behind the mask of the stern major, impersonal and cold at all times when talking to anyone in Setauket who he likely thought were all beneath him in station, and such a kind, and good man at that, there had been only love in her heart.
Surely he must have heard these things and she could only imagine how they had hurt him.

Besides, he was just like her, like Abe even, a victim of his time.

Hadn’t they all been pressed into unfavourable circumstances by the times they lived in, by having been born on this or that side of the conflict and pressed into action?

The British oppressed the Americans, who should have the right to govern themselves, for London was too far away from York City and the cruelty with which His Majesty grabbed for even the littlest coin in the smallest man’s pocket was outrageous.

She had by chance been born American, known the oppressive nature of British rule while Edmund had been raised a country gentleman of the Old World, the likes of whom held the likes of her under their thumb.

Of course she had felt compelled to act when the chance had presented itself to her, she had regarded it a necessity, nay a duty she would fulfil with pride to defend what was hers, her country, her money, her freedom, from the bloody bloodybacks.

-Edmund had seen it as his duty to provide for his family left destitute by his father’s ill judgement by taking the King’s shilling (though a major likely earned more than that), the easiest way to earn some coin these days in Britain, though not much.

Would she see him there, at the house? Would it be good, bad, would she feel anything at all, and would he?

Her mind kept coming back to circling around the same set of questions over and over again until they arrived at a street corner from where the back of Arnold’s residence was visible.

The front was guarded, she knew, but the back seemed to be treated in a more neglectful manner; bad for Arnold, good for them, Anna thought. Because surely someone would enter through the back door there was bound to be for the servants, get-

No, it couldn’t be that easy. There would be servants in the house, at least Abigail and Cicero, and what if Margaret Arnold was home?

She was ripped from her thoughts when around her, Caleb and Mrs Greenwood started to become increasingly nervous.

“Something ain’t right”, Caleb needlessly commented upon some sort of commotion that seemed to be taking place at the front of the house, men shouting, horses whinnying, an agitated woman’s voice pleading; although none of them could make out any distinctive words, it was clear that whatever was happening did not mean anything reassuring.

Good news never arrived at such an hour.

“We’ll wait here”, Mrs Greenwood proclaimed, crouching down half-hidden behind another building, eyeing the Arnolds’ house with concern.

Eliza’s heart raced. Had they found Edmund and Woodhull, had Peggy sold them to her husband, or had the General perhaps discovered them themselves and had called for his men to arrest them? What
if her brother was in danger and she couldn’t do a thing now? She wouldn’t even know where they would take him or if they would ever free him again. She didn’t want Edmund to rot away in some dirty whole somewhere below ground for all eternity or see him hang - they had to do something.

Even Woodhull deserved better. Never would she come to like him, not after all she had learned about him from Edmund, but he had saved her little brother’s life that day Simcoe’s hitman had come for him. Had he not wanted to kill Edmund about as much as she had wanted to kill Simcoe, Edmund wouldn’t be alive today.

He too deserved to be rescued, even if it might only be for his friends’ sake, who had come for him under great peril for their own lives.

“You’ll stay here. We can’t help Woody or your brother now. Won’t do them any good if we get into trouble too”, Brewster said and took her by the arm, gently yet decidedly keeping her where she was. He did not look like it, but he had great instinct and had guessed her next move, namely to rise and simply walk towards the sounds of war (or at least which she thought was what war sounded like) and look what would happen.

Brewster was right; it was idiotic to risk more lives than perhaps were already in danger. His words were calm and composed, his face however wasn’t. Just like her, he had a loved one, a friend inside this building for whom he feared and was obviously struck with the same helpless frustration, wanting to help, wanting to do something not entirely prudent but knowing at the same time that one false step might even aggravate the situation.

And so, there was nothing left to do but wait for all three of them, frozen with shock and tension.

**York City, Simcoe’s quarters.**

They wouldn’t march at dawn. He was too ill to sit on a horse, or at least, they had told him that. Not that he hadn’t tried, but Falkoff and the doctor had pulled him right off his horse again, and he had, as graceful as a sack of wet grain, fallen into their arms as they had done so and threatened him to secure him to the bed by force if he were ever to attempt such a foolish feat again.

Illness had robbed him of his authority. He was now half a man, truly only half the man Hewlett was.

The promise of battle should have revived him, but it didn’t, because he well knew he might never partake in it and would have to wait for news of the outcome while others would win glory in the field, lesser men, or at least lesser men in comparison to his healthy state.

He had heard rumours they were thinking of relieving him of his command, to let Falkoff lead the men to a certain point on the way to Yorktown where they would meet the cavalry of Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton, who would then provisionally assume command of the Rangers.

What a commander he was. He was supposed to ride into battle, to beat the enemy, and instead he was struck down by *weakness*.

For now, he had managed to keep his superiors from doing that and promised them, the Rangers, a mounted unit, would make up the delay of a few days with ease and still be rested and effective in battle.
He had until the next day to set off, and was intent to do so, even if presently, his head hurt and he was regularly breaking into cold sweats, his mind tortured with images of his captivity, of these bastards he wanted to annihilate in person, watch them die, gore them, slit their throats, make them pay.

Odd as it was, this thought restored some of his strength momentarily and he set up in bed, reaching for the wet rags wrapped around his calves to turn them around in order to enjoy the soothing coolness of the side that had not come into contact with his burning skin.

He wanted to fight. At the same time however, he wanted not to fight at all, he wanted to lie here and be consoled, feel a mother’s gentle hand take his, the other with concern feeling his burning brow, and coo to him, like it was done with little children, applying to him the most primal and probably most effective form of consolation. She was dead, though, and even if she were not, she would be in England, too far away to aid his recovery.

-Who was there to care for him, who would lament his death, should he not rise from his sickbed again?

-Oh he would. He would ride into battle and destroy the enemy.

-But what if he wouldn’t? Who would close his eyes, who lay a flower or two for him at a hastily dug up grave (the Army definitively had better and more important things to do than pickling dead men and sending them across the ocean)?

Nobody would. Nobody would be with him in his last moments and offer him consolation, nobody cared if he lived or died. He was not entirely certain if he did at all, either.

All he knew was that being a soldier, he ought to fight, not rest. He could rest once he was dead, which, oh great irony of fate, could be rather sooner than later if the fire in his body couldn’t be quenched. Maybe, if he rested just a little bit, he would be well enough to ride with his men come the following morning.

Nobody could take the Rangers from him and nobody could tell him to lie in bed and sleep while his men fought, sacrificing themselves for a greater, a higher goal.

Brewster and Tallmadge would be his. He would end them, for good, and as many of their misguided little friends he would be able to take down with them.

He would give them the same rough treatment they had given him. He would see them die, watch as their horrified eyes lost their lively gleam and finally triumph over those who had done him wrong.

With that last, rather uplifting thought, he slipped back into an episode of fever-induced dreams, in which he was not alone. He couldn’t see who it was, for in his dream he was incapable of opening his eyes, but a cool, comforting hand rested on his brow and a voice he vaguely remembered said a lot of pretty things, consoling him greatly. When he woke however, the dream was gone from him and everything left to think about was the prospect of finally having his revenge on Tallmadge and Brewster.

The Arnolds’ house, two hours later.

The night had grown calmer, at least inside, for outside, in the distance, the sound of drums, men shouting and masses of marching men beating a steady rhythm against the cobblestones were still audible. Abigail had come upstairs to tell them what was going on and brought her son with them.
Now, the boy sat on the floor, slumped against the wall and kept eyeing the door.

Cicero hadn’t talked much, mostly perhaps because he did not have the fondest memories of him personally from Setauket and in case he disliked Abraham for some reason, he could not blame him for that, because he felt no friendship for him either.

As far as he understood from the few and meagre morsels of conversation that had passed between them since Cicero had entered, pushed through the door by a frantic-looking Abigail, Arnold was moving his men and had orders from above to relocate his men to Virginia.

Ah, the final battle. This was at least what it looked like. For years there had been talk of that last battle, “one more victory”, greater men than Arnold (certainly of greater personal integrity) had promised to deliver the final blow, but what had come if it? Nothing. The war was still going on and nobody, man, woman or child, seemed to be able to keep away from it. The war was just like the fire that had raged through York City; killing and destroying, indiscriminately swallowing everything in its path, mercilessly devouring everything.

Would it end now, with Arnold in Virginia? Hopefully. After all, however naïve it sounded to still cling on to hope in this day and age, a supplement to faith when the latter was not enough to cling on to anymore, he wanted to end, everything to end, and he did not care about the outcome.

Should the Americans win, it was of no concern to him. Presently all he wanted was to return home, to escape this madness, attempts of being murdered and sitting in someone’s attic for days with a man he strongly disliked.

He wanted to be home, sleep in the bed he had known since his childhood days and glance up to the soothingly familiar stars in his native Scottish sky at night and then return home in the early morning light to Eliza’s scolding and mother’s nagging for having left without a word or having been away too long, making them worry.

He wanted to be alone riding through a heathery glen even further up north, where once the Jacobites had hid in their lairs, land that now lay still and calm and feel the cold sunrays of a spring day on his face, thinking nothing.

Sighing, he shook his head. Fanciful dreams and recollections of his native home would not help them. Besides, he was as much an Englishman as he was a Scot, for his mother was born and bred an Englishwoman and in his voice, he carried her southern twang, and drank his tea with her manners.

And was it not any Englishman’s duty to do his bit for his country?

In days not too long past, he might have believed that. He didn’t anymore. And even if there were to be some truth to it, he had done his duty already.

Now all he hoped for was an end, no matter what shape or form it might take, for a victory or a truce was better than continuing the killing, the shouting orders and firing balls at other men fighting with equal bravery for their cause.

On a personal note, he was not in favour of the Americans or their cause, now however, he almost wished for their victory. If they won, there would be no need for intelligence, they wouldn’t need spies anymore and he would certainly escape another Questioning with Arnold and Simcoe.

He could return home and leave everything behind here where it belonged and finally start to-

The sudden creaking of the door startled all three of them Cicero jumped instinctively, jumping
across the dusty sofa Woodhull had been seated on until a second or two ago and crouched down in the shadowy darkness behind it, hoping to remain unseen there.

Abraham had gripped for the next best thing he had found, an empty bottle of cheap wine Abigail had served them to drink a few days ago (luxury indeed) and which had, quickly relieved of its contents, been converted to a makeshift candlestick, the candle engrafted on top of it with the remaining wax of the last, burnt down candle.

The farmer held it chest-high like a club, doubtlessly considering to crack the glass against the door frame or a crate in order to create a far more impressive and dangerous weapon while he, overpowered by surprise, had not been quite so quick-witted as his companions and now had to face whoever was on the other side of the door armed with his bravery (what bravery?) alone.

“Hush. It’s me.”

Abigail’s form quickly slipped inside and closed the door behind her.

“We need you. Miss Peggy and I- there’s someone outside, knocking at the back door-“ Ah. When once one would have found use for General Arnold, he was not there. Although a military macaroni, he was no bad fighter, not at all; he had shown his bravery at Saratoga and fought alongside his men. His bad leg would surely mean there was a certain limit to his quickness in motion, but a trained fighter as he fancied himself to be surely could overcome such a difficulty.

Never in his life would he have thought he would ever come to think such a thing, but presently, he quite missed Arnold, since Abigail’s coming and the house’s emptiness save for its mistress and her maid could only mean they wanted him or Woodhull, or both of them to go and investigate.

“Someone’s banging at the door, what if they’ve come back to get my son-“

She held Cicero, who despite his age had run to his mother at the sight of her, as he was sure he would have done, too in his situation at that tender age, close to her, her knuckles straining, so tightly she was holding on to him.

“I doubt it is General Arnold or his men, Abigail. If anything, I would suppose whoever is knocking to have come with the intention to rob the house, having viewed the General’s departure. Is the backdoor secured? Is it strong enough to withstand blows?”, he asked soberly, hoping to sound calm and composed.

His words didn’t help ease Abigail’s state of most critical despair, for she almost shouted in his direction, “then you must go and help us, do you hear me?”, pulling her boy even closer if that was possible at all.

“Calm down, we shall go and investigate,” Edmund declared boldly, not feeling half as assured as he sounded. That was the trick he had always used, which had the people of Setauket believe he was a true military man.

Perhaps he should have tried acting.

Well, for that it was too late now.

“Abraham, come with me.”

The younger man looked positively horrified, but Abigail’s pleading glances and his own pretend-resolve probably convinced Abraham to pretend to bravery as well, which was a good thing, for together, they might stand a chance against whoever was pounding the door in.
“Abigail? ABIGAIL!? Come quick, whoever this is-“

Margaret Shippen Arnold’s cries sounded shrill, anxious; he would never have thought she was capable of such raw, human emission of sounds.

Completely unarmed, he was the first of the group to move when he heard a tentative young voice in the darkness behind him speak up:

“I’m comin’ with you.”

“Cicero, I must strongly advice against it. You will remain here, with your mother. In case we are mistaken, we would not want General Arnold’s men to find you. Your bravery does you great credit, but I fear, tonight requires the force of grown men.”

-And apparently, he could still speak like the Major, too. "Grown men”- a cabbage farmer was no trained soldier, no warrior, nor was he, and completely unarmed at that.

A renewed cry of the lady of the house prompted them to move downstairs, followed by the valiant Abigail, who claimed she would rather fight whoever had come to take her son than hide.

From the corner of his eye, he could see her swiftly picking up a very solid-looking silver candlestick, a weapon he should have liked to have very well.

When they arrived on the other side of the servants’ backdoor, the wild rapping and knocking had ceased.

“Perhaps it was a misunderstanding”, Abraham tried hopefully, yet in the moment he spoke these words aloud, suddenly, great ruckus arose outside and several voices shouted at the same time, fists finding the quite solid oak boards.

Both Abigail and Abraham lifted their weapons, ready for assault. As the ranking officer in this scenario, the task of opening the door fell to him, or so it looked like.

Gingerly, he unlocked it with a key fixed on a ring of several Abigail produced from the depths of her pockets.

He had barely completed the task of turning the key in the lock, considerable weight on the other side leaning against it brought the door to swing open to the inside, revealing three persons to them.

“Brother mine, about time,” he heard a dry remark being made and a woman’s face came close to his, allowing him to inspect her features somewhat better in the almost ink-black darkness that had swiftly fallen over York City.

He would recognise these eyes and this voice everywhere.

“Eliza-!” he exclaimed lowly, mindful not to cause even more commotion any neighbours might hear and come to investigate.

“You are not supposed to-“

“Be here? I know. But it’s important.” She was speaking to him in most serious honesty now, her voice heavy with sincerity. In this moment he realised how Abigail, the only one of them who had had a light, a small taper to master the steps to minimise the danger of falling on her way to the attic in the dark simply stood there, visibly petrified.
She looked thunder-struck, her mouth half open, fixating one of the other two persons in particular. Instinctively, he followed her stare to find-

“Anna?”

Her name fell from his lips without thinking. It didn’t sound the same it had when he had said her name back in the days they were affianced, there was pain, sadness, disappointment, even a little rage in it, but he could not deny there was also something else, a sensation almost like attempting to jump on horseback for the first time, a mixture of anticipation and excitement mixed with caution, and- no, if he was to be honest with himself, there was nothing to describe this feeling.

“Edmund!”

Her voice betrayed a similar range of emotions, but, although he shoved this thought to the back of his mind to make room for more pressing matters, a quick thought, unsolicited by his conscious passed through his head- he had missed her voice.

“Good evening, Major”, a third, far less celestial voice ripped him from his thoughts and his eyes of Anna’s- they were still beautiful, even now, widened in shock at seeing him again so unexpectedly.

“Caleb Brewster?”

He had seen this man before, a rebel through and through, his beard and unkempt exterior making him recognisable among throngs of men, though a man to be pitied- he had watched his uncle’s death at the hands of Simcoe, which elicited a degree of compassion within him.

“The very same.”

“What in heaven’s name-“

“Sorry about the banging”, Eliza interfered quickly, “but we really needed to get in. Wouldn’t want to be caught lurking and besides, we’re here to put a few things back to order. We thought Arnold was leaving, looked like he's going to be away a while, is that true? Can we go somewhere else where there is light and talk, perhaps?”

“You’ll give Miss Peggy a fright”, Abigail added nodding uneasily before leading the procession upstairs.

On the staircase, Anna walked before him and although he could not see too much, it was to him as if he could feel her, and perhaps he did; she had a presence, an aura, that surrounded her wherever she went. She truly was a siren, wrecking everybody in her path.

Abigail bade them to wait in the hallway before she rushed to Mrs Arnold’s side and, judging from the low murmur he could hear, quickly relaying the key points of the most recent events to her.

“Enter”, she finally ordered, prompting all four of them to join Mrs Arnold and Abigail in the parlour.

Mrs Arnold looked unwell, which probably had in some respect to do with her pregnancy, but in a much greater respect was likely attributed to the fright his sister and her companions had given her.

In the light, he with concern saw that Anna’s attire was not exactly the best; the material of her dress was becoming threadbare in critical areas such as at the cuffs and elbows and the shawl she had slung around her shoulders was too thin for the cold outside. Her clothes were clean but looked old and worn and her face hinted at the fact that since leaving Setauket, she had not at all
times feasted as sumptuously as he had at home being force-fed by a mother who would not take no for an answer and an older sister who even past the age of forty still at times assumed she could order him around like a five-year-old.

It had not been easy for her, either, even worse than for him. He didn’t even want to think about the things she probably had to endure there-

It had been her decision, nobody had forced her, he ended this dispute with himself and tried to take his eyes off her.

Anna had deceived him, used him even after she had broken his heart and soul, he didn’t need her, he didn’t need her anymore and he certainly didn’t need to look at her.

-And yet, his eyes remained on her face, which she seemed not to remark upon, busy apologising to the elegant and positively fear-inspiring lady reclining on the settee.

Anna considered it wise to speak on behalf of everyone, relying on the idea that she knew Abigail very well, whom in turn Peggy Arnold trusted, which could aid their position considerably.

After all, they had frightened her and entered her home without the permission of its at present sole inhabitant.

The blonde woman’s cold blue eyes that could fixate someone with almost the same threatening stare Simcoe employed so freely (perhaps it achieved even more effect in the eyes of such a graceful beauty than on a man who served as living evidence that the lines between humans and beasts were blurry in the extreme) rested on hers studying her intently as she spoke.

From her perspective, never dropping her gaze or looking anywhere else than Mrs Arnold’s face because this the latter might classify as a sign of untruthfulness or insecurity, she spoke of what brought them here, that they had come to take Abe with them.

“Very well”, Mrs Arnold said calmly, “one person less I have to worry about, though I had already struck a deal with Mr Woodhull and Major Hewlett that they are to leave this house by tomorrow afternoon”, she continued, stroking her stomach seemingly without consciously deciding to do so as she spoke.

For Anna, it was hard to follow what she was saying, because at all times, she could feel a familiar pair of eyes resting on her.

He had changed so much; the wig was gone and his facial lines looked gaunter than before. Well, after all he had been through which Mrs Greenwood had told her about him-

Mrs Greenwood, who had relayed to her she wished to reunite her with Edmund and had offered her to do exactly that, should she crave it.

All she could presently say was that it was comforting to see he was alive, relatively well in health-

Concentration. It is over now anyway. Thinking about the past won’t help.

“I will not have my house become a hive for the patriot demi-monde”, she then declared, “and I will not have my good will taken advantage of as it has happened in the past few days.” Her eyes rested on Edmund’s sister now, who nodded gravely in acceptance of Mrs Arnold’s words.
“Because of that-“

She inhaled sharply, her knees knocking together. As quickly as was possible carrying the additional weight of a little person in her belly, she sat up, motioning for Abigail to help her stand.

When Abigail had pulled Mrs Arnold to her feet, the upholstery where she had been seated was wet.

“The baby!”, Abigail exclaimed a little unnecessarily.

Greater panic than ever before rose in the eyes of everyone present- the men likely had no idea whatsoever and of the women, only one had ever given birth herself. Surely, Anna had once or twice attended births, assisted a midwife once, even, but that was not nearly enough to be helpful-

“It’s all right, Peggy”, Abigail, slipping into the less formal tone in which she likely conversed with Mrs Arnold when the two were not joined by a ragtag and bobtail army of what must to her be vagabonds and vagrants up to no good, in order to calm her.

“Let’s get you upstairs. It’s all right, that’s supposed to happen,” she said with the velvety voice of a mother who knew exactly what to say and how to say it to soothe and calm. “I guess today was a little too much for you and the baby and it’s a little early, but the baby is big and strong.”

Mrs Arnold’s arm wrapped around Abigail’s shoulders in search for better support.

What great relief crept unto the faces of everyone present that there was one person in the house who seemed to know what to do and who assumed command of the situation with ease.

“Mrs Greenwood, Miss Anna, I need your help upstairs”, Abigail commanded. Not thinking twice, both she and Mrs Greenwood rushed to Abigail’s side, who was attempting to undress Mrs Arnold, which was doubtlessly done more quickly with the help of an additional pair of hands.

“Tell one of the men to get Cicero, he knows the house, he can fetch everything I need”, Abigail ordered as Mrs Greenwood’s hands fell to Mrs Arnold’s sides, looking for clothing pins, and Anna could not do more than give a stiff nod before she disappeared downstairs, where Abe, Edmund and Caleb waited, each of them striking an uneasy pose either sitting or standing.

“I need one of you to get Cicero to help Abigail”, she declared without any ambages.

To her surprise, it was Edmund who was the first to move and nodded, following her out of the room.

She could not even look at him and was grateful he walked behind her and could not see her face.

In her hurry, she had not kept the hazard in mind which Mrs Arnold had involuntarily created; the stairs being slippery in some places with the fluids that always exit the body prior to giving birth, Anna slipped and caught herself by grabbing the bannister at the last moment- or at least she liked to think so.

Two very gentle, painfully familiar hands had come to reach for her and stopped her fall by taking hold of her around the middle.

“Mrs Strong, you must take better care”, the voice of Major Hewlett admonished her, before, once he was certain she had found her balance again, removed his hands from her body.

“Thank you”, was all she could breathe, lost for words for so many reasons and half-wishing she could have indulged the feeling of him holding her- no. Peggy Arnold needed her help.
As she had concluded before, there was no place for thoughts of that sort in this world, at least not for her and not about Edmund Hewlett.

She needed to help someone now, not mope and bemoan her own fate. Edmund Hewlett was the past, but this little person fighting the constraints of his or her mother’s womb was the future.

-And yet, throughout the night, which was, as all parties residing in the Arnold home that night were soon to find out, to become a long one, she could still feel him holding her- an oddly comforting thought, one she would cling on to for the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

The title is an allusion to a poem by Goethe.

Uisce beatha: I doubt Caleb has much Irish, but he certainly knows what his favourite substance under the sun is called in any language. Tip: it's not tea.

Caleb's backstory as given here is about as accurate as Simcoe claiming to have grown up in Calcutta, but given the series is largely fictionalised and Caleb Brewster likely didn't have a rather generic-sounding Irish accent in real life (given the fashion of the time, he probably didn't wear a beard either, at least when on land for longer periods of time, and don't get me started on his coat), I allowed myself to get a little creative here.

Dublin Castle was the seat of the British adminstration in Ireland from medieval times until 1922, when it was handed over to the Provisional Government of Ireland (Rialtas Sealadach na hÉireann) led by chairman Michael Collins. Today, the Castle is still a government building; now in possession of the Republic of Ireland (Poblacht na hÉireann), the state appartments once belonging to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland are still used for grand state affairs but it's also a major tourist attraction. The complex also houses a library, conference facilities and the Garda (Irish police) museum. It has a rich history that's worth exploring.

I had to read up on this, too, but simply impaling butterflies on a pin is not how they are preserved. Anna however is just as clueless as I was and in her imagination, this is what it looks like. Please know that I don't support killing animals for sport or as collectibles.

While Simcoe claims he was born in India, sometimes he's a little inconsistent and over the years, some of his comrades in Setauket found out he studied law for a while before joining the army, which is historically accurate. In that respect, Simcoe and Abe are not unlike another.

Simcoe being absolutely irresponsible and stubborn about riding into battle while sick is based on his own account of the Battle of Yorktown, in which he did not participate as he was plagued by physical and psychological illness.
Once however, he managed to convince someone to help him dress and find his horse so he could ride out to look after his men, in his absence under the command of Banastre Tarleton, who was also named in the story, in person. His ill health however meant he could only do this once and for only a limited amount of time.
Arrival and Departure

Chapter Summary

Ben has to explain Culper going rogue in York City to Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette has a plan to which Washington agrees (and all he requires is the Hermione), Peggy gives birth and learns Abigail's secret, Simcoe is sleepy but on the mend, and Hewlett and Anna finally find some time to talk. Oh, and a nightly yachting tour on the Long Island Sound has dire consequences...

Chapter Notes

Hello there, I'm back! I'm terribly busy these days but I fully intend to update sooner next time- I have more than half of the next chapter ready since a long time.

But now, back to chapter 12. I don't really keep track of this, but I just saw how many clicks this story has and I am overwhelmed people continue to consider reading this story. Wow. To all of you who read this, thank you for your interest in the story. This is what keeps authors writing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[...]

Doch ach, schon mit der Morgensonne

Verengt der Abschied mir das Herz:

In deinen Küssen welche Wonne!

In deinem Auge welcher Schmerz!

Ich ging, du standst und sahst zur Erden,

Und sahst mir nach mit nassem Blick:

Und doch, welch Glück geliebt zu werden!

Und lieben, Götter, welch ein Glück!

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Willkommen und Abschied, 1775)

Headquarters of Washington’s camp, shortly after Anna and Caleb’s departure.
“The British troops are moving southwards, to Virginia”, Ben informed the grave faces of his superiors.

Washington nodded before he asked, “and what of Mr Culper? Of late, it appears he has grown rather silent.”

Ben could feel how the blood in his head dropped to his stomach, making him feel uncomfortable and his face turn paper-white.

“No sir”, he started truthfully, not knowing how to present the dilemma to his commander, “we haven’t heard of him lately.”

“And what is the reason for his sudden… disappearance?”, the General prodded further.

Ben was left without any chance to buy himself more time to try and find a question to his answer that was not as bad as the truth. He had managed to keep Caleb and Anna going to York City to rescue Abe from committing an infernally stupid act of revenge from his superiors so far and had not heard back yet. For all that he knew, Abe could be dead and Caleb and Anna arrested. He did not dare to think about the consequences. At the latest after the deaths of Nathan Hale at the hands of the British and, perhaps somewhat more prominently, John André on their side, everyone knew how people who were suspected and found proven guilty of being spies were dealt with. And a man in the guise of a British uniform in the company of a lady whose last abode had been Washington’s camp did not look innocent of such crimes in the slightest.

“What I know, is-“

Though hawing for the greatest part of his narration, Ben managed to present the calamity as best as he could. When he had ended, Hamilton shook his head in disbelief, Washington paced up and down the room, thinking, and the Marquis creased his forehead in a very French little gesture of contemplating a severe conundrum as a dozen other pairs of eyes looked on.

“You tell me Mr Culper has gone rogue to extinguish a personal enemy?”

“Yes, sir. I have sent-“

“We do not know if he is living or dead”, Washington concluded rightly, still maintaining a calm countenance Ben envied him for.

“Then we must go on without him.”

“The war must go on without him”, Hamilton added, eagerly taking notes of what had been said.

“How?”

A voice heavy with a foreign accent addressed Washington. The Marquis was one of the few people who had proven optimistic even in the direst of situations and Washington valued his council, even if the Frenchman was, as Ben supposed, only half as old as the General.

“Culper m’a fait penser. C’est Simcoe, son ennemi personnel, non? Alors, si on pourrait- ‘ow to say-comment on dit on anglais? ’e made me think. If we could bind the Rangers, create a- manœuvre de distraction, a diversion, and sent them the wrong way on a wild goose chase, they will not be present at Yorktown.”
“What do you propose, Marquis?”

Washington’s eyes fell to those of the Marquis, which glittered eagerly.

“The Hermione is all I require”, he said simply. “We shall sail up the Long Island Sound and plant a message into their ‘eads that we ‘ave important cargo we mean to land there. It is utter nonsense, of course, but they shall believe it and since all other British forces except the Queen’s Rangers left for Virginia already, as our watchers suggest, they will ‘ave to send them. Which shall only be to our advantage- we know their commander is a force to be reckoned with."

Behind him, Baron von Steuben nodded and muttered something under his breath that Ben could not understand but identified rightly as a curse “Verdammter, elender Mistkerl. Der kann einen feinen SpieBrutenlauf erleben wenn wir ihn zu fassen kriegen. Habe Monmouth-” which he pronounced barely recognisable as “Mon-mouse”, “nicht vergessen…“

Washington nodded in von Steuben’s direction to acknowledge the latter’s displeasure and silence him thus. He couldn’t be the only one who found the man’s tendency to curse, despite his ability to speak English almost as fluently as their French ally (though with a far less charming accent) somewhat irritating to say the very least.

While Washington and the Marquis were trying to work out the details of the plan, Ben’s mind raced. Even if they wouldn’t send Simcoe directly to Setauket, he posed a threat to Anna, Caleb and Abe.

“Sir, what about Culper? If he returns home to Setauket and directly runs into-“

“Culper has put his own goals over ours, which should have been his also. And did he not look for Simcoe in York City? I cannot make a decision for one man, Benjamin, I must make decisions for the good of the army and our people. I don’t wish any harm to come to Culper, but if needs be, I would rather sacrifice him than you and all of your dragoons.”

He gave Ben a sad smile.

Once again, the reality of the war hit Ben hard. It wasn’t the chivalrous enterprise which he had thought he would enlist now, striving for a higher goal, fighting to let good triumph over evil- in his time in the army, he had witnessed things that had made him wonder sometimes and taught him that war was never fair, even if one considered one’s goal the righteous cause, which he still did. It was best if the war would be over as soon as possible. And if Abe’s life could save- but Abe was his friend. He couldn’t just think like that. Ashamed to even have thought of this, he hung his head. No, he would rather die for one of his friends than let them die. But what could he do now? He had no idea where Abe could possibly be at the moment and at least, he had Caleb and Anna with him (if they had found him in time), who would hopefully keep him out of trouble, even though Caleb’s name wasn’t synonymous with prudence and far-sightedness either.

All he could do was hope the Marquis’ plan would work.

The Marquis and some of his men would man the Hermione and sail into the Long Island Sound, where they would anchor somewhere and pretend to be letting man on shore in rowing boats- they would return to the ship of course, but it had to look like some clandestine events were going on there.

Through some British and Hessian prisoners presently kept on board the ship, the Marquis planned to communicate this vital piece of intelligence on to the British- he would accidentally discuss the secret plan of landing on a Long Island Beach to let a small force disembark, who would then ready
the ground for even more French ships with troops, which would then be marched to York City to claim it while Washington was away in the south- to Ben, the plan sounded as solid as any breakneck plan presently could be- surely, some prisoner who had heard the Marquis speak about his plan and being released on condition never to speak about what he’d heard would run to some British authorities- if you want a man to do something, forbid him to do it.

They would send Simcoe, no doubt, because a clandestine operation along the coastline of the Long Island sound demanded a force that could hide, would lie in wait somewhere in the thicket only to jump out and ambush their opponents when at the most vulnerable, using the element of surprise their green uniforms provided.

All Ben could do was pray his friends were safe- or would be once the mad dog would be unshackled.

The Arnold’s residence, a few days later, late at night.

No one slept that night, not truly at least; exhausted, Abraham and Captain-Lieutenant Brewster fell to a shallow sort of sleep for some twenty minutes or so, sitting at the table, before they awoke again and resumed their nightly vigil with uneasiness as from upstairs, the terrifying sounds of a woman in great pain mixed with the calm (or at least they pretended to be calm) reassurances of Abigail, his sister and Anna Strong.

Were the things happening upstairs normal? Of course, he was no ignoramus and knew that a new life usually entered this world with considerable pain on the mother’s part, but was it supposed to last hours?

Mrs Arnold’s renewed pleading cries to the Lord to stop this ordeal intermingled with a few unladylike curses and the soothing words of one of the three women attending to her and the occasional sound of footsteps either upwards or downwards bound when one of the women fetched a some more clean rags or hot water.

In the early hours of the morning (judging from what he could see of the stars through the windows) sometime between two and three, Eliza and Anna Strong had started to take turns sleeping for an hour or so, exhausted from their work, their hands and the fronts of their dresses covered in blood and substances that were not intended to be seen by the eyes of men.

They had asked Abigail, too, but she, out of loyalty to Mrs Arnold, could not be persuaded to desert her mistress’ side for longer than it took her to use the chamber pot in an adjoining closet.

Eliza, her hair no longer coiffured but simply tied back in a braid with a singular black ribbon to keep it from falling into her face or otherwise interfering with her work, fell into the cushions of the settee. Half an hour later, she woke, looking more tired than before, forced herself to rise and called for Anna Strong in order to relieve her of her sentry duty at Mrs Arnold’s side for a moment or two.

Perhaps due to exhaustion, Mrs Strong walked straight past him and her two associates, moving like an automaton, and in turn took the place before occupied by his sister, falling asleep almost instantly as she touched the cushions.

From the corner of her eye, he could not help but watch her there, even if it felt wrong to do so, as if he invaded a moment not intended for his eyes; Anna, laying there, reposing in deep slumber, strands of dark hair forming a gloriole around her head, her cheeks still flushed with the busy excitement of her work and her perfect (as he knows from experience) rosebud lips half-parted.
He mustn’t look at her. If anything, the sleeping woman before him is the effigy of what he once shared with her awake self; there is nothing more to say between them.

She has used him and although she might have had feelings for him, he can hardly believe these feelings consist of anything more than pity and lukewarm curiosity.

And yet- his heart bled a little whenever he thought back at their few, yet even more wonderful moments they had had together, a shy kiss here, an embrace there- it couldn’t have been all a mere phantasy of his, could it?

Anna slept soundly and even though he knew Eliza should soon demand a changing of the guards, he let her sleep. She looked like she needed it.

Studying her face, he could make out dark shadows under her eyes and bitter little lines around her mouth and, if he looked more closely, did her jacket and skirts not fit a little ill, a little wide for the frame stuck in them? They could have been passed to Anna from a previous owner of course, but by Edmund’s estimation they were hers and fit ill due to the poor conditions at camp- rumour had it squalor and famine reigned among Washington’s troops and their appendix of women and children. The life she had lead from the day of their wedding that had never been meant to be onwards had not treated her kindly.

Although he attempted valiantly to keep himself from thinking such things, his weary mind was susceptible to the temptations of things he otherwise, strengthened by a few hours’ sleep, would never dare to think and caused him to wonder how wonderfully her hair would feel under his fingers, even unwashed, not as well-kept as it had been what seemed like in another lifetime in Setauket.

From there on, his mind’s journey continued- did her hands still feel the same? Strong, like her surname, and a little rough at the undersides where her skin had adjusted to the work she had been doing and likely continued to do, but still gentle and warm, the skin of the back of her hand by contrast like animate silk?

No, he had to stop this. Tired, he tried to focus on something else, on praying for the safety of their benefactress and the welfare of her child, but to no avail. His eyes lay on Anna Strong as he fell asleep again.

“Very good Peggy, push!”

Abigail was doing all she could, but Eliza had observed a change in her demeanour within the last hour or so. She herself had no real idea of what was supposed to happen and when, not being a mother herself, only ever having been an onlooker at other women’s births, but Abigail, who was, would surely know.

Peggy tried to follow Abigail’s instructions as best as she could, but from her growing fear and the agony she visibly and audibly went through, it was evident she would not last long in this state- they couldn’t have her fall unconscious or anything.

Births, Eliza mused, were as much matters of life as they were matters of death; many a mother had died in childbirth, of some unforeseen complication, blood loss, or even somewhat later in the days following the ordeal, of an illness draining the weakened body of its spirits. A long time ago, she recalled, it must have been a few years before James Stretton’s death, her mother and a circle of her
friends (most of whom still lived in the same area and met for tea sometimes at this, sometimes at that house) had taken their tea with the news from one of the ladies present that her friend’s sister had died in childbirth, having only held the little girl once. “Poor little thing”, her mother had commented with as much genuine compassion a perfect stranger could muster for another at the other end of the island, “and the poor husband, too. Such a tragic death will surely be lamented.” The lady had shot her a queer glance and clarified “no husband. Her colonel died in the war over in Germany before he had a chance to learn she was in good hopes.”

At that, the lively conversation of mere instants ago had stopped and all five of them, a young Eliza included, had stared quite shocked into their laps.

“The poor child”, her mother had said, her voice very different this time from before.

What if Peggy Arnold would not survive- no, she wasn’t even allowed to think that. It would all be fine, Abigail was here and she knew what to do, Peggy was healthy and by no means a weak woman, even if her delicate frame might indicate otherwise- Eliza could detect some faint bruising on the hand she had given Peggy to hold and press in a gesture of compassion.

But what if? Arnold was as good as dead being the first target anyone in Washington’s army would aim at. In case Peggy would not live through this and Arnold died, too, who would care for the baby? Hadn’t the war produced enough orphans already?

Suddenly, Abigail’s voice penetrated her thoughts.

“You better sit down a while”, she said and picked the rag up Eliza’s hand had held and that had apparently slipped her grip and landed at her feet. She hadn’t even noticed.

“Go”, Abigail commanded sternly and would not take no for an answer. “I’ll be fine on my own.”

As Eliza groggily managed to make her way down the staircase and into the parlour where everyone else was awaiting her to bear the good news of a healthy mother and infant, but, as she was aware entering the room, her face revealed to those still awake that this was not the case—yet. Peggy would live, it would be alright.

Brewster, who had only lifted his head from the table for a moment when he had heard her footsteps passing him by shrugged tiredly, a little worriedly, too, before his head fell back onto his arm again and he was fast asleep once more.

Edmund however, once in a state of being semi-awake, vacated his seat to let her sit, bringing a second chair to allow her put her feet up.

“Thank you Edmund, it’s alright”, Eliza smiled tiredly and allowed her body to relax for the first time in several hours.

Although she was new to all of this, Peggy knew something was not right. She could feel it (was this a first surge of what they called a mother’s instinct?) through the immense pain she was suffering and was certain to catch a glimmer of disconcertment in Abigail’s eyes.

What if she would die? It was not unheard of. Panic took over and she struggled to push as frantically as she could, hoping the more force she used, the sooner the baby would come to be expelled from her body, but it was of no use.
Oh Lord in Heaven, the pain, that she would end like this— at least, she could be with John again, they would be together soon.

She could even see him stand there, in the room with her— he smiled, holding his hand out to her as if to invite her to come with him—

“John.”

Lieut. Col. Simcoe’s lodgings, mid-day.

“Colonel?”

Unwilling, he turned around in bed to face the person who disturbed his peace. His fever was much improved and had sunk over the night, which pleased him much; however, he was still weakened from the ordeal and had found himself in a pleasant dream when this damned poltroon Falkoff had woken him from his sleep.

For one moment, he had thought it part of his dream when a hand had gently come to rest on his shoulder to shake him somewhat, as one wakes a sleeping child and come to the conclusion it must be the dark-haired lady who had featured in his dream, brown eyes beaming up at him (he liked the idea to be in a position to protect Her were it necessary, not like other men he had met, like Woodhull, who was, as one heard and which he believed without batting an eye, knowing the man, out of his depth just protecting his cabbage, being a midget and a coward and all that). When however his mind had come to the conclusion it was not at all in his dream, as he had been in a pretty summer meadow, seated there while the brunette’s head had rested against his chest and not lying in bed, he had awoken from the dulcet dream to be met with the far less appealing face of his second rather than that of a petite, dark-haired woman.

“Sir?” He groaned with displeasure as he sat up in bed.

“Yes? What is it?” It was astonishing really how even much weakened as he was, his voice still managed to intimidate and he silently thanked the Lord for this rare talent.

Falkoff chose to ignore the threat embedded in his tone (perhaps he thought that he was too ill to rise and make him pay for his transgression?) and instead helped him into a sitting position. To his surprise, he was very careful handling him.

By now, he had espied the letter in Falkoff’s hand. His eyes followed his second with interest that momentarily made him forget about his affliction as the latter turned around again and poured a jug of water, which he held out to him. He would have preferred something stronger and of a better taste than water, but presently, given he was quite interested in finding out what the letter sealed with red tape might contain, he complied, brought the jug to his lips and took a sip. Actually, it was not half-bad. To his sore throat, the cool liquid felt better than even ambrosia could have.

After having taken a second, larger gulp of liquid, he returned his attention to the letter and to Falkoff, who had seated himself on a chair close by.

This was much to his displeasure, for Falkoff was still his subordinate and had by no means the right to choose freely when to sit or to stand in his presence. This clearly fell to his superior officer, who, though still bedbound, was alive and well enough to speak and have his way. He hadn’t gone mad, he was simply somewhat indisposed. The present situation reassured him once again that one never
ought to turn one’s back to one’s men- even when sick.

In his condition however, he knew he was in no position to exercise the physical power and punishment over his men as he was wont to do and thus had to remain still and said nothing while Falkoff continued to act without any respect for his commander.

The very same, who had likely noted his interest in the thing in his hand, looked up and held the letter out to him.

When the latter tried to “assist” him one moment later by trying to break the seal, he yanked the letter away from him with a quickness and speed he had not thought himself capable of at this very moment.

In order to continue reading in peace, he rolled himself onto his right side, out of Falkoff’s reach.

“What does it say?”, a low voice interrupted him some moments later.

“Orders”, he replied, now sounding almost cheery, “within two days’ time, we are to march for Long Island- it seems, our spies have gathered some valuable information. We are to look out for the ship belonging to the Marquis de Lafayette and prevent any landing party of said ship from reaching the shore. Apparently, they have plans to come at us from the back and take New York while we are away, fighting in Virginia. Who would have thought Washington such a coward that he only dares to attack-“

A coughing fit cut his speech short. After days abed with a sore throat among other things, speaking was not as easily done as he had hoped. Falkoff removed the jug from his hands in order to prevent any water from spilling onto the blanket and gave him a concerned look.

The man was not paid to pity him, he was paid to do as he was told. But first, he needed his jug back.

Falkoff nodded as he asked him to give him some more water and cautioned him to be careful and not to spill anything.

The water did him great good and steadied his voice:

“We’ll ride for Long Island in two days. Ready the men."

“But sir”- his second objected, he however was in no frame of mind to be disrespected any further and snarled (best as he could) “no. We shall leave as per our order, and you will ready the men, whereas I shall spend my time getting better.”

In order to prove how much better he already was (indeed, such news were much more effective than camphorated shirts or cold leg compresses), he gave the man one of his usual unsettling half smiles, before he airily ordered him to leave and do as he was told.

The Arnolds’ residence, early morning, the same day.

That wasn’t good. Peggy obviously had started to see things that weren’t there, because her eyes fixed a point close to the fireplace as if there was a person in the room as she said the name of the man she had loved, and loved still.
It was no good however to upset her further and tell her she was mistaken, that she was alone. Perhaps she could be consoled somewhat.

“Major André always loved you. It broke his heart for you to be with someone else. He wanted you more than he ever wanted to turn General Arnold.”

She gave Peggy a smile, but she, perhaps through a veil of pain, did not seem to realise she had been talked to. Or so at least Abigail had thought until Peggy looked up at her, visibly suppressing the pain she felt, and asked “how do you know? I can't imagine he would be sharing his plans to turn Benedict Arnold over dinner with his servant.”

To this, Abigail momentarily did not know what to say. She noticed how Peggy’s strained voice had transformed and taken a sharp tone, almost dangerous, even through her constant emissions of pain, which she suppressed bravely and reduced to low hisses and heavy breathing.

“Before conspiring against my husband, you were spying against John for the Patriots. Benedict said Tallmadge was a step ahead of him at West Point, and that’s how they caught John. You are the reason he’s dead!”

Tears of rage and pain, both physical and emotional, left Peggy’s eyes in two small rivulets, but she did not care. Although she was in no condition to do so and already weakened considerably from the ordeal of birth, which had not even fully begun as there still was no sign of the baby when there should already have been a long while ago, she tried to lift herself up from the bed in order, or so Abigail thought, to come at her in her anger with her bare hands.

“I never meant for him to be hurt. I only warned them about the General Arnold's betrayal”, Abigail heard herself say, though to whom she could not tell. In part, she was speaking to the angry fallen angel on the bed, the vivacious young woman Major André had courted who had aged decades since her marriage to General Arnold, who had become gaunt and embittered, lost in her love for a dead and her hate for a living man.

-And in part, she was at fault. It was the truth, she had never intended to harm André personally, he had always been kind to her, but in the end, her actions, her intelligence had proven his downfall. Even though he had absolved her of her sins and told her before his death that he did not blame her for his fate, Abigail felt as if her intestines were snakes, coiling unpleasantly in her stomach as she thought about Major André on his last morning before they hanged him.

Abigail however did not have much time to think about Major André’s death, for Peggy had got it in her head to indeed make herself stand and get her hands on her.

Out of instinct, she made one sizeable step backwards and out of Peggy’s reach. Under Abigail’s protests, to which Peggy only answered by ordering her to be silent and leave her alone, and much strain, she managed to stand, her legs shaking and clutching a bedpost to steady herself.

What appeared to keep her standing was by no means her physical strength, it was raw rage and ire.

“Please, Peggy sit-“

“No, don’t you dare speak my name! Get out! Now! Leave before I force you out myself.”

Just as Peggy attempted to make another step toward her, another contraction forced her to grab the bedpost even more tightly while her other hand went to her belly.

Abigail used this moment to manoeuvre the more or less stunned Peggy back onto the bed.
“Get the doctor”, Peggy instructed her through gritted teeth, “then leave.”

“There is no time, baby wants out now.”

“Then why isn’t it coming?”, Peggy emitted with great desperation. “It’s been hours-“

Exchanging glances, Peggy nodded weakly, giving Abigail permission to touch her.

“The baby’s not turned right.”

A pair of blue eyes widened in shock and horror, seeking for guidance in their dark counterparts.

“All Cicero tried to come into this world upside down. A midwife helped me guide him out during my reckoning, and she taught me to do the same. But I need you to trust me.”

What else could she do? She was fated to be here with this woman, the woman who had killed John and who now offered her help. It was beyond ironic, and how could she know Abigail wouldn’t help her along on her way to the Lord, too, but in her desperation and knowing the other two were of no great help either except for assisting Abigail in her endeavours by fetching things and running errands when asked, she had no other option but to put her fate into Abigail’s hands.

“Mrs Greenwood? Mrs Strong?” Abigail shouted loudly enough for the two people in question to hear, even downstairs.

A moment later, a very weary looking Mrs Greenwood arrived, declaring Mrs Strong did not look well and that they would have to make do with only one additional pair of hands.

Peggy did not care. All she wanted was this to be over and slowly, the longer her pain continued, she did not even care about the result anymore. At least in death, she would not have to be with Benedict any longer.

“Now, now”, Mrs Greenwood tried clumsily and held her hand, stroking it reassuringly. “Abigail knows what she is doing.”

Anna awoke at dawn to the sharp cries first of a woman, then a few moments later of a second voice, a lot higher than the first.

-The baby.

She had missed her watch. Embarrassed and sorry, she rose.

The cries had woken the three other people with her in the room as well: Abe, though still sleepy, was awake enough to acknowledge her presence with an indistinct movement of his head; Caleb struggled to keep his eyes open under a low stream of curses presented to the early morning air in his characteristic lilt; Major Hewlett by contrast already sat boldly upright, his shoulders pushed back and his spine straight, parallel to the back of the chair, looking quite the soldier.

“Good morning, Mrs Strong”, he said a little awkwardly, “my sister and I deemed it unnecessary to
wake you. You looked so exhausted, I- we-, ah, everything has been going well as young Cicero has just informed me and mother and son are both healthy, though somewhat tired.”

He smiled when he spoke of the baby and Anna doubted he knew he was doing it.

“Thank you, Major. That is good news indeed.”

She could not help but smile back- after all, the news of a healthy baby boy did warrant some joy and Anna could not deny she was very happy and relieved everything had ended so well.

“So, the traitor has a son now?”, Caleb demanded to know with a little scowl and interrupted the moment before either Hewlett or Anna could spend another thought on it.

“Caleb”, Anna admonished him sharply, “that’s not the baby’s fault.”

“Yes, but y’know- it’s not as if we needed more of that name-”

“Lieutenant Brewster”, Major Hewlett cut in, “please show some civility and respect for Mrs Strong and our hostess and her new-born son. I do rather share your sentiment regarding General Arnold, but this does not give you permission to behave thusly.”

“Alright, Major”.

Caleb, now standing, made a mock-bow in Major Hewlett’s direction and muttered something indistinguishable under his breath, sometimes weaving in words Anna could make out as belonging to the English language.

In order to avoid further confrontation, Anna asked Cicero, who had been tasked with assisting his mother by taking away some of last night’s bedding, to show her around the kitchen. As a battle-hardened tavern-wench who had worked in an establishment hosting its regular share of lobsters, drunken locals and the Devil Clad In Green with his merry henchmen, she would experience no trouble with a regular kitchen in a mannerly household.

Besides, she knew she would find a reliable aide in Cicero, who had agreed to help her carry the tea and some breakfast prepared from what she had found upstairs.

“It’s fine, Miss Anna. I’ve done that before.”

From the depths of his eyes, Anna could not tell if he was making friendly conversation or if there was more to it- she was aware in what way they had been known to another before the attainder. He was a young man now, almost. Abigail must be very proud to have a son like him, she mused, and felt a small sting of jealousy in her heart when she recalled Peggy Arnold’s reaction to the bloody, screeching bundle Abigail had put in her arms an hour or so ago.

The morning progressed and Abigail remained with her mistress in the upstairs bedroom. What they were talking about, she could not tell.

Together with Mrs Greenwood, whose talents in the field of cookery were rather limited due to inexperience, they managed to prepare an acceptable meal, though likely none of the kind Mrs Arnold was used to.

Anna did not mind standing in the kitchen and working hard, chopping vegetables and stirring the pot, no; it provided her with a measure of quiet solitude, even though Mrs Greenwood was still present. The latter, sensing she was in no mood to talk much or make merry, quietly did as she was instructed and provided no other commentary.
Everyone praised her work, Abe, Caleb Mrs Greenwood, Cicero and the Major at the table and even Mrs Arnold had sent Abigail to tell her she felt strengthened by the food she had been served. To be granted acknowledgement for one’s work, even if it was so little as a thank-you or some offhand commentary how the meat was exactly right or the sauce had a nice texture, was wonderful and for one moment, when everyone sat at the table where usually, the Arnold’s supped in mutual silence, animated by the good fortune of little Edward, for that was the name Mrs Arnold had chosen for her son, and his mother being well despite of the complications that had arisen during the night, the company seemed not to distinguish between foe and friend, rebel and redcoat. For a few moments, nobody seemed to mind anything save the celebration of little Edward.

It always should be like this, Anna mused, watching how Caleb (apparently reconciled with the parentage of the new arrival), scruffy and not wearing either his wig or coat anymore, poured the Major a glass of Arnold’s best madeira, a good-humoured expression on his face and a cheery toast on his lips.

The good spirits of the morning and early afternoon were not to last however; in the afternoon, Peggy Arnold had ordered them all to come upstairs to her room.

In comparison to the last night, she looked rather well, had been put into her dressing-gown and fresh bedding and had had her hair arranged, though not in one of the elaborate up-dos she was famous for. The blonde angel was restored to her radiant looks, and shone perhaps even brighter due to the adoring glances she reserved for the babe in her arms, holding the little thing close to her chest and cooing to him softly.

Eliza felt almost improper for being received by Mrs Arnold, who had somehow managed to look otherworldly than ever, while she tried to hide a stain of sauce on her right cuff by covering it with her left hand she had acquired while helping with the dishes (Anna and she had done that together, seeing as Abigail had still been with Mrs Arnold).

This sentiment was completely irrational, she knew given that she had seen a whole lot more of Mrs Arnold than just her (somewhat painted? Could anybody’s lips be this rosy?) face and immaculate hair.

“I wish to speak to you”, their host declared without ado, her baby asleep in her arm, her voice cool and composed.

“We must make a few arrangements.”

Of course. She wanted to be rid of her houseguests, three traitors to the crown, one of them still wearing a borrowed British uniform, an irritating pair of siblings, of whom one had snuck into the house uninvited before and, if she had heard correctly, Abigail. She hadn’t heard everything that had passed between Abigail and Mrs Arnold, she had likely been asleep during some of their conversation, but when she had returned to help and the deed was done, Mrs Arnold had held Abigail back as she had been on her way out (Eliza had supposed to go get a laundry basket or something for the baby but was now not so certain anymore), taking her sticky and somewhat bloody hand in her lily-white one.

“It wasn't your fault. Providence played a greater hand in our lives than either of us could ever know. It brought you into my home, for better and worse. But you saved my life. You saved us both.”
Eliza had looked onto the strange scene and felt that between these two women whose lives could not be more differently, things had happened she had no knowledge of and had no right to ask about.

Abigail’s face had lightened, and both women had continued to hold each other’s hand for a moment longer, a gesture both of friendship and of distant formality at the same time before Mrs Arnold had let go, realising Eliza was still with them.

Presently, Mrs Arnold’s room was crowded with the strange household she had unwillingly accumulated under her roof and from her bed, she presided over her court of rogues, rebels, runaways and redcoats with the cool hauteur and effortless grace of a queen.

“I wish to thank you, Mrs Greenwood, and you, Mrs Strong, for your assistance during labour and for that reason, am willing to extend the my ultimatum regarding Messrs Woodhull and Hewlett for another two days in order to allow you to put your things into order and make a plan to leave this house safely- although my husband may be away, as are most of the troops formerly stationed in York City, Colonel Simcoe and his men have not joined them in Virginia, on ground of sickness on his part. I thought you ought to be informed to arrange your travels accordingly around this circumstance. Ill, his person ought not trouble you, though you should keep your eyes open for his men.”

Everyone nodded in unison.

“There is, however, one demand I wish to make in return.”

Yes, of course there was- how could she have thought Mrs Arnold would do something without a much more elaborate idea behind it?

“I demand you take care of the boy, Cicero. You must take him somewhere safe where my husband, should he return”, at that she frowned as if she did not fancy the thought of it, “will not find him. God only knows what he might do were he to find out he was hidden in the house all the while- it shall be best for him to believe Cicero has run away. It is for his protection only.”

“If you could take him with you to Setauket, I would be very happy. He knows the place and he has been doing fine, he can earn his own money- I’d rather have him stay there with people he knows than somewhere else where he doesn’t know anyone-“ Tears ran down Abigail’s cheeks and Cicero, who had stood next to his mother, did his best to comfort her.

Abe nodded. Mary wouldn’t be happy to find he had brought home another mouth to feed, but against Arnold, they all stood as one. He thought of Thomas- if his son ever would come into a situation he needed help in where he or Mary could not be there for him, he would hope someone else would do the right thing and help. Mrs Arnold, holding her newborn, thought the same, he could tell. And so, he agreed, assuring a distraught Abigail her son would be well provided for.

A proposal by Caleb to take the boy to camp was met with firm no-s from all sides. After talking the matter through, it was agreed that Cicero would indeed be brought to Setauket, which would also complete the two patriot’s mission of returning their friend to safety- they had in the past days seen of what Simcoe was capable of, having sent a man to murder Edmund, and there was no need for
Edmund listened attentively as views and the diverse histories of everyone’s arrival in Mrs Arnold home were exchanged and the plan forged. They would set out in a boat Captain-Lieutenant Brewster would find (which he was sure was a euphemism for the unlawful acquirement of property) and leave York City under the cover of darkness. Brewster could, as per his own diction, organise (again, a euphemism) a suitable vessel within two days. A rowing boat he could have gotten on the spot, but he had in mind a sailboat, with which he could follow the coastline and thus shorten their journey considerably in comparison to attempting it on foot.

They would not sail by day, only in the night, which, Brewster, who claimed to have been a seafaring man in the days before the rebellion, would not pose any problems, as he knew the Long Island sound like the back of his hand, which he professed not without pride more than once.

Abraham would be returned to his wife, take Cicero with them and Brewster would navigate the vessel. -What of Mrs Strong?

She appeared to ask herself the same question he observed, as she bit her lip, watching as Mrs Arnold and Eliza voiced their approval of the plan.

The party was soon disbanded and Abraham and his bearded friend decided to move into the old attic-quarters to plot and plan their adventure further.

On the way out, leaving Mrs Arnold, her child and the ever-helpful Abigail to themselves, Brewster patted Anna’s arm and said “Setauket, Annie. It’s been a while for both of us, hasn’t it?” and grinned as if what he was about to attempt only a child’s adventure like stealing some apples in the neighbour’s garden, not a matter of life and death- should the boat capsize, or worse still, meet with one of the few British ships left to control the coastline? Granted, not even when full attention had been given to the task under Admiral Graves and his successors (who would better have kept an eye on his godson when the latter had been a boy than occupy himself with naval adventures that hadn’t earned him any fame), the coastline had been sufficiently secured, but still, mishaps and misfortune could strike swiftly and unexpectedly, especially in times of war.

He did not want her to go on board, he realised.

Anna too looked unsure what to think, doubtlessly influenced by the painful memories she had of this place, her former home and only nodded in response before making her way to the parlour, where she stood by the window, her gaze fixed on some point outside in the distance.

“Mrs Strong?” he cleared his throat, unsure how to approach her.

She turned, surprise on her features.

“Major. How can I help you?”

It was clear to him she had only said that in order to say anything at all; likely, she felt as he did, unsure what could or should be said.

“It is nothing, Mrs Strong. Would you care to sit? I am sure you must still be quite tired after all
you’ve gone through”, he enquired and motioned toward the settee. As she complied to his suggestion and stiffly seated herself, he took an armchair facing her.

He could feel her eyes on him, these wonderful, warm dark orbs that had so long ago inspired a fire within him that had set his breast aflame and then, in the end, scorched it, leaving him a burnt ruin of his former self.

“Allow me to, ah, congratulate you. You have been instrumental in the delivery of young Edward.” Anna shook her head and avoiding his eyes, answered: “No. You should praise your sister and above all, Abigail. I slept through most of the night-“

“I am sure you needed it.”

Her eyes. How he has missed them, even if presently they look at him with great caution and confusion.

“I suppose so.”

“Life in camp must have been unpleasant to say the least. I expect you will be relieved to be returning home, to Setauket.”

Why is he even talking to her? This woman has wounded him so badly- and saved his life. She had done it to save him. But she had started it all to use him for her rebel friends’ benefit.

Two hearts warred within his chest and were only interrupted in their fierce joust when Anna answered him.

“I don’t know. If I stay, that is. In Setauket.” She avoided his eyes as she spoke.

“But is it not your home?”

“It was, once. Before the attainder, before I fell in disgrace, before the-“ she shook her head from side to side and broke off. Edmund however did not need her to speak the word she had wanted to say; he knew only too well about what she was talking.

“When you joined the rebels, did your husband- did you tell-“

“Selah’s dead. Died in Philadelphia.”

Anna did not know what she felt when the words slowly crept across her lips. She couldn’t look Edmund in the eyes, because it was so ironic, wasn’t it?

In some sad, broken musings, she had sometimes in the semi-privacy of her tent wished Selah could have died just a little earlier. One month, two months more or less could hardly make much of a difference, could they? She and Edmund could have been happy. Why couldn’t Selah have- no, it was unchristian to think that. Ashamed of herself and her selfish thoughts, she had tried to counter her bitterness with a prayer or the knowledge that what she had been doing she had done for her convictions, had contributed to a greater cause, this however, had been cold comfort on the nights Edmund Hewlett had invaded her thoughts, warming her almost as much as the thin, worn tarps of the tent did on a cold night.
“My condolences Mrs Strong, I did not intend to distress you-“

“No, please. Sit.”

Edmund had made a move to rise, visibly embarrassed, which he needed not be for he could not have known about Selah’s fate and before she knew what she was doing, her hand extended to touch his, laying in repose on his knee in a gesture intended to reinforce her words.

As she became aware of what she was doing, she recoiled and folded her hands in her lap, the left controlling the right and vice versa, keeping each other in place.

Doing as she said, he sat down again. An uncomfortable silence spread between the two, which neither of them knew how to alleviate, what could be said to guide their conversation out of the cul-de-sac they had first manoeuvred it into.

At long last Anna braved herself to speak. The question she was going to ask him had come to her naturally, especially after he had asked her about Setauket.

“You will return, to Scotland, I mean?”

“I suppose so. My mother will already be waiting for the two of us, my sister and I. They have brought me in for questioning, which I deem Simcoe’s doing to lure me back onto these shores.”

Anna frowned with disdain. Simcoe was their common enemy, perhaps the one thing they still had in common.

“It is a long story.”

Edmund waved his hand dismissively as if to wipe away the memories of these past months.

“The point is, I am not required here anymore. They would not want the ‘Oyster Major’ with them in Virginia.”

“Don’t say such a thing.”

Her eyes found his and he felt scolded.

“You are a kind and decent man, Edmund. And always have been.”

Inhaling sharply, Anna rose, a look on her face he could not quite discern and rushed out of the room. He would have given everything to have her to remain with him, but did not want to force her.

They did not speak again until the next day, Eliza noted, when Edmund helped Anna wordlessly with some dishes, carrying them to the kitchen for her, where she did not dare to follow them.
Both seemed to want to be in each other’s company, and dreaded it at the same time- and for good reason, Eliza mused. What had happened between them could not be forgotten easily.

“I saw you two talking, Edmund. You missed her.” Her brother only shrugged and pretended to be busy with one of Peggy Arnold’s books when she had taken him aside later that evening.

“Edmund! For God’s sake, won’t you listen to me?” Of the two, she had always been the more short-tempered.

Her brother glanced up from the book he was studying oh-so-intently and met her stare as he had done when they had been children, only to instantly return to his book without saying a word.

Sighing, Eliza was at his side in two bold strides and snatched the book from him, slammed it shut and put it on a table behind her and out of his reach.

“I have no time for your childish games, Eliza”, he managed to press through gritted teeth.

“If you think this is a game, you’re dead wrong.”

“As dead as Simcoe”, he could not help but retort and for one moment, Eliza felt the wish to hit him, hard (this hadn’t happened since she had been some ten or twelve years old), but restrained herself from doing so by digging her fingernails into her palms.

“You know what I mean. Speak with her. Part with her on good terms, tell her to come with us, whatever you will. But I’m not tolerating the Edmund Hewlett we got back from the war any longer. At the time, I pitied you. Now there is nothing left to pity, you have your chance to either finish with your past or continue to live in it. I can only hope at least for the nerves of mother and me you will chose the first option, if not for yourself.”

With that, she had left him to his thoughts.

As the second day came, the two still had not spoken. Peggy Arnold, still weak and pale, though in good spirits (because she would be rid of her guests that night and because, or so Abigail had told Eliza, she hoped the campaign in Virginia would prove Arnold’s undoing, an event his wife seemed to be looking forward to as eager as a young child to Christmas celebrations) and Abigail constantly fretting over Cicero, who too seemed sad to leave his mother behind.

The evening came and Caleb Brewster had indeed managed to charter, rob, borrow or whatever one called it in his line of business a boat. Dressed in some leftover civilian attire of Arnold (“Christ on a pony, I hope those togs are not contaminated with treason”), he had ventured back into the heartland of York City’s demi-monde he was so well acquainted it and had his arrangements made. The boat would lie in wait for them somewhat outside the town in a small natural harbour, meaning they had to leave in the afternoon to make it there until nightfall.

“Yes, but how do we get there?”, Woodhull had asked, racking his brain to find a solution.

“We’d need a pass to travel”, Anna answered. “Signed off by a British officer.” Caleb Brewster grinned and directed his next words to Edmund: “Finally, we find some use for the lobster, eh?”

Edmund had smiled wryly and demanded pen and paper to be brought. From his tales at home Eliza knew Edmund had last done that for Anna for their last meeting- before now.

“Here.”

Brewster thanked her brother with the genuine whole-heartedness that seemed to inhabit every single
action of his and shoved the sheet of creamy-white writing paper into the pocket of his (Arnold’s) coat. He would not travel back in uniform, a soldier now not with his regiment in Virginia would pose too many questions. Although they were too big for his much shorter frame, he certainly looked the part in Arnold’s attire, a circumstance which even the General’s wife had noted and asked him to pick out the finest shirts and everything else he might want.

Edmund watched as under tears, Abigail and Cicero said goodbye to each other. The poor boy and the poor mother indeed. He was sympathetic to Abigail and her tribulations, had not his own mother cried terribly when he had left for service?

“Be good. Don’t cause them trouble, do you hear me?”

“Yes, mother.”

Cicero attempted to smile and come across as grown-up as possible, but the lump in his throat was visible even a mile away.

A last embrace was exchanged before Caleb Brewster, Abraham Woodhull, Cicero and Anna Strong went on their journey to Setauket.

He had shaken hands with Brewster and Woodhull, as had Eliza. Over the short time they had come to know each other under less than ideal circumstances, he had found Brewster especially quite a likeable man, though not very learned and certainly not schooled in the rules of society.

“My condolences on the death of your uncle”, were the last words he had said to him and Brewster had given him a faint nod, letting him know he believed the sincerity in which these words had been uttered.

Without a word, Anna passed him by.

“Anna- wait.”

She turned to him.

“Edmund.” Her eyes spelled the same as his, words neither of them could speak.

“Don’t go.”

He remembered the day at the harbour when he had wanted to throw himself in but had not had the courage- he had learned from this day.

Mustering all his courage, he was surprised when she spoke first. “Adieu, Edmund. Take good care of yourself.”

“Anna- if you- if you want to return, to York City, that is, I suppose I shall still be here before my sister and I find a suitable ship back to England.” It sounded so wooden, so wrong, but what else could he say? He had to say what he meant better, with more gravitas, more force-

“I shall never forget you. There will always be a place within my-“
“You sound as if I was about to die.” Anna looked a little horrified, amused and sad at the same time.

“No, what I mean is-“

“I am not Eurydice”, Anna suddenly countered, “and this is not the underworld.”

He noticed how everyone else had moved a little away from them, sensing they would appreciate some privacy. From the corner of his eye, he could see Abraham frown.

“You look well.”

With a gesture to his hair, Anna smiled sadly at him.

“You don’t”, he replied in a darker tone and shuddered when he thought back at her weary form on the sofa.

“I have made my peace with the past, Anna. I accept what happened and the pain it has given me. It still pains me, but the wound has closed. You saved my life. If you want me to return the favour-“

“I must go, Edmund.”

What else could she say? She could not hurt him again. She had never wanted to in the first place. She could not leave Caleb, Abe and Cicero, Abigail’s son, Abigail, who had contributed so much to the cause, undertake the journey on their own. She did not like the thought of returning to Setauket, where the dark shadows of her past would be ever-present much, but what else should she do? Edmund couldn’t possibly mean what he had insinuated. He simply was a kind man, that was all. At least she tried to tell herself that.

Her ribcage felt much too narrow for her heart when she looked in Edmund’s eyes.

The small procession set in motion again but before she was out through the door, she mustered all her courage and reached for Edmund’s hand and squeezed it, holding on to him for as long as possible for the last time.

Surprised, he looked up to her, tears flooding his eyes and hers alike.

“Always”, she mouthed before their hands separated and Abigail, her own eyes too teary to notice, closed the door.

The evening was dull and grey. Anna did not speak and neither did any of the others. She did not retain many memories from that night, a circumstance brought on by an event later that day, all she could recall was the boat. It was not the worst vessel to be sure, but not one that should have been out in such choppy seas. Caleb had creased his forehead and said that while the conditions were less than ideal, he would attempt steering the boat through the sound. They couldn’t risk being caught.

As the sea rocked the boat about like an autumn leaf in the wind, Anna could not help but wish she had remained behind in York City. To comfort herself with the gale blowing icy air into her face and the spray penetrating her clothes like tiny pins made of ice, she tried to remember the old days, when she and Edmund had been engaged. The memory of his warm embrace stood out markedly against
the cold night and water. They had had their chance, they could never be. She had hurt him and made him unhappy once. There was no good in making each other sad a second time and she tried to forget, concentrate on whatever task Caleb had given her to do, but the picture of Edmund that afternoon still remained with her.

None of them except for Caleb were expert sailors. As a child, Anna had rowed a rowing boat on a small lake once or twice, which was by no means comparable to the terrible storm that had hit them here, in the open water.

“I have to strike the mainsail, it’s too dangerous!”, Caleb shouted over the wind and waves crashing against the boat and rocking it about with eager, destructive force. Two or three times he had tried to loosen it in order to rob it of its power and gather wind, but failed before he tried again.

Caleb made a renewed attempt to grasp for the sail in order to take it down. The sail, swinging in all possible directions since Caleb, the only man versed in the art of seafaring had already loosened the rope that held it steady, turned in Anna’s direction and hit her on the back of the head before she knew what was happening.

“Anna!”

Abe’s voice was the last thing she heard as she felt how her body was tossed across the side of the boat, hitting the water with a splash that was drowned out by the waves, the wind and the shocked exclamations of her companions.

Everything went dark instantly and she did not even feel anymore how the current took possession of her lifeless form, driving her landwards.

“Anna, Anna, NO!”

Caleb flung himself to the side of the boat, causing it to shake precariously. Abe tried to restrain him, but it wasn’t done easily.

“Caleb-“

“Annie-“

They were both crying, he noticed, and Cicero too had bent himself so he could see the water where Anna had vanished, reaching out for her with his lanky arms.

“Anna-“ Caleb wailed desperately, his hands threading the water in hopes to grasp her, take hold of her hair or her dress, anything at all, but she was gone from them within seconds, lost in the choppy waters of the sound.

At last, Caleb was the first to regain a state akin to composure, swallowed a sob and said in a quivering, broken voice:

“Alright, prepare for landfall, men. If we’re lucky, we can make it.”

It was evident he could, at least for the moment, though his eyes were still filled with tears and his voice revealed the true state of his soul, force the horrible incident to the back of his head to take command of the situation.

When Caleb hadn’t been privateering, he had been a whaler who had seen the world as far as the
coast of Greenland or Iceland. On his tours with the big whaling ships, he had likely seen men go overboard more than once- they might have been comrades for a voyage or two, but not a friend like Anna had been, they had grown up together-

Before his mind’s eye, images flashed past: Anna, barely older than seven, running through the fields barefooted, laughing, Anna, now aged fifteen, kissing him for the first time, Anna, a few years ago, when he had genuflected before her and asked for her hand and she had agreed.

Sobbing, he tried to do whatever Caleb told him, tried to focus on what he was doing, but it was of no use.

Indeed, they managed to make landfall somewhere. A day or two passed, neither of them remembered anymore, because in the catatonic state of grief they each found themselves in, neither of them cared nor realised; under Caleb’s leadership, their legs bloody from incessant encounters with thorny brushwood, their clothes ragged and torn, they arrived in Setauket, hungry, thirsty and almost as dead as they considered the fourth member of their expedition party to be.

Thankfully, Richard had been on a two-day ride away from Setauket to visit some distant relation when Abe, Caleb Brewster and the boy who had once belonged to the Strongs had arrived in Setauket and luckily, Whitehall was far enough removed from the other houses to prevent the three scarecrows from making a spectacle of themselves.

Upon seeing them, Abe showing himself past a quite shocked Aberdeen, she had ordered Thomas to go to the nursery and given her husband a piece of her mind. The other two, she was not responsible for, seeing as the boy, whose name she now recalled to be Cicero, had a mother to whom such tasks fell and Caleb Brewster was and always had been a rogue who was his own master and would answer to none.

Abraham had only stood there, his gaze lowered to whatever one would call the remainders of his shoes clothing his feet and listened.

“Well, don’t you have anything to say for yourself? Leaving me here alone, to get Simcoe-“

“Anna is dead.”

He looked up at her, his eyes filled with tears. Mary couldn’t say she was sad, even if the message of Anna Strong’s death surprised her; one hadn’t heard much of her since her disgraceful conduct at Whitehall with Hewlett and her subsequent flight to camp, but one did not wish death upon another.

Granted, she had once aimed a shot at Simcoe, and a very good one at that; but while Anna Strong had strained her marriage and made her unhappy, she had never physically threatened her family.

No; while she had often wished never to see her again, she had never wished death upon her.

“I am sorry. My condolences”, she said a little more softly in an awkward tone that almost denied she knew the man to whom she spoke these words. She forced these words one was supposed to say even if it pained her to see her husband mourn another woman, his former side piece across her lips, even if she had rather not said anything at all.

She would not lose face. She always knew what was proper to say.
However, he had loved her, always and had Thomas not died, he would have married her.

Before the three were allowed to enter the parlour, she bade them wash and dress themselves upstairs; for Cicero, some old togs of Abraham’s were found, which were somewhat too short, but looked considerably better than the ripped, worn clothing he had had on him.

Aberdeen in the meantime had been ordered to prepare some leftovers, bread and soup, which despite the fact they had to be hungry after such an ordeal as they told her they had been through, barely touched.

When they came to the tale of Anna’s demise, she lowered her head. As they had evidently finished their meal, she bade them all to stand up and speak a prayer for her soul- and she would have dire need of that, the adulteress she had been.

A moment of silence was observed after that and even Mary felt some emotional movement, pity perhaps, in her bosom. Drowning was one of the worse modes of death she had heard, almost as bad as being hanged by the neck.

At least God in his mercy had granted her the state of unconsciousness, so she could not have felt much as death overcame her.

As to the question of Cicero, she would take him in for the time being, provided he would work around the house. Richard surely would vocally disapprove of an idle eater in their home and he could make use of his youthful strength assisting in the vegetable garden, the stable or wherever help was needed.

So Anna Strong had found her untimely end trying to keep a promise to Abigail, her former housemaid, if Abe’s tales were to be believed. So the other woman had had some decency in her after all.

Seeing as one could not disobey someone’s last wish, Cicero was granted the right to a small chamber under the roof, which was not the most comfortable place in the house, yet quite acceptable.

That night, she held Abe, sobbing still in her arms, confused, not knowing what else to do. She would be there for him in this hard time, she was his wife after all, for better, for worse. She would be strong, even if it pained her to see her husband cry bitter tears over the death of another woman, the woman who would have been lying in this bed with him as his lawfully wedded wife had it not pleased the Lord to intercept and take Thomas from this world.

She was being tested, as earthly life was a test preceding the reward of eternal life. Although she doubted she had passed all tests put before her, she would remain strong and find solace in the thought that nought happened without a reason. She would be strong and live through this ordeal with her head held high- after all, she was named after the Virgin Mary, mother unto Jesus Christ, who had shown ultimate fortitude witnessing her son’s death on the cross. She wasn’t sure if she could have done that, simply watch on as someone did wrong against her family (which was why she had aimed a shot at Simcoe), so perhaps she was not much like Mary after all, but the thought to have been named after a woman who had borne such pain and sorrow comforted her, feeling she should not complain about the very earthly and much lesser injury done to her. She would prove her fortitude, she would remain strong, whatever hard times would come her way and act as she would have to protect her family and herself.

- Stronger than Abe and stronger than Anna had ever been.
OH NO. Is Anna dead? Is she alive? The answer is hidden in this very chapter but you may have to squint to see it. ;)

Please, dear French people out there, I know you don't speak English like that in real life, I'm just trying to imitate how Lafayette sounded on Turn. Pertaining the little bits and pieces of French in there: j'aime votre pays et votre belle langue, que je suis heureuse de parler et écrire passablement. Malheureusement, il me manque d'exercice. Je m'excuse en cas des erreurs.

I'm not going to translate what von Steuben said. ;) Most Germans really have a problem with both "th"-sounds and the voiceless th (as in "Monmouth") often becomes an f- or s-sound. There is no historical evidence von Steuben did it, however I thought it plausible.

Regarding Monmouth: I've used a historical document for orientation here. Simcoe noted in his diary how von Steuben fled at Monmouth and lost his hat while doing so.

The orphan: Eliza's story of the little girl who lost both her parents is an Easter egg for everyone who follows my other long-read, too. Elizabeth Posthuma (so-named to commemorate the sad circumstances of her birth) Gwillim lost her father Col. Thomas Gwillim before he even knew her mother was pregnant with her presumably in early 1762. He was on campaign in Germany and died there of unspecified causes, perhaps somewhere around Kassel (Hesse), for which I can't find enough sources. Her mother died shortly after having given birth to her. Taken care of by various family members, Elizabeth spent the best part of her teens in the household of her aunt, who had married Admiral Samuel Graves. The admiral had a godson who came visiting in early 1782 for convalescence after having fallen gravely ill on campaign in America. Said godson and Ms Gwillim got on well- so well in fact that on 30th December that same year, John Graves and Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe were married.

As Turn-verse's Caleb is of Irish descent, he has enough Irish to curse. He doesn't speak the language fluently but knows a few more or less rude words he uses every now and then.

Ok, I have no knowledge of ships or sailing, all I know comes from "Horatio Hornblower" (very accurate I suppose) and- a boy on the bus. So, last week on my way home, a thunderstorm hit the area. A boy, probably in his mid-teens, sat down opposite me and made a commet about the weather. We started to talk and he told me he had basically been raised on boats and had a few hair-raising stories from the high seas to tell as well. So of course, I had to ask him things I needed for the story. He was extremely nice and told me everything I wanted to know. He once had the same accident as Anna, which I wrote before we met, but was surprised my idea of sailing boats is not entirely off.

Thank you, sailor on the bus. I doubt you read this, but anyway, thank you for your help and may you always have enough water under your keel and never be struck by the boom again.

The boom is the horizontal bar holding the triangular mainsail straight. Made of wood, that thing is very unpleasant when it meets your head with force as I have been told.
The Sun and the Crescent Moon

Chapter Summary

What happened to Anna.

Chapter Notes

Here we go again! This time, a very Anna-centric chapter, because we didn't have one yet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.

nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

(Gaius Valerius Catullus, Catullus 85)

A deserted farmhouse on the Long Island coastline at dawn.

Dawn rose and the foul weather of the night dissipated into a grey, overcast morning with a light gale blowing inland. The storm had prevented them from searching the area and keeping watch of the sound, which angered him somewhat, but felt comforted in the thought that the enemy would have fought the exact same forces of nature.

Sometime late in the night, one of his men had reported a small boat on the sound, white sails billowed in the wind. His comrades had laughed at the man and patted his back, asking him what terrible apparition that might have been or, the more serious among them claimed so, it must have been sea foam. He too did not believe it could have been a boat; according to the tales of his father and godfather he had grown up with, both of them being or in the case of his father having been distinguished navy men, a small boat could not withstand such weather, weather that would even be quite unpleasant to experience in the captain’s cabin on board of one of His Majesty’s ships of the line.

Groaning, he rose from his bedstead in the deserted farmhouse he had made his headquarters. It was too short for a man of his build and the uncomfortable position he had fallen asleep in aside, for the night had been quite cold, which had forced him to sleep in his clothes. Given his gradual recovery, he would have much liked to have a fire, but the smoke rising from the chimney might attract the enemy- who knew if their ragtag militia might still be hiding in the woods around these parts (probably what had prompted the original owner of this structure to flee) and he would not want to exert his men or use up too much of his supplies of shots and powder before reaching their ultimate destination.

“Sir?”
He turned abruptly to face his second, whose voice came from the door.

“‘The men found something, sir. In the water.’”

Without a verbal answer, he nodded stiffly and gestured for Falkoff to lead him to the waterside, where they had apparently made an interesting discovery.

His hand on his pistol (one could never know), he walked toward the water’s edge. He couldn’t make out much except for a dark shape in the water, caught between the reeds.

In their caution, his men had left it alone and hadn’t approached, not knowing what to think of it. As he drew closer and closer to the river, its water already greedily reaching for the tips of his boots, he realised whatever was caught there between the reeds was not an amphibious rebel attack or some driftwood, as he had first thought: the shape was distinctly human.

“You men wait here”, he commanded, unbuckling his baldric and handing it alongside his pistol to Falkoff.

With determined steps, he waded into the water. He was relieved his back was turned to his men (not something he did lightly on an ordinary day) for this meant they could not see his face.

It was just like all those years before. Summoning the combined forces of his body and mind, every step into the water became a struggle. A part of him wanted to walk back and collapse on the shore curl up into a tight ball hoping to forget, but that would have been weak. He wasn’t weak.

Instead, he tried to concentrate on the task at hand, step by step, one foot before the other. Water filled his boots, made walking harder, then it reached up to his waist, so cold it made him shiver.

The closer he got, the worse the vivid images before his mind’s eye grew, the louder the cries only he could hear resonated in his ears, louder even than the memory of the gunshot that had almost extinguished his life.

“John, help me, please!”

“Percy! I can’t, the current is too strong!”

“Please-“

"Hold on, do you hear me? I’ll get help-”

But help had been too late. Two hours later, they had found the lifeless body of his little brother caught between some plants and reeds, not unlike now, a mile downstream. He hadn’t been there when they had found him, but he’d seen the body, and that had been enough.

 Suppressing a shiver, he urged himself to walk on, step by step. This wasn’t Percy, too young to die, this was likely just some other patriot ne’er do well who had been killed rightly by one of his men.

Percy had been his first body, but he had seen so many others, many of them his creation, he should not, did not, care about another.

-But none of them has died like Percy.

Blinking profusely to find a physical way of pushing the images away, he forced himself to walk on, closer to the reeds, closer to the body within.

“John-“
The closer he drew, the more details he could make out: the body was that of a woman, not a man, her long dark hair covering part of her face, obscuring her features to him, her skirts pooling around her in the water.

Like Ophelia, a terrible, tragic, morbid beauty.

*I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died: they say he made a good end.*

He didn’t make a good end, he died aboard his ship, the HMS *Pembroke*, and lay buried somewhere in the waters off the Canadian coastline. Sometimes, as a child, he had wondered if it had been Father who had taken Percy away because he missed his family and so he would not have to be alone down there in the deep anymore.

For some seconds, he could not see the reeds or the woman before him at all, memories fogged his brain and clouded his senses, the feeling of being shaken by the shoulders, his mother asking him why, *why* he hadn’t saved Percy, he was supposed to watch him, he was the older one, saw little Percy, his red-brown curls damp and adorned with last winter’s leaves and whatever else had floated in the riverbed of the Exe, his face waxen, his eyes closed, his mouth half-open in death’s mocking imitation of what probably had been Percy’s last attempt to gasp for air.

In that moment, all he wanted to do was what the water seemed to whisper to him in its incessant movements, its cold caresses, namely to allow his body to go slack and in turn submerge, to join his father and brother.

But he battled on, kept telling himself this was a battle like any other.

When he finally reached the woman, he needed some time to free her heavy, soaked clothing and a few strands of hair from the vegetation in which it was caught; finally, he was able to lift her up. The flexibility of her body indicated she couldn’t be dead for long.

Holding her to his chest, he did not dare to look at her; he wouldn’t see her countenance anyway, he would see Percy.

She grew heavier the closer they got to dry land and without the water supporting her weight to some extent, he had trouble carrying them both upright, especially given their heavy, wet clothing.

With a feeling of deadness inside, he laid her down on the grass and remained kneeling by her side.

Had the boat been real after all? Had she been on the boat? Could she have been saved, had he not dismissed the sighting of a boat in the night as arrant nonsense?

His men had receded to a gawking semi-circle that gathered around them at a distance that was meant to be respectful, some had doffed their caps and lowered their eyes in respect for the dead woman or to say a prayer for her soul.

Carefully, he brushed the hair in her face away to reveal her countenance to him. Although a voice inside him still cried not to do it, he now wanted to see for whose death by drowning he was responsible this time.

As he did so and a heavy strand of hair bared her face to him, a sudden wave of shock swept over him, threatening to drown him on dry land:
The pale, little body before him was Anna, his Anna.

He could barely hold back tears. In the past few months, he’d gone rather off her, especially after having left Setauket and having found ample consolation in the arms of Lady Lola, but seeing her dead, knowing the dreadfulness of the mode of her death and that it may have been him who did it, was an altogether different matter and wounded his heart in a manner not even her disdain for him and her love for Hewlett had ever been capable of.

What was she even doing here?

Stupid, stupid Anna. If only she had seen reason and elected to be with him instead of attempting to marry Hewlett and subsequently running off to hide with the rebels, it would never have had to come to this.

His head bowed pretending to pray, he gazed upon her one last time. He would order his men to bury her somewhere near, mark her grave. His terrible, truculent Anna deserved better than this, but more he could not offer her presently, alas.

He wondered if Woodhull knew, if it was the Weasel who had something to do with her death, or one of her other fellow rebels from Setauket, Tallmadge or Brewster and vowed to both God and the Devil he would end them, more slowly and painfully than drowning even, should he ever come into the fortunate situation to be able to lay hands on them.

They would pay, badly. He had learned things over the years. In his mind, a scenery began to form: Brewster tied to a chair, his upper body bared to him, the skin there reduced to a bloody mess, and he was there, too, standing behind the murderer with his bayonet in hand, glowing red-hot from having been shoved into the fire for a while. When he brought it against Brewster’s already mangled chest and the murderous rebel began to cry and wince in pain, he could feel some sort of primal contention at the thought that he would really do this, not only in a phantasy, but in reality, once Brewster was his, that he would make him pay for not having kept her safe, make him feel the same painful despair (and twice that, even) his poor love had most likely felt when she died, fighting to live, yet knowing it was of no use-

Anna’s pale chest heaved forcefully two or three times, causing water to sputter from her mouth like some grotesque gargoyle.

Agitated murmurs spread among the men and he quickly rolled her over to one side so the water could leave her lungs more easily when she coughed.

She was alive, Anna lived.

Her coughs grew stronger and a shiver ran through her body. She wasn’t quite dead yet, he realised, though very much unconscious, shock, horror and relief inhabiting every fibre of his body.

“To the house”, he commanded all men who were presently not on guard duty and gave further instructions for the bed to be readied and water to be heated. Swiftly, he picked Anna up again, who was still unconscious and put her on the bed inside on top of a horse rug he had ordered to be brought in order not to drench the bed that was supposed to soon warm her.

While in the neighbouring rooms, his men were heating the house as per his instructions as if it was midwinter, warmed water and filled it into the only bedpan and a few metal vessels they had found to pre-heat the bed with, he undid Anna’s clothing with skilled movements.
It was easier however if the person in the dress was helping, as he knew from experience. Since Anna couldn’t assist him, he called for Johnson, a young lad a little younger than he had been when had joined the army and, judging from his flushed cheeks whenever the men had talked about their latest conquests in York City, not experienced with women, which would likely mean he would treat her carefully and with reverence instead of improper ogling at a defenceless woman in need of help.

They had to get the wet clothes off her and then carefully warm her body.

After what had happened to Percy, he had kept these things in mind, not thinking he would ever need to know this ever again, but at least, it had bestowed him with some measure of (though quite cold) comfort to know in later years that, no more a boy of twelve, but a grown man of some height, he would be able to wade into a river and rescue someone if he had to and that in such an event, he would not have to watch, that he could help then, provided the person was still alive.

Johnson did not ask many questions but stared incredulously at being instructed to help remove the woman’s clothes, understood however the necessity of it in the current situation and nodded only, blushing, as he turned around, facing the fire, to allow Johnson change her drenched shift to one of his own nightshirts and tell him when he was done.

Naturally, it took some time for Johnson to complete his task, but it wouldn’t have felt right to him to do it himself.

“‘m done, sir.”

Anna lay on the bed, almost as pale as the clean, dry linen enwrapping her figure. Drawing the covers over her, he pulled a knitted cap from his traveling chest and put it on her head to protect her from losing more body heat.

Even with the warmth of the bedpan, she was still too cold under the covers. He had hoped that perhaps the previous owners might have left a cat or dog behind one could place in bed with her, but after not having seen a pet around in the past day, he would not count on that.

Realising he was dripping water on the floor, wet from the sash downwards, he, feeling oddly watched by Anna though her eyes were closed, turned into a corner of the room to lose his damp clothing in favour of a dry pair of breeches.

Anna needed warmth now, best not dulled by too many layers of clothing. His godfather, the man who had told him about what to do in the event someone was found unconscious in the water, and as a veteran of the high seas likely witness to such an event in the past, had taught him that the most effective way to heat a person’s body up was the preferably unadulterated warmth of another human being. It was best done by having skin meet skin, this however was strictly prohibited by common decency and his reverence for her.

She wouldn’t like that at all, but it had to be, lest she should want to perish.

Having sent Johnson away, he slipped under the covers with her, brought her back against his bare chest and hoped, holding her close and enwrapped in his arms, that she would survive.

The men would certainly talk and he would hate to have to lash one or two of them for the indecencies they would come up with before the battle, but he would have to.

There was always some perverted, base-instinct-driven mind among a group of soldiers.

However much he had in the past fantasised about these exact circumstances, his mind could not embrace the scenario as fully as his arms did Anna: while a part of him rejoiced, knowing he finally
had her by his side and she wouldn’t go away or slight him the next second, another part of him scolded him for being so vile as to even indulge in such thoughts.

Anna had been cruel to him in the past, used his heart, she had never loved him and never would, and had told him so to his face.

She had hurt him rather badly. A cruel instinct told him to throw her back into the water and watch her float away and die like Percy, doubtlessly more deserving of such a death than an innocent child of ten years whose only fault in the world had been to have had an inattentive older brother.

Of course he wouldn’t do that. He wasn’t a monster, but he could not deny the way she had smarted his heart had left scars deep within, which would remain invisible to the outside world and which she never would see, in case she would ever wake up again.

His efforts were having an effect, he could tell; her body felt warmer and a slight rosy blush coloured her cheek a livelier hue than the almost waxen paleness that had made him believe she was dead when he first dragged her out of the water.

-Where would it go from here? Presently, he was quite fine holding her, making himself believe in the fantasies he had so long harboured, that he hadn’t just pulled Anna, drenched, unconscious and corpse-cold out of the water, that she was his, her name no longer Strong, that she wasn’t with him because he tried to save her life, but because she had chosen to intertwine her fate with his, that they could be happy and later, she would wake him, happy and healthy with a kiss.

But that wasn’t the truth, was it? She hated him with all her heart and would probably, come the time she would be conscious again, say cruel things about him for having rescued her.

The way he remembered Anna, she would probably have preferred to die in the cold waters of the sound instead of being rescued by him and would berate him for having lain in bed with her to warm her as soon as she was fully back among the living.

They had to march soon in order to join forces with the main body of the army. He was no nurse and had no time even for Anna to wait for her convalescence. He had to do his duty but similarly, he could not leave her behind, either. There were no civilians nearby, none he could entrust with her care and certainly not someone he would feel comfortable leaving her with and still, he could not take her with him- or could he?

Give it two, three days, perhaps she would regain consciousness and some strength; enough to sit before him in the saddle, she needn’t do anything anyway because he would hold and support her, she could sleep, leaning against his chest and wrapped up in his cape, and once they joined the army somewhere near a place called Yorktown, he would coerce a doctor into caring for her.

Most men did what he told them to quite quickly, usually, the coldly-burning stare of his eyes or a quick flash of his bayonet sufficed.

And after the battle-

Then what?

He could keep her.

And what woman would refuse a victorious soldier? He has even been promoted twice since they last met, from captain to major and from major to lieutenant-colonel, it’s not a full promotion as his is a provincial rank, but it is quite something.
That means he also earns more than before, if that was her consideration in allowing Hewlett to court
her.

He can support them both with his pay and will endeavour to make the Queen’s Rangers a
permanent regiment within the army, which means that his rank will be made permanent also; she
will have a proper colonel, a respected man, and he will take her back to England to meet what
remains of his family.

They will set up home in the area and be happy and she will laugh at him and take his face in her
hands and thank him for saving her life, and he will only shrug for he had only done his duty.

They will not live in excessive splendour, but well, and there will even be enough to support a child
or two, a little girl with flaming curls or a little boy with big, brown eyes.

Lost in his thoughts, hopes for the future which had soon eliminated any reasonable doubts from his
mind, he fell asleep.

He woke early in the afternoon and, fearing Anna could wake up to find herself enwrapped in his
embrace and would scream bloody murder, reluctantly unwound his arm that had held her close from
around her body, carefully plumped the cushion that was hosting her head up a little and tightened
the blankets around her like the cocoon of a butterfly.

Anna looked better, her breath was regular and her pulse, as he assured himself, taking her wrist,
steady. It seemed that, bar the terrible possibility she could have caught an illness from her prolonged
exposure to the elements, she was back on the mend. She would be fine, it seemed.

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steady. It seemed that, bar the terrible possibility she could have caught an illness from her prolonged
exposure to the elements, she was back on the mend. She would be fine, it seemed.

Luckily, her forehead, though warm, was not hot; it seemed she was as healthy as one who had
eluded death by a hair’s breadth could be.

Dressed and washed, he went downstairs to find that blasted man whom he had ordered to keep the
fire burning through the night- it had gone out and the culprit was nowhere to be seen. At last, he
found him snoring in his tent, from whence he extricated this sorry excuse of a soldier and put him
back to work with nothing but a few half-hearted threats and shoving him against the kitchen door in
the house (carefully, though, he would not want to wake Anna up disciplining someone as unworthy
of even existing as this man).

As soon as the kitchen fire was burning, he ordered for some food to be prepared for Anna.

In the meantime, he returned to her, who was still asleep and took a chair across the room, settled
onto the rough-hewn piece of furniture as comfortably as was possible and read in his badly-battered
copy of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, which he had taken on campaign with him. While in England a small
library awaited his return in the attic of his godfather’s home, he had taken a few, easily replaceable
prints with him to America and bought a few more there, mostly things that could serve a military
man well, such as Xenophon, whose descriptions of the Greek army and their tactics never ceased to
interest him, even if he had read this particular work several times in its entirety.

At one point in the morning, Falkoff had entered to report to him and he had been given instructions
to keep an eye on the men; the health and welfare of their foundling was most important to him.

Falkoff had nodded obediently and given Anna a curious glance on the way out.

Had he recognised her? Some of the Rangers, such as Falkoff, had been with him in Setauket. Had
someone recognised her, would it make a difference if someone had? His infatuation with her had
not been a secret.
What could they do? He was their commander and his superiors didn’t know nor care about her so for them, he could still fabricate a nice little story in which she had become his prisoner and that she was to remain close to him because she was in possession of important intelligence and he was hesitant to trust anyone with overseeing her, a lone woman in a camp almost completely consisting of men. It would work. Nobody would question him, would they?

To hell with anybody who questioned him or decided to venture too close to Anna. Once, he had killed in her name, in the name of love, and hoped to kill Hewlett also.

Now, there was no need to kill anyone to have her by his side. He would keep her close to him and weak as she was, she would probably not even resist him and stay under his care.

There was a chance she would follow him home to England once this war was over, and that they could be happy. He knew he would do everything for her if only she decided to no longer resist him, he who had almost always been sincere to her, more sincere than Woodhull at any rate and Hewlett, who had been responsible for her fall from grace in the first place, who had degraded her to a tavern-wench with the help of the elder Woodhull, who had as much decency in him as his son (none). She wouldn’t have to go back and clean other people’s vomit off the floor and fetch ale anymore if she would stay with him. She would be a lady, a proper one, once more.

They wouldn’t get married here, he had no idea whether that husband of hers was still among the living after all and had learned from Hewlett’s mistake (and he had even more ill-wishers than the little major), they’d wait until they reached England.

He’d buy her a splendidous dress and she would look like a queen walking down the aisle of Exeter Cathedral, which would be filled to the brim with cheering townsfolk and his godfather and his family would be there, too and be happy for him and Anna.

All would be well, finally.

Only one more battle and the Americans would be subdued for good and then-

Suddenly, he was woken from his daydreams as the figure in the bed stirred, groaning.

Anna didn’t know where she was when she woke up in a strange bed, dressed in a nightshirt that was much too big for her and feeling poorly. She was very, very tired she realised, even if she must have slept for quite a while.

Blinking into the daylight and studying the ceiling above her with gradually more focussing eyes, she tried to reconstruct how she had come to this place, but could not do it.

Last she remembered, she had fallen out of a boat and the sail had hit her head, then there was only dark nothingness until this very moment.

So she must have been in the water, unconscious- had perhaps Caleb, Abe and Cicero pulled her out again once the danger had been averted and brought her to a safe house?

Groaning, she tried to sit up, pulling herself into a sitting position with both hands.
Focussing on the task, she did not notice the man approaching her until his big, firm hands were at her shoulders and pushed her back down into the cushions.

He didn’t need any force at all to do so, some gentle pressure applied to both her shoulders at the same time was fully sufficient.

“Ah-ah. You must rest.” That voice, so characteristic she could never forget it, could only belong to one person on God’s green earth.

Upon recognising who it belonged to, she sat bolt upright in bed within a split second, her body relying solely on the impetus of the shock his presence had given her.

“You-“

Anna was ready to fight him. What did Simcoe, Simcoe of all people do here? Yes, he had an uncanny talent to always be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but how could this be? What did he do here, why was it him of all people in America in this room with her now?

“Hush. Do not overexert yourself. Rest.”

His hands returned to her shoulders and he, this time with a little more force, made her lie down again.

Simcoe wasn’t completely wrong, she was rather weak and didn’t feel well, but her bodily illness was diminished by her dislike for him.

She’d rather lie somewhere alone beneath the forest floor than be here in the same room with him.

An unnerving pair of iridescently blue eyes looked at her from above with great interest and what might have looked like concern in any other person’s eyes, unblinking as always, like a child examining a particularly big beetle or frog they’ve found playing outside.

“My men saw you floating in the river”, he began, probably reading the confusion on her features, “I went in and carried you out. I thought you were dead-“ he hesitated, breaking eye contact for a moment and blinked before he fixed her with his gaze again and continued, “but you weren’t. You were very pale and very cold. Private Johnson changed you into something dry to wear and I-” he hesitated once again, “I kept you warm in the night.”

He blinked again, slowly, his eyes hiding behind long, pale lashes and added at her horrified facial expression, “nothing else. I just didn’t want you to die and you were almost as cold as ice- I never would- I was afraid you would- it is how it’s always done, I was taught- I wanted to save you.”

Good thing she had been unconscious, or else- he’d probably saved her life, as unappealing as the thought of having spent a night in the same bed as Simcoe was.

God, she hated him for having saved her life. Or did she? She hated him with a passion for so many things, beginning with his nature, but she could not hate him for having saved her.

-Maybe it wasn’t such a good thing after all. At the moment, she was at his mercy. He could do with her as he pleased, she realised with a shudder that physically manifested on her skin, probably helped along by still being a little cold.

“You are still cold”, Simcoe remarked, misinterpreting her shiver for a symptom of having lain in the cold water for too long, and left the room for a moment to shout at one of his men downstairs to gently heat the lid of a pot somewhat and bring it upstairs and bring some food, warm please, as well.
Wrapped up in a piece of cloth, he gave her first the lid to put it where she needed it most and then, allowing her to sit up with his help, his arm around her back, placed a small bowl of barley broth in her hands.

“Eat, you must regain your strength”, Simcoe remarked in the tone of a strict matron as her shaky hands brought a spoonful to her mouth, “we’ll ride tomorrow, during the night.”

He could not be serious and yet, what had she expected of this man? Due to her weakened state and aware of her situation under his so-called “care”, which she classified as a hostage-situation more than one person being kind to another, she reduced her reaction to his words to glaring at him.

“What else would you do?”, he asked, clearly having remarked upon her horror at the thought to accompany him wherever he was headed but unaware of the fact that other human beings had a free will, too and might appreciate being able to choose where to go for themselves.

The truth was, she did not know. She did not even know exactly where she was, which did not make things easier.

“I don’t know”, she replied in all honesty. Now that she slowly became more and more aware of everything around her, she could feel her head throb, growing more violent by the minute. The room around her begun to spin.

Nausea crept up her throat and the only thing she could do was to lean over the side of the bed. As she hung there, gasping for air and the taste of saltwater, broth and bile on her tongue, she would have liked to cry.

How did it come to all this? Why did fate, the Lord, the universe, hate her with such a passion, what had she done to deserve being shipwrecked with her friends surely thinking she had died and John Graves Simcoe of all people as her saviour, who would likely demand something in return for having rescued her-

“It will all be over soon”, Simcoe crooned in a tone he likely thought sounded consoling and in all fairness, his diction might even have, had it not been uttered by him in his unique (and uniquely upsetting) voice that never sounded quite sincere. And knowing him, Anna knew better than to trust in his sincerity.

From his mouth, it sounded like a thinly veiled threat. A large hand came to rest on her back for a moment, only to stroke the length of it in a gentle, languid motion.

Anna’s body tensed in response.

She could not see him, and turning around was presently not something wise to attempt, either.

As some seconds later, a few strands of errant hair that had escaped the much too large woollen cap were gathered and held back, Anna understood what he had done and her body trembled with relief and confusion in equal measure.

When she was finished and nothing left inside her, she let herself slump back in bed, closing her eyes. The room, so small, so warm, smelt terrible of her own bodily ejections and she could feel Simcoe’s eyes on her, even as she had turned away from him. In this moment, she felt no fear of death. Hell could not be worse than this.

She could hear the sound of heavy boots making their way to the door and shortly after Simcoe’s voice, who called for one of his men to come post-haste and then returned to her bedside.
The bed groaned, as if the wood too wanted to complain about Simcoe being near, as he sat down on the edge of it, slightly leaning over her. Instinctively, Anna moved as far away from him as she could.

Him settling his imposing frame on the edge of the bed, knowing she would not be in a position to pose great opposition to anything he, much stronger and more muscular than she, could do to her.

Her heart pounded and she would have liked to run away, if only she could have, but her legs, paralysed with fear, did not answer her command.

She’d known Simcoe was different from most people and that such a twisted mind would certainly enjoy twisted things in other aspects of life as well she found not hard to imagine, but this?

She, sick, weakened, certainly not at the cusp of health and beauty, as she was bound to look now-her eyes flew open in defiance. She’d give him nothing of herself, ever.

Frantically, her eyes darted across the room, left and right in order to find something preferably within her reach that would make a good weapon against a man of Simcoe’s built.

-The lid.

Pressed against her stomach, the still somewhat warm lid could be transmuted to a dangerous weapon. One hit on the head and-

Her body had acted before her mind had finished the thought. Before Anna could tell what was happening, her right wrist was held firm in a much larger hand, suspended in the air, her fist holding the lid.

A mixture of anger and surprise washed over Simcoe’s features as he searched her eyes and found them narrowed, glaring back at him.

“Are you afraid of me?” His voice quivered strangely and Anna could not tell why exactly. He sounded offended, angry and sad, a dangerous mixture.

“Yes”, she answered, her voice steady and clear.

For a split second, his grip on her wrist tightened painfully before he released her without taking her makeshift weapon away. Her arm fell onto the bed.

He made a face and rose abruptly. When he was standing, he extended his left hand to her, holding a pristinely white handkerchief.

“For you.”

In that moment, the man Simcoe had called entered and was ordered in the usual cold sneer Anna had grown to hate and dread in equal measure over the years to go and clean “that” (the tip of Simcoe’s boot pointed in the vague direction of the foul-smelling puddle on the floor) up.

When the unfortunate soul had left once more, probably to look for such necessary items as a rag and a bucket (having worked in a tavern, Anna knew only too well what awaited the man and felt somewhat sorry for him for having been the cause of his misery), she took the handkerchief up and blotted the corners of her mouth clean with it before folding it again and putting it down.

Assuring himself with a quick glance to the door that no one was listening, Simcoe said lowly
“I am not a monster. You need not fear me, Mrs Strong.”

There was something utterly child-like in the abhorrence expressed in his features, Anna noted. However, she had had enough. Enough of him, who had been a night-terror come to life for her, for Setauket and for Edmund.

At the thought of him, a hotly stinging pain impaled her heart as she half-suspected Simcoe’s beloved bayonet would do in a matter of minutes- Edmund. From Edmund, her thoughts roved to Caleb, Cicero and Abe, who likely thought she was dead, and she would remain dead to them in any way this situation would play out she could imagine; either Simcoe would stab her in an angry mood or he would take her hostage, if she wasn’t his hostage already, and in either case, no one would ever find out she was still alive. He would know better than to ever return to Setauket with her, Simcoe was clever, she had to give him that.

And, dead as she was now to anyone but the flame-haired and ice-eyed Beelzebub incarnate, nobody would come for her.

Would Caleb or Abe inform Edmund? No, they better shouldn’t. Or would it matter? Either way, she would break his heart anew. Either he would mourn her or he would come to think she had run away without him.

If only she had stayed behind with him, maybe they could have talked, maybe time could have helped and healed the wounds of the past.

Lost in her thoughts, she gave a start as Simcoe’s fear-inspiring falsetto penetrated her mind once again.

“All I ever wanted- “

Although Anna had not paid attention what, or if at all he had said anything before or after this half-sentence, she decided to fight.

In the past, a pleading look and a brief touch had made him submit to her will, but now, she was not so certain anymore. Besides, if she continued to play the dangerous game she had employed in her days in Setauket, namely keeping Simcoe in a state of limbo, vaguely hinting at a supposed growing affection that might take root in her heart in the future (as she had used to prevent him from killing Abe) but at the same time avoiding him best as she could, he might indeed believe she liked him.

She did not. She never would. Her helplessness in the face of him, a man twice her height and a redcoat officer at that, had forced her to do so. She hadn’t liked it. She had felt horrible after having come to his room that night two years ago and when she had returned to her own chamber, she had tried to wash his glances and her shame for having offered to sell herself and her pride to him, scrubbed her skin until it had become ruddy and hot, so hot in fact she had not felt the desperate tears she had cried for Edmund running down her cheeks.

Simcoe had done so many horrible things and revelled in the bloodshed and mayhem he created and fancied himself a hero in his very own fairy tale, which ended by him taking his rightful place as king of America with her as his consort.

She was done pretending.

“You threatened me. You had me pinned against the wall and I was fearing for myself, colonel. Everyone in Setauket dreaded you, and you made full use of it. And you wonder why we don’t tolerate your army anymore”, she spat angrily, past caring how he would react.
“I never meant to hurt you”, he tried, but Anna was having none of it.

“But you did. Did you think I would come to love you if you held me there, afraid you’d rip my gown apart and take me then and there? I’ll tell you something, colonel: I do not love you, and I never will. And if there is one grain of honour left in you, you’ll let me go, now.”

Her words smarted him badly, worse than any wound he had ever received.

“All I ever wanted was to protect you”, he finished, his head hanging low.

Yes, he had pushed her into the wall, and had done it in rage, but to think she was under the impression he would, could ever harm her- he never could. She had started it. She had been hurtful and said so many terrible things into his face when even then, his feelings for her had been genuine and he, blind fool that he had been, had blissfully overlooked the subtle hints that had been there all the time and that would have revealed her spying to him well before word of her sudden departure for Washington’s camp had.

He should arrest her, Simcoe reasoned. She was a spy after all-

But she was also Anna.

For one moment, he watched as before his mind’s eye, a gaunt, desperate-looking Anna was dragged by both arms before a judge who condemned her to hang for her service to the rebels and then Anna, her eyes pleading with him to stop, gasping for as he closes his fingers around her neck in a vice-like grip, and found grim satisfaction in this thought, which was washed away instantly by a storm surge of unfaltering adoration for the woman who had done naught but hurt him (and had he ever complained?), cheated on him with the personification of a cabbage-maggot and a frog in a wig.

He shouldn’t think such things.

Without saying another word, he turned and left her to herself.

Simcoe didn’t return for the rest of the day. His book lay abandoned on the chair at the back of the room, serving as a reminder that he was never far.

From time to time, she could hear him shout outside, indistinctly in the distance, but what did it matter.

The man who had cleaned the floor had returned with some more food, and this time, she was able to eat a few morsels and keep them down, which Anna thought was a good sign. She would grant herself one more day’s rest to recuperate somewhat, and at the next possibility, she would leave and run. She couldn’t be too far from Setauket, could she?

She could find Abe and make contact to Caleb and Edmund, and tell him how foolish she had been- if he would want to hear that at all.
Whenever her thoughts threatened to gravitate towards renewed desperation, she thought of him, his smile. Even his sister, who was as different from him as night and day are different from another, outgoing, self-assured, crossed her mind, Mrs Greenwood with her inviting smile and practical manner who did not ask any questions and had signalled her she would not be opposed if she were to renew her contact to Edmund.

Oh Edmund. It would have been better if they had never met again. And still, as dusk slowly began to settle, his image was before her mind and as she at last fell asleep, she did not remark upon the creaking floorboards before the door, lost in a dream in which she was holding his hand again.

The morning came too soon and Anna was awoken by the cries of Simcoe’s second below her window, drilling the Queen’s Rangers.

Tired still, she sat up in bed and to her surprise, found her clothes, dry and probably somewhat cleaner than they had been after having been dragged from the water, over Simcoe’s chair.

Relieved to leave the status of incapacitated patient behind, she dressed and arranged her hair best as the absence of a proper comb and pins allowed.

As she was busy trying to fasten a few strands of hair to the more or less artful bun on her head, she heard a brisk knock at the door.

“Mrs Strong”, a familiar voice greeted her and Simcoe made a half-attempt at bowing in her direction, if only ever so slightly, “I see you are better.”

Simcoe smiled, nay grinned like an overzealous schoolboy.

“I am, thank you, Colonel Simcoe.”

“I have come to apologise for my behaviour, it was not my intention to distress you any further”, he clarified the reason for his visit before continuing, “I know how you must feel, ill, in severe distress- I have been unwell myself of late and understand you only too well. If there is anything you need for your comfort, do not hesitate to ask me.”

His grin was undiminished, which prompted Anna to silently ask herself what he was planning to do. For clearly, his sudden pleasantness must have been brought on by something.

“I’ll be fine, thank you”, Anna managed to say, somewhat taken aback and frantically trying to think of what might have made him so cheery so early in the morning.

“Do ask me, if there is anything you require, after all, I would hate to see you suffer discomfort on our journey.”

“‘Our journey?’”, Anna echoed incredulously. What was he thinking?

“Yes”, Simcoe chirped back, his teeth bared in a disconcertingly genuine smile, “we’re riding for Virginia tomorrow. It seems our original mission is of little use, whereas the Rangers will greatly add to the numbers of the British troops there. I would of course not leave you behind here, all by yourself-“

Anna straightened her back to make use of her full height, however little that was in comparison to Simcoe, who easily towered most men around him by a head or two.

“I won’t-“
“You will, Mrs Strong. It is for your own good. Once Washington is defeated, you and your friends will be accused of espionage - if you remain with them that is. With me by your side, nobody will dare to question your integrity. Do I need to tell you what punishment a convicted spy receives?”

He cocked his head and reminded Anna of someone lecturing a naughty toddler.

“Death”, she hissed through gritted teeth, hoping she sounded self-assured and unafraid. In truth, she was not, how could she be, but Simcoe was like a wild animal: don’t show fear and it won’t attack. At least she could hope and pray the laws of wild beasts were applicable to him.

“By hanging”, he was helpful to point out, “I do suppose you know of the fate of Major John André and that traitorous schoolmaster Nathan Hale?”

“I was there when André was hanged.”

Something akin to morbid admiration flickered across his eyes when she said that.

“It is not a good death, is what they say. And I would not wish it to you.”

With his eyes cast to the tips of his boots, he almost whispered the latter portion of the sentence into her ear, as if saying these words aloud would cause this gruesome fate to indeed befall her.

“If I be hanged, I die for my country”, Anna braved herself to answer. It was not what she felt, she did not want to die, but knew or at least hoped such empty phrases of bravery would impress the soldier in front of her.

“But I could not see you hanged, Anna. It would tear my soul apart.” And then he drew her into his embrace, holding her close to his broad chest as he had done when she had thought Edmund had died in captivity - which had only been a convenient lie on Simcoe’s part to win her.

“You will be safe. And I shall take good care of you”, he murmured into her hair, attempting to pull her rigid body even closer to him.

“No.”

“No?”

He let go of her, and Anna took the opportunity to take one step back, out of his immediate reach.

“You have saved my life, colonel, after having made it hell for years. Do you think I can love a man who followed me around against my will, whose presence I feared, who almost killed two men dear to my heart, one of whom you told you would save-“

“So you don’t deny-“ his voice had grown sharp and shrill, his gaze alarmed.

“I don’t. I lay with Abe long before you came to Setauket and I don’t deny it. There is no point in it. The whole town knows. I loved Abe. And Major Hewlett-“ Anna broke off, not knowing how to proceed.

“He is weak”, Simcoe spat.

“The Major is strong, stronger than you ever will be. He is no brute, and it is his- his kindness, his humanity that makes him so.”
Her eyes glistened with angry tears that only ornamented her beautiful eyes even more, but he barely took note of it at first.

Hewlett.

She had loved that man after all. Hewlett was a weakling in a silly wig; he by contrast was a man of stature, family, connections and rigour. And yet Anna Strong, who could take her pick among men, had chosen the little major over him, even now that she was far apart from him and he would probably never want to see her again.

Oh foolish Anna. Why cling on to Hewlett, who would likely never take her back, even if she came crawling to him on her hands and knees and pretending to be a table to set his beloved telescopes on.

He should take her with him. He would make her see, make her see he knew what was best for her.

However, the tears in her eyes and her reluctance to allow him so much as extend basic human kindness and consolation to her and in such a terrible situation at that, when one would think she should be glad to be offered a strong shoulder to rest her weary head against spoke of true honesty and in that moment, he realised as something within him snapped, a little cord or string that had held him together, sharp and precise as being struck by the bayonet of an infantryman.

-She would never look at him like that nor ever feel such distress as she did for Hewlett for him.

She loved Hewlett.

She, Mrs Anna Strong, wife to a known traitor, sometime-mistress to another and later fiancé to a British officer, had refused and insulted him as a passion-driven fool, hurt him badly. However he twisted and turned things in his head, toyed with the thought of simply keeping her by his side as his prisoner (officially, at least), it always ended with the realisation that Anna would never requite his love. She would never wake up next to him in the morning and whisper “I love you, John” into his mangled ear, which thus touched by a fairy’s breath, would feel whole and mended again, like his soul would. She would not share his bed. She would never be his, except in his dreams where she haunted him sometimes.

Not knowing how his mind drew a connection to such a long-lost memory, a picture of a picturesque meadow entered his conscious.

She reminded him of something Elizabeth Gwillim, his godfather’s ward, had once told him when he was a young lad and Elizabeth but a little girl on one sunny day in early summer in this very meadow. It must have been shortly before he was dispatched to the Thirteen Colonies.

To let his godfather know of his visit, he had sent a letter in advance, which as he was to find out two days later arrived after him, meaning his coming was unexpected. Consequentially when he entered the gates of Hembury that day, he was informed that his godfather and his wife had gone for the day to visit some neighbours. Being known to the household staff, he was let into the house and left to his own devices.

He had spent the day loitering in the library, leafing through a volume here and there. For tea he was joined by the governess and Mrs Grave’s ward, her niece, an orphan who lived with her aunt and uncle. Little Elizabeth, maybe about eight at the time, was overjoyed to find a guest had come to distract her from her studies. Although he had not been a great friend of children at that age,
especially not after his still quite fresh experiences at school, he reluctantly agreed to accompany the giddy Elizabeth and her governess on an afternoon stroll through the meadows behind the gardens.

The weather was fine and the flowers in their first full bloom since the winter. It must have been quite a pretty scene, actually, the tall youth, the little mousey governess whose name had slipped his memory, and Elizabeth, eight years old, not even half his size and armed with her beloved sketchbook strolling through the blooming fields. The little girl tried every trick she knew to gain the attention of the rather reserved youth and somehow, he found he had given in to her childish games and attempted to talk pleasantly with her, as far as his limited experience with eight-year-old ladies of good breeding allowed him to.

At some point, Elizabeth had ordered them all to stop so she could draw a particular flower she had found. When she had finished (the sketch was exceptionally vivid and detailed for a girl her age), he had stayed behind and plucked the flower for her. What was intended as a small token of appreciation was rejected with a frown and a precocious talking-to. As far as he could remember, none of his superiors in the army had ever been as grave and important in their manner of speech as this little girl.

“John, why did you pluck it? It was so pretty!”

“It still is, Miss Gwillim. You can put it in a vase or press it to preserve its beauty”, he suggested.

“No, Joh-on. It was pretty there, on the hillside in the fresh air and sun. It will die either way, in the vase or in the back of the copy of Shakespeare’s Sonnets you lent me. You cannot just smother a flower to keep it forever. It will never be as beautiful now as it was up there on the hill.”

You cannot just smother a flower to keep it forever. He could not just smother the Flower of Womankind to keep her forever. It was the Anna he had learned to know that he loved, not a waxen effigy of a woman forced into submission to fate. Anna was worse than his captivity, worse than the wounds beneath his battle scars, worse than everything else. And still, he loved her despite everything. One part of him just wanted to pull her close, ignore her resistance and hold her, never to let go again. Another, more quietly spoken part of him realised that he had been defeated. This war, its battles worse than any action he had seen on any battlefield of the Colonies, had been lost. It was time to present his sabre to General Anna Strong, the expert commander who had conquered his heart and bow in unwilling submission to her will.

Once again, with forlorn hope, as a last stand, he contemplated to make her bend to his will, but he found that he could not. It was as if it had been fate, as if he had been destined to save her to let her go again.

He couldn’t.

He should.

She would be happy in England, where she would never have to clean tables and fetch ale again.

She would be unhappy in a strange country with a man she despised.

“You will leave tonight,” Simcoe announced to her, “we shall say you have fled. I will have a private punished for letting you escape, find a scapegoat. You will have provisions and a horse, can you ride?” Anna nodded. All of a sudden, Simcoe pretended to be all business-like, as if they were
strangers. It was such a great and confusing contrast to his usual self, invasive and unaware of other people’s privacy.

“Good”, he answered without looking at her, “I will come for you. Until then, I would advise you to rest. It is a two day’s ride to Setauket, provided there will be no rain, and some three to four to York City, if that is where you are headed.” The acidity he laid into the words York City did not escape her.

The day passed slowly, but mercifully, Anna found some sleep in between, marred however by restless dreams of Setauket, Edmund, Simcoe and water, lots of it.

She was awoken at dusk by three tell-tale knocks on the door.

“Mrs Strong? It is time.”

She rose, stretching and yawning lowly as she followed Simcoe’s knocks to the door and then a dark silhouette with a lantern downstairs. He blew the lantern out, leaving them both in the dark.

“No one must see us”, he clarified, sensing her uneasiness.

-He could still trick her, push her against the wall again and do God knows what to her. Her instinct, to her own surprise however, told her not to be afraid, which confused her as she was in the company of John Graves Simcoe.

He led her outside, a little away from the house to a dark hedge, where a tall horse stood waiting.

“All I ask is you take good care of him. His name is Salem.”

Taken aback, Anna nodded, “yes, Colonel. I will.”

Upsetting Simcoe at the last moment did not seem like a good idea.

One of Simcoe’s large hands came to rest on the horse’s forehead for a moment before he turned to her with an expectant look on his face and Anna understood.

Her dress was no robe de court but made mounting the horse difficult enough. A woman from rural Long Island, Anna had of course learned to ride a horse both side-saddle and, when nobody was watching, astride, but mounting was an altogether different matter. Often, she had either had help from Abe or Caleb or led the pony (much smaller than Simcoe’s steed) to a tree stump or the like.

“May I?” Her pale, long shadow asked. She nodded. She needed to get up there, after all.

“No, wait. Take this. It will serve as protection. In this guise, you are not likely to be attacked, at least from afar. The Queen’s Rangers are not known to be merciful when attacked and have a reputation for being well-trained.”

As if he needed to tell her that. Anna knew only too well what reputation the Queen’s Rangers had built for themselves on Long Island. Arms outstretched, he offered her his coat.

Gentlemanly, he held the coat out for her to slip into. Anna slipped the coat over her shoulders with open disgust on her face. Simcoe was right in that she needed protection traveling alone, which was the only reason why she even considered wearing the odious green thing as a disguise. Tonight was however not the time to be prideful and refuse out of personal beliefs or mere vanity (or because this particular garment unsettled her greatly simply because she knew to whom it belonged).
Once inside, a stiff nod gave him permission to heave her up onto her mount.

Her weight didn’t seem to cause him any difficulties; he lifted her up with ease. She was glad these hands would never touch her again after this. Sitting astride, her dress slipped up to her knees.

*The time of his life*, she thought dryly.

“Goodbye, Mrs Strong. Travel safe.”

His voice quivered slightly, betraying the usual veneer of distanced mock-politeness he could no longer uphold. In a solemn gesture of farewell, he offered her his right hand and Anna accepted, sensing the honesty in which the hand was extended to her in order not to upset him and perhaps make him rethink his plans. His hand trailed on the tips of her fingers for a little too long; she pulled away, reaching for the reins.

Anna sat on Salem’s back like Boudicca; a warrior queen in a battered dress, his coat (the colour of which strikingly complimented her complexion) over her shoulders, knees bare, wild hair and proud eyes. Never had a woman been more beautiful than the fate-stricken fate-striker in front of him. She was riding into battle -and he her mere squire tasked with preparing his queen for the field. She pulled her hand away from him; one last look, a nod of her head in silent acknowledgement of his help, and she was gone, galloping into the night.

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En route to Virginia, later the next day.

Sadness, especially of the painfully stinging kind one experiences at the loss of a person dear to the heart was not a sentiment Simcoe had been taught to handle or even identify as such.

He struggled with the basic concept of the existence of things, such as feelings, he could not fully understand or control. It *scared* him. The only outlet or coping mechanism he had ever adopted for such situations was to counter fear with more fear on his part. Scaring the thing that scared him usually worked; although scaring somebody else would suffice as well.

On their ride (now seated on a much less pleasant mount than Salem), they passed a remote farmhouse, raided it (the owners would not let them in and resistance to a royal officer made them no better than patriot rebels anyway) and ordered for the house to be set ablaze.

The owner and his perhaps twenty-year-old son and two farmhands, the only ones to have been at home, lay at his feet, throats slit, in a pool of their own blood. Quite handily, Salem could be compensated for with a mare from the farm's stables. The dapple grey wasn't him, but would suffice for the Ranger he had punished for letting Anna escape by making him walk, hands bound, behind him for the duration of their ride.

He watched as the flames first licked and then fully encompassed the roof. For one moment, among
the smoke of the burning house and the pleading sobs of his victims, he had forgotten about her. His red travail over, his victims limp and lifeless, the house’s charred remains collapsing into a raging funeral pyre for something he would never part from entirely, she re-entered his thoughts, the shards of whatever cold, little, shrivelled, frostbitten thing he had for a heart cutting deeply into his intestines.

He had to forget her. Hopefully, she would be safe. He would still not be able to watch her being led to the gallows. God, he would have killed for her. He had attempted to. He did. And would nearly have died once himself in the act of trying. Wistfully staring into the raging house fire like a less bellicose soul would into the softly burning embers of a homely fireplace, the overly familiar smell of blood heavy on the cool night wind, his hands and second-best uniform coat covered in red stains, he asked himself who he truly was. A weakling pining after a woman of no fortune or reputation that had slighted him more than once, a man broken by the flick of a delicate wrist?

No.

This was him. All of this. Even though a part of him believed it, the pulsating void in his chest denied it. A void that the entirety of what he was could never even hope to fill.

Somewhere, the previous night.

Anna clung on to Salem’s mane with great ferocity. She did not know where she was going and had no hope of finding out until the sun rose again, but what did it matter?

As long as she could get away as far as possible from Simcoe, any place seemed good to her.

A part of her was relieved the decision where to go was postponed until the morning because it gave her time to think about this exact question.

To Setauket, where Abe and Caleb, if he hadn’t re-joined the army already, were spreading the news of her death?

To York City, where Edmund presently dwelt?

She did not know. At the moment, she was busy keeping herself awake and steady as Salem thundered through the night.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so I know this chapter is probably inviting discourse to say the very least and I suppose many of the Annlett-community are not exactly pro-Simcoe to say the very least, either.

One thing that irritated me on the show was how Simcoe simply seems to forget about Anna entirely when it becomes convenient for the narrative, the same way he “forgets” Akinbode. Because I wasn’t convinced by that, I wanted the two to meet one last time and give them the chance to speak about a few things that really needed addressing.

As I mentioned countless of times before, in my storyline, Simcoe invented the whole Black Hole of Calcutta story in order to cover up the real trauma of having lost his father
and younger brother early in life with a fictional narrative that does not hurt him as much as the truth- and to sound more interesting. "Died on board of his ship of pneumonia" and "drowned in a river in England" simply don't have the same ring to them as the Calcutta-narrative does.

The version of his childhood I build up in the story is based on the childhood of the historical John Graves Simcoe. In 1764, his younger brother, at the time ten years old, drowned in the river Exe in a horrible accident in which two other boys, one of them likely a twelve-year-old John Graves, were present. On 29th June, the Trewman's Exeter Flying Post reported on the incident either the day after or a week after Percy's death, as the issue went into circulation on Friday and cited the accident to have happened on "last Thursday evening", which could mean both Thursday the 21st and Thursday the 28th, though I would think while in theory, the 28th is possible, by Thursday evening the newspaper would have gone into print already, so it was more likely the 21st. This year, by the way, will also have a Thursday, 21st of June. Although it was possible to pull him out again, attempts to resuscitate Percy were in vain.

Although we can't be certain if Simcoe was there when his little brother drowned, it seems likely and within the realms of this story, he was.

"I would give you some violets etc.": Ophelia, act IV, scene V of "Hamlet" by William Shakespeare.

Simcoe, by the way, is doing what one should to to warm someone with hypothermia when no modern emergency equipment is available and a 911/999/112-call for whatever reasons (such as being in the 18th century) impossible. Removing the victim's wet clothes and applying body heat within the boundaries of modesty and propriety is the surest way to warm the person's body up gently without causing more damage than is already done.

As I suppose everyone who read this chapter also read the last, you know who Ms Gwillim is. If however they met before 1782, which is not out of the question, we don't know- there is no definitive historical evidence. That scene is poetic license on my part entirely.

Salem is the historical Bucephalus. Contrary to what TURN told us, Simcoe was not a crazed horse-murderer- on the contrary. Historical!Simcoe was a Hewlett kind of guy. Salem was Simcoe's horse during the war and in 1783, the latter paid forty pounds (a small fortune indeed) to have him shipped to England because he couldn't bear the thought of him falling into American "rebels" hands. If it could not be avoided, his contact in New York, a captain in the Queen's Rangers, had instructions to shoot and bury Salem with military honours. Luckily, to the joy of Salem and his master, Simcoe's man in New York could find a passage for Salem and a human plus one to care for him. In a letter to a friend, Simcoe said that Salem was not even worth ten pounds, "but I love an old servant". Salem lived with the Simcoe family until his master's departure for Canada in 1791. Simcoe then arranged for a local lady to take the elderly horse in and care for him in his absence.

In the story, Simcoe gives Salem to Anna. As this is a work of fiction, who knows where Salem's hooves will carry us next?

While I enjoyed fitting in some history to counter the character assassination of the real JGS that is his TURN-portrayal (though I must say, as the central baddie, Simcoe as played by Samuel Roukin was absolutely captivating), I hope the show's less pleasant Simcoe is still visible here.
Dear Readers,

First of all, I am sorry to have lured you here thinking there would be a new chapter (there will be within the coming days, I promise!), but I need to address a very important issue that will affect you just as well as me. Normally, (contemporary) politics are not a topic of my work but now, I feel compelled to speak up, hoping to reach as many people as possible.

I am based in the EU, which means I will be affected by the EU’s proposed change to copyright laws- and one way or another, wherever you are, you will be, too. Never heard of it?

Many of you I suppose don’t live in the EU and are not directly affected by what might happen if the vote goes through on July 5th. If you supported the Net Neutrality protest in the US, you should care about what is happening in the EU, too.

Articles 11 and 13 of this changed copyright law are endangering the internet in particular. Especially article 13 could bring down the internet as we know it as it would put algorithms in place to detect copyrighted material, which would then be hidden from view for anyone trying to access the site in the EU.

**Why is this bad? Why should you care?**

The internet as we know it is at stake. As we all know, systems like YouTube’s Content ID can never be as accurate as a human reviewing uploaded material for copyright infringements. Even contents that do not infringe any laws might thus be blocked because the system categorises them wrongly. Just ask yourself how many “funny” AI-stories you have read (probably online) about people’s Siri, Cortana, Alexa and co. doing things they weren’t supposed to do, like ordering expensive goods or recording conversations etc. So far, even these projects, behind which there are powerful companies who invest a lot of money into their development can’t offer any fault-proof system, resources the EU cannot muster.

And now, to the content that will be restricted. **Things EU residents will no longer have access to should the law pass are (only to name a few of them): memes, fanart and fanfiction.**

Yes, **fanfiction.** Under article 13, EU residents won’t be able to access and upload fanfiction sites, because fanfiction is, as the name already indicates, created by fans and based on copyrighted material.

Should article 13 go through, I and all other creators of fannish content in Europe will be barred from uploading, reading, reviewing, commenting etc. on fanworks of all kinds.

**How does this affect you?**

In case you are not in the EU, you will still be affected: some of your favourite artists will disappear. **No more stories, no more cartoons with your favourite characters in them or gif-sets with funny captions.**
The internet will lose a large part of its diversity. I don’t know how long I will be able to keep updating on my works in case the new copyright laws are approved.

If you are now thinking “well, this is never going to get through anyway, people love the internet as we know it too much to let that happen”, please think again.

Media coverage has been slow and many people, even in the EU, don’t know about it or don’t think it will be *that* bad.

Being complacent about this is the wrong approach. Standing idly by and hoping things will pass is dangerous. If you don’t speak up, your silence will be viewed as agreement.

I am unsettled that such government-controlled censorship is now endangering the freedom to express one’s self and one’s opinion. I haven’t talked about it here as I am mostly speaking about fanwork in this context, but article 11 will affect news coverage negatively.

Thinking about not too long-past European history, I am sickened by the sheer possibilities government-controlled media is going to open to all willing to use it to further their own ends.

Please note that I am not generally against copyright laws; people who hold the right to a work should be supported, but this goes far beyond the protection of those creating original content and prunes democratic values and ideas we all should hold dear, which is the reason why we should make our voices heard.

To say it in the words of a character from a show I might soon no longer publish fanworks for,

“the revolution never ends”. Now, it’s our TURI.

Whether you are Team Annlett, Benwash, or pro-Coe, please care about what is happening. This goes beyond the fandom-lines of “rebels” and “redcoats”, on this subject, we should all stand united.

What can you do?

Inform yourself. I will provide a few resources below, but would strongly encourage you to go beyond them. This list is neither complete nor definite. Form your own opinion.

Speak up. Talk to others, post about it, and if you’re directly affected by it, contact your MEPs. We need to spread the word. There is also a change.org petition anyone can sign. Please consider doing this. Every single signature helps.

In case this vote goes through and I will not be able to access this site anymore in the future, I am terribly sorry that I won’t be able to answer comments or update any longer. I will keep posting as long as I can (hopefully forever, if enough of us show opposition and can convince law makers to repeal the vote) and a new chapter of “Roses and Thistles” is close to being finished.

If I should be barred from uploading in the future, that will not keep me from writing. I refuse to let that happen. If you want to read my works, I will privately circulate them via email. My email is
displayed on my profile, so simply drop me a line and I will set up a mailing list should the time come.

Please, support this cause. It doesn’t take long to sign a petition or share a link via social media.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours, Reinette

Resources of interest:

https://saveyourinternet.eu/ - here, you can also find ways in which to contact your MEPs

https://savetheinternet.info/


The Petition:

Across the Sea and Far Away

Chapter Summary

Anna tries to build a life for herself in York City, Lola is in for a surprise, Eliza and Edmund plan their departure and Robert Townsend tries to evade his nosy boss.

Chapter Notes

Happy 4th of July to all ye who celebrate it!
This is my little contribution to the spirit of the day with a genuine surprise in the end!
Thanks to everyone who read the author's note and helped, I am thankful for each and every one of you. Let's hope the EU’s copyright-mayhem will not proceed as they have announced. In any case, I will do my best to keep posting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,
Onward! the sailors cry;
Carry the lad that's born to be King
Over the sea to Skye.

Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar,
Thunderclaps rend the air;
Baffled, our foes stand by the shore,
Follow they will not dare.

(Skye Boat Song, words by Sir Harold Edwin Boulton, 2nd Baronet (1859-1935))

“Give it a rest, Edmund, will you?”
At last, Eliza could endure no more and her patience snapped. For the past hour or so, her brother had restlessly walked up and down the length of Mrs Arnold’s parlour like a sentry on duty.
Edmund did as he was bid and sat down, only to substitute his previous exercise by fidgeting with his fingers.
Sighing, she rose from the comfortable sofa and walked to the window, her back facing Edmund. Like this, she at least needn’t see him, which was presently a blessing, too.

Since the rebels’ departure for Setauket, he had unceasingly walked the house like a tiger his cage. She understood it had likely to do with Mrs Strong and pitied him; yet at the same time, it was their own fault. Their story was written now; the last chapter closed. It hadn’t been a happy one, bitter-sweet at best, and those kind of stories had never been to Eliza’s taste. She’d had enough bitter-sweetness in real life to know to those affected it tasted not a bit sweet, only bitter, like the tears she had cried when news of James Stretton’s accident had reached her and the thoughts she’d had watching Mr Greenwood breathe his last.

But somehow, life always continued on. Life was nothing but a circle of creation and destruction, ever-renewing in its course. This sounded terribly like something Edmund would say, Eliza realised with sad wistfulness. How long since she and her brother had last sat together and discussed matters of science or philosophy? It must have been years, she figured, very likely even decades. Last she recalled, they had both been two very self-important teenagers trying to convince each other of their respective opinion- o, what careless times it had been.

Life would continue on for Edmund, too. He’d find a way, get back on his feet eventually. He was a man who lived among the stars- no wonder he had no luck in earthly endeavours and perhaps his beloved stars would offer him the consolation he needed so much and that no one seemed to be able to give him.

She’d done everything to make her brother happy again, and Mrs Strong, too- in the end, it had been them who had made their own fate. This made her a little sad, too, had she not tried her best to make them see?

Matchmaking however was a delicate art form few were capable of commanding to perfection and she certainly was not one of them. Besides, there had been so many things between the two left unsaid, wounds, open and festering that perhaps it was for the best her plans of bringing them back together had failed. While it was perfectly understandable while any romantic notions they had once harboured for each other were no longer existent (even though she had hoped quite fervently for it) after all that had been said and done, the least thing they could have done is to have sat down and talk, talk about everything. Perhaps that might have eased the pain of farewell, knowing the last words had been said, goodbyes and good wishes exchanged.

It was more than evident Edmund’s restlessness was a product of his torn-up heart. But he had made his choice, Anna was never to be with him and frankly, there wasn’t much time for him to nurse his wounds, some very immediate problems needed addressing and subsequent solving. Firstly, they were to leave Mrs Arnold’s house within a matter of hours- where should they go? Secondly, now that basically, nobody was interested in keeping him in York City anymore was here to call upon him and whatever was boiling there in Virginia called the entire British Army to attention, there was nothing to be done.

With the clouds of war looming dangerously on the horizon, who knew how long they would still be safe. Washington had attacked York City before and she had no mind to die on foreign soil, be it at the hand of the rebels or in a British musket volley.

They had to act, and fast. Anna Strong might be lost to Edmund, but they were alive and healthy still so far. That was something at least. If now she could make her brother see that a swift retreat to Scotland had to be their imminent next step, preferably within the following days, if a passage could be found in such a short amount of time, which she sincerely doubted, one could nevertheless hope- Eliza glanced at her brother, who had resignedly seated himself on the other end of the sofa.
Once again, she fought the urge to pity him. There was no time, nor reason for such feelings. And yet, she understood only too well what he was feeling to fully suppress this emotion within her bosom.

They would be home soon, and then, there would be time, time for all of them enough to watch moss overgrow the troubles of yesteryears like an old tombstone on a grave no one visits any longer, the person within dead too long to be recalled by living memory and then, hopefully, all would be well again, or at least better than now.

Earlier the same morning, somewhere.

White knuckles buried in Salem’s dark mane and the bobbing head and neck of the latter were the only things Anna saw for most part of the night. She did not dare to look up, nor move, for fear of falling off in the darkness and hurting herself and so pressed her thighs tightly against the saddle and clung on to the horse’s mane, praying she could keep herself in this position until morning.

With the coming of daylight, her chance to regain a sense of orientation would rise- she’d grown up on Long Island after all. In the night however, there was no possibility for her to do so.

More than once she had contemplated simply getting off, making Salem, who since a long time seemed to run without any command, following his own instincts, stop and rest for a while by the roadside, but was too afraid to do it- Salem, a well-fed, well-tended to horse that looked nothing like the creatures owned by the better local families and larger farmers, was bound to spark envy of possession and God only knew who was waiting in the dark for a lone traveller.

Speeding down what seemed to be a well-beaten road, she could do nothing but hope they would reach a settlement of sorts soon- she could sell the horse and use the money to travel back.

-Back?

Where to?

There was no home, no husband, no family. Her livelihood in Setauket had been lost long ago and even if De Jong might offer her employment once again, what cold comfort was that, to live out her days in a town that universally despised her, with Richard who would do everything to make her life miserable and Abe, Abe whose jealousy had cost her Edmund.

She couldn’t go back there and with Selah gone, too, there was nowhere and nobody she could claim as “home” or “family”. There was no one to help her, no one she could rely upon, at least not in civilian society.

Ben and Caleb of course would help her and the first thing she would do would be to let them know she was alive and well, but if she was honest to herself, camp did not appeal to her either. She had seen the squalid conditions in which women and children lived, had done what she could for those she had come to know there and even petitioned Mrs Washington to show mercy for unruly Hester: mercy however was a rare commodity seldom dispensed during war.

What would she do there, not having any proper work to do but attending to the small stall she had run and mending clothes for the men? While Ben and Caleb fought on the battlefield, she had been
tasked to stay behind and mend their socks and coats.

It was a bleak existence, watching the men return from the battlefield, women wailing when it had become clear their husbands had not returned, children crying, an upset voice petitioning a band of soldiers to accompany a lone mother in search of her husband there, so she could at least find and bury him, but being denied this request—she'd seen her share of that and it had made her sad each time, sad and angry.

In these moments, she had always known what she was fighting for—rather, had fought for, for in camp, she was no longer able to orchestrate the intelligence work in and around Setauket. Nobody should have to live like this, and once America was free from the tyrannical rule of the British Army—

Tyrants? Was Edmund a tyrant? Yes, he had been, one of the first order. He had desecrated their church by making it his stable, where his horses lived better than some of the people in and around Setauket did, had openly ruled the town with Richard Woodhull as his consort (until the latter had spoken out against their engagement) and had had no qualms evicting her from her house and home.

Had the Edmund Hewlett she had first come to despise been the epitome of oppressiveness, of British arrogance?

And yet, she had come to love him, even if this love went against every principle she’d ever had.

Simcoe came to her mind, the cold, hot-headed captain she’d come to despise, who had denied her sound rest in her own home and oppressed so many Americans with sadistic mockery—and who had rescued her in her crisis.

Had she not been found and dragged from the water, she was likely to have died there. She had no illusions about that.

She still did not like him, never could—but he had not tossed her back into the water to watch her drown or done other things to her, terrible things, when she had been at his mercy and too weak to put up too much of a fight—while decency could and should be expected of a man, it had struck her how much he had cared for her.

As the morning rose and ruddy sunlight penetrated the early morning fog that had risen in the dampness of the fields and meadows at around dusk, Salem fell from a lively trot into a slow walk, his head hanging low, his breathing heavy.

By comparison to his owner, she must have been a fairly light weight to carry on his back, but after such a long time, hours, he was naturally exhausted.

She patted the horse’s neck before daring to move her feet in the stirrups for the first time.

Her legs were barely present, and could as well have had detached themselves from her body miles ago, so little did she feel them; when she attempted to move first her right, then her left leg, they cramped unpleasantly.

Getting down was not an option, it seemed. At least now, in the glow of the steadily rising morning sun, she could see she was on a road, a fairly broad road at that. Although the road a few yards ahead of and behind her were obscured in the continuously thinning fog, Anna was able to deduce that this must be the road leading to York City.

Horses were far from stupid and Salem, who had together with his master travelled this road often
enough, must have come to the conclusion that his master wanted him to return to York City, where
in the barracks occupied by the Queen’s Rangers, hay, water and perhaps some treats were awaiting
him.

Salem had carried her to his home- which led to the question, where was hers? Where did she
belong? Should she turn around and ride back, settle in Setauket and try to continue on as if she had
never left? Should she ride into the city and find Edmund?

“Halt! Who goes there?” Salem stopped dead in his tracks. He had been long enough among soldiers
to know and obey a command when he heard one.

Panicking, Anna did not know what to say.

“Hello?” she tentatively asked back into the white veil of clouds in front of her.

“It’s a woman”, she heard a second voice with a distinguishably Welsh accent say.

“Madam?”, the first voice called out to her, “Do you need help?”

The fog in front of her parted and revealed three uniformed men.

“Lieutenant James Granger, Madam”, the one in the middle and the first voice she had heard, said,
tipping his hat.

“May I demand what is going on here? Are you in need of help?”

The two privates who accompanied him curiously circled Salem like hungry wolves, shooting
curious and lecherously hungry glances at her.

“I- I am on my way to York City”, Anna stuttered. What else could she say? “You must’ve ridden all
night”, Granger observed, “have you experienced any trouble on your way? And what of your
attire?” How was she to ever give a coherent explanation for this culmination of unfortunate but
curious circumstances? Granted, she could tell them the truth, but in her case, the truth would sound
more like an outrageous lie than anything else. Ship-wrecked? Saved by a man she knew and
despised but who loved her so ardently even after having been refused several times he had clothed
her in the colours of his regiment and given her his horse for travel? That sounded more like the plot
of a novel or cheap broadsheet than anything else.

“I-“

She did not get further than that. Granger ordered her to dismount, with the Welshman assisting her
when it became evident her legs, fallen asleep, did not want to move on their own, taking her by the
hips to set her down while his comrade had snatched the reins from her hands and held Salem.

Unhorsed and faced by three men, Anna’s heart began to beat, hammering against her ribcage in
despair.

To her misfortune, the Welshman, a middle-aged private called Evans, exclaimed “Lieutenant,
there’s something in her pocket!”

“The coat, madam.”

The lieutenant held her arm out for her to drape Simcoe’s coat over.

Slowly, she pulled the warm woollen garment from her shoulders and stood shivering in the cool
morning air as the lieutenant examined the pockets of Simcoe’s coat while behind his back, the two privates were murmuring lowly, concocting some truly terrifying scenarios in which Anna had come into possession of the uniform coat belonging to the commander of the Queen’s Rangers, all of which involved things she was by no means guilty of, from murder, to theft, to prostitution.

Hours seemed to creep past until Granger’s hand retrieved a crisp piece of paper, folded in the middle and sealed.

He broke the seal without any questions or ceremony and read. When he was finished, he looked up, folding the letter in the middle.

“What’s your name?” For one moment, a lie was sitting at the tip of Anna’s tongue, it would be so easy to lie now, what if the British had already gotten wind of her involvement in the war, what if Abe and Caleb had been captured, too, if Cicero had talked, but then decided against it. She already was captured now and lies would do nothing to improve her situation. As long as none of her friends were involved in this, whom she would protect with all her might, there was no reason for her to lie other than increase her own suffering once they’d incarcerate and subsequently try her.

“Anna Strong.” “Hm”, Granger grunted, unfolding the letter again, “that’s correct. Here-“ he held out the letter to Anna, “you should have told us before. Why were you wearing the jacket anyway?”

Whatever the letter said, it had saved her. Without knowing which narrative the letter had made of her travel, she opted for the flattest and most reasonable response:

“I was cold.”

“Get yourself something decent to wear in York City then. You are no soldier of the Queen’s Rangers and I would advise you not to wear the coat upon entering the city. Show the guards the letter and you’ll be alright. Get the thing to the tailor and yourself a warm cloak.”

“I shall.”

“Good. I’ve no idea why Simcoe sends a woman, but that’s none of my business. All I care for is the changing of the guard”, he yawned and bid her safe travels. The leering and somewhat disappointed glances of his men, who had squabbled over who was allowed to help her back on Salem’s back, followed her as she continued on the road toward the city.

As the city guards came into view, Anna dismounted to spare herself further questions about her supposed inappropriate attire and reached deeply into the pocket of Simcoe’s coat and unfolded the letter which she was to show once more to prove she had business in the city.

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter grants safe passage to its bearer, who identifies herself as Mrs Anna Strong, to pass any British guard, patrol etc. by authority of Lt Col. John Graves Simcoe of His Majesty’s Q. Rangers. Her business is the alteration of a uniform coat, which is greatly needed and thus must not be delayed.

Signed,

Lt Col. John G Simcoe.
“‘Ol’ butcher-boy Johnny’s grown fatter, eh?”’, one of the soldiers on guard duty commented as another read the letter out loud. “And vane as a peacock ‘e is, too. Sends a lass like you to get it done for ‘im, and nothing but gettin’ it done in the city would do.”

Anna nodded and made some offhand comment how Simcoe was so enamoured with his mirror image he would one day fall into a body of water and drown glancing, so taken with his reflexion was he (Anna vaguely remembered a tale from one of Edmund’s books on ancient mythology), before she continued on her way.

She had no idea where she was going, she was simply following the masses of people there down one street and then another.

Perhaps she would find her way back to the Arnolds’ house and if Edmund was still there—lost in thoughts such as these, she had gotten lost.

“Lost, are you?” a voice murmured into her ear. Anna was surprised to smell cheap, pungently sweet perfume—after her brush with a number of green- and redcoats over the last few days, she had not expected a woman to approach her. No soldier in any army would ever wear such a scent. Spinning around on her heel, Anna looked into the face of a woman in a well-worn dress that had once probably been pink but now sported a pale shade of rosé. Her untidy hair the woman, who, judging by the tone of her skin seemed to be of African heritage, wore in an indistinct up-do that did not look careless or messy at all; it looked cleverly arranged, effortless and she moved with a grace, and yet determinedness Anna had never before seen in this combination, not in Setauket and not among the camp followers either.

“You don’t look right. You’re frightened? What’s happened to you? That horse, where did you get it? Stole it from a rich gentleman? Like that coat of yours?”

A pair of concernedly curious dark eyes seemed to fixate hers with an unblinking stare that faintly evoked memories of Simcoe.

Shivering, she abandoned this particular thought and tried to remain calm and composed.

“I cannot say.”

The woman, visibly displeased with her answer tsk-ed and quickly looked around before she took Anna by the arm.

“You’re coming with me. Something’s not right here”, and before Anna could say or do anything in her state of mild shock and exertion, the stranger had firmly grabbed her wrist and beckoned her to follow.

For lack of knowing what else to do and not wanting to cause a scene that might alert soldiers who might recognise her, Anna decided to follow this woman, Salem following meekly and obedient behind her.

“Ey, Octavius!”, the stranger called out for a little boy playing between two rows of tents and other provisional buildings, “get that horse and keep an eye on him.”

The boy, perhaps ten years old, jumped to his feet and obliged her. “I’ll skin you alive if I find he’s missing.”

“Yes, Lola.”

“If you’re good, perhaps I find a little something for you?” The woman, Lola, smiled a seductive
smile she, if Anna’s assumptions were correct, usually reserved for her clients and rubbed her thumb and index finger together, indicating he would earn himself a groat if he did as he was bid.

“If not…” She did not say more, the way in which her voice hardened was enough to instil fearsome respect in the little boy. Once more, he assured Lola he could be trusted and waited as Lola, her de facto captor, beckoned her to enter a nearby tent.

“Come inside.”

“Who are you?”

“You can call me Lola.”

Anna, who had remarked upon the odd phrasing in which the woman had introduced herself, repeated “call you?”

“I’ve gone by many names”, Lola smiled, a smile that must have quite an alluring effect on the less fair sex with her full lips and glittering eyes, Anna thought, and the woman, Lola, continued, “I am who they want me to be, if they pay accordingly, that is.”

Lola smiled cryptically as if she recalled a special “customer” or two- Anna had no illusions what trade Lola was in and rather wondered about her nonchalance talking about it.

“Now you must tell me who you are.” It sounded like a command.

“Anna.”

She had forgone using her last name- who knew where Lola’s true loyalties lay? Whom she would later talk to if one of the remaining British soldiers was next in line to seek her out for her services?

Lola nodded with the gravitas of a lady assured of her position in life, like one aware of her power and grace.

“Tell me, Anna, where did you get that coat?”

“Found it-“

“You’re lying.” The other woman’s eyes fixated Anna’s again.

“You have no reason to lie to me. I am not interested in your story, what brought someone like you, a one-time respectable woman going by your looks to the Holy Ground- we all here have one. I want to know where you got that coat. You don’t need to tell me anything else.”

Why was Lola so interested in the green Ranger uniform coat?

“Why would you want to know?”

She looked wistful with a hint of sadness in her roguish black eyes. Lola extended a hand and ran her fingertips over the silver epaulette as if she were caressing someone dear to her.

“I know the man it belongs to, such a good, kind man- and here you are, wearing his coat. How did you get it? The city’s tense, everyone’s on edge- the war’s only just begun, they say, with talks about an operation in Virginia and since he’s a soldier- Is John well?”

Hot and cold shivers took turns running down Anna’s spine. Lola knew Simcoe? Well, it was not inconceivable to assume he had visited a prostitute, but that she was so fond of him that she wanted
to know if he was well?

Coming to think of it, her wearing the coat must have looked like having taken it from a body as a means to shelter herself from the cold or something along these lines in the first place- so even if she had no understanding how Lola seemed to have developed for someone like Simcoe, her concern for him was understandable.

“He- John Simcoe, the colonel, he gave it to me.”

Lola’s face did not stir, but her eyes betrayed her and gave a flicker of jealousy away.

“He gave this to you?”

“He did.”

“Is he well?”

“His usual self, recently ill but recovered as far as I know.”

“Do you know him?”

“I do. He was stationed in the town I lived in until not long ago- and now we met again. He helped me-“

Anna broke off. What was she to tell Lola? She did not trust this woman.

“You were running away, I see. What from? A cruel husband? A jealous lover? The rebels?”

“I think I might be running **to someone**”, Anna heard herself say and purposefully avoided Lola’s eyes. The words tasted strange on her tongue.

“Hm.” Anna knew Lola could tell she was only relaying to her a carefully constructed selection of half-truths, but she did not say anything else on the matter or express her doubts.

“You were running away from something. Or someone.”

“I am- I was, then.” Lola smiled at her.

“I don’t care what’s it you have or haven’t done. You don’t seem like the sort of woman who is a regular petty criminal or whore, though. Here in the Holy Ground- or what’s rebuilt of it, no one will look for you.”

She seated herself on the bedstead on the floor and looked up to Anna, grinning.

“What? Not good enough for a fine lady as yourself? Or is it about-“

Speaking his name seemed to trouble her for some reason.

“No. I never- **no.** It’s not about him. It’s about the person I might be searching for.”

“A sweetheart? You’ve run away, haven’t you? From your husband? He beat you? ‘S all right, we’re alone, among escapees if you want to call it that.”

Anna could well imagine what Lola meant when she said this and thought of Abigail, wondering not for the first time how and why the colour of someone’s skin determined their fate in life.
“You—"

“Ran away, when the master wasn’t looking. I was twelve. Snuck on a ship that brought me here. At least, now I am queen of my own little castle.” She spread her arms like one showing the lavish interior of a stately home to a guest.

“I didn’t love my husband”, Anna said, if only to say something, “and then he died.”

“Lucky you”, Lola replied, “so why are you still running?”

“I’d rather not talk about it.” Lola stretched like a cat and exhaled somewhat disappointedly and with great theatrical merit.

“We all have secrets, I suppose.”

And then, changing the topic, continued, “did he look well to you?”

“Reasonably so.”

There was no way in hell she would tell Lola about Simcoe’s infatuation with her. The spirited woman could, she was certain, be just as terrifying as she could be empathic and friendly- or inquisitive, for that matter.

“You know, I knew him. Came to me often.”

A wistful smile softened Lola’s features.

“Such a kind, sweet man. Cared more for me than for himself- rare in this line of business to say the least. Called me a lady.”

Anna could barely believe her ears. There was a long list of adjectives she would use to describe the commander of the Queen’s Rangers, among all those that had accumulated during their time in Setauket now others to describe the service he had done her, but “kind” and “sweet” were not words she would ever have thought hearing in connection to him. For a moment Anna wondered if there had been more between Lola and Simcoe than the traditional relationship between buyer and seller.

A woman like Lola, *Lady* Lola, did doubtlessly not receive much respect or kindness from those who deemed themselves above the likes of her (ironically often those who would, as soon as the sun set, flock to her and her sisters in throngs)- and to hear Simcoe had treated her better than he had the entire town of Setauket sounded outlandish in her ears.

It started with the thought of Simcoe visiting a prostitute, or engaging in sexual acts in general. There were things in this world she did not need to know happened and did even less want to imagine.

Moved by Lola’s recollection (not at all for Simcoe’s sake but for the woman in front of her) and the need to become invisible in York City, an idea crossed Anna’s mind.

She peeled the much too big coat off her shoulders and held it out for Lola to take.

“Take it. I don’t want it.”

Gingerly, Lola took the big, green garment, never letting Anna escape her wary glances for one second.

“Nothing in this world is for free. So what do you want for it?” “I didn’t want to sell—"
“Hm.”

Lola sensed something was not quite right with the doe-eyed woman whose face looked like she had received a good beating.

Something was wrong, very wrong. But what did the matters of others concern her?

The only interest she had in the woman was John. She now knew he was alive and as well as a man on campaign could be, which was all she had wanted.

True, there was some compassion for the woman who was hesitant to say any more about her reasons for coming to York City and her past, having experienced the brutality some men exercised over women and, even more so, slaves, at first hand, there was a tad of sympathy for Anna in her heart.

She couldn’t force the woman to talk about who had done this to her nor did she want to be involved in anything, but she could offer Anna some help, which would aid her lie low and hide in the Holy Ground (what had she done that she feared to be found? Was she a criminal? But then, what did this matter, this was after all the prime destination for dishonest trades and who was she to judge?) and get her away from here, should she really mean trouble.

Lola couldn’t afford any trouble, not after the Holy Ground burnt down. It had only been thanks to John’s help that she wasn’t left destitute on the streets. He’d sent her money from his sickbed alongside a sentimental note she had another woman read to her in exchange for some coin, telling her she should use it well and that he was thankful she was still alive.

She had been able to buy a new tent- a little smaller than the last, but in good condition, and a few modest furnishings to take up her trade again in the area where the Holy Ground, a growth that was not weeded out by a day of fire, was slowly taking root again with gamblers meeting around card-tables out in the open at night and new tents and shacks springing up again by the day like mushrooms after heavy rainfall.

“Here”, she said at last and held out a worn dark-blue pelisse to Anna. It was not exactly pretty, more functional than anything, but it was reasonably clean and would be the perfect guise for her.

“In return.”

As Anna took the garment, their trade was completed.

Looking into the other woman’s eyes, she wondered what history she shared with John, if she too had been allowed to experience the joys he had given her.

No, she decided at last, she didn’t look the type and the way she had talked about him indicated that while there had to be a shared past of sorts, she was not too fond of him.

Her loss, really. Often she wished John would come back soon, not because he paid her, others paid, too, but because she missed him.

In her trade it was a rule never to let a cull come close to one’s heart, and most didn’t anyway, only
there to relieve themselves after a frustrating day working or with a prudish wife at home who wouldn’t let them try things; John, however, had been different.

He’d been very much like the others, at first when he had looked her over on the street for the first time and asked her for her prices, or so she’d thought. As soon as they’d been alone, he’d been shy, not like the self-assured commander he’d been on the street. Not that he didn’t know what to do, that he did very well, but there remained a certain awkwardness in his interactions with her she had never observed in another john before. It was as if he felt wrong about this, as if something was missing for him. To ensure he’d pay her afterwards, she’d tried everything to make him satisfied with her services. What happened next was quite odd; as she’d tried to make it worth his money, he’d started taking care of her, as one would of a lover. She couldn’t hold herself back and gave a low scream of pleasure when he was through with her and she only doubled her efforts to give him the same pleasure he had given her, too.

After the event, he’d clung on to her for a short while longer, his arm around her, just lying there for some minutes and not said anything.

Then, he’d dressed and went his way, amusingly touched when she commented that he’d been so sweet to her she should be paying him, to which he had answered she should better reserve her tongue for other purposes, suddenly (probably due to the fact one of his men had knocked) oh-so-rough and intimidating again.

Her curious cull had returned and soon, something had grown between them. He’d learned she wouldn’t judge him for any of his desires and she realised her enjoyment in the affair curiously sparked his flame.

“Now, what are you going to do?”, she asked Anna, this most curious specimen of a woman she had only just met, the one-time respectable Mrs. fallen from grace it appeared.

“I don’t know.”

“You need to know, sooner or later. Sitting about, thinking, won’t get you fed. Or that horse of yours. You could sell it back to the army, that’d surely make a pretty penny.”

Anna thought, and thought hard. What was she to do? She still did not know. Her heart, this treacherous, quivering thing, pleaded with her to go and find Edmund, Edmund who surely would-no, she’d forfeited that.

It had hurt unlike any pain she had ever felt, but it had to be done. She’d made a sacrifice, as so many others had, like Ben’s friend from Yale Nathan Hale, who, not unlike André, had paid with his life for fighting what he believed in.

She by contrast was still alive and should consider herself lucky to have paid only with the loss of a man in her life she had plotted to kill not long before anyway.

She should. But she did not. It had cost her so much restraint not to answer his question and when she had started to cry, it had not been, as Edmund must doubtlessly have assumed, bitter tears of shame, she had cried tears of deepest regret and pain, because she loved him with all her heart and knew at the same time that if she truly loved him, what she had to do in order to save his life was never to tell him.
Her silence had not only been a sacrifice to her cause, but also to her personal happiness and that of Edmund, but utterly necessary. Anna knew she could never have borne being the cause of his death. He deserved a life beyond this conflict, to be happy again one day, and he would be, he would return home with the resolute, no-nonsense Mrs Greenwood, his sister and would be awaited at home surely by others—perhaps even by women interested in marrying him, not necessarily for love, but he was an officer and everything—

Why should not some other woman want to marry him for love? Who was she to suppose she was the only one, the only one with a right to ever love Edmund Hewlett? He was no young boy, and had not been particularly young when he had arrived in Setauket, so there had doubtlessly been others before her, a teenage sweetheart, a short-time fiancé, a so-called acquaintance who had been a whole lot more than just that, the possibilities were endless.

She herself had loved more than one man in her time on this earth; first, there had been Abe, the love of her youth, then she had been married to Selah and for as long as she could support it had tried, tried hard to fall in love with him, told herself eventually, they both would love each other tenderly, even if she had known all the while that her heart still belonged to Abe Woodhull. And lastly, there was Edmund Hewlett, the only man she could claim she ever loved without doubting for one single moment.

Over the years with Abe, she had often doubted whether they had been meant to be at all, they’d fought, as young couples always do, when they had been some fourteen, fifteen years old, usually pertaining trifles, unimportant things, and later on, they’d fallen out over more serious business, such as Abe’s decision to step into his brother’s shoes and continue the life Thomas Woodhull had left behind as his sole legacy when he had died on the streets of York City, complete with Thomas’ fiancé, one Mary Smith, and hopes for the future—a life in which there had been no place for her.

At last, when she had finally, after years and years of doubting if they weren’t meant to be together after all, years of deceiving herself by holding on to the belief that nothing that had happened had been Abe’s fault, that she was guiltless of the steady deterioration of their relationship, too, Abe had shown her his true colours when he had been instrumental in intercepting the wedding.

He could simply not accept she had moved on, that in the new life she had imagined she would be having with Edmund Hewlett in Scotland, there would no longer be a place for him. Abe had been unable to understand she was not his property, that she was not “his” in any sense only because they had shared a childhood, a first kiss, a first time, and a lifetime living in the same little town under different titles from sweetheart, to fiancés, to secret lovers and ultimately, to two people who had become estranged from knowing each other too well.

Abe’s failure to grant her space, to view her as an independent being untethered to him reminded her eerily of another man she did not like to think about, even if he had shown her unexpected kindness only recently. Sometimes, she could still feel his unsettling ice-cold eyes following her around, sending chills down her spine wherever she went.

Edmund had never made her feel like being a possession, a moveable and replaceable item not completely unlike a broken chair or three-legged table. In essence, that was what marriage meant for a woman, entrusting her husband with her possessions, her wealth (if there should be some to speak of) and general welfare. Abe had thought he could tell her what to do more than once and Selah had been even worse in that regard, considering it his right to tell her what to do when and to chastise her when he thought it necessary, having used the words “you are my wife and shall do as I say” more often than she had been able to count.

Edmund had never presumed he could tell her anything. Not at all, on the contrary: he had listened to
her council, had shared his thoughts with her and given her the feeling she was more than the disgraced tavern-wench the world took her for, more even than what she was to Washington and the Ring and she in return had come to know him in a very similar way and had begun to love the man beneath the scarlet uniform.

Should she go and look for him? Wouldn’t it look as if she only had done so to save herself from the disgrace of ultimately roaming the streets of York City without a house or home? He would surely think she only wanted to take advantage of him and he had every right to believe that after everything that had happened between them.

She should have mustered the courage to talk to him when they had both stayed under Mrs Arnold’s roof, but she had not. What could she have told him? He would not have believed her when she would have told him she hadn’t told him she loved him that fateful day to save his life anyway. Although it was the truth, it sounded too much like a convenient lie.

“Hm. You must find out, then.”

Lola gave her an encouraging smile.

“As a friend, I give you this advice—” But Anna wasn’t listening anymore. A friend. She had a friend in York City, someone who would surely help her for now in her predicament and let her rest in his home for a day or so.

That evening, long after Curious Anna had gone, heaving under the weight of a heavy-set cull who was roughly taking his go, One of Lola’s hands slipped to the side of her bedstead under which the coat lay hidden and tugged at a small piece of fabric she could get hold of, thinking of John as she pretended to enjoy the man’s onslaught on her body.

How sad it was that good things had to come to an end as well as bad ones, but at least one could keep the memories, and these no one could ever take away from her.

When her customer had gone, she took the coat out of its hiding place and put it on. It smelled a little like the strange woman, this Anna, but underneath was the characteristic scent of John’s cologne still heavy in the fabric.

One day, she might see him again, and then she’d return his coat to him—under one condition. Finally, she’d be paying him for being so sweet to her.

She grinned at that thought and fell asleep soon after.

What little luggage had been left to them he had packed, ready to leave. Mrs Arnold had bid them
adieu and thanked them, but appeared to be quite relieved the last of the trouble-stirring party she had housed were gone.

He had felt a little sorry for Abigail, whom he would have liked to reassure Cicero was well, but did not, for in the unthinkable event something had happened, he would hate to have been the causer of forlorn hope. In the coming days perhaps, the boy might write a letter to his mother in case the Woodhulls would grant him such luxury as a pen and quill and provided of course, the boy could write, which he doubted. A former slave of the Strongs, they had likely not seen any need for him to be proficient in reading and writing when his daily work involved aiding in the tavern and on the fields.

Had not his own situation and that of his sister occupied him, he would have shown more compassion for Abigail, perhaps. His mind was set reeling, spinning, and he did not feel quite well, but put it off as the effect of prolonged exposure to emotional turmoil and strain he had suffered throughout his unwanted stay in the Colonies.

The thing he longed most for was the quiet solitude of his room, the view from his window, and above all, his bed at home. Momentarily, he closed his eyes and made himself believe he was there, could smell the comforting scent of leather bindings and paper mixing with the warmth of sunlight falling through the window by the desk on his face, quill in hand, his desk covered in maps held spread out on the table by books on each of their four sides.

For some reason however, this idyll, thought of his sanctuary could not soothe his mind, not even as half an hour later, they sat on their not exactly comfortable, yet fairly clean bedsteads in a run-down inn somewhere far away from the first rooms they rented- the attack on his life was still on both their minds, he had noted, for Eliza’s quick eyes kept scanning the room at intervals of thirty seconds and had made certain the little window providing them with a small amount of light could not be opened; she had claimed she would prefer to suffocate from lack of air at her own hand than be murdered in her sleep at somebody else’s.

Restless, he stretched himself out on the sack of hay they had tried to charge him extra for and did his best to submerge in his fantasy of home, but to no avail.

Something he could not explain by the laws of science held him back from giving himself over to this dream and falling asleep.

It was as if there was somebody with him there, watching over his shoulder, but whenever he turned around to face the other side of the room where the door was, there was no one. It was like chasing a ghost, made even harder by the fact that the ghost did not haunt a building of stone and wood, but a construct of his imagination.

Perhaps in his deliberate day-dream, he had for some reason invited Eliza, or a notion of her to dilute the pristine sereneness of his refuge. Eliza, yes. It must have been he, whatever business she had in his mind.

Edmund inhaled deeply, as if in need of air. In, and out, in and out and again, in and out. Not being able to control even his imagination gave him a sense of dread, as if he was fighting for air.

At last, he forced his eyes to open again and found himself staring into those of his sister.
“What’s the matter with you?”, Eliza asked concerned.

“N- Nothing”, her brother stuttered, shook his head from left to right somewhat and sat up.

“I believe we must make plans”, he said instead, doubtlessly to gloss over the somewhat concerning display he had offered.

“Indeed”, she replied and settled down on what they had tried to convince them was a bed next to him.

“You know William Stretton lives here. We could ask him for help, he is a merchant and knows the ships. Perhaps he could help us find a passage back to England. He would help us, I am certain. After all, he’d almost been my brother-in-law.”

She tried to give Edmund an encouraging smile, because his face revealed he was immersed in some memory, by the looks of it a wistful one.

“I am not in favour of begging”, he objected, “we should attempt to find our own way.”

“It wouldn’t be begging. We’re merely asking him to help to find us a suitable ship. You don’t want to stay here any longer than necessary, am I correct?” He nodded.

“See? Then we must do something about it. And I suggest we take our chances while we still can.”

With imploring eyes she looked to her brother and continued, “Heaven knows what’s going to happen- in the next few weeks, days. We don’t have the luxury of time. We must act now if we want to leave before-“

She stopped, barely able to say out loud what she was thinking. From the safety of Duncleade observed only through the newspapers she read religiously who, given the enormous distances only printed reports of what happened across the Atlantic with considerable delay, it had all seemed safe, a British victory against the rebels, who were nothing but a bunch of disgruntled farmers and small countryside businessmen led by a man who had for some reason given up the prestige his British uniform had afforded him in order to greater personal enrichment through proclaiming himself commander-in-chief of aforementioned disorderly rabble.

In York City by contrast, things felt different. The air was tense, people did not stop on the streets to exchange a few passing words, everybody seemed restless and in fearful expectance of what might happen.

The rebels were strong and as it appeared, not even in the British stronghold of York City one could be certain of one’s safety. Not to speak that travelling by ship would become impossible should the French block the port, as it was rumoured everywhere on the streets. Edmund did not and had never paid much attention to rumours, Eliza however did.

And then, there wouldn’t be any escape from York City for quite some time. They could only hope then for a select number of scenarios, neither of which would be ideal.

Firstly, they could still hope the Royal Navy would challenge the French and distract them somewhat further away, making it possible for civilian vessels to sail in and out of the harbour, which was unlikely,
Secondly, they could hope and pray for a quick rebel defeat, which would then encourage the French to make the journey back to where they came from.

And thirdly, they could hope it was nothing but an unfounded rumour and continue making up some noble and elaborate plan how to leave the city until they were satisfied it would stand up to all eventualities and be honourable and gentlemanly to boot.

Edmund had to finally understand the gravity of the situation. This wasn’t about simply biding their time, they had to act fast. As far as Eliza understood the situation, there was no way of telling how the battle, which was believed to be the most titanic clash of armies of the entire war, would turn out.

If Britain would win, that would leave them with the security that as Britons, they would remain safe on colonial soil— if not, a British major and his sister would provide a prime target for anti-British sentiments, lynchings and the like.

Edmund might have forfeited his chance at happiness with Anna Strong, but she was not ready to forfeit her life and die on far away from home, buried in an unmarked pit for lack of relations and friends to take care of her body.

William would help them, she was certain. Like his brother James had been, he was a man of honour and a friend to those who knew him. He had helped her before organising an exchange of letters between her and Anna Strong, so why should he not help two fellow countrymen and women, his childhood companions no less in their hour of need?

“Eliza—“

“Edmund. We cannot take any risks now, think on it, you have already almost been murdered in this town, had not one Abraham Woodhull’s attempt on your life coincided with that of Simcoe’s killer. Our funds are dwindling and if the rebels win— if they win, we are in grave danger here. We must depart, better today than tomorrow if you like it or not. I will put on something decent and pay a visit to William. I would be much obliged if you would rise and join me.” Her brother sighed, tried to reason with her against her decision but eventually could be persuaded to don one of his better civilian coats (his scarlet uniform would only attract trouble instead of preventing it Eliza was certain), brush his hair and join her.

The house of Scottish merchant William Stretton was hard to miss indeed. Located in one of the better parts of town, already his address spoke of the family wealth the last three generations of the family had accumulated and steadily increased one after the other.

At the gate, they almost were turned away by two imposing men in livery— doubtlessly, the company William usually entertained did not wear their second-best or travel wardrobe, they were clad in the latest fashions of London or Philadelphia.

After some reasoning and assuring them of their identities as friends from far afield, eventually, they were let in and led to a grand parlour.

On her way, Eliza noticed how empty the house seemed; there were marks on the walls where once portraits had been, no decorations of any sort could be detected— maybe William was moving away, to Philadelphia? If she remembered correctly, his wife had family there or did he too harbour similar plans as hers and Edmund’s?

They were made to sit on a sofa more comfortable than the beds they had been offered at the inn they were staying at and drank a drop of expensive wine from finely-cut glasses. Such luxury coaxed Eliza into a momentary state of relaxation, of feeling divine, until a pair of familiar footsteps
announced the coming of their host.

Although they had not met in quite a while, Eliza easily recognised William, who had always borne great similarities to his younger brother. His eyes were of a similar blue, though darker, and his lips were curled by the same amiable smile.

He had aged, though, the wrinkles on his face deepened, and his belly a little more rotund than she remembered him, an effect doubtlessly enhanced by the grey wig he was wearing on his head.

“You here? How-“ he shrugged as if it really did not matter too much, “Eliza Greenwood, Edmund Hewlett!”

He quickly greeted them, Eliza by informally drawing her into an embrace that allowed her to study the intricately-patterned fabric of his sky-blue banyan and when he was done pressing the last air left in her lungs out of her, he turned to Edmund, whose hand he shook in a rather stiff and formal manner.

“Pray tell, do you like it well here?”

William had of course only tried to make friendly conversation as he would have with any of his acquaintances or business partners in order to offer an easy entrée into a conversation that would all too soon turn to hard, serious business; he could not have known or imagined what had indeed happened.

Not wanting to burden her brother with the task of relaying their odyssey to William (and secretly fearing he might tell their childhood friend more than would be conducive to their objective) she briefly summed up their predicament of Arnold’s summoning, almost being murdered by a vengeful spirit of the past and now, with the clouds of war looming precariously dark over York City, did he know ships sailing for England rather sooner than later and if among their number, was there one he could recommend?

William, who had listened quietly and with a sober mien, nodded slowly as she had finished.

“My own ship, the Jane, will sail for Liverpool within four days.”

He looked around, encouraging his visitors to do the same.

“My wife and I have decided it would be safer for us and the children to leave. Her folk are loyalists throughout, but refuse to leave their native country. I, however, am from that land across the sea the rebels so hate and have in the past been quite outspoken about my views in a column in the Royal Gazette. Provided they can read, my family and I shall be among the first to suffer their misguided ‘justice’. We held out until the last, but with rumours of the French soon blocking the harbour and the rebels advancing on York City, which they are bound to do as Washington is obsessed with the notion of winning the city, I can no longer consider my own person or my family safe here.”

He took a glass from a tray a servant held out to him and toasted them in a wry manner.

“Here’s to Clinton and Cornwallis. May they get Washington before it’s too late forever.” They returned the toast and drank silently from the doubtlessly costly wine they had been served before William began to speak again.

“Of course you can come with us. I think two more or less on board will hardly make a difference; we have cabins enough. Keep us good company.”

He smiled and announced the Jane, named for his eldest daughter, would sail for Liverpool four
days later in the afternoon.

Finally, they were going home.

“Townsend! More wine, please!”

With most of the British officers gone for Virginia, it had become quiet at Rivington's Corner and the few guests that still frequented their establishment, which had been a favourite of the military gentlemen who now had other things to do than to woo companions for a single night or drink their heads off, were local ne'er do wells and other characters Robert did not enjoy serving much.

Besides, with the soldiers gone, there was no way he could deliver any intelligence of importance. All he could presently do was keep an eye on Rivington and the nonsense the old man published in his newspaper.

Before the war, he mused as he did as the early morning drunkard had bid him, or rather before he had been recruited, a quiet life like this was what he had dreamt of.

Quiet? Though the tavern-life might be, what happened outside the tavern was far from tranquil; in Virginia, the armies would clash, and the outcome was unpredictable. Would they reap the seeds the Ring had sown on the fields of Virginia, or would the British win?

He did not know the answer and was not interested enough in military life (he was a Quaker, after all) to be able to form a sound opinion of infantry, fieldpieces and such.

He had done his bit, and now, victory lay in the hands of God and hopefully capable commanders.

Worrying however would not help him a bit. He shrugged and concentrated on the glasses he was trying to polish, each of them ought to look meticulously spot-free. They had standards to maintain in this establishment after all.

The work was monotonous and did not keep his mind off wandering however.

-Where was Rivington by the way? It was past eleven o’clock in the morning, surely even he would by now be up? Or had he entertained female company again, or was presently entertaining?

Since when did the old man not enjoy barging into the taproom and ‘gracing’ (or rather molesting, for his manner was intrusive and overly familial) his guests with his presence and his never-ceasing witticisms.

Robert had barely finished his thoughts when an only too familiar presence burst into the room, letting the door shut behind him with a loud noise that, or so Robert mused, served the same purpose as a cannonball shot in salute of a great dignitary.

“Robert, dear boy”, James Rivington exclaimed dramatically before patting him on the back so hard he had almost lost the glass he was polishing, “and a very, very good morning to York City’s most industrious Quaker.” “Good morning, Mr Rivington”, he replied in his usual composed manner, hoping Rivington would leave him be and choose his next victim from among one of the other gentlemen present or retire to the pool table, where two gentlemen were engrossed in a game to
watch and deliver unnecessary commentary.

Luckily, Rivington had indeed espied a familiar face among the guests and without further ado, turned on his heel and went straight for his table, banyan billowing behind him like a flag in a stiff breeze.

“Good to see you, Samuel, good to see you. Now tell me, how is…”

Exhaling deeply and silently thanking the Lord Rivington was busy for the time being, he returned to his duties when, as he was about to make up a list of provisions that had run low, he heard a knock at the backdoor.

A quick glance to Rivington revealed he was still engrossed in a conversation and would not notice his absence- the nosy man would only ask questions and by now, Robert had developed a sixth sense for things that would prove themselves an exception to the routine and the knock at the door certainly gave off a strange feeling.

Briskly, he opened the door, bracing himself for whatever surprise (Abraham’s sudden appearance was on his mind still) there might be for him.

“Robert”, a deep female voice exclaimed and a pair of arms slung around his neck.

It took him a few moments to wake from his surprised stupor and return the embrace upon noticing who the woman was- Anna Strong.

She looked agitated, as if in turmoil. What had brought her here? It seemed people only ever visited him to seek his help and advice. Perhaps this was some form of paying a compliment, but it was rather inconvenient for him, especially with overly-attentive Rivington breathing down his neck at all hours.

“Anna- come inside.”

Mindful not to make a scene that might attract gawkers on the street, he led her upstairs to his room.

“What in Heaven’s name-“

It took her a few instants to compose herself, but once she had started, the story of her ordeal broke from her soul like a river after heavy rainfall.

“The horse”, he said at last, not knowing how to approach the more delicate topics of her tale, “where is he?” “Your stables. Gave him to the stable boy.”

Robert nodded. Ranger Salem could stay there for the time being until Rivington, who liked to play the grand gentleman with his guests but was more frugal than a Scotsman when it came to all other matters of keeping household, would notice the sudden excessive consumption of hay.

Anna looked beaten, her hair a mess, as were her clothes, which also were slightly stained and crumpled, casualties of her Paul-Revere-like ride.

He had contemplated to offer her to sit down on her bed but, cleanly as he was, he did not quite like the idea.

Instead, she sat at his desk, her face buried in her hands.

From his early days on, Robert had never been a person who enjoyed the company of others and had
never quite understood the easy, convivial ways with which the people around him met each other.

Though far more reserved than Rvington or even a man like Simcoe (he had still not quite gotten over hearing the man calling him his “friend”), he felt the urge to reach out and touch Anna, offer her consolation.

Rather awkwardly, he put an arm around her shoulder and reassured her everything would be alright. They could write to Abe and tell them she wasn’t dead, everything would be fine, she should not worry. There always was a way.

Anna thanked him and pressed his hand.

“Thank you, Robert.”

She gave him a lopsided, pained smile that reminded him of his little sister at home. The image of Sally hit him rather unprepared and he could not help but think of her, one of the few companions of his youth he had not resented with wistful throb in his heart.

Somewhat overcome by the feeling in his chest, he did not notice how the door to his room opened before it was too late.

James Rivington stood in the doorframe, casually leaning against it and a wide grin on his face.

“Robert! Who would have thought you’d have found yourself a little tart for dessert, in the day at that!”

Chuckling at his own joke and mischief in his eyes, Rivington moved closer in on them.

“Well, you’d only needed to have asked and I could have introduced you to a lady less… rustic in her looks and with more ample-“ “Mr Rivington”, Robert cut the latter’s tasteless remarks off, “may I introduce you to my sister, Sally. She has had a terrible journey and needs some rest.” The older man’s face dropped.

“My apologies, Miss Townsend, my most heartfelt apologies. You see, this is a gentlemen’s establishment primarily and your brother, well, we tease him somewhat in good sportsmanship for his rather monkish ways and then finding him having deserted his place and up in his room with a lady- you know what it looks like. James Rivington, at your service.” He seemed sorry in earnest and patted Anna’s hand in a fatherly manner. He withdrew, but had his servant send up a plate and some wine (the same he usually reserved for Clinton and Cooke, who paid small fortunes to have it served to them, he noted) for Anna, who was visibly grateful for the nourishment she received

In the evening, Robert had since returned to the bar and left Anna to sleep off the horrors of her ordeal in his bed after she had perfunctorily washed herself and combed her hair, a very sorry-looking Rivington approached him with a bundle in his hands.

“Here. For Miss Townsend. I asked around among my acquaintances- As an apology for my gross indecency of implying-“

“Thank you.”

"You still don’t-“

“No, Mr Rivington, that is for my sister to decide and she made me swear upon the grave of our
grandmother to remain silent about her motives for leaving home.”

“But what will you do?”

Robert thought for a moment.

“Allow her to remain with me for a few days before convincing her to return home”, he answered, hoping that Anna’s predicament could be solved in such a short time span. “I am sure she will already be much missed by our father.”

“Very good, very good. But please, do take care of that infernal creature of hers- he has tried to bite the stable boy twice and, if you don’t mind me saying, with her not being a paying guest, I would advise this hell-horse be brought somewhere he shall not attack anyone working for me.”

Nodding, he accepted Rivington’s gift and headed for his rooms at the back of the building, leaving Rivington, who appeared to be very disappointed to be missing a story he doubtlessly considered worth hearing, to entertain his guests.

Anna had slept through most of the afternoon, resting in Robert’s bed in a small, yet tidy and welcoming room at the back of Rivington’s Corner.

For the first time in days, there was nothing else to do for her but sleep, sleep without having to think about anything else, be it a baby being born or keeping aware of the unsettling, almost ghostly presence of a person she could not trust.

How merciful, how good it felt, and her weary body soaked each minute of it up like a dry sponge water.

In the evening, Robert returned and brought her something to eat. Afterwards, they sat and talked about what they should do next.

Having heard the entirety of her story, he was adamant there always was a way and something always could be done- for a start, he, or if she wanted to do herself, she was free to use his equipment, could write to Abe and inform him she had made it through and not died in the sound.

Thinking a letter from her would serve this purpose best as her own handwriting would serve as evidence of her authorship and thus would convey without any reasonable doubt she had written it herself, which meant she could under no circumstances be dead and the letter was genuine and not a trap, she sat down behind the desk and penned a few short lines onto some sheet music Robert gave her in invisible ink.

When the ink had dried, he folded it neatly, sealed it and called for the servant boy attending to him and Rivington to get it on its way post-haste.

When the business had been done, they sat in silence until Anna spoke again.

“Thank you for helping me, Robert. I have no idea-“
“That I keep you here as my sister? I have a sister, you know, Sally. At home in Oyster Bay, when she isn’t about visiting family up and down the country. We are working for the same cause. Who am I to desert a comrade-in-arms?”

“Our arms are lies”, Anna whispered, mindful not to raise her voice to such a level it might be heard in the corridor outside, “and you lied for me. It was a kind thing to do.”

“Mr Rivington is sending this to you with his compliments and apologies”, Robert said instead of responding to what she had said and reached behind him to hand her a bundle of fabric.

Without a doubt, the dress had belonged to one of Mr Rivington’s more illustrious of friends and had fallen, so far as Anna could tell, out of fashion a while ago but it was made of good material and, though rose-coloured and adorned with ornamental bows at the front, very modest by comparison to the lavish costumes she had seen ladies wear in York City.

For the night, Robert elected to sleep in an armchair by the fire while she was given the bed. For the first time in a long time, she slept soundly until the late hours of the morning.

Four days later, the harbour.

Seeking out Robert had been the right thing to do. He helped her where he could and the two of them had discussed what should be her next step.

Patiently, he had listened to her predicament and stated that if she did not want to return to Setauket, she should stay in the city. She could work for her living here just as well as in Setauket and had through Colonel Cooke, one of the few British officers not required to join the frontline (though in the case of Cooke, both she and Robert had in a moment alone privately and under some suppressed laughter agreed would likely pose more of a danger to his own men than to Washington’s) enquired if any gentleman in the city was in need of a reliable lady to look after his affairs. So far, and with many of the soldiers gone, nothing had come of it, but they both were of good spirits and heart that eventually, they would be successful in securing her a station in service.

It was a far cry from the life she had lived when Selah had been alive and with her and perhaps an even farther cry from the life she could have lead with Edmund Hewlett, but she was content nonetheless.

She hadn’t told Robert too much about Edmund and whenever he had come up in their conversations, usually by accident, he had gone rather quiet and told her she need not talk about him if she didn’t want to.

Obviously, he was not too fond of the idea she, a member of the same secret band of spies he was a member of, had fallen for a British officer, he however seemed to accept and understand the deceitful nature of the heart that roamed off the paths of the mind at times.

That lay in the past now, anyway.

As she had been informed Rivington did not like having Salem in his establishment and honestly not
really knowing what to do with him while knowing he fed on Rivinton’s water and hay, she and Robert had agreed to sell the horse by the harbour to one of the more dubious merchants and salespersons, where he would not fetch the same price as he would if they sold him to the army, but since they did not want to run the risk of someone recognising him as Simcoe’s property and cause them difficulties of one or the other sort, Anna was happy to accept selling at a lower price than he probably was worth.

Whatever little she would get from selling Salem she could use to finance the life she would build up for herself here in the city.

Leading Salem by the bridle, she watched the ships lying at anchor and inhaled the smell of the sea that reminded her of home, of days when life had been far less complicated, of her careless youth.

Not too far away, a rowing boat was setting out for one of the ships at anchor a little farther out, the men at the oars pulling in practiced unison.

There were three people and some baggage in it, one of them a gentleman holding onto his hat, the other two a woman, who was trying to hold her cap in place just as the man did his hat and the third, who seemed to have taken his headgear off entirely to protect it from flying away, stared back at the city, as if to allow himself a last glance-

“Edmund!”

Her heart missed a beat and caused her to leap forward one step, towards the water’s edge.

Yes, there was no way she could have mistaken him for someone else, it was Edmund and he was looking at her and-

She was brought back entirely to the moment so many months ago, when they had been in a somewhat similar situation.

Befallen by sudden paralysis, she watched as the boat pulled away, the men at the oars not even batting an eye; they were sailors and most likely had seen stranger things in the world as, or at least so it must appear to them, a forsaken wife or mistress calling out for her beloved to return.

Edmund, close enough still that she could make out the features of his face looked at her, his face contorted in a pained expression.

“Anna.” Although she could not hear him say her name, she could read his lips and had read them with her own in the past.

-Memories of a time long gone, of days when they still had each other.

What was she to do? There was no time to reason, no time to think.

She let go of Salem’s reins, turned until she faced Robert and took him by the hands.

“I am sorry, Robert.”

Pulling him into a close embrace, she held her friend for one more moment before she pulled away.

“Thank you for everything I-“

Anna shook her head, not knowing what else to say.

In one step, she was at the water’s edge and jumped.
The water of the harbour was cold, colder than she would have expected and not too clean, but it
didn’t matter. The fabric of her dress, now soaked, attempted to pull her down, she however
countered the force of her wet clothes by only swimming faster, urging herself to go on.

By now, the rowing boat had stopped and she, keeping her head above the water, could see Edmund
standing up in it, exchanging heated words with the man in the hat.

“…Don’t just stand there…!”

Before Anna could make sense of the situation, he had leapt from the boat, too, causing it to shake
and rock right and left with precarious force.

With a few strokes, he was by her side and took hold of her in what could almost be called an
embrace.

“Come, come”, he urged her on and side by side, they made it to the boat where the woman, whom
she now recognised as Elizabeth Greenwood, and the two rowers held their hands out for her to help
her climb inside.

Edmund was helped in, too, and both of them sat there, panting with exhaustion and an altogether
different reason that had nothing to do with the physical exercise of the swim, not daring to look at
each other.

The man in the hat broke the spell, obviously the one in command, he ordered the men to resume
rowing.

At the very edge of the quay, there was Robert, standing there, watching her, Salem behind him. She
waved to him, not knowing if it was a farewell forever.

Anna. Impossible, impossible Anna. What was she even doing here? He had made peace with the
past, at least tried to, and now, here she was, with him, had jumped, as she had done in Setauket- if
she had left her husband behind out of loyalty to her cause then if she had claimed, why had she
done it now? Was she sent to infiltrate Britain for intelligence work? Even if a bitter part of him
believed this motif to be true, his heart that had convinced him to jump and get to her told him
otherwise.

When last he had departed from American shores, he had regretted not to have made a decision that
would have cost him more bravery than retreating home and nursing his wounds.

He could not say if he had done the right thing, if it was right, if it would be just to both of them for
all the hope their deed implied, to indulge in it, but presently, a bout of warmth crossed his heart like
a hopeful shooting star as he watched Anna clinging on to the side of the ship, her chest having still,
and walked over to her, not knowing what to say.
Robert stood and watched on as the scene unfolded.

Anna waved from the boat, and he waved back, glad she could not see the tears in his eyes from this distance.

He should be concerned about the Ring, about Abraham, who would likely go ballistic and once again find some reckless way in which to self-sabotage his own mission as he had done trying to kill Hewlett, but he was not.

If this was what Anna wanted, if he made her happy- in her recklessness itself, there was true love. And who was he to deny her that?

In the coming days, he would have to sort things out, but figured the mess Anna had created by her sudden departure would be negligible, given that Washington was busy in Virginia in what might come to be known as the last battle of the war for either one or the other side.

The time for open war had come, both in the field, and in love, or so it seemed.

Wondering what this meant and trying to draw parallels between the two, he watched as a second, slightly bigger, boat set out for the quay again and, having received orders from the first on their way, approached him.

“Sir, the horse.” Without a word, he handed Rivington’s “infernal monster” over to a sturdy fellow who made Salem walk down a plank onto the boat.

As all passengers, horse and human had boarded, the man, just before setting off, asked quickly:

“You too, sir?”

“No”, he replied and turned away, disappearing in the crowds of sailors, children, fishwives and other inhabitants of the city.

Rivington would ask questions as to the whereabouts of his sister, he was certain and chuckled at the idea of telling him a tale of her daring escape across the ocean, only in his thoughts of course and watching his eyes grow wide listening.

In reality, he would come up with some sensible, boring explanation the man would expect from his Quaker barman of course.

On his way back to obliging to the wishes of noisy patrons, he stopped for one moment and held his nose to the wind.

A change in the weather was coming, if he was not mistaken.

Shrugging, he continued on his way to Rivington’s, where he knew he would be awaited by the penetrant, if well-meaning presence of his proprietor, some dirty dishware and his set of ink and paper to note down the essential developments of the day.

Chapter End Notes

I suppose this could be the end of the story and to be frank, I, in the light of the recent political developments in Europe regarding the copyright reform whose outcome will be
discussed tomorrow, I wanted to be ready for all eventualities and in the event that I should not be able to post anymore in the near future, give you a chapter that could be read as an ending.

BUT this isn't the end yet. As I said, I will try and continue posting. This isn't the end of the story I intend it to have, oh no. There is so much more to come, both in America and in Britain...

Here's a confession: I used the lyrics from the "Skye Boat Song" on purpose and, as perhaps some of you who watch other dramas set in roughly the same time-period might have noticed, in reference to "Outlander". I'm not a fan for several reasons but thought to include the lyrics of what has become the show's theme as a reference to Hewlett being Scottish and a few obvious digs "TURN" made at the show.

Ok, so I made an edit because the pun was too good to pass up: "john" is a slang term for someone who engages a sex worker- which goes nicely with Simcoe's given name.

Sally Townsend: Although she didn't feature on the show, I felt compelled to add her to the story, because Anna, or rather her love story with Hewlett, is based on Sally's story, or at least the doubtlessly somewhat romanticised version of it that has lived on to this day. The story goes that Sally, decided to help her brother Robert by spying on the British officer who had quartered himself in their family home on Oyster Bay. To win his trust, she, just like Anna, pretended she was interested in him and over time, he warmed up to her and let her in on secrets that, once she had passed them on to her brother, would eventually lead to the capture and eventual execution of said officer's close friend, one Major John André.

The only problem, according to legend, was that Sally soon realised she was not only seeking the redcoat's company for intelligence- she truly liked and with time, fell in love with him. When however she, guilt-stricken, confessed to him she had passed on some of the information leading to André's capture, he, broken-hearted, could never love her again.

Now, from the as I said before, without a doubt dramatised legend back to history: When Sally Townsend died in the 1840s, her family found a valentine's poem among her things, dating back to the war. She had kept it all her life. The fact that she remained unmarried fuelled the legend she could never forget her British officer who wrote it and never recovered from having lost him.

The valentine from John Graves Simcoe to Sarah "Sally" Townsend is today owned by the Raynham Hall Museum in Oyster Bay.
Battles of Many Kinds

Chapter Summary

Abe receives Anna's letter, the Battle of Yorktown, Caleb avenges Lucas Brewster and a ship sails for England...

Chapter Notes

Sorry everyone, I would have hoped to finish this rather stroppy chapter that did not want to write itself much earlier this week. To everyone to whom I still owe comments, I'll be back tonight!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That I did always love,

I bring thee proof:

That till I loved

I did not love enough.

That I shall love alway,

I offer thee

That love is life,

And life hath immortality.

This, dost thou doubt, sweet?

Then have I

Nothing to show

But Calvary.

(Emily Dickinson, That I Did Always Love)
Setauket, Long Island

The days since Anna’s tragic death had been slow, dragging on in an ever-repetitive mass of sluggish greyness of meals and duties until it was time for bed and sleep granted him a few hours of forgetfulness.

Why did she have to die, and die like this? When his mother had died, and when Thomas had died, too, there had at least been a body to wash and dress, a person to say goodbye to. Anna by contrast had been swallowed by the hungry sea showcasing its domination over the human race, leaving those who loved her with only her memory.

And why Anna in the first place? How could men like Caleb sail the seven seas to the coastlines of Greenland or Iceland and back without coming to any harm and why had Anna, on a small vessel in far less dangerous waters, drowned? Perhaps she could have survived, had she not been unconscious.

The thought of imagining what drowning felt like made Abe feel sick to his stomach.

Mary didn’t talk much of late, partly because she knew how he grieved and he appreciated her thoughtfulness, however he could not help but also detect a hint of sullenness in her features whenever she spoke to or set his dinner plate before him.

Was she jealous of Anna that even in death, she supposedly occupied a greater space in his mind than she did?

The thought made him angry. And sad. And left him feel helpless.

It was on a warm morning a week or so after Anna’s tragic demise when all of a sudden, he heard a knock at the door to the bedroom he and Mary shared in his father’s house until their own was finished.

“Abraham?”

His voice sounded surprisingly soft.

He looked up from the book he had held in his hands but not read and turned to face him.

“Father.” “There is a letter for you, from York City.”

Expectantly, Richard Woodhull held the letter out to him, asking him to take it.

He didn’t want any letters and none from York City to be sure. Whatever Townsend was up to, he could do it alone. The Ring was over, had died the moment Anna had fallen off the boat.

For one moment, he was inclined to simply send his father away or to take the letter with the sole design to throw it away, rip it apart or burn it, but decided against it.

When his father was at a safe distance, he lit the taper he kept by the bedside and carefully held the, as the ‘letter’ revealed itself to be, piece of sheet music over the flame, just enough to caress the paper without scorching it.

Almost immediately, dark lines became visible to the eye, grew in whatever direction he moved the taper until the lines connected to words, entwining around each other and growing across the page,
words formed sentences and at last, there was a letter.

Blinking, he stared down on the piece of paper in his hands.

No, it couldn’t be. His mind was playing tricks on him. Was he drunk? After Anna’s demise, he had been more inclined to take up the cup and fill it to the brim than he had before, if only to soothe his nerves, but as far as he could recall, he’d always stopped before he could be befallen by a state of drunken stupor. He had some dignity left in him.

Anna’s handwriting greeted his eyes. And he of all people, who had received little letters of love from her in the past when they had been young, would know how her hand looked like.

Five times blinking did not make it go away, nor did rubbing his eyes or pinching himself achieve the effect.

Abe,

*My story is too long to tell you everything in one letter and for now, I hope it is enough for you to know I have survived and was rescued in very unlikely circumstances. I am well (currently with 723) and hope that you, your family, Caleb and Cicero are, too.*

*As this letter will already have revealed to you, I am currently in York City, at Robert’s, who has taken me in.*

*I don’t know what may happen in the next few days, where my path may take me, but what I am certain of is that I shall not return to Setauket.*

*I want you to know I have forgiven you and hope you can find the same closure I did. My thoughts and prayers are with you and our friends.*

*Until we meet again,*

Anna

Abe didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry. Anna lived, but she, as far as her cryptic lines revealed, was not intent on coming back home.

She *should* was his immediate reaction, Setauket was her home, she had grown up here and it was here they had fallen in love and everything, but it had soon dawned on him that in her case, the memories of their time together, their careless childhood spent running as wild as their parents would allow with Ben and Caleb, were outweighed by the pain of everything that had happened to her in the last five or so years, starting with Selah’s arrest, the attainder that had reduced her to a serving-maid in her own tavern, her work for the Ring, in which she had lost herself to such a degree she had for some reason begun to harbour romantic feelings for Hewlett of all people (had he not signed the attainder that had left her destitute in the first place? How could she ‘love’ a man who had degraded
her like that?) which had then been broken—in part, by him.

And besides, her standing in the town had never been easy, especially not since it had come to everyone’s notice they had slept together and cheated on their respective spouses with one another in the autumn days of a youthful love that had lasted on his part until Anna had written her letter from camp to him— and beyond.

He’d done everything right, hadn’t he, by calling the bigamist marriage off? He’d done it because he couldn’t let Anna, his Anna, marry Hewlett, their sworn enemy alright, but—

There was no ‘but’. He had lost her even before she’d fallen off the boat.

-And at the same time regained her, her friendship at least, with this letter. While the loss of her and the certainty that he would not see her again in a long while from what he read into the letter smarted him, the joy of her being alive outweighed everything else.

Anna lived, she lived, and she was well.

Jumping to his feet, he ran through the house to the garden, where Mary sat, Thomas on her lap, reading, while Cicero made himself useful assisting Aberdeen spanning a line to dry clothes on between two trees.

“Mary!”

Surprised, a head of red curls (that, to his shame, always reminded him of somebody else and made him nervous in her presence, especially after having learned what his wife was capable of) turned sharply in his direction.

“Abe?”, she asked visibly confused and even Thomas’ little brow was furrowed in questioning amazement.

Neither his wife nor his son had suspected him to be in such high spirits, joyous almost.

“Mary, look at this—“ he held the letter out to her and, in order to allow her to hold and read it, exchanged it for Thomas, whom he spun around in the air and then seated him on his hip.

Mary’s eyes widened in amazement for one moment before she turned to him again, her features somewhat hardened.

“It is good to hear she is alive”, she said, her voice softer than her face.

Perhaps Mary would have been happier to hear the news had he never made love to Anna after having married her, which had likely brought disgrace on her, too, and made her the secret mockery of the ladies of her sewing-circle as in a small town like Setauket, no secret was safe from discovery for long.

As he had done so often before, Abe wondered what would have, what could have been had Thomas not died prematurely, had he not proven his brother’s undoing by inciting a riot that would consume the city and prove lethal to more than one man through a silly joke.

Anna would never have left. They would be married, have their own little home and be happy, and Mary would be married to Thomas—

Shrugging, he let go of the thought. Would he and his brother, standing on different sides, have a good relationship? Their father would still favour Thomas, the older one, the responsible one, and
might even wage war against him for marrying Anna, whom he had since it had first become clear they loved each other viewed as the least desirable daughter-in-law under the sun.

But, most inconceivable of all, the realisation hit him that then, little Thomas wouldn’t be here. Whatever could be said about his difficult relationship to Mary, who was his wife but whom he had never loved the way he loved Anna, he loved his son with all his heart and would never want to trade him for anything.

Kissing his now laughing son’s head, he took the letter from Mary’s hand, not wanting her to think about Anna too much. Perhaps he had been too rash in showing her, perhaps he should simply have told her at supper.

It wasn’t easy, never would be between them, he figured but now, she could find some comfort in the fact Anna’s letter was a farewell for some time to come (of forever, he did not dare to think).

“Very well-“, Mary began tentatively, when she was interrupted by Cicero, who, having fastened the line to the trees, ran over to them.

“Miss Anna lives?”, he asked incredulously, his smile broadening.

“She lives”, Abe affirmed, and showed Cicero the letter.

“Wait-“ the boy said as he was about to pull the letter away from him, thinking it was evidence enough as a mere object.

The boy held onto the piece of paper and read, murmuring the words to himself.

“She’s alive”, he smiled, “We have to write to Mr Brewster, he was devastated when-“

“You can read?”

“I can”, he nodded proudly, “my mother taught me.”

“Then write to her. She’ll wait to hear from you. And tell her Anna might turn up on her doorstep again, who knows-“

That thought however was more of a wishful dream than anything else. Deep inside, he still hoped Anna would come back as the closing words of her letter stated, that she would contact Abigail and would with her aid find a way back to Setauket.

Years at war however had cured him from the simplicity of dreams that is inherent to youth- Anna’s letter was too much of a goodbye for her to ever come back.

She had forgiven him, which was a comforting thought as well as knowing she was as well as her situation permitted.

The hurt of having lost her was dulled by the relief of finally knowing what had happened to her and even better, that she was safe and well.

Still, Abe felt an emptiness in his heart when he thought of her, of what they’d gone through throughout the years, the path they had shared for so long until their ways had parted.

It was not until a few days later that he should learn more about Anna’s fate when a letter from Townsend reached him, which assured him in his judgement of the nature of Anna’s letter.

For the moment however, still ignorant of Anna’s new whereabouts, he decided to take a walk by
the waterside, to think, and, if the waters of the sound were permitting, let a few stones hop across the surface for Thomas and teach him how to make it jump five or six times, a contest he had enjoyed as a boy together with his friends who now had all scattered; Caleb and Ben at war, Anna in York City or godknowshwhere else; only he had remained in the sleepy town they all had grown up in.

With the departure of Hewlett and Simcoe, some quiet order of days gone by had re-established itself; Captain, now Major Wakefield, promoted to fill Hewlett’s place, was not a man intent on meddling in the business of the townspeople and, although he was not very cordial with most of them, he saw to it that his men afforded the people of Setauket the civility they deserved as fellow subjects of His Majesty King George III. and preferred not to parade the regiment through town, restricting his work to the lookouts along the sound and the strategic fortifications designed to hold the town in case of an attack.

All in all, Wakefield was a decent man, though on the wrong side. Peace had come to Setauket. No more rumours about Anna and him roamed the town, nor did secret opposition to the British fester since Wakefield had decided to, while not giving up the church entirely as it occupied a strategically important point in the landscape, opening it for Sunday service as a means to appease the hostile sentiments his fellow officers had allowed to build up over the years.

Without Hewlett’s eccentricities and Simcoe’s reign of terror, Setauket had become thoroughly quiet.

If one chose to oversee the lobsters in the tavern and on the streets of the town, it could be just like in the days before the British had come to Setauket.

Taking Thomas by the hand, he walked down to the waterside, picking up a few flat stones he wanted to use to teach his son skipping them.

Thomas laughed seeing his father throw the stones and demanded to try it himself, and for some moments, the world was as peaceful and whole as it had been when he had been Thomas’ age and a moment later, both father and son laughed, enjoying each other’s company, and Anna was at least momentarily forgotten.

Soon however, with the passing of a patrol near the spot where they stood and hearing the men who paid him no mind talk about what was about to happen in Virginia, Abe was called back to the present.

The world would never be as it was when he was young. War had come and the world would turn upside down, however the outcome of this decisive battle everyone spoke of.

All he could do was hope that the Ring’s work would now pay off and Washington win- and pray for the safety of his friends at the frontline of battle.

Thomas, oblivious to the worries of his father, grasped for his hand and smiled.

“Show Mama”, he proclaimed loudly, meaning he would like to show his mother his new trick.

“You want to show her? We’ll get her quick!”

And Abe scooped Thomas up, took him under his arm like a sack of wheat and carried him, making his little boy laugh.

Abe could not help but laugh, too. In this moment, the world was as it should be.
On the Atlantic Ocean, a week before.

Everything happened so quickly Anna could barely remember any details when she thought back to the day years later in the safety of her own home, facing a cackling fireplace.

As far as her knowledge of ships went coupled with what little of the spinning, turning image of the world before her eyes at that moment she could recall, they must have heaved her on deck with some sort of pulley-contraption and then, she stood at the railing, supporting herself with both her hands braced against the wood, facing the quay.

In that moment, her mind had raced infernally. Had she done the right thing, or could her reckless bravado only be rewarded with greater pain and misery still than what she had endured? Had it been foolish to jump, to leave behind everything—her friends, the Ring, everything that had ever meant anything to her—?

But she had made her decision and here she was now, on deck of the *Jane*, headed for distant shores.

Standing there with the wind mercilessly increasing the feeling of being cold from uncomfortable to resembling braving a mid-winter ice storm, Edmund had walked up to her, shivering just as she did.

“Anna—“ he tried, but there was nothing more he could tell her, and she couldn’t blame him, because she didn’t know what to say to him, either.

She looked at him, drenched to the bone and strands of hair clinging to his forehead and although her heart leapt at the sheer sight of him, her mind, more rationally inclined than the heart, started to think leaving in such a hurried way without anything at all, a pauper in essence, might have been a rash mistake.

What was she to do now, what to do once the ship would anchor in the harbour of Liverpool, Portsmouth or wherever it was headed?

Had she, blinded by love, just made the biggest mistake of her life? They could have found a way, Robert would have helped her. Perhaps, in York City, she could have found employment, there were a lot of establishments like the Setauket tavern and they needed reliable workers. Or she could have entered domestic service, formerly having had servants of her own and then having fallen to their station in life herself, she knew what to clean, when and where.

This was not a glamorous outlook for the future, but a paid one, whereas momentarily, she was a blind passenger almost on a ship headed to a country she had never been to, where she would be alone, friendless, and in enemy territory.

Edmund still hadn’t left her side. Together, they just stood there, shivering, and watched as York City grew smaller by the minute.

“Edmund! For God’s sake come on and get dry, you’ll freeze to death before we’re even a day at sea!” his companion, the one with the hat, called out to him. “And bring the lady with you!”

They were ushered below deck, where in a cabin dry clothes assembled from the combined force of the two other women’s traveling wardrobe was laid out for her. Mrs Greenwood’s stockings were a little too big and Mrs Hat’s gown a little too tight, but Anna was thankful for the charity and helpfulness with which they had acted.

“There, now”, Eliza Greenwood had smiled at her in a motherly fashion, “that’s better, isn’t it?
Before Anna could answer, a cup was placed before her and filled with steaming amber liquid. The tea, by no means the cheap sort, tasted divine, warming her shivering body from within.

Edmund was with them in what turned out to be the main room of their living quarters, too. She hadn’t seen him at first because both Mrs Greenwood and the other woman, who introduced herself as Mrs Stretton, were fussing about her, asking questions and refilling her cup whenever it was empty and found dread and curiosity arise from within her simultaneously when she finally took note of him.

Seeing her sitting there and being cared for most diligently by his sister and Mrs Stretton, he did not quite know what to think, whether the scene before him was even real. Perhaps seeing Anna sit here was a fiendish creation of his imagination and in a matter of minutes, he would be wakened by the real Eliza shaking him by the shoulder and then he would wake up, facing another day in York City being interrogated by Arnold and Simcoe.

Being honest to himself, everything beyond this point felt more like the plot of a third-rate novel than real occurrences.

But apparently, all this had really happened. Here he was and Anna was a woman of flesh and blood, not a ghost of his memory, Anna Strong watching the stars with him, both of them too shy still to say what they felt.

If she had felt anything at all. She had deceived him, and though she had claimed to have done it to rescue him, she had clearly taken advantage of him freely when after the wedding that had forced him to leave in utter disgrace, heartbroken and made a mockery of in front of his brother officers and the entire town of Setauket, she had sook his company again in York City, but only to drive the dagger of her insult and deceit deeper into his heart by using him to gain entrance to the City and, when indeed meeting with him, giving him the answer he had so dreaded when he had asked her if she ever loved him. She’d only cried tears of shame and that had been answer enough to him.

-And yet, she was here. She had jumped into the water when she had seen him on the boat.

All this could just as easily be dismissed by a host of explanations; first and foremost, as a rebel spy, she may well be afraid of a British victory in Virginia and the consequences the defeat of her cause would have. Although she would probably not be hanged as women were usually granted the mercy of a quicker death by the sword, she would lose her life and her friends, too, if they were found out.

Going to England, she would at least save her life.

Bitter thoughts such as this one circled his mind for a while, but the woman he had come to know and love before she had so cruelly deceived him did not look happy or relieved as she sat there on a sofa between his sister and Mrs Stretton who ensured she would take some tea and biscuits to enliven her spirits after the ice-cold waters of the harbour.

“Here.”

William Stretton held a glass of brandy out to him, which he gratefully swallowed in one sip. The
alcohol scorched his insides with its familiar flame that was only outdone in heat and fervour by the flame burning in his soul.

He wanted to forget about Anna, forever, for good, and yet, she always seemed to cross his path- or was it the other way around? It appeared neither could avoid the other for long and despite their catastrophic shared past, it pleased Fate to let them cross paths every so often.

Was there more to it? Would Fate stop arranging them for to meet at one point, if they showed the desired reaction perhaps?

At the house of Mrs Shippen-Arnold, he had wanted to talk to her, but hadn’t found the words and a cynical part of him had sneered and rolled its eyes, telling him there was no use in spending any more thoughts on her, that she was not worth it and all her gazes directed at him mere play-acting to further the greater good she had chosen above love, if she ever loved him at all, which was to be doubted.

And yet- the recent memory of her in his arms in the water, swimming to the boat betrayed his thoughts. He had jumped in to save her, feeling he could not, though knowing from her last act of deceit she was an able swimmer, even fully clothed, leave her there alone and had wanted to help her.

Perhaps, had she not intervened, he would not even be alive today.

It was most confusing, infuriating and troubling to think of her, for he could never decide what to think- the Gordian Knot that was their relationship could not be undone, however hard he tried to tug at different strands and tried to connect and disconnect a variety of odds and ends.

At least, he thought drily, upon their return to Duncleade they might have an Alexander to deal with it, though he doubted he would show any interest in anything or anybody not his elder sister, who had appeared quite taken with him, too.

At least one of them would be happy, that was something.

-Or did he want to forget about Anna as he tried to make himself believe? When they had been with Mrs Arnold, he had wanted to talk to her, but failed. Now she was here, and he was here, too, confined to this ship for the duration of their voyage to Liverpool.

There would be a lot of time to talk. Maybe later, not now.

Silently, he made his way back to his cabin and laid down in his cot, letting the waves lull him into a mercifully dreamless sleep.

Yorktown, Virginia, a week later.

The soldiers were getting more and more restless with every day. French reinforcements had arrived and coupled with the Régiment Saintonge to name but one, Washington was confident they could put up a decent fight.

Although victory was the anticipated goal, nobody dared to speak of it yet. Too long, too laborious
had their fight been to believe in an easy victory despite their numbers and the work invested in the
troops by General Baron von Steuben and his men and the raised morale coming with it.

Ben knew his thoughts should be with his men, but they weren’t, not entirely. When Caleb had
joined them again without Anna, he had not needed to ask what had happened.

They’d cried together for a while, but there was no point in it, he knew. Although he would have
liked to grieve properly, mourn her loss in the ways he had been taught by his father, there were
other things he had to work on, duties to perform.

Of all people, Anna would not have wanted him to desert his duties for her. Was it not she who had
told him that they were the people who made sacrifices so others wouldn’t have to? Anna had given
her life on return from a mission and thus made the ultimate sacrifice. He was ready to fight, fight in
Anna’s name and claim their victory in her name.

They had to win, for Anna, for Sarah, for old Lucas Brewster, for all others who had lost their lives
in this struggle without a reason.

The battle lines were drawn, the armies encamped. It was only a matter of time.

Granting himself a few moments of respite, he sat in his tent, eyes closed, trying not to think of
anything, when all of a sudden, the flap of his tent was torn open and Alexander Hamilton stood
before him.

“Benjamin, come”, he said curtly, though not unfriendly. “There is a letter waiting for you come with
a currier from York City. Said he would only hand it to you.”

Nodding, Ben quickly slipped into his coat and followed Alexander, who chatted merrily on their
way to Washington’s headquarters. In camp, nobody except for Washington himself knew of the
reason why he was so melancholic of late and he had asked the General not to tell anyone.

He had understood and embraced Ben in a fatherly manner when the tears hadn’t stopped from
falling despite his best efforts trying to recount to their commander what Caleb had told him had
happened, and when he had sobbed that Anna had been like a sister to him, the General had only
tightened his arms around him and told him that he knew what it felt like, losing a sibling, and that he
was sorry for his loss.

Caleb had taken to the bottle to drown his sorrows and Ben was becoming somewhat worried for
him. He was irate, needlessly aggressive and his mischievous smile had transformed into a gaunt,
angry thin line.

Of course, he had tried to convince Caleb to stop drinking, but the latter had only thrown an empty
bottle in his general direction, too drunk to aim properly, and had shouted at him. A number of
colourful expletives aside, his words amounted to the following.

“You don’t know how it feels! I’ve watched her fall, Ben, and I knew she’d drown and I couldn’t do
anything for her! She was our friend and I knew I had to let her go if I wanted to save Abe, the
young boy and myself! I should have died, not her. It will be forever in here-” he stuck his index
finger to his head, “forever, do you hear me? And all because of those bloody British-”

He was angry with everyone and everything at the moment and blamed the loss of Anna on the
British, without whom this entire war would not have to be fought.

His special hatred he appeared to reserve for those redcoats he had come to know personally, first
and foremost Simcoe, whose murder of Caleb’s uncle would never be forgotten and who, or so he
had proclaimed loudly in rum-slurred words, would pay for Anna and Uncle Lucas as soon as he would get his hands on him.

Inside the house Washington claimed as his headquarters, many of the highest ranking members of the Continental Army, among them von Steuben, Lafayette, Alexander Hamilton, who had taken the pains to fetch him personally, and the General himself were present.

The boy who could not be older than twelve, looked down at his shoes, insecure among so many uniforms.

“Major Tallmadge?”, he asked almost fearfully, “for you.”

He extended the letter to him. He knew this particular handwriting since forever, it was Abe’s. Ripping it open without ceremony as he expected it to be intelligence of great importance to the coming battle, he was surprised to find Abe’s handwriting, everything spelt out, no code.

At first, he scolded Abe in his mind for not coding whatever message he had for him, but once he had struggled through the first line of agitated scrawl, it became clear to him that the letter had been written in haste and its content was not of military nature. One sentence, only two words, stood out to him:

Anna lives.

He had to read the sentence three times, once aloud, to make sense of its meaning and didn’t read any further. He didn’t need to.

Anna lived. He wanted to collapse and cry again, this time weeping with joy. He had to tell Caleb immediately.

“Himmel Arsch und Zwirn, was ist denn mit Tallmadge? Does anybody know what’s the matter with the boy?“, von Steuben asked incredulously, watching on as Ben stormed out of the room and Lafayette only shook his head in response, only so little his impeccably powdered wig would not get out of place.

Leaving the room full of military dignitaries and the little boy hired to deliver the letter behind, Ben stormed to Caleb’s usual place underneath a nearby tree, where he found him sitting, sharpening his axe.

Luckily, he was not as drunk as he had proven he could be in the last days and was more interested in Ben’s sudden appearance than hostile.

“Look at that, Caleb, read it!”

For one moment, Caleb was quiet and evidently needed a few moments to comprehend the contents of the letter, just like Ben before him.

“Christ, Ben, Annie’s alive. Did you hear that, Annie’s alive!”

He jumped to his feet and punched the air in a victorious gesture.

It was good to see him happy again. Hopefully, his sudden raised spirits would help him in the coming battle.
At sea.

Caleb had been right, Anna found out to her dismay, first-time sailors often suffered sea-sickness and she was no exception. She had been alright on smaller vessels, like the one they had sailed on their ill-fated journey to Setauket, but on a ship this size and at the high seas with the waves crushing mercilessly against the ship, she was powerless against the rolling sea and the feeling of nausea it stirred within her.

“It’s all right”, Eliza heard herself say, clumsily patting Anna Strong’s back as the latter clutched a bucket to her face and retched piteously.

She hadn’t been seasick and Amelia Stretton, though no veteran of the high seas but apparently in this respect of a stronger constitution than Anna Strong, did not feel sick either. Her children, Jane and Cornelius, had complained somewhat but were being looked after by their nurse, who would also take care of any unpleasant effects the weather was having on them.

Her bull-headed ignoramus of a brother had decided it would be best to lock himself up and sleep, or whatever else he was doing in his cabin. Seasick, as William had supposed, he was certainly not. This was his fourth time crossing the Atlantic and the last time, he had certainly not been ill; nor had she, of which she was a little proud. She would tell Alexander when they were home again and tease him because he, though as per the traditions originally destined for a naval career, had let go of any such plans due to his violent seasickness very early in his youth.

In contrast to him (and many naval officers, as he had told her) she would make a splendid first Lord (Lady) of the Admiralty.

And as such, she’d order a ship to get rid of Edmund for her.

Deaf and dumb to anything but his beloved science and living alone in his conceited little world in which he was the highest moral authority, he did not see how much he hurt Anna Strong by evading her.

She hadn’t thrown herself in the water for her own benefit, she could not have done, for what did she gain from this? Nothing, she was en route to a strange land, penniless and only owning what she had had on her person.

Nobody in the right mind would do such a thing- nobody who didn’t love another person so much they were willing to give everything up for that person.

Deep inside, Edmund knew that, too, but the bitterness of the past months, which had only been added to by the misfortunes of their voyage, had made him blind to emotion, always suspecting a foul trick even when there was none, wary of how close he let other people venture to him.

Her poor, broken little brother. Just as much as she wanted to slap him for his cold ignorance, she wanted to embrace him, tell him everything would be alright, he was safe now, far away from
Woodhull, Simcoe and the war at sea.

“Are you better?”, she asked Anna, whose face had turned from a sickly green to a somewhat healthier paleness.

She nodded, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and asked for some water, which Amelia Stretton’s maid provided for them almost immediately.

Seated on the edge of her cot, Anna’s eyes found hers.

“What if I made the wrong choice?”, she asked insecurely, not her in particular but the universe in general.

“There are no wrong choices”, Eliza answered, knowing that while she could offer some harsh, though just commentary on the matter, such would only aggravate Anna Strong’s state of mind rather than give her hope, which, given they would spend a long time together on this ship, would be preferable to making her even more despondent than she already was.

“There are no wrong choices. Only long journeys.” Giving the other woman an encouraging smile, she left her to rest for a while. She wanted to speak to William anyway regarding the provisions for the additional person and horse on board.

Luckily, he said that while he was somewhat anxious for the fresh water supply, what other choice did he have and if all was well and the winds would blow in their favour, they should reach Liverpool without running precariously low. At this point, all they could do was pray for good weather and a short journey- and the story of the lady they had taken on board to shorten the long evenings below deck.

Yorktown, Virginia.

Caleb had seen and heard it all before; horses neighing, men shouting, muskets roaring, exclamations of pain from the wounded and dying. Although he was afraid (no man in the right mind went to battle unafraid), over time, he had learned to close his mind to the horrors around him and concentrate on the task he had vowed to fulfil.

He fought as he always did, using the weapons not standardly issued by the Continental Army but more effective than any bayonet or musket. Hacking and cutting his way through the lines of lobsters, the green of the Queen’s Rangers suddenly appearing before him markedly stood out against the rest of the British troops.

The man riding at their front with his red hair burning in the sunlight, sabre drawn and hacking at the rebels around him, was a painfully familiar sight.

Finally, the time had come.

Quickly, Caleb, protected by a line of his own men fighting right in front of him, loaded the musket he kept slung across his back and aimed.

He would not throw away his shot. He would shoot Simcoe, for Uncle Lucas, for Anna, who hadn’t
slept a quiet hour as long as he had been in town and everybody else who had had to suffer from and under him. If he had only been able to kill him back when they’d held him captive, but providence, who was now smiling down on him, giving him a second chance, hadn’t wanted him to die then. Now however-

Caleb aimed and fired, praying his shot might hit its target only half as well as Mary Woodhull’s had not long ago.

Falling. There was nothing to feel except for the sharp sting in his side, a bullet lodging between his ribs.

He tried to draw breath, but there was only the taste of blood in his mouth, welling up from his lungs. Surprise and pain caused him to lose grip of the reins, then his balance entirely before hitting the ground. There was no time to cry or to even pray. His thoughts were with his mother, the last person to leave him, trying to concentrate on the image of her face, calm and comforting. He’d see her again, soon. A warrior knows when the end comes.

The last thing he remembered is the taste of blood in his mouth and a blunt pain to his head, perhaps caused by the hoof of his horse or a man stumbling over him before the world dissolved into darkness.

At sea.

Two days at sea passed without any occurrences. The sails billowed with a hearty breeze and the weather was fine to allow them to spend some time on deck. The two children of their hosts had taken a liking to her and wanted to play with her, calling her “the lady from the sea” and asked her if she was a selkie woman or a mermaid- they had already been on board when she had swum to Edmund in the boat and seen her for the first time drenched and with a few strands of whatever maritime plant life inhabited the harbour entangled in her hair.

They had not asked Edmund the same things- as it appeared, they already knew him, or at least knew he was an acquaintance of their parents, whereas she was a stranger who did not belong with them and who had come to them under such curious circumstances they, in the wondrous imagination of small children, had come to the conclusion her visit on “their” ship had to be connected to the supernatural.

When they had asked her if she was a selkie, she had to ask them what a selkie was. As the two, raised as it appeared on Scottish folk tales their maid, like their father a native of Scotland, were eager to explain to her, a selkie was a person who could transform into a seal by slipping on their sealskin. If however a human would steal the sealskin from a selkie-person, the selkie was bound to that person for life.

“Did Major Hewlett take your sealskin? Is that why you followed him?”, young Cornelius wanted to know.
“No”, Anna shook her head.

Cornelius looked disappointed.

“I am not a seal”, Anna tried to cheer the little boy, whose belief in the Wondrous had been shattered, up, “but who knows what’s out there-” and gave him an encouraging smile she could only muster because she was talking to a small child who had done nothing wrong and who should not be burdened with the true reason why and how she had come on board.

“Let’s play a game”, little Jane, the older and the ringleader of the two announced, their talk of selkies and merpeople already forgotten. “You hide, and I seek! One… Two…”

He had watched on for quite a while now and deep within him, a feeling of warmth was stirred when he saw Anna engaging with the Stretton-children. Although there was not much possibility to hide on deck, Anna made the most of their game and ensured each child was granted the success of finding her quickly as well as strategically overlooking them when it was her turn to look for them.

Deep inside, he wondered if she was hiding from the children alone.

She also appeared to have befriended his sister, with whom she often sat together, passing the time.

When he had left the boat to assist her, for one moment, everything had been clear to him, that this was how it had to be, a higher instinct had made him join Anna in the water and prompted him not to escort her back to the quay, but to the boat, the boat that would carry them to the ship bound for England.

Anna. Would he ever be able to forget the day she sat before him and remained silent when he had asked her the most important question he had ever asked a person? She didn’t love him and she never would. When he had helped her on board, he had been very selfish, momentarily indulging in a phantasy that could never be- he had done her wrong by taking her with him.

Shaking his head, he left for his cabin, not knowing against whom he should direct his ire- should he be angry with Anna, for all she had done to him, disappearing into the void, or rather the patriot camp, before suddenly resurfacing again and crossing his way at the most inopportune moment or should he point the finger at himself, for after all, he had condemned them to be on this ship together now, and God only knew, perhaps for longer, because he was, despite his mistake, a gentleman and a gentleman would never abandon a woman, whatever her status or misdeeds, alone and penniless in a strange country. He had shackled himself to her, it was his doing they now were bound to be together, he had made her his sea-anchor, dragging her perpetually behind him in days to come.

-Despite everything, she did not deserve such treatment, nor should he have succumbed to such a folly.

Confused, angry with himself, Anna Strong, and the world, Edmund looked left and right, trying to find a way to let go of the burning wildfire-like rage in his soul.

His first instinct was to scream, but screaming would have alerted the sailors and digging his fingernails into his palms did not grant him relief either; the pain was too insignificant to match the galloping tempest of his soul, rearing like a wild horse cornered.
Bucephalus. Simcoe. For the first time, he understood the mad dog’s anger and longed for an
opportunity to let it out; but where Simcoe was nothing more than an unleashed bandog, he was
human and unwilling to hurt another person, something he had abhorred throughout his military
career. While he had understood that sometimes, the sacrifice of life was necessary to a greater good,
he had always believed that by the sacrifice of a few, a greater number could be saved and that those
who died had not died in vain, even the lowliest criminal hung for stealing served a purpose, namely
to discourage any possible epigones.

Taking this, his firm belief into account, he had been able to enforce such severe judgements as these
and fired at the enemy in battle. Never however, had he enacted violence to feel better, to find a
suitable scapegoat for his anger and hold this person unjustly responsible for his ill humour.

Now, for the first time, he felt such unbridled anger, born from self-hatred and helplessness rising up
in him that he wished for one of the sailors to give him a reason, and be it ever so small to allow him
strike the man, a trifle, something, anything.

As always, the man inside him won over the animal. Reason, he was a man of reason, not of blood.
Repeating this mantra in his head did not help; if anything, it made him even angrier. Lastly, on a
whim and in absence of any other possibility to grant his rage release, he relieved his anger by
forcefully smashing his fist into the rail; a pointless gesture, but if anything would happen at all, some
wood would split, which was to be preferred over a person coming to harm.

He was a man of reason, not of blood after all.

When his knuckles met the railing however, they crashed into the weather-hardened wood with
more force than he had anticipated and a violent pain shot up his arm, taking him by surprise. Years
with Simcoe had made anger and violence seem so painless, effortless.

“Ow- for God’s”

“Edmund-“

To his great embarrassment, Anna had seen him, abandoned her current hideout and come over to
him.

Before he could do or say anything or even realise what was happening, she was by his side, taking
his hand in hers, examining it.

The skin had split in one place, not deep, but bleeding a little.

Without any ado, she reached for her pocket, intent to pull out her handkerchief in order to stop the
bleeding with it.

“No, thank you, Mrs Strong. I would not want to be the reason your only handkerchief is ruined.”
He really did not want to be and extricated his hand from hers, unable to look her in the face.

Sometimes, and to her great shame, Eliza had come to fantasise how it would have been had she,
instead of attempting to end Simcoe’s life assisted the latter in getting rid of her brother. Watching
him from afar as he hurt himself in pointless rage (what about? Could it be Anna Strong? Was he, a
person giving precedence to the head, not to the heart, lost in the mazes of his thoughts again and had cornered himself therein?) made her lust after impaling his heart, which he used far less often then he should, or at least giving him a good slap.

Anna, visibly trying to keep her countenance, nodded and stumbled below deck, shaken. Even if this was the end, if the two would never find happiness together, he had no right to treat her uncivilly and for the interest of all on board and the general atmosphere among all passengers, he would do well to be nice to her.

She waited until Anna was out of sight and earshot before she made her way to her brother.

“Was that truly necessary?” He turned, his eyes meeting her defiantly.

“She wanted to be nice to you and you—” she shook her head, “you treat her like a servant.”

“I did not”, Edmund protested, but he did not come much further than that: “Yes, you did. And have you seen the look on her face? Is it truly necessary you hurt her, she who has lost everything, her home, her possessions, and recently her husband—”

Here, Eliza stopped herself. Her own rage had prompted her to throw caution to the wind and before she had thought properly, she had said it. The news of Mr Strong’s death she could not realistically know from having been on a ship with Anna Strong for a few days, as this was not exactly a piece of information one relayed to another person in casual conversation. Edmund hadn’t known until now and she only did because of her clandestine exchange of letters with Anna in hopes a reunion with Edmund, then a hopeful thought, now, as it seemed, an unachievable phantasy, in which she had relayed this piece of information to her.

Just like her brother, she had trapped herself.

“Selah Strong is dead?”, the latter promptly asked incredulously, then muttered something amounting to him having heard these news before but his brain having chosen to push them away.

“He is”, Eliza affirmed, “quite a while now; Mrs Strong told me.”

Hopefully, he would be content with this explanation of why she knew, too- she had a feeling he would not take hearing about hearing about the exchange of letters between Anna Strong and her well at the moment. Perhaps later, one day, she would tell him. This day however, was not today.

“Hm”, he huffed, the sound one of utter bitterness.

“That explains it, why she is here.”

And there he was again- the man she so resented, the man who had come home from the Colonies- embittered, aged beyond his years and unwilling to acknowledge anything but the bad in other persons.

Worst of all however, it was she who had unwillingly aggravated Anna’s situation- she had only wanted to help, tell Edmund off, not make him even angrier.

“Do you think she has come here because now she can marry you without the fear that someone (although I have no Idea how that would be relevant at home, where nobody knows her) might object at the ceremony, that now, she has taken the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go to Britain with you because she is afraid she has been found out as a spy or something? She is not saving her skin, this woman, whatever there never will be between you two again, is braver than you will ever be- whatever she has done, I am sure there is a reason for it.”
“So you defend a woman who has liberally made use of other people’s feelings in the past? How can I know she is being sincere now?”

She had been sincere. He had known it. She had simply been alarmed by the way he had treated himself and wanted to help.

But he hadn’t wanted her to help him, no. Not her, and there was nothing more to such basic kindness as offering a handkerchief to another person than that. Everyone should, and would have done as much.

-And yet, the wound on his hand smarted less than the memory of her touching his hand, her eyes diligently examining the gash in his flesh.

Vile temptress, had she ever been anything else? It was a role assigned to her by her rebel masters, and who better than her with her large, hazel eyes and sultry voice accompanied by a favourable physique to play it? How many other man had this siren wrecked, cracked open like the vessels they had sailed to give their innermost, their feelings and their secrets away to her rebel compatriots? He couldn’t have been the only one, could he?

Likely, there were a number of British officers whom she had played thus; it was a small wonder she had not shown any interest in Simcoe, who would willingly have done her will without invitation to do so- perhaps she liked the game of it, the acting, the part where she convinced her victim and had found him in his hound-like submission and tawdry ingratiating rather dull?

If so, she was no better than the actresses the likes of Cooke hired to pass the time they would better spend on matters more pressing and military.

Had she truly thought thus, enjoyed the game? Although his mind spoke a firm yes, he could barely believe it in his heart, for although she did not love him, she had been fond of him at least somewhat, at least so much so that she had cared, proven his friend in the enemy camp, preventing his death by protecting him from Abraham Woodhull.

Had she entrapped herself by coming to care for him more than she liked, just like he had by taking her with him?

He didn’t know what to think anymore. By no means would he speak to his sister, who would only berate him for his behaviour, as she seemed to enjoy doing recently, and neither could he speak to the Stretton’s. Mrs Stretton, apart from being their hostess, he did not know well enough to entrust or rather burden her with his thoughts and he had never been as close with William as Eliza was.

He was alone, as he had been all his life probably, even with people around.

By the evening, the passengers congregated in the small, crowded space that would for the coming weeks be their shared home.

Although nobody dared to talk about anything that was not light-hearted or pleasant, especially with the children and the general atmosphere on board in mind, while the children, for whom after initial spells of light sea-sickness traversing the Atlantic Ocean had become an adventure of the finest sort, for the moment at least, the adult’s faces bore strained expressions and even though the unspoken
mutual understanding between them stipulated that no gloomy thoughts ought to be exchanged to preserve the morale of all on board, worries and woe found their way to worm themselves into conversation, often abruptly and without warning.

Mrs Stretton, born and raised in the Colonies, wondered if they would ever return, or if they would remain in England, a country she, though having visited before, did not like as much as compared to her home, where she had grown up and most of her social connexions resided. She also wondered that, even if all would turn out well and the rebellion would be quenched, they would find their home there intact; did not their action of packing everything possible and valuable onto a ship and leaving speak of the exactly opposite? William had sleepless nights regarding his business, not knowing what would happen after the war, especially if it should turn out in favour of the rebels. Just like his wife, he regarded their packing up and leaving as a gloomy premonition they could only hope and pray would never come true.

Eliza tried to keep the spirits up, inviting to makeshift card-parties and making merry, but it was written in her features she did not believe in half the cheerful words and encouragements she distributed so freely. Below the façade of merriment, she was as restless as everyone else, nervously pacing up and down the deck each morning and afternoon to exercise with the ambition to tire herself to such a state of exhaustion she would find it easier to sleep at night.

Mrs Strong by contrast resigned herself to not speaking much if at all, hiding in the cabin she shared with the Strettons’ nurse and was more of a ghostly presence than a human one; silent, she seemed to glide through the small corridors, her lips thin and mouth downturned, dark circles under her eyes. At times he wondered if this woman truly was of flesh and blood, or if the real Anna, the one he had known and loved, had died, but her ghost had returned, coming to haunt him. Were there not persons more deserving to be haunted than him? As a Christian, he knew he ought not entertain such thoughts, but he hoped Bucephalus, whose soul he could not imagine was at rest after having been murdered by poison, would at night gallop through the dreams of a certain colonel, a spectre of white mist, breathing sulphurous smoke through his nostrils and glowing embers for his eyes and teeth like a shark’s, pointed and sharp, making the man suffer who had brought about his untimely death.

A week into their journey, Edmund found himself unable to sleep at night, as he had so often in the past days. The cot he was lying in was uncomfortable in the extreme and the motions and sounds of the ship, romanticised in literature, did keep him up rather than make him sleepy.

The day had been clear, and so, he reasoned the chances of a clear night-sky were fairly promising—underneath the stars, identifying them by name and greeting them like old friends, he knew he would feel safe, at home, wherever he was. Since he had first come to the Colonies, fairly young and homesick, he had learned they could provide him with a home spanning distances that could not be travelled in weeks.

It was dangerous, walking through the ship at night, even with the little taper he had lit, but accustomed by now to sea voyages, he managed.

A night watch was keeping sentry on deck and only greeted him with a nod and a curious stare, of which he thought nothing; clearly, they had not expected anyone to be up at night or to entertain such a dangerous venture as his (for if something were to happen in the dark, saving a person gone overboard would be almost impossible).

As however he ventured farther into the darkness that was only accentuated by the moon’s light reflecting on the waves, he could make out a second person, standing at the railing. At first, he was thoroughly unable to tell if it was a man or a woman and thought nothing more of it; likely, he belonged to the crew’s sentries looking out for enemy ships.
With talk of the French coming their way, one would want to avoid contact with them altogether and better not risk a race with the French naval fleet which, contrary to their own vessel, would be richly equipped with men and cannons to sink them, if so inclined.

He took a few steps more into the general direction of the figure and to his surprise found it to be a woman, not a man, staring out into the darkness.

Hearing his steps on the planks, she turned, and in the pale blue-silver moonlight, a face became visible to him.

Anna Strong stood before him, her dark eyes appearing even darker and larger by the pale light of the moon causing her fair skin to appear almost radiant.

“Major”, she breathed, visibly taken aback.

“Mrs Strong”, he answered, not knowing what else to say to her. They could hardly speak of the beautiful night or the favourable winds billowing the sails by day, they were long past any point of such pleasantries.

In her eyes, words were welling up from the fountain of her heart, eager to be spoken and when her lip trembled somewhat in an attempt to articulate whatever it was she wanted to say, he found himself inclined to listen- but no words came.

Anna closed her mouth again and shook her head in a gesture of defeat.

At last, after a rather uncomfortable moment of silence, he heard himself say “I am sorry for what I have done. I should not have encouraged you to board this ship, I have thrown you into a great predicament. You will go to England without a home without-” Here, he found himself unable to go on, colour the picture of her currently rather precarious situation in even more vivid hues, because he could not stand, he found, looking at the repressed despair she tried to hide from him, though her feelings were still displayed on her face without a doubt as to their nature.

Anna however remained strong, swallowed what he perceived to be a sob, and looked him directly in the eyes as she spoke:

“When I jumped and swam to the boat, I meant that.”

“Just as you ‘meant’ to go away with me when I asked you if you ever loved me”, he remarked, his tongue and cynicism far quicker than his brain.

She took a step backwards, away from him, one hand nervously engaged with the end of the braid resting on her right shoulder.

“That I meant, too”, she replied composedly, her eyes fixed on his as she said so, unblinking with honesty and speaking to him of words that wouldn’t follow, would remain unspoken, which he could only guess at and would forever be lost to him.

“I wanted to go away with you, to Scotland, I truly did.”

“It appears you are going now.” Inhaling deeply, Anna looked away again, into the distance and then up to the sky.

“Perhaps it was written in the stars that-“

Although it was clear to him all she meant was to employ an old saying to accentuate whatever else
she wanted to say after that, he cut her off abruptly, “Nonsense, nothing is ‘written’ in the stars. The stars, Anna, are an orderly arranged body of celestial entities, every star has its place and has had it for thousands of years. Unless the ‘prophecies’ you aim to find are written in the exact same set of letters in the exact same order and thus have read and will read the same to everyone looking up into the sky, there is nothing to read in them.”

Anna did not know what to say to him in reply. Even though the Edmund Hewlett she had come to know (and love) had shone through for a brief moment, the continuation of his speech had had nothing of the man who had first introduced her to his telescope.

His wonderment, his excited love for what there was to discover was gone, reduced to static knowledge that did not require telescopes, only old books and maps.

There was nothing left to discover in the sky for him- and judging from the way he spoke about the skies, there was nothing left for him to discover on earth, either.

It pained her to see he had resigned himself to the role of a passive spectator whose only wish appeared to be to watch the world trickle by, events pass before his eyes, seasons coming and going, while he confined himself to a darkened room, alone with his books and his memories.

For a moment, she felt the urgent need to shout at him, shake him by the shoulders, ordering him to wake up from this stupendous apathy, which she obviously couldn’t do.

She did not recognise him, and yet she did- would she want to be in the company of a person who had done her great wrong? And oh, she had. She had used him in order to obtain information about the British from him- how could she ever have known she would come to care for him deeply?

However, he of all people should know of the erring judgments of human beings; had it not been him whose attainder had left her destitute, working in a tavern when before she had been mistress of her own home when he had convicted her solely on grounds of her husband’s misdeeds? She could and perhaps should have tried to speak to him about that, hold him responsible for what he did but instead, she had chosen to overlook this matter, focussing on the pleasant aspects of their relationship that was never meant to be.

Maybe, Edmund was right. They should not be here together on this ship, what had she been thinking?

She had jumped, not thinking at all, her mind overruled by a love-drunken heart that had seen hope where there clearly could not be any, she saw that now.

Nothing between them could ever be as it had been in those beautiful, blissful days in Setauket when she had at least for some moments, had been able to make herself forget about the guilt she felt for her two-facedness, forget about the information she gathered and passed on, forget about the Ring, the dangers they faced, forget about the scrutinising stares of the townspeople who disapproved greatly of anything she did but even more of her love for the major, forget everything that did not exist in the moment Edmund pecked her on the cheek when he passed her by in the corridor, or when they held each other in a comforting embrace.

These days had not been the same as the careless love-struck hours she had spent in her youth, no disdainful whispers yet following her on the streets, when she had sat in her room in her parents’ home thinking of Abe, this love, at an age where she had ceased to believe in tales of princes and princesses (whom she had come to resent on a very different level anyway) had been so different from the youthful infatuation of days gone by.
She had loved Abe with all her heart, but people grew older and changed, and their hearts with them. How long they had continued on to love each other in supposed secret she could not tell, but they had always done it knowing one day, everything must come to an end. She had seen it in Abe’s eyes every time he made love to her without abandon, taking her in the shortest moments in the tavern cellar or wherever they could find five quiet, undisturbed minutes, lamenting the future they had never had in this way under the governance of a sentiment best described as “at least we are together”.

They had both known they could not pretend to hide every now and then in plain sight of the entire town of Setauket forever, they had both married in the meantime and even though Abe had not wanted to see it, she had grown from the wide-eyed teenage girl who had nervously lain with an equally nervous teenage Abe for the first time on a spring day in a field a mile outside the town.

The girl she had been was no more and would never be again, not after everything that had transpired.

The world had been colourless then, just black and white, as she supposed all young people saw it. There was only good and evil, and those who stood against what they had believed in had automatically been villains to them who had nothing but their suffering in mind.

Nowadays, she would no longer subscribe to such a notion, even though it had taken her a long time to rid herself of such prejudices, a process in which Edmund had played a critical part; Edmund, who now saw the world just as she had back then, a fixed system in which everything had an explanation, a place, and an affiliation with either One or the Other Side, whatever this meant.

“Then what about shooting stars?”, she asked all of a sudden, not knowing where exactly the question had come from, but instinctively sensing it was the right thing to say.

“Shooting stars-” he broke off, cutting a lecture short that may have held them in this place until sunrise.

“Why are you asking me this?”

“What about them?”, Anna countered, “the sky does change, they’ve had their place for thousands of years as you say and then they leave it-“

“To crash into the earth or indeed be swallowed by the universe”, he closed.

“Have you never thought about that while they are only visible for a few seconds, they shine brightly, give hope and joy to those who see them?”

After a short pause, he replied “We were a shooting star, Anna”, avoiding her eyes.

“Perhaps.”

For a while, they both stood there, not saying anything.

“So you think that we have been cast into the void of the universe?”
How was he to answer that question? Yes, he felt so. God had long forgotten him, abandoned him as he had this entire world, letting it plunge into disorder whereas he, above the orderly arranged sky that was only momentarily disturbed by rebel shooting stars (at that, he could not help but look at her eyes, gleaming black and silver in the darkness), had resigned to be a mere onlooker, perhaps even enjoying the unrest and chaos he had created.

“The war has demanded us all to decide which side we are on, Anna. I bear no grudge against you for having chosen yours.”

The formality and composed coolness in which he expressed himself bore evidence to the contrary. He had not made peace with the recent past as he pretended to; he was still hurt and if she had to guess what he saw before his mind’s eye in this very moment, she was certain it was the scene of what should have been their wedding, she pointing her finger at him in front of their assembled wedding guests saying “he made me do it.”

“What side have I chosen, Edmund?”

Indeed, which side was she on? She had abandoned everything she had had left, her friends, the Ring only to be with him in a foolish second in which her heart had proven to be bad counsel.

She could feel her lips tremble, but repressed it as good as she could, tears were welling up in her eyes, and she could see his eyes were not dry, either- how could two people, who had loved each other so much, end like this?

Why had this war forced them apart? Why had it been them, and not Mary and Abe, who both, to her knowledge had vastly different opinions on the governance of America, or, as Mary would prefer to put it, the Thirteen Colonies?

“I am here, not in camp, not with Washington, or Abe for that matter, I am here, on this ship-“

He could not watch on any longer and found the present situation distressed him more than he was willing to admit to; he could not bear seeing her like this, on the verge of tears, and although they were both at fault for her being there, despite everything that had happened in the past, he simply could not.

“Anna”, he breathed, his hand reaching out to hers, clutching the railing.

Edmund’s hand came as a surprise. For a moment, her body was on the verge of recoiling due to the unexpectedness of this development, but she did not.

His hand was soft, comforting almost, had she not known what discussion had preceded its reaching out to her and yet, she could feel her grip around the wood of the railing grow slack, relax underneath his.
For a moment, their eyes locked; for a moment, this could have been their first night in Setauket together, watching the stars from his telescope, Edmund dressed in a most adorable hat and rather scholarly-looking banyan that had made her forget about her mission and the Major.

For a moment, they were just Edmund and Anna, two nameless stars in a galaxy of a million more, the moment pristine and uninterrupted.

For a moment, both of them wished nothing had ever changed.

Chapter End Notes

"Himmel Arsch und Zwirn": popular myth has it that von Steuben amused the American soldiers by cursing in German. This one's a somewhat dated exclamation of frustration or disbelief, translating literally to "Heaven, Arse and twine"- repeat at your own risk. ;)

Among the number of seasick naval officers by the way was one Horatio Nelson-Alexander is certainly in illustrious company.

I took particular liberties with the Battle of Yorktown and Simcoe's injury in order to fit my story around the events of the last season. Yorktown was actually a siege and lasted from 28. September 1781 to 19. October 1781 and Simcoe was already bedridden by then. The Queen's Rangers were posed under the command of one Banastre Tarleton (the man on whom William Tavington from "The Patriot" is partly based) and Simcoe only rode out once to see his men, but then retired back to bed, too ill to fight. Similarly, his injuries, inspired by what happened to him at Blandford in the series and the picture Samuel Roukin twittered from shooting that scene that probably gave half the fandom nightmares, are also fictional.

Please, if there are any connoisseurs of 18th century ship voyages and sailing in general reading this, I am sorry to disappoint with my lack of technical terms and knowledge of sailing. Admittedly, all I know about sailing comes from the "Horatio Hornblower" TV-series, which is doubtlessly not the most trustworthy source.
Love and Friendship

Chapter Summary

A sea voyage draws to a close; an old threat returns to England and Mrs Hewlett suffers a (luckily only proverbial) heart attack.

Chapter Notes

Hi there everyone! I hope you enjoy this next chapter and I've finally found the patience to update the tags (somewhat), which may give away a few goodies for you in this chapter. Also a fair warning: I've had way too much fun writing extensive notes today, I'm sorry.

The chapter title, as some may recognise, is taken from Jane Austen's first novel (1790).

Oh, and yesterday, as I have been informed, was the first anniversary of "TURN"'s last episode. To be honest, I can't believe it (which may partly be rooted in the fact I still have this and several other stories going set in the series' universe)- time truly flies when you're enjoying yourself writing fanfiction. The big question now however is: where's the spin-off?

Anyways, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We never said farewell, nor even looked

Our last upon each other, for no sign

Was made when we the linked chain unhooked

And broke the level line.

And here we dwell together, side by side,

Our places fixed for life upon the chart.

Two islands that the roaring seas divide

Are not more far apart.

(Mary Elizabeth Coleridge (1861-1907), We Never Said Farewell)
Yorktown, Virginia.

Directly after the battle, nobody had been able to make heads or tails of what was happening, that they had won, they had won.

And everything still felt surreal when they watched as the British surrendered their weapons and General O’Hara presented Cornwallis’ sword to Washington.

The fifes and drums were playing *The World Is Turned Upside Down*, for this was how the British felt, but they were wrong, Ben found. The world hadn’t turned upside down, their world had.

This new world, belonging to Washington, to America however, had just stepped out from the twilight of dawn into the light of history and so, Lafayette ordered the men to change the tune to theirs and let the British march to the song of *Yankee Doodle*.

The Atlantic Ocean near Dooneen, Co. Cork, Ireland.

Their journey across the ocean continued and with the weather still in their favour, the good progress they made caused the general atmosphere to be merry with card-parties every night as entertainment.

While Eliza Greenwood was an adept player and enjoyed playing, Edmund kept to himself most of the time or watched over the edge of a book from a chair set apart from the company around the table.

Their recent meeting in the darkness had not made things easier between them. The tenderness, the sweetness of the moment when he held her hand left her utterly unclear about what to think of Edmund Hewlett.

However, since then, the tension whenever they met was relieved somewhat; he greeted her respectfully, though still distanced, and sometimes even, they found themselves engaged in conversation on this and that, though never anything of substance.

One day, on deck with the children (who had still not quite given up on the selkie-idea), Jane pointed to the sky above them: “Look, a seagull!” And indeed, a seagull it was. Anna did not need to be a sailor to know what this meant, land was near.

Standing by the larboard railing, she saw green hills in the distance, her first glimpse of Europe, or rather its western rim, the south coast of Ireland.

On the wind, she could smell rain-wet grass mixing with the by now very familiar scent of saltwater and inhaled deeply.

“Bid a good day to the good people of County Cork”, Eliza Greenwood’s voice chimed into the children’s loud expressions of excitement and joy, asking their nurse to hold them up so they could see better (which the latter was reluctant to do, fearing one of them might fall and go overboard),
trying to make out houses or people in the distance, waving.

“It’s not that far to Liverpool anymore from here”, she continued, this time turned to Anna, “and not as dangerous any more either. If the Irish don’t get up to no good and start collaborating with the French-“ shaking her head, she abandoned what she wanted to say. She had likely realised their beliefs and political outlook would clash on this topic.

“No matter, we shall be safe. What will you do once we reach Liverpool?” The other woman sounded genuinely concerned.

“I don’t know”, Anna replied truthfully. Everything else would be a lie.

“I would offer you to accompany us for the time being”, Eliza Greenwood went on, studying her features intently, “but seeing as you and my brother-“

Anna nodded softly, staring out to the coast once more.

“No. It was never meant to be.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that. Fate in most cases is a poor excuse for the actions of people. If I can help you in any way, do not hesitate to ask. Neither I nor my family are rich, but we are of means enough to help you get by as long as you cannot support yourself.”

“I don’t want to be a burden to anyone.”

“You are not burdening anyone if a favour is offered to you, Think on it.”

Eliza Greenwood gave her a smile, pulled her woollen shawl tight around her shoulders before going below deck again, leaving Anna where she stood, watching the rolling emerald hills in the distance.

In the evening, after another meal of preserved food, she was ready to leave to go and lie in her cot while the rest of the company made ready for another card-party.

“Anna- Mrs Strong”, a familiar voice called lowly out to her while the Strettons and Eliza were engaged in a lively conversation about strategies and who would win this time and did not notice a thing.

“Major Hewlett.”

“I wish to speak to you- alone, if I may.”

Without another word being spoken, Anna followed him on deck again.

“It is here I find speaking easiest, without my sister and the Strettons to hear us.”

In their stead, a number of sailors were possibly listening in to them, but apparently, a number of strangers greatly exceeding the number of people who could listen in on their conversation, be it intentional or not, did not irk him as much.

Perhaps he did not even regard them as capable of listening, or rather understanding; the Edmund Hewlett she had first come to know, when he had been newly stationed in Setauket had certainly not thought anybody below his rank and education as his peer.

“I want to make a suggestion”, he announced, luffing nervously on his toes. “seeing as your situation is, ah, quite precarious, might I invite you to come to Scotland with us? I have thought long about this but it seems like the most prudent thing to do, given the current state of your affairs, one would
not wish you to fall prey to any indecent characters such big cities as Liverpool breed like the vermin inhabiting the warehouses by the harbour.”

Once, in another life, she had dreamed of going to Scotland with him, had treasured this phantasy, now, she wished the boat would never reach the harbour and she could remain there forever, wearing borrowed clothes, never to arrive anywhere.

“It would please me to see you safely set up for the time being”, he continued insecurely, “after all-you did save my life. It is the least any Christian man of honour could do.”

Anna’s heart sank- again, his personal views of self-centred honour had won out, she was only secondary and should only come with him because he wanted to be able to sleep at night unperturbed.

But why was she wondering about any possible feelings he ever had for her still? She had loved him, not even that long ago, and he had loved her, yet other things had been more important. Their little love had come into the way of the pursuit of happiness of the entirety of the American people, for which she had sacrificed her part.

Why should Edmund not be allowed to act out of his own beliefs then? She wished she could say no, but what else could she do than to follow Eliza and Edmund to Scotland? There would likely be work in Liverpool, but for the likes of her? Penniless, without somewhere to sleep, she would likely have to start in the same business as many other destitute women did, finding a mistress in one of the brothels by the harbour to take her on, earning a little something giving herself to sailors.

A part of her, prideful, told her to do just that, it would not be a life of leisure and pleasure, but it would be her life, independent of anyone who did not even wish to see her anymore and besides, had she fought for American independence only to become the dependant of a British officer?

Prudence and a sense of self-preservation however won the dispute in her mind. She could either die hungry in the gutters of Liverpool or live with the Hewletts in Scotland, where she would not be embraced as a welcome visitor, but could stay for a few weeks or so as a temporarily tolerated guest.

So far, she had always persisted throughout constant adversity and would again. She would live, would perhaps not flourish like the new roses in June, but would eventually come to make a living.

And at least Eliza Hewlett did seem to like her, despite knowing everything there was to know about the love she had once shared with the latter’s brother.

Colonel Cooke’s House, York City.

“Make way! He’s damn heavy!”

He was carried on a stretcher or some such, and a man whose voice he recognises as Colonel Cooke complained.

“Why do I have to quarter him-“

“Because General Lord Cornwallis says so and because after the Hell that went down at Yorktown,
you’re not going to inhabit your little *palais* her for much longer anyway”, the man tasked with transporting him snaps back, eager to get his job done.

“All you have to do is provide him with bed and board- doesn’t look like he’ll cause you any trouble soon.”

To illustrate the claim, the man slapped his shoulder, hard, at which he could only wince feebly, and not even in a protesting tone; it sounded plaintive, begging to be let go, begging for someone who would end this for him for good, shoot him like Hewlett did that horse of his.

“We’ll come back and collect him for transport to England soon, don’t worry.”

“Yes, that is if he survives.”

The man did not seem to care much and told his underlings carrying the makeshift stretcher to drop him onto the bed, which was done with unnecessary roughness likely grown from the thought they had no idea he was alive and sentient- still. He could not protest or make himself known in any other shape or form and that would until 28th January 1784 constitute his most horrible memory, being able to hear, but unable to speak, as good as dead in the eyes of the world.

He would even be glad for Hewlett to come, he reasoned, for he would not hesitate to kill him after their shared history in Setauket. And Hewlett being a self-proclaimed gentleman, he would do it quickly.

Hopefully, he was still in York City.

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**Liverpool, England.**

Upon arriving at Liverpool, it had suddenly dawned on Edmund Hewlett that the offer he had made and the entire situation around it were very real. When for some time on the ship he had come close to believing everything that had transpired so far since their departure from York City was some sort of very vivid dream, or rather nightmare that saw him confronted with the shattered and betrayed hopes he had once harboured for a future that was never to arrive now, suddenly, the dream had come to life.

Once upon a time, Major Hewlett of Setauket had dreamt of going to Scotland with Anna Strong and marrying her there, before he had thought it more romantic and soldierly to remain in the small Long Island town of Setauket to boldly defy the rather rustic and narrow-minded locals’ scrutiny by making the woman they seemed universally to agree upon was a bad match his wife in front of them all.

Looking back on it, it had been the right decision, for had Anna’s bigamist aspirations not been exposed then and there, he would have unwittingly become guilty of the same crime. But worst of all, he would have been together with her, would have read her every wish from her lips, not knowing it had all been a farce, a clever design, for if there was one thing one couldn’t say about Mrs Strong from Setauket, it was that she was stupid.

What a cruel trick of fate (yet another one) that now the dream he had once dreamt of taking Anna home was to become reality, but under totally different circumstances.
She wouldn’t become his bride in the little church of Duncleade now and they wouldn’t set up home somewhere in the area, now, they would simply move quietly into the house of his childhood, two ghosts from the same past, hoping the neighbours would not talk too loudly about them.

Stretton insisted he hire them a carriage, partly to showcase his financial magnanimity just because he could and partly because he had always liked Eliza, who had become a friend to him over the years even after she had been forced to abandon her plans of marrying his brother after James Stretton’s untimely death many years ago.

For the comfort of the women, he had offered to let the ladies sit in the direction they were driving in and now faced them both.

He had almost considered to ride on Anna’s horse, for which they had found a rider to take it with them (where did she get it from? Until then, it had never occurred to him to ask her), had not the weather been so dismal, as if attempting to reflect his state of mind and so, he had left this task to the Scotsman one of Stretton’s servants had picked up in a tavern, a man called Fraser who was intent to make his way north again but found himself without money or means to do so. When he answered yes to the question if he could ride a horse, he had been employed to ride behind the carriage to Duncleade, where he would be rewarded with a little silver to boot.

They were all tired and soon, both Eliza and Anna Strong were fast asleep.

He was tired, very tired in fact, too, but could not sleep at all, even if he tried, and it was not the condition of the roads or the thought of highwaymen that kept him awake, it was the sheer torment of knowing he would sit here and face Anna Strong for a full week, which was the time it would take them to get to Duncleade, even if they made good progress each day.

The coachman, who was probably making the money of his life by being paid generously for the troubles of driving from Liverpool to the south of Scotland, was a good fellow, who would not maltreat his horses by making them go fast for long periods of time, which would also prolong the journey.

He was entombed here with his sister, a woman he thought he knew and the former life he had tried to shed, but which kept following him around like a shadow on a sunny day.

Viewing Anna’s face asleep, it was inconceivable such serene, regular features akin to an angel’s could be guilty of sin and deceit; but was it not always the case that sin and deceit masqueraded as something desirable, perfect, like the apple in the garden of Eden?

Eve had been the cause of Adam’s ruin as Anna had been his, he thought bitterly. Still, Adam and Eve, after their eviction from paradise following the fall of mankind still had had one comfort, and that was being together and given they had a family and populated the world, their marriage had probably not been loveless- he would never have that, a family, a home of his own, not now, not ever.

In his mind, he could see Anna holding a little, dark-haired child about two or three years old up and twirling her around in some sort of game, both the little girl and she laughing, while he held another, smaller, child and watched on with adoration.

Often he had had this vision, recalled it with particular anticipation in the days when he had still thought she would become his wife and they would cross the ocean and eventually have a family.

He had yet to forget about this particular wish, or rather the empty shell of it he still carried around in his heart.
At long last, he too found some sleep and by the time they made it to the next coaching inn felt refreshed enough to take a short walk down the side of the road while the horses rested and the two women opted to refresh themselves with whatever they served in this establishment.

“For the life of me, I’m never doing this again”, Eliza complained loudly when the next bump in the road shook the carriage again, veritable poison to her poor, aching back.

Anna gave her a feeble, yet sympathetic smile while Edmund only stared out at the scenery flying by. Within the day, they would make it to Duncleade, before nightfall if the horses could be persuaded, where her dear, beloved bed awaited her already. A week spent in terrible coaching inns and run-down taverns where she had shared a bed with fleas and whatever other vermin there had been had made her long for the narrow cot and rocking motions of the ship and even more so of her comfortable bed at home, which she had missed for too long.

The landscape had changed and she slowly started to feel more and more at home when she looked through the window, where the landscape had become a little more rugged and hillier, indicating they would be in Scotland soon.

“Gretna Green”, the coachman bellowed and halted not too long after.

“Welcome to Scotland”, Eliza announced stepping off the coach for their last break before Duncleade and smiled broadly at Anna.

They did not stay long as they wanted to reach Duncleade before nightfall and the shortness of the break appeared to be a blessing for her brother dearest, who could not look either of them in the eye throughout the duration of their short rest, likely because he was thinking of the most common association one had with this place. Maybe, had he and Anna come to Scotland under a different star, they would have stood at the smith’s anvil in this very village.

The fewer the miles between them and home became, the more the tension inside the carriage increased. Nobody was speaking, or willing to speak, offer some light-hearted conversation to ease the heavy silence that hung over them like the sweltering air just before a large thunderstorm.

Truth be told, neither of them probably wanted the carriage to stop, ever, before at least one of them had found the right words to say, to each other and to their mother, who would likely be worried sick by now, but at last, they could hear the driver telling the horses to halt and felt, with hearts heavy as stone, how they stopped.

“We’re there”, she said helplessly, at loss what else to say in this moment, “we’re home.”

Three pairs of sleepy legs walked stiffly to the door, which their mother’s housekeeper had already opened at hearing the commotion of visitors arriving at so unusual an hour.

“Mrs Greenwood, Major Hewlett, you’re back!”, she exclaimed without even realising there was a third person with them and ran inside quickly to tell their mother.

Much to Eliza’s dismay, the latter, dressed in her night-attire with a cap on her head and a dressing-gown wrapped around her form that billowed behind her as she walked, was there by the staircase within seconds- the old lady must have flown to achieve this feat, but it was not unheard of that
mothers could develop near-supernatural strength when their children were in some way involved.

“Edmund Theodosius Hewlett! Elizabeth Georgiana H- Greenwood, WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN THINKING?”, she thundered and for one moment, Eliza was almost as afraid of her scolding as she had been as a child.

“How dare you leave like a thief in the night, Elizabeth? And Edmund, I would have thought better of you than conspiring with your sister, breaking your mother’s heart- you could have died, both of you!”

Eliza’s heart sank. She had known this moment would come, she had known their mother would be angry and disappointed, and she had known, too, that her mother’s anger was born out of her love for her children, the two people she loved the most in the world, but even though she had known all this and willingly accepted it to go on her mission, she had never wanted to hurt her.

It had had to be done, she would never have made the boat had she given her mother the time she would have needed to adjust to the thought of her leaving and technically, she did not even need to tell her anything as she was not liable to her mother in her actions, however, she loved the old woman, who had, though strict and demanding, always done everything she could for both her children and never given them reason to doubt her love and care.

“We are sorry-“

“You better are”, she commented. “Gone like a thief in the night, you were and I had to press information from that bloody Captain like he was a ripe lemon to find out about everything!”

Eliza hung her head, now truly feeling like being fourteen, not forty. Oh Alexander.

“And who is this?”

Mother’s eyes had found Anna, who had stood a few steps behind them. At asking this, her voice suddenly lost some of its cuttingness and turned towards genuine curiosity and a civility reserved for a guest unfamiliar to her.

“This Mother”, Eliza was quick to say, “is Anna Strong, a good friend of Edmund’s from America. It is a long story- perhaps a little too long for tonight.”

“A good friend, you say?”

Mother’s eyed Anna intently.

“A pretty friend”, she commented, “I did not know my son had any female friends of any sort and certainly not such pretty ones.”

“Mother-!”

Now it was Edmund’s turn to blush and interrupt her, visibly uncomfortable and probably suffering pains worse than hell only listening to them.

“All well and good. We will talk in the morning.”

This was enough to signal to both of them not to put up a fight and retired quietly to their respective rooms-

“Not so quick.”
The old woman’s hand reached out for Anna’s arm, who had insecure and unknowing what to do, followed Edmund and her, but was held back.

“You come with me.”

Terrified, Anna followed the elderly lady, whom she presumed to be Mrs Hewlett, in an adjoining sitting room, where she was made to sit on a settee facing Mrs Hewlett’s armchair.

Groaning, she settled in the cushions of this much too big piece of seating furniture and put her feet up on a cushioned stool.

“You must pardon me, Miss Strong, the cook lives in the village- I’ll see if the maid can find something and make some tea.”

With that, the poor still somewhat sleepy maid, a fairly young woman with a strong accent Anna struggled to understand, was called and received her instructions before disappearing presumably to the kitchens to do as her employer bid her.

Mrs Hewlett by contrast sounded very much like Edmund, her accent clear-cut and her pronunciation even and somewhat nasal, as she had learned from the army stationed at Setauket the posh people of the south of England spoke, which meant the old lady probably was as Scottish as her American self and had raised her children to speak like the fashionable crowds of London rather than a Scottish farm labourer.

“Thin you are”, she commented, unabashedly roving her body with her eyes, “was the voyage very strenuous?”

“Somewhat”, Anna replied, still very much on her guard as she did not know the other woman and could thus not tell which answer she expected in order to please her. The latter only gave a snorting sound.

“Not a great conversationist, I take it?”

“I am a little tired, that is all.”

At that, the old woman’s eyes rested on hers, eyes she recalled from another familiar face, blue and quick like those of her daughter. In her youth, Mrs Hewlett must have been a striking woman with her eyes, her regular features and keen mind.

“Indeed, you are tired, Miss Strong. But not of the journey.”

She spoke the truth. Anna’s first instinct was to look away, ashamed a complete stranger had guessed such a private thing, but came to realise that her reaction of whatever kind would not matter, the old woman did not need any affirmation to know she was right.

“Ah, tea”, came Anna’s temporary relief, “be so good and pour me some, Miss Strong.”

Wordlessly, she obliged. Miss Strong. It was incorrect and did not feel right.

-She could go with this assumption. Nobody knew her here, she could start all over, nobody would
ever have to know about Selah, the Ring or the war. On the other hand, both younger Hewletts knew already, which ruled lying out.

And had she of all people not lied once too often?

In a somewhat shaking tone, she pressed herself to correct Mrs Hewlett, who put her cup down on the saucer again and promptly asked her about the prefix to her name she had so often cursed and wished she had never come to adopt.

“My husband is dead, Mrs Hewlett. He died several months ago.”

A sympathetic glance was exchanged before Mrs Hewlett, after taking a generous sip of tea, spoke again.

“You find yourself in understanding company. It has been decades since Mr Hewlett’s death.”

“I am sorry for your loss.”

“Don’t be. We were not exactly a love match”, the old woman recalled in a matter-of-fact-ly tone as if she were recounting the plot of a book she had recently read, “I was wed to him for his wealth and because my father knew his people. Little could I know he would die bankrupt and leave the mess to my children and I.”

Although she should be angry, Anna would be, Mrs Hewlett did not sound like it, which surprised her.

“We didn’t love each other, but we were fated until death did us part and after all, we had our two children, unto whom he was a good father. My husband was a good man, and a good friend. I hope you can say the same of yours?”

Clearly, by providing her intimate information about herself, Mrs Hewlett hoped to receive some about her in return.

Anna tensed, not knowing what to do. Not to tell her anything would be rude, to lie would be unwise too. Reluctantly and on her guard, she decided to say a few vague things Edmund and his sister knew already and which thus could not be used against her.

“We were not happy, it was a match made for me, too.”

“As most are. Now, where does my son come into this?”

“It is a very long story. And I am not sure if it can be called that.”

“Why has he brought you here?”, the old woman demanded to know, “He would hardly have taken you with him if he did not like you.”

Anna did not like the way Mrs Hewlett stressed the word like. This was it, she was going to be chased from the house within the hour. No mother would want her son to keep the company of a serial adulteress, penniless widow and, seeing as Mrs Hewlett was clearly English and did not share the American sentiment of freedom her people had in common with some of the Scottish highlanders, a former rebel spy.

Perhaps she could go with Mr Fraser, who was sleeping in the hay loft over the stable, and would be, now that his task was completed, bound for his highland home somewhere near Inverness. Nobody would know her or look for her, should somehow some of her former activities and her current
dwelling become known, there.

“It is a long story.”

“I see.” There was no quick or easy way to explain what had transpired and she had no idea what to say.

“There are things you don’t wish to tell.”

“Yes”, Anna answered cautiously.

“Perhaps this is a tale for another night, another time”, Mrs Hewlett closed, leaving it open if she meant the coming evening or some vague moment in days to come.

“Now, let my maid take you to our guest room. I suppose it is not your story alone to tell, it is my son’s, too.”

Duncleade, Scotland, a month later.

“What a lovely stitch you have”, a voice called her from her thoughts.

Anna looked up from her embroidery and set the frame aside. Of late, there had not been much else to do for her.

“Thank you, Eliza.”

The latter, just returned from one of her frequent visits to the local garrison, smiled and ran her fingers across the beautiful flower pattern Anna was adding to a waistcoat. The embroidery-things had been a present by Mrs Hewlett, who thought a respectable lady ought to have a pastime other than lending a helping hand where she could and wandering aimlessly across the estate at any given time of the day and by now, Anna had come to know the area well enough not to have to explore it at all times.

It was accurate and time-consuming work, but it also allowed her to lose herself in the intricate patterns and designs and feel some sort of contention at seeing how beautifully the flowers started to blossom on the light-green silk at the end of an evening’s work when the light would no longer suffice to continue working with needle and thread.

While it gave her some measure of contention to have something to busy her hands with, she often found herself staring out of the window and into the surrounding landscape.

Scotland was so different from America, the bright greens of the grass that was nourished by the constant rainfalls that ambushed any unsuspecting person out on the road on a seemingly nice day quicker and more effectively than the Queen’s Rangers, the small stone-walls, piled up centuries ago to mark the boundaries of property that had not changed owners since the times of the Celts, that fearsome savage people of old often described in song and story disconcertingly looking like Simcoe, tall, broad-shouldered and with hair like flames. All he would have had to do was to remove his clothing from his upper body and replace it with fearsome war paint.
The houses looked different, too - not wood, grey stone and tiny streets marked the features of Scotland, so different from the often far-apart farms of her home.

The birdsong sounded different, too, and the smell of the earth after a long day’s rain was not the same, either and the in some cases heavy accent of the local people was entirely unfamiliar to her as well- sometimes, when thinking about these things, she wondered if she had made the right choice to go away.

What hurt her most was not being near those people whom she had held dear all her life- Caleb, Ben, even Abe. For the largest part of her life, these friends had been with her, had grown up alongside her from young children playing in the fields behind Whitehall to adulthood.

Setauket had never treated her kindly after her unhappy marriage and her consecutive affair with Abe had become the town’s best known and most talked about secret, the attainder and Simcoe’s unholy obsession with her had further sullied her name and at last, the wedding had struck the last blow against what had remained of her respectability. Still, even if nobody there would ever look her in the eyes again and people would whisper in hushed tones behind her back, she missed Setauket somehow, her home.

-A home in which she was not welcome any longer.

Where did she belong to?

She had been a rebel and taken pride in being called that. She had fought for her country, her belief in a free America.

Now, she sat in Scotland, since centuries subdued by the English and mingled with the polite society of Lowland-scots who did their best to pretend to being as fashionable as London society, even if the latest fads and fashions only arrived there a week or two after they had fallen out of favour in the capital.

Strictly speaking, she was in enemy territory. Eliza, who had seated herself next to her, even was a frequent visitor at the local garrison; to think she had once plotted the deaths of many redcoats-

Who was she? Right now, she felt like a leaf fallen off its native tree and carried by the whims of the autumn winds sometimes in this direction and that, uncertain where it would finally come to rest.

This feeling had only intensified when a mere two weeks ago, news from America had reached them. The war was de facto not over- Even if there was as yet no formalisation of this fact there was no denying that Britain had lost.

She thought of everyone she knew and kept dear in her heart, people who were her friends still, her comrades in the secret battle they had fought, thought of Ben in his shining helmet and proud blue uniform and Caleb grinning from ear to ear, tossing his hat into the air.

She should have been a part of this, the celebrations reported of throughout America, sharing her joy with her friends or at least feeling proud of the service she had dedicated to her country and consider herself recompensed for the hardships she had willingly endured for it, but she did not.

Sometimes, she thought of returning. At other times, she scolded herself for such thoughts and abandoned them quickly: where would she go? Over the past month, she had become a permanent resident in the Hewlett home and assisted them as good as she could as she saw this as the only way she could repay Mrs Hewlett for her magnanimous offer to stay here as long as she liked, seeing as she lacked the financial means to leave them anytime soon.
Her wardrobe was a wild mixture of old things of the days when Mrs Hewlett had been young, some things of Eliza’s younger days and a few donations by good Samaritans who saw it as their duty to aid a woman in a perilous situation.

The local people did not know much about her and seemed content with that; while they were always friendly to her and sometimes engaged her in a conversation, it was clear they enjoyed the idea of the mysterious stranger and sometimes talked behind her back, exchanging wild theories about the reasons for her leaving America without a penny in her pocket.

In recent time, she had started earning herself a little on the side by mending clothes. It did not pay well, but it was something at least. Having been asked to embroider a waistcoat for a local gentleman was her greatest project so far and the first that exceeded taking cares of wholes and tears in breeches and dresses. If it would turn out well, she could maintain reasonable hope word of her skillfulness would spread and draw more people to her.

Mrs Hewlett (“Call me Charlotte, dear”) did not like her new business endeavour much as she said it was not befitting a lady of her “station”, though Anna sincerely asked herself what she meant by that. Any supposed station she had in this little town, essentially a Scottish Setauket, though less hostile, was based on the fact she stayed with the Hewletts, who were respected members of the community, though not as rich as apparently they had been before the trade boycotts had bankrupted the late Mr Hewlett.

Her past, at least for the moment, was not important; a few times Mrs Hewlett had tried to make further enquiries among all parties she deemed knowing more than she did, but at last relented somewhat, contenting herself with the fact that her guest was hard-working and provided good company to her.

“You are homesick”, Eliza, who had grown closest to what could be called a friend, stated bluntly.

Slowly, not wanting to think about anything related to the country of her birth, Anna answered: “Yes. I miss- I miss my friends, my life there even sometimes. I was not a respected woman- not with my past. But I had my own place, worked for my own money, even in camp, while here-“ Eliza wrapped an arm around her shoulder in order to provide some comfort to her.

“This is your home now, here”, she tried, gesturing around the room with her free hand, “mother likes you and Edmund-" she paused, “Edmund has got used to it.”

*Edmund has got used to it,* this was one way to phrase it. While he was still avoiding her as best as he could, his froideur had ebbed, as had his anger, which he had displayed in such a concerning fashion on their voyage.

He had become a quiet presence, never much visible among his much more outspoken, communicative mother and sister who enjoyed an active social life largely comprised of visiting and being visited, in which they urged her to participate. Standing in stark contrast to them, he was often left to his own devices, studying the stars in his room.

Whenever the two of them by some measure of chance met somewhere alone, he reduced himself to utmost civility that lacked the familiarity of two people who had come to know each other as well as they had.

When he saw her lifting something he presumed heavy, he suggested he lift it for her and when she entered a room, his hand opened the door. They were just like two planets whose paths crossed at certain times without colliding or touching, coexisting in a precarious state of being close to each other and not being close all at once.
With Anna Strong now living in his home, there was no possibility to evade each other anymore. She was always with his mother, who liked her and regarded her as her personal companion, and when she was not, she tried to help where she could, which she regarded as a way of earning her living in this household.

Of course, she needed not to think such things and upon questioning his conscience, he found he quite disliked her attitude, for she was not a servant-maid, she had been a woman of property and quality, if of such could be spoken regarding Colonists on rural Long Island, before fate had decided otherwise and reduced her station considerably.

No, not fate. He had done that. He had given Richard the attainder against her husband as a Christmas present in a most unchristian gesture and, although her husband’s treason had effectively sparked the wildfire of her destruction, he had held the torch to the pyre of her former life.

He shook his head. She had wronged him, wronged him terribly, and yet, he had done the same.

Perhaps it was her right to worm her way back into his life as a means of penance assigned to him by the Lord, he was to perpetually behold the woman whom he had wronged and who had justly avenged her misfortune in return.

Unable to concentrate, he lowered the pen with which he had been making additions and notes on a copy of Halley’s *Astronomiae Cometicae Synopsis*. Not even the stars were far away enough from the earth and the world he tried to escape these days.

Looking out of the window, he perchance (mischance?) espied Anna, a basket at her hip that was filled with white linen. The thought that she, not only the woman the family employed for such duties, at times washed and starched the shirts he wore filled him with an inexplicable feeling of excitement and embarrassment in equal measure.

Those were private things he wore against his own skin, not intended for the eyes of a stranger, on the other, had certain things not come to pass, she would have seen far more than his shirt—stopping himself right there before he would descend into the dark Orcus of once-happy memories, of Anna’s kiss that now, faded to posterity, tasted like a cup of hemlock on his lips, his grip tightened around the pen, almost snapping it.

Sometimes, he still was angry with her, which was one of the reasons he tried to avoid her as best as he could, for her protection and his in equal measure.

What good was there in dark thoughts accumulating like storm clouds whenever he beheld her face, looked at her when they sat opposite one another at the table or were forced to stay in the same room at gatherings or during conversation in the evening, and what good would reminding her of her own sin do whenever he crossed her path? However recently, he had found it had become harder for him to be angry. A part of him, he reasoned, had wanted to be just that for a long, long time until he remembered what such negative emotions did to people.

He did not want to die a Simcoe or an Arnold, which was motivation enough for him to attempt at least one thing, namely compiling a complete and annotated edition of Edmond Halley’s works in the hours of his hermit-like solitude spent in his room.
Major Hewlett had not made a mark on history, or on life itself indeed and would pale to nothingness over the course of time, whereas the scholar Mr Hewlett, the degree-less dilettante as the true luminaries of his discipline would certainly call him, still stood a chance, whatever this meant.


Fighting the urge to look out of the window like a bored schoolboy again, he at last gave in and watched Anna as she hung items of clothing and large bedsheets for drying in the sun.

She was slender, yet, under his mother’s insistence she would take a second helping at supper no more disconcertingly thin, which likely had been a product of living in the squalid conditions at Washington’s camp. Her dark hair, much of it having escaped her coiffure as always, danced in the gentle breeze of this uncharacteristically fine day and when she turned, having removed the plain white fichu obscuring her neckline, probably because it grew too warm under it while working, he could not help but look at the advantageous figure she struck, her chest heaving lightly with exertion.

No, he shouldn’t look at her.

Perhaps it would be indeed for the best to find himself a situation elsewhere, resign from the army for good (though he currently needed the pay he still received to maintain his studies and the house) and try to live the life of a gentleman-scholar if his treatises sold well, perhaps he might even become a professor or some such.

It would be best for both of them, for him and for Anna.

The other day, he had found her standing by the great windows of the drawing room, looking out into the distance. His initial thought had been to approach her and ask her what she was doing, but he had caught himself before he had done that however as he did not want her to believe he was spying on her or finding joy in watching other people when they were not aware of his presence.

She was homesick, no doubt. For how could a rebel spy feel at home in a majority loyalist town close to England’s border? There was nothing to do for her here except her attempts to be useful and accompanying his sister and mother on outings.

In that moment, he realised she was just as entrapped in this place as he.

They couldn’t remain in this place together and yet he had become accustomed to her presence, a part of his daily routine he would notice if it were missing.

As he had done so often before, he tried to make sense of why she was here, why she had jumped. Clearly, he could not deny the suspicions he had harboured against her right from the beginning, but the way in which she acted around his mother and sister did not speak of such motives- she was a spy, a talented actress and he should know best of all people. He shook his head.

After supper in the evening, his mother and Eliza had forced him and Anna into a round of whist, Eliza partnering with Anna and he with Mother.

Never having been particularly fond of card parties, he endured it for their sake as he did not want to be the reason they were bereft of their joy playing, for they needed a fourth player.

A few minutes in, a frantic knock at the door woke them from their concentration and sent him to his feet with a start.

Without waiting to be asked in, little David, the cook’s son, stood before them, rain-wet from head to toe.
“Mrs Greenwood, Major Hewlett, come quick! There has been an accident by the crossroads to Dumfries, a carriage overturned! The horses are going wild and nobody dares to come closer! They say they need you, because you like horses and-“

The boy’s voice broke off as he was still fighting for breath from running.

“How have you been at the garrison? Did you get help?”

David shook his head.

“Mother said to get Major Hewlett first.”

“I’ll do that then. You stay here with Mrs Hewlett and keep her company, will you, David?” his sister declared and was out of the room before anyone could say another word.

He was half-way out of the door when he noticed Anna, who had risen too, standing lost in the middle of the room.

“I’ll come with you.”

“This is out of the question, Anna. I cannot-”

For the first time in months, he had called her by her by her Christian name again. This however, Anna remarked upon only much later.

“No, I take responsibility for myself. If there are people in need for help, I am sure every pair of good hands is needed.”

Apparently, he couldn’t argue with that as he only grunted something incomprehensible before he walked into the rain without even putting a coat on.

Following him, they soon reached the carriage, which had fallen so unfortunately into a muddy roadside ditch the door could not be opened and the horses, still attached to it, were in panic.

A small crowd of people had gathered there already, but no one dared to step closer to the two spooked beasts.

“Major Hewlett”, a man she recognised as a neighbour exclaimed with relief, “what luck you are here.” Inside the carriage, voices could be heard and even through the darkness, a fist banging against the window was visible.

“Don’t worry, we’re coming to get you”, the minister’s housekeeper assured the unfortunate souls inside.

Her employer had been called, too, yet it appeared to Anna his spiritual assistance was at the moment not as much required as his hands would be as soon as they would be able to attempt rescuing the passengers.
Edmund walked towards the two horses, their eyes rolling to the back of the head and struggling to free themselves.

A few times, their hooves had crashed against the coach, at which one could only hope the people inside had not been hurt.

Slowly and calmly he walked through the rain towards the animals and raised his hands as if to show he was unarmed.

Anna did not know what this meant or why he was doing this, all she knew was that she did not believe in whatever magic he was trying to cast here and prayed he would not be hurt. At the thought of him lying on the ground, his head smashed by a horse’s hoof, her heart missed a few beats- he was such a fool.

She could not look away. The left horse indeed calmed somewhat after some moments of Edmund trying to soothe it, and he managed to free it. As he was about to lead it out of the ditch, which luckily was not very deep, and onto the road, she stepped towards him, taking the reins from him to allow him go back for the second horse.

There was no time to exchange thanks as they needed to be double-quick helping the passengers, leaving Anna to hope Edmund would be able to free the second horse quickly.

Alas, the second horse was not as easily persuaded by Edmund and thus made getting it free from the drawbar in the dark rather difficult.

“I need help”, Edmund shouted, his usually cool and almost haughty demeanour gone, “someone come and hold it by the holster-“ The poor spooked creature had started flinging its head from left to right, probably thinking Edmund was its enemy, not its saviour and tried to break free on its own. Well aware of the danger of the horse’s stomping hooves, Anna pressed the reins of the first horse into the hands of the coach driver (who, though shocked, had survived the fall without any greater injuries than a few bruises) and followed Edmund’s call.

“Not you. Go-“ were the first words he said to her, but they were not spoken with the same cold rejection she had come to expect from him. In fact, he sounded afraid and wary of the mighty animal between them.

Without allowing the conversation to deepen to a fruitless exchange of no-s, Anna reached for the animal’s holster, bracing herself to be thrown back into the mud behind her.

“Hush”, she tried, remembering she had kept herself up and riding a horse when barely feeling alive and tried to calm herself by imagining this was Salem, not some strange animal with strong legs and hooves two or three times the size of her palm.

To his infinite surprise, Anna managed to hold the horse relatively still without incident. There was one thing one could not deny, Anna Strong was a woman of bravery, perhaps mixed with a more or less unhealthy amount of recklessness that had prompted her to act in this very moment and had prompted her to join the rebels in a life gone by.

At last, with the horses out of the way, they were able to free the passengers when Eliza’s beau
arrived with a number of men. The travellers, two men and a woman on their way to Glasgow, who were shaken, but unharmed except for one suffering a mild concussion and a few bruises, which they could sleep off at the local tavern, where beds were readied for the three unfortunate souls.

Captain Barnett insisted on walking Eliza home on his arm (in case it had not been obvious before their departure, their mutual feelings for another clearly were now, even in the darkness), walking a little before him and Anna.

Feeling awkward not talking to her in this moment, he began: “What you did was very brave, thank you.”

She made a dismissive gesture and looked at him with those pools of indefinite darkness, of myth and legend, of secrets yet to be uncovered, saying “someone had to.” It occurred to him he could have delivered a scalding reply saying “just as someone had to spy for Washington, I take it? Congratulations on your victory”, but he chose not to.

There was no use in such behaviour and besides, he was a lot more interested in how she had come to be able to calm the horse when he had not been able to.

“I just did what I thought- I don’t know.”

Maybe she really did not know. Fear and the need to act could prompt people to do a great variety of things they would under normal circumstances not consider themselves capable of.

“I was unaware you were a horsewoman”, Edmund continued, thinking of the large brown stallion in their stable.

He had been curious how Anna had come into possession of this animal, but he had never asked out of principle.

“I am not”, Anna answered quickly and shook her head. “I’ve had worse when I-“

“What happened?”, he asked, positively concerned.

“It is a very long story”, she answered without looking him in the face, “not to be told here”.

Nodding, he remained silent for the rest of the way, but planned to speak to her later out of sheer curiosity, or so he liked to tell himself.

Home again, all parties retired to find some dry clothing before relaying the tale to the matriarch of the house, who had tried to teach young David card tricks in the meantime and roasted pieces of bread in the fireplace to pass the time.

Anna returned downstairs in Eliza’s old dressing gown, which he remembered having seen on his sister when the latter had been a teenager worn as an overcoat over a dry dress which too stemmed from his sister’s effects.

Mother was all ears and eagerly demanded to know everything, later praising all three of them for having taken action, when so many “ne’er do wells and gawkers” had not dared to help.

Soon after, both she and Eliza, retired to bed, leaving him and Anna alone in front of the dying fire.

“You asked about the horse”, she began, biting her lip as if not knowing what to say, how to continue.
“You remember I said that I couldn’t lie to a man anymore who never lied to me?”

He nodded briskly. How could he?

“I’ll tell you the truth.”

Why did she make it sound as if there was some hideous mystery behind the animal? Had she robbed him? Anna was a great many things, but a petty criminal she was not. As in all aspects of her person, she was a superlative- in her beauty, for which he had not long ago fallen, her bravery, which she had demonstrated today, and her crimes too, for nought but treason had previously been good enough for her.

“Salem, that’s his name, he is Simcoe’s.”

His stomach felt as if a heavy rock had fallen onto it, painfully crushing his intestines.

“Simcoe’s?”, he repeated incredulously, still hoping he had misheard the name.

“Yes. He gave him to me.” “What on earth-“

“When I was on the boat to Setauket, we sailed into a storm. I knew something was wrong, but prayed my intuition to be mistaken- and scolded myself for not having stayed in York City, either.”

“Why?”

So far, he could not make sense of anything she was telling him, leaving him anxious and confused.

“Because I knew what I wanted then, to stay with you. We’d had the chance to talk there, at Mrs Arnold’s house, but we didn’t and then, caught on the waves when I went overboard, I thought my life was over for the one wrong decision I made-“

“You went overboard?”

His brow furrowed with concern, he dragged his chair closer to hers to better understand her as she spoke in a very low tone.

“I did. I was unconscious for long and when I awoke, I was in a little hamlet, and Simcoe was towering over me.”

Upon retelling this, Anna shuddered as if she still were drenched with the icy waters of the sound.

“He found me and saved my life. He wanted to take me with him, but he let me go, told me to take his horse to get away.”

Simcoe had let her go? Perhaps she had been delirious, she had mentioned having been unconscious for certainly, had the man really been Simcoe, he would not have let her go. He would have suffocated her in his embrace and dragged her before the next best altar without her consent to truly make her his. Simcoe had never known the concept of personal boundaries, especially when his twisted idea of what love was was involved.

“Are you certain-“

“I am, I was there. You see, I had reason not to tell you about this before, because, while I vowed never again lie to you, I could not tell you the truth in this matter either. You appeared to be distressed, to say the very least that I am here. I realise I might have made the wrong choice coming to Scotland with you-“
“Stop it.”

Her eyes, widened with terrors gone by and her fear of his reaction to her tale, which made him somewhat ashamed of himself and the image she has of him, found his.

“You need not recall things to me that pain you. I would hate to force you to relive such terrors as being captured by Simcoe again. It is the past, which does not affect the present.”

“Doesn’t it?”, Anna countered.

“It does not. You are here, with or without my knowledge of where our friend Salem came from.”

“But it does”, she silenced him, frustrated with his narrow-minded and short-sighted assumptions. “If the past wouldn’t affect the present we would- we would-“

She did not need to say any more, she could see it in his eyes and on his quivering lower lip that he understood and felt the same.

“You are right, Anna”, he answered her, his voice sad and brittle. “But the past- it need not be the future, even if it is the present. And Simcoe- he is far away, likely in America still. You need not worry about him.”

Hembury Fort House, residence of Admiral Samuel Graves, Devon, England, earlier the same day.

It got worse before it got any better, even though he was back on dry land. Unable to walk without assistance or a cane, his bones broken, he was still alive, his soul still encaged in its prison of useless flesh and bone.

Hewlett hadn’t come to kill him, poison him or whatever a weakling like him would do (for he was a weakling for not showing his face to end his enemy when he could have) to rid themselves of an undesirable character, which appeared most disappointing to him at the time as he stared out of the window, his back turned to the door.

He hadn’t left his bed the day before and he was not keen on doing so today, either.

After all, there was nothing for him to do, no rebels to catch, no men to drill and besides, he didn’t even have the body to complete these tasks.

They’d drag him out of his bed soon enough, though; in the afternoon, the Admiral had invited for a hunt and the men, some of whom he knew from America, would demand to know where he was would he not show his face. He’d do it, if only in order not to overstretch the patience the old man had shown to him over the past few weeks. He was quite fine in his room, this oversized coffin, waiting impatiently for one of his injuries (currently healing, which was most disappointing) to claim him.
Finally dressed in an ill-fitting suit of black that markedly showed how considerably a toll his sickness had taken on his body, the only decent set of civilian clothing he owned, he hobbled downstairs, supported by a cane like an old man. Not even the Admiral at age sixty-eight needed one.

Outside, in front of the house, a congregation of riders and hounds was already waiting for the signal to start chasing the fox they were supposed to catch. Amidst this busy scene of lively chatter and anticipation of the action soon to come, he spotted a few familiar faces.

He preferred watching from afar as he had no desire to talk to any of these men, whose wives sat at tea with his godfather’s wife and the latter’s ward.

“John”, he heard someone call out and found General Sir Henry Clinton walk towards him. His patronising smile, use of Christian name and much too hard pat on the arm made him sick to his stomach and reminded him of the regular treatment of supposed concern he had to endure from his godfather.

“How are you faring? Will you join the hunt?”

“I am afraid I am not quite able to ride just yet.”

“Not the best endorsement for a cavalry man, is it?”, Clinton said, knowing he was currently not in a state to even beg for any post, however much he would like to go on campaign again and planned to do so as soon as he was sufficiently restored to health, should he not die, which was still an option to be considered, perhaps even anticipated.

“Indeed not”, he shrugged a little helplessly.

“Why don’t you enjoy your convalescence, indulge a hobby, find a wife? I’ve heard Jonathan Cooke married an actress from the New York stage and brought her back to Surrey-“

“With respect, Sir, I have no taste for actresses.”

Before his mind’s eye, the images of Lady Lola’s teasing smile and Anna Strong, rescued and not drowned asleep beside him lingered for a moment, delivering a sharp pang to his heart.

“Well then. I assume we shall hear from you sooner or later?”

Clinton’s faux-paternal smile, which otherwise would have enraged him, suddenly made him feel very alone.

“I hope so.”

He was not certain what to hope for. Even when recovered, Cornwallis was not his biggest supporter and many of the other officers had taken a dislike to him, too- whatever post they’d give him, it would be one of no consequence and importance, somewhere where he’d rather fight the weather than anything else, extremely cold or extremely hot, where no other, in their eyes more valuable, better man, could be sent.

They would find a suitable punishment for him, and not sent him anywhere from where he’d return crowned with the laurels of success but drenched in the shame of defeat, or even somewhere one could bring the hypothetical wife Clinton had spoken of.

When the horn sounded and the dogs’ bark indicated the animals were eager to give chase, Clinton excused himself to mount his horse and he watched on as the hunt left without him, almost as if it
had been staged as an intentional metaphor for his life.

“They’ve caught the scent. They never tire chasing their quarry but then, they’re only hounds. It’s all they know.”

His eyes followed the General until he and the other riders, encircled by a pack of yowling and growling hunting dogs, disappeared by the forest line in the distance.

“Colonel Simcoe, won’t you join us inside? You have been enquired after.”

He did not even turn around to acknowledge the speaker, Mrs Graves’ late sister’s daughter, her ward and surrogate daughter to the Admiral. Apparently, they regarded him as part of their inventory now, for now he was supposed to join the ladies at tea- what was he to do, make merry and tell anecdotes as the other officers did, like a well-trained little dog performing tricks for their amusement?

-There was nothing amusing about war.

“I would prefer not to.”

“I understand”, Miss Gwillim replied in a tone he did not recognise as mockery, which some gentlemen had been so good as to extent to him or pity, the sentiment Admiral Graves and General Clinton exhibited when in his company.

For a while, neither of them said anything before he managed to ask, on a whim, if she would mind staying outside with him a little longer and she, standing next to him, nodded and adjusted her ruffled *fichu à quatre falbalas* to cover her bosom from the cool wind. She simply stood there, not saying any cheerful words he did not want to hear or offering unwanted commiserations. In that moment, he came to the conclusion that silence could express so much more at times than words could as he looked down at the positively small dark-haired woman beside him.

Although the wind was quite cold, he was not and neither was Miss Gwillim, for they continued in their odd statue-like pursuit for a long while before she bid him come inside with her once more and he obliged.

Duncleade, Scotland, the same night.

“I thank you for your honesty, Anna, it is much appreciated. And I would like to, as you, ah, have made it plain to me my- ah, my conduct in recent weeks, has been- disagreeable to you, I would like to apologise. It was not my intention to cause you any pain, certainly not.”

“I would like to apologise, too”, Anna said slowly in a soft and slow tone that spoke of how vulnerable, how much in torment she felt at that moment.

“For the one thing I ever regretted-“

Edmund’s head tilted to the side like that of a beagle, eager to hear what she had to say- had the situation not been so serious, she would have smiled.
“There is only one thing I regret. I don’t regret having been a rebel, I don’t regret my work for Washington, I don’t even regret what happened between me and Abe, and I never will. What I do regret is having lied to you. It was necessary to preserve your life, and I knew the price I would pay for it would be high.”

“You were not the only one who paid a price, Anna.”

In the glowing embers of the firelight, Edmund’s eyes glistened with the hint of tears brought on by the memory of the ill-fated day she had almost married him.

“But what would you have had me do then? Should I have left you to Abe to be killed? The only way to save you, and save Abe, too, was the one I took. And when I did not answer you when you asked me if I ever loved you- I could not lie to you and say no to send you on your way and if I had said yes, you would have stayed for my sake, which I could not risk. I figured a broken heart can be mended if given time, which I considered preferable to you meeting an untimely end.”

“Then how would you have answered?”

In this moment, she felt like being transported back to that fateful evening at Rivington’s coffee house, reliving that terrible night again.

Her brain formed the words perfectly, the answer “that I love you” came as naturally to her as her own name, however her tongue was tied, a useless slab of flesh unable to move at her command.

Edmund watched on, his eyes now filling with tears as the bandages of time were forcefully torn off their still open wounds on their souls and forced them both to relive a day they would rather forget.

Swallowing hard, she brought herself to say “I- I would have told you, if I would have had a choice.”

“You must know I loved you, Anna, I truly do. Don’t cry. It is of no use, we cannot turn time back to eradicate things we would rather forget.”

Although he delivered this little speech in a supposedly cool, scientific tone, the trembling in his voice gave him away.

This time, it was he who had lied. He had not loved her, his face told her otherwise. He still did, beneath his pain and cynicism and everything she disliked about him with all her heart, he still did, for whatever this was worth now.

“Tomorrow is a new day. I propose we leave this topic and retire to bed, and leave it for good. It does neither of us good to belabour past woes and agony.”

“I agree”, Anna said, trying to discreetly wipe a tear from the corner of her right eye by means of her sleeve.

“I see now what you did and what your motives were, I cannot say I did in the beginning but I do now”, Edmund went on, “and I thank you for sparing my life. I, and those precious few who find my presence not entirely superfluous, are indebted to you. Allow me to offer you my –friendship in return.”

“Friendship”, Anna repeated blankly and instantly felt the lump in her throat grow again, even if her mind told her she should be happy.

“My friendship”, he said again, this time with a nervous smile, “and I hope to have yours, too.”
“Of course”, she answered. “My friendship.”

The word left a sour aftertaste in her mouth. Wasn’t this a lie, too? She had said friendship, but not meant it. And he did not mean it either, but time had forged sharp blades from the letters of the word both of them meant instead, which was why they did not use it; too high was the probability to hurt or to be hurt again.

Chapter End Notes

The choice of location where Anna first lays eyes onto the western outskirts of Europe was absolutely intentional:
1.) I love the song “The Cliffs of Dooneen” by Christy Moore.
2.) Two star-crossed lovers on a ship crossing the Atlantic, anyone? Although the “Jane” did not sink and travelled in the opposite direction, Dooneen, Co. Cork was a deliberate allusion to the “Titanic” and the popular film by the same name, whose last harbour before meeting its terrible fate was Queenstown (today Cobh), also in Co. Cork and, viewed from the sea, is only a short voyage from Dooneen.
3.) Well, this one is more complicated:
Firstly, Dooneen is situated among such fun place names as Howe’s Strand and BallyANNA, which provide very subtle allusions to the story if you are an enthusiast of south Co. Cork geography or a local from that area.
Secondly, Dooneen belongs to Oldcourt Lower, which is a not-so-subtle allusion to the end of this chapter. Old Court, this time spelt apart and not situated in Ireland but in the Wye Valley/Forest of Dean in the border region between England and Wales, bears a huge significance to two characters from this fic.
Old Court, today a hotel, is the birth place of Elizabeth Gwillim, the future Mrs Simcoe, who had a cameo in this chapter. When the last inhabitants, her paternal grandmother and two aunts, died, it passed into the hands of Colonel and Mrs Simcoe. In addition to this, in or around the same village where Old Court is situated, scenes for “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part One” were filmed- if I am not mistaken, this may have been the chase through the Forest of Dean, where Harry, Hermione and Ron are kidnapped by “snatchers” – contract kidnappers and bounty hunters. One snatcher, uncredited and with a whopping two lines of dialogue (“It was in her back when we searched her. Reckon it’s mine now.”), was played by one Samuel Roukin.
To round the whole thing off, the Coleridge and Simcoe-families were close. In fact, Mary, whose poem we have prefacing this chapter, is the niece of John Taylor Coleridge (1790-1875), himself the nephew of the famous Samuel Taylor Coleridge of “Tintern Abbey” fame, whom Eliza Simcoe (1784-1865), Simcoe’s eldest daughter, named as executor of her will.
How could I leave this triple-Simcoe-connection alone? And please, can I get ten points for Ravenclaw?

Eliza's opinions on Irish politics are a taste of what will come at the end of the century, which will see Irish rebels collaborate with the French to free themselves of British rule in a failed naval operation and on land, the so-called Wexford Rebellion of 1798.

Fraser, the Scotsman: Ok, I confess, this is another dig at the “Outlander” books and TV-series. As “TURN” never left an opportunity to do the same (if you want some theories, just ask me and I’ll elaborate in the comments) I could not resist doing the same here.
Gretna Green: a Scottish village just across the border. Given the loose Scottish marriage laws at the time, a haven for eloping English couples.

Middle name: I just love the idea of Hewlett having an awkward middle name, while his sister’s was probably chosen for a godmother or simply because her parents liked it. He doesn’t usually use it for some reason. Theophilus (named after Pope Theophilus of Alexandria) is a crater on the moon, so I thought it fits. Additionally, the German translation of “Theophilus” is “Gottlieb” – this one is for all you “Pacific Rim” fans out there, where Burn Gorman plays the scientist Dr. Hermann Gottlieb.

“Astronomiae Cometicae Synopsis”: an essay by Edmond Halley (1656-1742), English translation: “A Synopsis of the Astronomy of the Comets”. The English translation is available online (culturally elitist that he is, Hewlett of course only reads the Latin, though).

Fichu á quatre falbalas: admittedly, I only can safely confirm this particular style of fichu, a triangular kerchief to cover the neckline particularly worn for day dress in the 18th and early 19th century, from a German drawing approximately five years later in the decade, but as Elizabeth was an extremely stylish and fashion-conscious woman, Germany usually took some time copying English fashions and coupled with a teaspoon of artistic license, it existed in late summer/early autumn 1781 for the purposes of this story. Quatre falbalas describes there being four layers of pleats or ruffles on it.

As we have already addressed this topic above, a note on time: please notice that here, I submitted somewhat to the timeline of “TURN”, where the exterior scenes of season four, which comprised all the major battles, were shot in spring instead of Yorktown e.g. being in October. I’ve dragged Yorktown into late June/early July, so we’re in August / September 1781 by now.

Also credit to AMC for the quotes and open allusions to season 4, episode 10 in particular.
Amor and Amiability

Chapter Summary

Edmund has a think, Eliza and Alexander have done some thinking, too and everyone has a thing for someone.

Chapter Notes

For once, a more light-hearted chapter, at least by my standards I suppose as the title (inspired by the title of the ingenious "Blackadder"'s S03E05 "Amy and Amiability") might already indicate. Sorry for the long wait, I still grapple somewhat with writing everything that is not pure misery.

Anywho, I just had a look at the viewing figures and I am so humbled, thank you so much for tuning in for more than a year now. I am super grateful for everyone who clicked, kudos'd, commented and embarked on this journey with me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[...]

Love, why do we one passion call?
When 'tis a compound of them all;
Where hot and cold, where sharp and sweet,
In all their equipages meet;
Where pleasures mixed with pains appear,
Sorrow with joy, and hope with fear.

[...]

( Jonathan Swift, Cadenus and Vanessa, 1726)

“Have it”, Eliza Greenwood told her and trusted the silk, yarn and needles into her hands. I am not patient enough for this game and have already started. Cut off the pieces with the embroidery already on it and use the rest as you please.”
Anna wanted to refuse, as she was not intent on taking alms, but her hostess remained firm.

“You take it; I am certain you will put it to better use than I, who left it laying idle for many months.”

And so, Anna had come into possession of an abandoned project Mrs Greenwood despite the price she had likely paid for both the yarn and the fabric, was not intent to finish.

It certainly was something else, blue silk decorated in white with alignments of stars stitched onto it. Eliza had been very meticulous and accurate when she had started, which made Anna wonder if she had ever wanted to be finished within her lifetime. This was too laborious a task for one person and certainly, to be done with it more or less timely almost impossible.

She would find use for it, as the project had not progressed too far and much of the fabric was still useable.

In the meantime, Eliza had wandered over to the window and looked outside.

“You must excuse me, there is somebody waiting for me”, Eliza excused herself, smiling.

Anna did not bother to turn; she knew exactly who that was. Captain Barnett was laying siege to the house, or rather, to Eliza, who had not hesitated to reciprocate his attentions.

As a fellow widow, she was of course free to choose male company and Anna, aware of her own rather unconventional story, was the last person to stand in the way of love, having personally encountered the joylessness of a loveless marriage and the stigma of having taken a lover, but it nevertheless irked her to see a redcoat officer around the house.

Even though she now lived in Britain, though not England proper, she could not help but resent the presence of the men at the garrison. Mostly, she did so silently and consoled herself with the fact that the Scots, at least those in the Highlands, disliked the army and the Empire just as much as she and her friends had done when they had formed the Ring.

And the redcoats weren’t all like that- not that it mattered.

Once more, she wondered what had become of those she left behind, but had never dared to write- after Yorktown, she was fearful to receive news of deaths, of letters being returned to her with the information that Ben, Caleb or even Abe had died and, rather selfishly, because if she did not hear how good they had it in the United States of America, she could not crave to never have come to Scotland any more than she already did.

She had been an opportunist, literally jumped at the chance when she had seen Edmund board the ship and while she had not done it because she had feared for herself, it without a doubt would have protected her from possible prosecution had the British won at Yorktown.

Sighing, she rose, intent on joining Charlotte Hewlett in her bedroom, to which she had lately taken with a cold to keep her company.

Had not everyone their company in this household? Eliza had her redcoat, she had Charlotte and Edmund had his stars.

He was kind to her now, polite at all times, but whenever they were in the same room, it felt as if they were miles apart, almost as if she was still in America and he here.

They were not living together in this house at all, just happened to inhabit it at the same moment in time.
“How’s your brother faring?”, Alexander asked, more out of politeness than anything else. All of Duncleade knew Edmund was only ever spotted outside at night and although everyone knew the purpose of his doings, it was mockingly commented that he made a right proper vampire sprung from a rustic tale from the far eastern edges of the European continent.

“Howm. The usual, I suppose, though he has found some politeness and manners in the presence of Mrs Strong recently, which I consider an improvement”, she dismissed the question quite indifferently, unwilling to discuss Edmund in what precious little time she was granted with Alexander, whose duty would call for him again all too soon.

“And Mrs Strong?”, he prodded further.

“She assists my mother, mends a few clothes or embroiders for those who approach her about it and generally tries to be pleasant.”

“So she is not always pleasant?”

“You take my words very literally, but yes, not always.”

“Why not?”

“She is grateful to our family and very partial to Mother, but I have the quiet feeling she resents you.”

Alexander pulled her arm closer to his and smirked.

“Oh, I can live with that. It is not her I mean to impress, you know. Though she is a very pretty woman-“

“Undeniably. Which makes your wooing me even more suspicious.”

Accustomed to her jests, he theatrically stopped and turned her by the shoulder to face him.

“Dear Widow Greenwood, pray tell me, what could a charlatan like me, who you must know only took the uniform out of cowardice as a seasick man like me would scarce be fit for the naval profession intended for me by my father (and of course, a red coat is more impressive to the ladies than a blue one) want of a penniless American rebel? Am I not better advised to make my company indispensable to the Queen of Scotland?”

Snorting, she called him a flatterer and linked their arms again.

Their little walks whenever Alexander found the time to do so had become her favourite part of each week. When on their own, they found time to talk and speak candidly. Alexander was really the only one with whom she could be this open, who would listen to her and whom she in turn was willing to listen to, something that could not be said about anybody at home.

News of the return of the lost Hewletts had of course spread like a wildfire through Duncleade and had not stopped at the garrison, from whence Alexander had hurried the very next day after their arrival to see her.

“Mrs Cooke”, he had whispered into her ear so nobody could hear, “I am pleased to see you have
“And instead of a husband I brought a sister-in-law”, was her reply, upon which she had bid him follow her outside and told him everything on a very long walk that had become their first of many.

He had been particularly impressed with her skill in trying to do away with Simcoe and praised her for a deed he would, even if properly armed, never have dared himself.

“Men are cowards”, she had then concluded the arduous topic of his childhood- and her much more recent enemy, “even soldiers.”

“Especially soldiers”, Alexander had added in a curious tone she had not previously come to know.

“My brother surely can be counted among their number”, she then remarked aridly in order to stir the topic away from any potential dark abyss back to the matter at present moving all Duncleade, “when you supped with us last week, did you see how he stared at her?”

“I certainly did”, Alexander replied, nodding, “but she, too. Mrs Strong cannot keep her eyes off Major Hewlett longer than he can takes his off hers.”

“…and yet, neither of the two will admit to it”, Eliza sighed, resting her head on his shoulder.

“It isn’t that easy”, Alexander reasoned.

“I understand you are frustrated, especially since you spent all day around the two, but think on it, of the entire situation the two are in.”

He was right of course and often, she asked herself how just she was in her anger, however, why did they never talk? It was incomprehensible to her. Yes, she and her brother had since childhood been described as being as different as day and night and where she had been vocal and demanding, Edmund had been shy and insecure, something many relatives had lamented, culminating in pats on the head and people saying she would have made a splendid little boy instead, which with time as she had grown had become more and more of an accusation than an amused little remark.

She’d grown out of ragingly demanding her will be done or storming off to hide somewhere without returning until she full well knew the entire house had already been searching for her for hours, but some of the flame she had had in her when young had remained.

In her mind, it was a lot simpler than Edmund and Anna were seeing things: Edmund had been responsible for much of Anna’s misery in America, had taken everything she had owned away and forced her into servitude in the same tavern she had once owned in order to please a ‘friend’. He had degraded her and subjected her to a life of hardship without knowing her, had taken her husband from her and thus shredded what little reputation she had had.

Anna in turn, as far as she knew, had plotted against Edmund and at last jilted him at the altar to save his life when she had not seen any other way to protect him from the assassination she would given her political inclinations just some two years ago or so not have minded coming about.

Why two people like that, stuck in their ideas and convictions like a heavy oxen-drawn cart in the mud and of so contrary positions at theirs could fall in love in the first place was inconceivable to her.
“Perhaps they need some help”, he offered Eliza, whose strained features only ever softened when they were far enough away from the house.

It was no secret he had started courting her, though not yet dared to call it such in front of her or anybody else. However, since she had returned, Major Hewlett and Mrs Strong had often been the centre of their discussions with little else taking precedence over Eliza's frustration with the two. Time would tell what would come of them, the Major and Mrs Strong, and of Eliza and him, though he hoped they stood under a more favourable star than the two unfortunates who had met in the Colonies.

The trust that had been established between them despite only having been acquainted very briefly before Eliza's departure for York City was unparalleled by anything he had known in his life, perhaps because partners in crime, as the two were, always had to cover their misdeeds together.

“Mrs Cooke” had been one hell of a good act and he congratulated himself without humbleness for having been able to feign Admiral Graves’ handwriting so convincingly, but in the end, the crown of thespianism had to be placed on Eliza's head, who had executed their plan so convincingly.

Seeing as they worked together so well, why not try a second time?

“They remind me of a play I saw in London once”, he started and was content to see Eliza look at him questioningly.

“A Tragedy Rehearsed? Or rather re-enacted?”

Alexander could not help but emit a chuckle. Never had he met anyone with quite so dry a humorous disposition before and he never ceased to be surprised by Eliza’s wit in situations like this one.

“No, The Taming of the Shrew!”

“Only our play knows two shrews and frankly, I was never fond of this one. I don’t like how Katharina is tamed.”

Her upper lip twitched in disgust.

“It is true not all can afford to marry for love, which is a luxury very few know, but at least one should have the choice and not be starved by an overeager suitor.”

“I am not suggesting that we starve either of them or imprison them against their will of course, what I meant—though perhaps expressed poorly—is that they need to be sent in the right direction if ever the paths of their lives should cross again. They are two, and we are two. It is a fair fight. For each shrew a shrewd.”

“Then what do you propose?”

“I don’t know, I haven’t thought that far yet. I propose we belay any further plotting to tomorrow and enjoy ourselves for now.”

“A good thought”, she agreed and with their arms interlinked, they continued for a while longer before dusk caused them to turn back to Duncleade.
He was relieved to see Mother was better and her cough much relived. He was thankful, too; mainly because Anna would now not occupy the seat by her bed any longer and Mother could move around the house with the assistance of a stick, for Anna’s constant presence had caused him to keep away fearing Mother, though ill, might make a comment that would embarrass them both in front of each other. If he was being honest to himself, he did not quite want to face Anna, either.

It was good to know they now shared what he had proposed was a friendship—though the word sounded hollow and devoid of any meaning past a formal agreement to lay down any active form of unrest or strife between them.

For a start, he did not know how to face her every day, how not to think of her deceit or the fact that she had all along when she had kissed him only closed her eyes to think of her beloved America. Really, how had he ever come to think any woman as fair as her would debase her eyes on him? He had been a vain fool and a conceited officer who had thought the authority awarded to him by his King would be enough to survive the Colonies.

Secondly, he had no idea how to face her alone in particular, how to speak with her. She was not the same woman he had met, not at all. Sometimes, when she was standing alone by the window he watched on from afar and felt concern rise in his heart at her seeming forlornness despite the anger and ire he still harboured in this same place for her.

Anna was trying to be nice and friendly with everyone, but more often than not she appeared sad, as if she had submitted to fate. The Anna he had known was a fighter who had not bowed her head to him, not even to Simcoe, from whom grown men had run without a second thought.

Often she was to be found on the hill overlooking Duncleade, staring westwards, to where first Ireland and then America’s shores interrupted the blue expanses of the sea.

Anna was sick for her old home, the place she had actively aided to build whereas he had been part of the decline of his, as he had come to realise fairly recently.

He had known that feeling, too, when his parents had sent him to boarding school at Harrow and he had only been able to come home over the holidays. The other boys hadn’t been very nice to him, who had been rather scrawny and less of a rake than most of his peers at the same age and he had cried himself to sleep from time to time, especially in the early days, wishing for his father, especially his mother and even his terrible older sister to be near.

Maybe Anna felt the same now. Maybe she even missed Selah Strong, who had at least as long as he had not gotten himself too deep into revolutionary dealings, been able to provide for them both and maintain a sizeable home.

She certainly missed Abraham, he thought bitterly. And why should she not? Had not the two been close since childhood days? She had lied to him before, why then should she have necessarily been telling the truth when she told him she had let go of him for good?

Even if she had jumped ship (quite literally) for him only, what tenderness and mutual feelings could there still be between them?

Of whatever stupid, complicated nature things between them were, he still found he cared for her and wished to alleviate her loneliness somehow but ironically, could not approach her, lend her his own
hand in the hour of her evident need for he knew that if she would touch it, her hand would scorch his.

Besides, nobody had ever taken him seriously, the clownish farce of an officer better suited for a silly play than the actual field or even some decrepit, sorry little backwater town's garrison. Why should his words help her?

Eliza, though not heartless as he had sometimes thought when they had fought in their youth as siblings do, remarked upon such things but was too polite to address matters directly and instead offered her friendship quietly in an unassuming fashion that stood in sharp contrast to his sister’s outgoing and more than outspoken personality.

He was too plump and awkward for such subtleties, bumblingly embarrassing whenever he was forced to talk to her and not courageous enough to speak to her directly. And if he would simply take her hand in an innocent gesture, he would burn himself, brand his own flesh with a renewed bout of pain he had thought to have put behind himself, or at least had tried to.

The following day, their plan to hatch a plan was crossed by unfavourable weather that prevented them to take a walk. Bad weather usually meant Alexander remained at the garrison, which was wise because the way between the garrison at the other side of town to the seat of the old-ancient House of Hewlett could be very long and very muddy.

Alexander had told her he, being a soldier, was trained not to mind rainy marching in the painful field, but she had retorted her mother would certainly mind muddy boots on her carpets and wet clothes on her sofa.

So instead of spending time with the man whose company she enjoyed very much, she sat playing at whist with Mother and Edmund, and, for the lack of the critical fourth player, little Daniel, who sat opposite Mother and was taught in the art of the game by the latter.

The game was of course slow and the boy often turned his hand to Mother to ask what to do now, which card to pick, but she did not appear to mind and evidently delighted in instructing him more than in actually playing.

Eliza reasoned that she would probably let Daniel and Mother win and make a few purposefully unwise discharges of good cards. Not only would the little boy be happy and Mother content, Edmund could for once not be self-sorry as it would be clear she was to be held accountable for playing the wrong hand.

Daniel's little chest swelled with pride when the game was over; he had won and ran over to Mother, hugging her.

“Yes, yes, it’s all right child. Go ask your mother if she has a treat for you.”

She ruffled his hair and smiled on as the cook’s son enthusiastically ran through the door in a careless and indecorous fashion she would never have permitted her own children.

It was somewhat peculiar Mother, who had laid so much emphasis on the “proper” education and deportment of her own children and always prided herself with her aristocratic lineage, had taken a
fancy to the son of her cook. David was bright and pleasant to be sure, but not a likely candidate for patronage or charity as he had a mother (Eliza did not know about the father’s whereabouts, she had never asked) and was always fed and clothed.

Just as Eliza was asking herself this question, Mother looked at her sternly: “Don’t you look at me like that. Since none of you have given me any grandchildren, one has to find some one’s self!”

“Well, I was married”, Eliza then replied somewhat annoyed, “it is not my fault Mr Greenwood left this world early.”

She side-eyed Edmund, whose cheeks coloured slightly.

“Whereas my brother dearest”, she continued, “has not even made an effort to continue the family line.”

“Eliza-“ he attempted to interrupt her, but when it came to verbal fights, he knew that he stood no chance against any of the women in his family, who in nature were the exact opposite to his less confrontational, quiet personality.

“I’m just telling the truth”, she just exclaimed a little more loudly than necessary, “You’re the one who bears the family name-“

A sharp inhale of air interrupted the argument between the siblings and both turned to the sofa. In their game and the somewhat heated conversation that had followed, they had almost forgotten about Anna, who had sat there on the sofa, a little away from the card table mending a basket of clothes that had accumulated over the last few weeks- stockings with holes in them, sewing a loose button back on and the like.

“I’m sorry. I must have slipped- the needle.”

Anna’s voice sounded strangely shaky and Eliza was sure her little mishap was not the reason for her emotional tone.
She brought her needle-pricked index finger to her mouth to suck any blood away that might otherwise have stained the dress she was mending.

Knowing Anna did not like it when she became the centre of attention, Eliza tried to overlook what had transpired and decided to pretend nothing had happened. Anna, who had sat so Eliza had had a good view of her from the side but Edmund had his back to her, sniffed and set her needlework down on the small table before her, leaving the room in quick steps.

“I am sorry-“

The door fell shut and left an uneasy silence behind.

“Well, what was that all about?”, Mother asked at last, genuinely wondering if she should go after Anna, who had become a good, trusted friend or if it would be best, as Eliza would have recommended, to grant her some privacy instead of imposing unwanted company on her.

“That I can tell you”, Edmund quite surprisingly added in a voice that reminded Eliza more of Major Hewlett than of her little brother. His hard, impatient tone came rather as a surprise, which silenced an astonished Eliza momentarily.

“Must you always-“ he shrugged and gave them all a killing glance which was a lot more fearsome than Simcoe’s bayonet before he too rose, leaving her and mother somewhat dumbfounded behind.
It shouldn’t upset her, she had no right to be emotional, not when the Hewletts were treating her so kindly, she had no right to be sad about something as silly as this.

How could such a little thing, a discussion she had not even been part of send her into such a state?

Anna dabbed at the corners of her eyes with her sleeve and sniffed, not stopping in her stride to do so.

She’d come to know the house well enough to know the staircase without having to look at it, so long had she stayed there already.

It could have been their future. They could have had one, maybe.

She needed to be alone now, all alone, away from everyone and thus made her way to the stables, where she did not expect anybody to be at this time of day.

Opening the door, the comforting smell of horses and hay crept into her nose. There was something universal about this smell, known to her from home, which thus made the small place in Scotland she found herself in presently a little more hospitable, but at the same time somewhat increased the sting in her heart.

Home. There was no such place as home for her anymore. Even if she had stayed, she could never have returned to Setauket, the only place she had known as home for her entire life. Not that she would have wanted to, Setauket’s inhabitants had long talked behind her back and sometimes more openly shown their dislike and disdain for her because of what had been between her and Abe.

She’d fought for her ideals, her country, but what did that matter here in Scotland where she found herself an exile and a dependant who had to rely on the goodwill of an elderly lady and the man against whom she had once conspired only to find she had, ensnared in her own net, fallen in love with.

Perhaps there would have been a future for her in America, with her friends, but she had decided against them when she had decided to follow Edmund across the Atlantic instead.

The horses snuffled welcomingly, acknowledging her presence. Without thinking much, she opened the stall in which a large brown steed was being kept.

Salem eyed her curiously and quickly searched at her hip, where he had come to know people usually had pockets in which treats might be concealed, for a lump of sugar or an apple, but found none.

He raised his head and Anna took the opportunity to wrap her arms around his neck and buried her face in his mane.

“‘I don’t know what to do’”, she confessed to the horse who listened so much more patiently than any human could, “‘I just don’t know.’”

Crying helped. The horse, noting she was distressed, lowered his large head and rested it on her shoulder, almost as if he were trying to embrace her.
He had had enough, enough of his mother and her snide remarks on his bachelorhood, his duty and about everything else, including his rage-inducing sister.

Since his teenage years, he had actively worked trying to pay off the debts his father had left them, had abandoned his own dreams in favour in serving his family through serving his country.

Why were people just the same? There was no reason to imitate one’s forefathers, to procreate and pass on a family estate, of however dwindling significance to the next generation.

It was, in his opinion, for the best that the House of Hewlett would, at least in this branch, die out within either this or the next century, depending on when God would finally grant him eternal rest and peace.

It was best to bury a corpse, which he thought was a fitting analogy for a family on the verge of dying out, rather than to dress it up and pretend it be alive and in flourishing health.

And that was only one part of the ire he felt, the other concerned Anna Strong.

From all he had heard, seen and come to suspect, his mother treated Anna kindly not only because she liked her and thought a runaway American rebel a splendid addition to the household as her personal companion, but also because she had thought and hoped he would like her.

He didn’t dislike her, not at all, but they had not exactly parted on good terms and now she was here, she who had split his heart in two, always under his view.

There was nothing harder than to behold Anna’s countenance every day, she whom he had once considered to be the love of his life, knowing what had transpired between them and knowing that, perhaps, they could have been happy had not their contrasting convictions put them on different sides.

They had both erred, he saw that now. Once, he had seen a reason to believe in what he did on behalf of King and Country, to distribute law and order across the colonies, do good while his pay ensured his family could uphold the family seat.

And for what? To be stabbed in the back by his own men, have his sole true friend poisoned with an arsenic-laced apple under his nose, suffer incarceration under conditions so unspeakable he had never told anybody the details for fear the memories would resurface and haunt him daily, to lose everything, in fact.

He had been blinded, fool that he was, not only by Anna, no, by the shinningly polished buttons on his own uniform.

In this moment, he wished for a mere fraction of what precious little authority he had enjoyed in the army, if only to tell his family to shut up for once.

Alas, he was quite subjected to petticoat rule and his word would always be overruled by his mother, still the head of the family, and his sister, her right hand man or rather woman.

They probably had only wanted to tease him, but did not recognise they had finally gone too far-
granted, neither of them could have known having a family, being loved by someone outside the obligatory love professed to him by family members, having a little family perhaps had been his dream that lay crushed at his feet in the dust as he was not a person to talk about such matters, but still, they had been rather tactless.

They were just as subtle as John Graves Simcoe dolled up in a pink gown and full face of make-up delivering a deafening rendition of *Mother Watkins’ Ale* in the middle of Duncleade’s town square in the dead of the night in their every word and just like Simcoe, liked to strike out without minding who would be hit but would wage fierce war if a just blow was delivered against one of them.

Worse still, they had hit not only him, but Anna, too, with their strikes and slights. Naturally, she must have felt addressed as well when they had been belabouring his child- and wifelessness. Had he married her then, a year or more ago when they had planned to, he might be a father by now and she the mother of his son or daughter- blushing, he wiped the image of Anna in a pose he had before only drawn her in out of his imagination away and made his way to the stable, where he intended to find peace with the only friends he had left in the world.

Equidae were so much more understanding than humans and met everyone with unbiased gentle affection if one treated them with kindness and respect.

Fuming still, he opened the door to the stable and for one moment stood petrified in the doorframe when a familiar voice greeted him.

“…I am alone and I don’t know what to do next. It was all so straightforward during the war until Edmund came and it wasn’t anymore and brought me to where I am. I should never have jumped, should never have done a lot of things in fact. I’ve made all the wrong choices. I can’t go anywhere because I have no friends, no home. I can’t return to America now, they’d think I am a spy-“ at this she gave a chuckle poisoned with hypocritical bitterness, “which I am, really, or rather was. My friends are far away and here-“ she continued to sob for a while.

Apparently, Anna was talking to one of the horses, likely the beast she had brought in, Salem the Queen’s Ranger who was hers.

His first thought was to go in and tell her to leave and sell the horse to make some money if life here was so terrible, but he could not bring himself to do that.

How had he felt in the Colonies? Equally alone and friendless but with a difference: however terrible its inhabitants, he had known that, given he would not be killed in action (or in an attempt on his life) he always had a home to return to, his books, his room and a warm meal by the fireplace.

This wasn’t the world and it was not much, but it had given him a basic contention and comfort to know this when he had looked at the stars at night in his early days over yonder when he had been freshly deployed and wondered how the sky would look over the peaceful land of his childhood, the hilly landscape around Duncleade at the spot where so many years ago he had found his sister and her beloved kissing in a meadow at night or down by MacPherson’s barn, where he had played often as a boy.

Anna might remember the night sky over Setauket, the particular hues of blue and the alignment of the stars over the houses, but there was not even the coldest of comfort for her in doing so, for there was no reason for her to return.

Setauket’s sanctimonious society made up of corrupt judges, prim and proper housewives who in their needlework circles would abandon all the Christian principles they supposedly adhered to in order to rant and ridicule, backstab and belittle everyone they found fault with among their number to
later spread their toxic word among their husbands and children and a colourful array of unsavoury characters with side-careers in smuggling, murder and arson and about everything else.

Setauket, which he had heard Simcoe call “Sodom-on-the-Sea” more than once, hoping to stir the embers of hatred in the hearts of its inhabitants for his personal amusement, would not want the oh-so-terrible adulteress and penniless former barmaid back, even if her political leanings had become fashionable. Given however she’d almost married the feckless commander of the British garrison there, her true patriot spirit would likely be written off as a convenient lie to save her neck anyway. Not even her friends would be able to defend her from public opinion. Were she to start from nothing somewhere in York City or elsewhere, she would arrive at the same point she found herself in in Scotland, penniless and alone. Poor Anna. Despite the anger and rage he had cultivated over the last few months, he would never have wished that to her.

“…and Edmund, you know, he has offered me his friendship. I accepted, and I lied at him even though I have sworn never to lie to a man again who had never lied to me yet I did! He offered me friendship and I said yes. I never wanted to be his friend. A friend would not have done what I did, come to Scotland with him- as his friend, I would have let him go, but I couldn’t. He lied, too. He doesn’t want me as his friend, either. Well, we keep lying to another. What good people we are.”

Still standing in the door, Edmund became aware how rudely he was listening into the albeit one-sided conversation that was certainly not meant for his ears.

He had two options, either entering and making himself known (and thus revealing he knew someone was in there, which implied he had heard at least a portion of what had been said) and thus embarrassing her as she was clearly expecting to be completely alone or going away and hoping the door would not creak as he shut it.

Neither option was very good.

Faltering, he remained in his pose and considered his position.

“We were never meant to be. I did try to make him trust me in the first place to facilitate what we were doing with the ring, but then I got to know him and he was so different- Edmund was such a kind and decent man—“

It sounded almost as if this Edmund she was talking about had died.

“I know he is angry with me, and he has the right to be. What I did I did with the goal to save him, and Abe. There was no other way and while I regret it had to end like this, I don’t regret saving his life, even if he has become a bitter cynic who has turned from the world.”

The bitter cynic’s mouth tightened into an even thinner line than it was on ordinary days as his teeth bit the inside of his lips.

He wanted to be angry at her and shout that he would have been better off hastily buried under Abraham Woodhull’s cabbage field than thrown into the life he was leading now, but he could not.

He could not even tell her that she was a deceiving adulteress who had always loved Abraham more than him, because it was not true. What she was saying was not intended for his ears, or anyone else’s for that matter, and spoken with such raw candidness there was no way it was merely the trick of a skilful actress using her seductive charms to make men do her bidding.

His hand held on to the doorframe and his heart was set on going in.

In the end, he did not.
Instead, he closed the door softly and without a sound and walked down on the road to Edinburgh a bit, only to wander on the given stretch of well-trodden road without having to think of either direction or destination of his voyage.

Carts and carriages passed him by, voyagers on foot and on horseback, the rich and the poor and he watched them, their lives driven by something, a place they wanted to reach before nightfall, an invitation they were following or the goal of selling their cattle or geese at a market town a little farther away, a group of soldiers dressed in their regimental red; all people with a purpose in life, at least for the moment, busily passing the lonesome wanderer with his hat pushed far into his face by.

From a passing carriage, he would not look like more than a common wayfarer; only at a second glance when people would notice his good boots and the clean, well-kept nature of his suit would they ask themselves why a man who was obviously of certain means was travelling all alone and on foot through Scotland.

But who ever looked twice?

When he returned, it was well after darkness had set in. Perhaps the only practical application of his astronomical studies was the ability of being able to navigate by the stars, which he had used to orientate himself when he had, for the sheer challenge of it, decided to leave the road for a little pathway crossing it that looked as if it would follow the general direction of Duncleade.

Home at last, he went to his room without saying a word (after all his mother and sister still deserved to be punished for their behaviour towards him- and Anna) and stretched out on the bed, folding his arms beneath his head.

His prolonged stroll had given him time to think. In fact, it reminded him somewhat of the pilgrimages of days gone by, at least on this island, but were still practiced by Catholics travelling to places like Santiago de Compostela or the Holy Land.

The travels probably attempted by his own forbears to Our Lady of Walsingham or Canterbury might not have been as long and his own outing in turn ridiculously short in comparison to any of these destinations (and destination-less even), but he understood why some took it upon themselves to walk for long distances to a faraway place for no apparent reason. Personally not a great believer in religion beyond the fact he believed in God (but whom he had, contrary to what those hypocritical souls preaching their congregations told every Sunday come to know as vengeful and hard on those he was supposed to those who turned to him for guidance and help when in despair), he could see the appeal in pilgrimages now: the destination was never really the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the shrine of Thomas à Becket, the way was. With no other work to do than put one foot before the other, there was plenty of time to devote to one’s thoughts, to contemplate and, if one was so inclined, to hope or pray.

Having felt the wind in his face despite the autumnal weather had cleared his mind somewhat, settled the tempestuous chaos in his brain after having listened in on Anna speaking to her sole confidante earlier in the day.

It still hurt, he would never be able to forget that day he had thought would be the happiest of his life, never.

However, despite the pain he still carried around in his heart, there was a new feeling inside him he could not quite describe- he could not even say if it was new or if he might simply have overheard it beneath the loud, angry clamour composed of a cacophony of screams for retribution against anyone who had ever wronged him in America, his loud disdain for personal attachment to another person, mistrust and misanthropy.
Edmund found he could not dislike Anna, or his troublesome mother and sister for that matter, in the way he had believed when he had set out initially.

Eliza and Mother were sometimes very direct, undiplomatic and at their best, which most people would call worst, downright rude, but their hearts were not blackened with malice. Anna was no ill-wishing person either- she had done what she had thought was right in order to preserve two lives and had admitted candidly to the nature of her intelligence work, the true reason why she had first allowed him into her life.

Before his mind’s eye, the pictures of boarding the *Jane* in York City sailed past; Anna seeing him and throwing herself into the water, which had prompted him to do the same in order to help her? Be at her side? Anyway, the two of them in the water and later on the boat, Anna shaking and shivering with the cold as her friend, whom he later thought resembled the barkeep Mr Townsend of *Rivington’s Corner*, watched on, somewhat taken aback.

She had given up everything to follow him for no other reason than- he could not speak or even think the word, even though he wanted to.

Oh yes, he had once upon a time felt the same for her, and even now, he was still not as indifferent to her as would be prudent.

Life was complicated, bewildering, terrifying even in more ways than what he had witnessed defending the Setauket garrison from the rebels or trying to survive for days out in the open while being cold, hungry and injured.

In some way even, this was worse, more complicated as there was something straightforward to hiding at day and running from danger at night in hopes to reach a spot, any spot, of civilisation soon. At least when he had escaped his rebel captors he had known what had to be done if he wanted to survive, now he did not know what to do, where to go from here.

More exerted from his exercise than his pride was willing to admit, he fell asleep fully dressed and did not wake until morning.

Edmund had gone off in a huff and knowing him, he would hide somewhere and pout, as he was wont to do.

She had borne the brunt of Mother’s speech in the same way as Edmund had and she had certainly not taken it so personally, even if she had every reason to do so. Contrary to her brother dearest, she had lost the man she had loved, the love of her young life and they had meant the world to each other. Sometimes, the memories of that day came back to her, of seeing William, devastated and a very young Edmund hugging her to give her a measure of comfort in her immeasurable grief.

Contrary to her, he had not had to say goodbye to the dead, broken body of the one he loved. She had stood at James’ coffin and saw him lie there, his grey skin contrasting the crisp white cravat they had used to conceal his broken neck and his face vanishing in a mass of white curls, which was for the best, really, as his mouth would not shut properly and he looked somewhat unsettling like this, as if he was alive enough still to breathe and rise from his coffin any moment.

They had never had a proper goodbye. She had tried to remember when she had last told James she
loved him, and could not name a concrete instance.

And then, later, she had also buried her husband, of whom she had similar memories only the second time, she had not been as shell-shocked as she had been as a young girl and in the case of the late Mr Greenwood, the illness which had struck him and had rendered him bedbound a good while before he had finally been relieved of his earthly load. For him, death had been kinder than life and it was good in a way, better than continuing to languish in the twilight of pain for yet another day without any hope that the doctors would be able to help him.

Maybe, if Jeremiah Greenwood had lived, she would have had children, too. Or maybe not. She had accepted Jeremiah’s proposal, liked him even, but there had not been much desire on either part as long as their marriage had lasted.

Theirs simply hadn’t been the big, stormy love she had shared with the young man whom God had called to his side much too early.

 Jeremiah, who had been a merchant of middling station, had been kind, friendly and pleasant to talk to, but she hadn’t married him for love. He had offered her financial security and by moving out a second time, more of the money Edmund sent would remain for other things that had to be done in or around the house. Jeremiah had known this- he had been somewhat lonely after the death of his first wife several years ago and looked for companionship alongside someone to take care of his household. This marriage had been, as so many, conceived by Prudence.

Only very rarely was it cupid who caused people to go to church and be wed, this was a luxury for a select few.

Edmund had always been a little day-dreamy and inclined to romantic naïveté, which explained why he thought he was the sole person on earth with a right to be loved, and loved by someone fitting in his own narrow mind set at that.

At least she had made the attempt to give her mother grandchildren, so to speak (although Mother would not have been happy in times gone by had she known that she and James had- oh well, teenage imprudence) whereas Edmund thought he had a right to be offended for being a bachelor.

What had transpired with Anna was very, very terrible, but it didn’t give him the right to behave as he had done, storming out of the house and returning after dark without saying goodnight.

It was a good thing she had almost four decades of experience handling him.

Absent-mindedly playing with an apple from the bowl on the table, allowing it to roll across the table before stopping it at the last moment before toppling over the edge at the opposite end, she savoured the peaceful quiet of the evening.

Anna and Mother had gone to bed, as had her brother and except for the cook and little Daniel, nobody was in the house at this hour.

She was just about going upstairs to undress when she heard the low sound of a horse’s hooves against the beaten earth of the driveway and she sat up, now more awake than before.

Although the cook, as the only servant still in attendance, should have opened, the woman could not hear any visitor downstairs, especially not with her little boy probably distracting her somewhat, and out of curiosity who it could be, Eliza decided to investigate herself.

“Captain”, she chimed in the mocking tone of someone reading aloud from a terrible romance novel “at this hour? What could you possibly want here?”
“Nothing half as salacious as you insinuate, dear madam”, Alexander smiled and followed her inside.

“I am sorry I could not come sooner”, he said and at Eliza’s invitation settled in one of the armchairs by the fireplace and gratefully stretched his limbs, “I was quite busy. This afternoon, I was gone on the road to Edinburgh with a few of my men, and I thought I saw your brother there, dressed in a plain suit and travelling on foot. I couldn’t tell if it was him, we had passed the man before I could have a closer look and he had pulled his hat into his face so far it was difficult to make out his features, but I still wanted to make certain everything is in order, especially given our talk the other day.”

“That is very kind of you”, Eliza smiled warmly and leaned closer to press his hand in gratitude, “it might well have been him, he was out and about-“ and then relayed to him the events of the afternoon.

“You could still have children, if you liked”, Alexander suggested, “if you marry again-“

“It is not that easy”, Eliza interrupted him. “I am past forty. Apart from pregnancy being more dangerous the older one gets, well, there comes an age when it is no longer possible for the female body and given my age, I am quite close to it, I suppose-“

“I see” (he certainly did not, given men’s ignorance of female biology, but his concern did him credit) “You could adopt or become the patroness of a local child of little means if it is your wish to engage with children.”

“If I am honest, I don’t think I need to to be happy. Women are taught they need to have children and be loyal to their husbands to lead a good, fulfilling life, but we all know that isn’t true for all. Were I a mother, I could not have joined Edmund in the Colonies, not only because I might have felt that such a voyage was too dangerous for someone with so much responsibility, but what if my husband overruled that decision? The late Mr Greenwood has not taken it well to find out his wife was quite a bluestocking.”

Alexander nodded, visibly not knowing what to say.

“I have no expertise in these matters nor do I, unmarried and without ever having given great thought to the institution of marriage, allow myself to opine any further. But, speaking of unmarried men, your brother-“

She shrugged.

“Some people don’t want to be happy because they find complaining about their lives a fulfilling past-time in itself.”

“Some people simply need a little help and perhaps a little gentleness and patience”, Alexander countered. “Any ideas since we last met?”

“Find John Graves Simcoe and invite him over for supper to remind Anna and Edmund they are on the same side?”

“The only thing we need to find is something to unite them, something they have in common or can both relate to.”

“I hope you won’t ever bring up politics at our table then”, Eliza smirked.

“...or you certain red-headed people.”
“I can’t help it if our cook prepares some red mullet next time you eat with us, be warned.”

They laughed.

“Now, in all honesty, I don’t know.”

“Alright”, Eliza summed their fruitless conversation up, “then our plan is to have no plan and improvise.”

“As happens in all good theatres”, Alexander replied.
Each to their own, and love to lovers.

Contented, he retired from the window.

Dunclade, Scotland, the following day.

Assembled around the table sat the entire Hewlett family with the addition of Eliza’s redcoat, who had taken the place at her right and made merry with Charlotte. Captain Barnett laughed often and easily and appeared to feel comfortable being the centre of attention, which he, the only guest of the table, inevitably became.

At the other end of the table, Edmund appeared to play more with the slice of cake on his plate than he ate of it and generally avoided their conversation through feigning passive interest by sporting a nervous smile and looking alternatingly to whoever was talking.

Anna did her best to partake in what was being said and said expected, polite things whenever she was addressed. Barnett struck her as pleasant, though somewhat too loud and present in the room, very much like the woman he had come to visit and although Anna would never like his uniform much, he appeared not to harbour any resentments based on her extraction, on the contrary, he asked her a lot about home and showed sympathy when answered the question if she missed her native land with a diplomatic though candid, “at times I think about those I left behind.”

“Why I do hope my dear Mrs Strong you will find some excellent people here, too- not necessarily among the scoundrels of my regiment, but it is high time you attended a social occasion at the Stretttons’, whose son William I have heard you already know, or take a trip to Edinburgh or Glasgow, where there is more noise, laughter and perhaps refinement to be found if you look in the right places.”

“I thank you for your recommendation”, she answered curtly.

“Eliza, is this true? You have never taken our friend to the city? What must the poor creature think of Scotland, nay of the Empire? That we all live in small stone huts among heathery hills and tend sheep? You should both go to London for the Season to give her a taste of the divertissements to be had in the capital! We must, after all, now be more anxious than ever to bind our American friends not by the so-perceived chains of subjugation, but by firm bonds of friendship.”

Captain Barnett flashed her a wide, warm, and very boyish grin that somewhat contrasted his face, which was that of a man in his late thirties.

All in all, he was a pleasant enough person, a little too noisy and pompous perhaps, but he only meant well even if she disliked his rhetoric.

“What do you say, Eliza?” he reinforced his argument by hoping to coax words of approval from her.

Eliza looked up from her plate and held his gaze without blinking.
“No, you see, someone has to stay with mother—“

“What arrant nonsense!”, Charlotte inserted herself into the conversation, “I may be old, but not so old that I cannot keep my own household together. I am in quite a mind to be offended now, daughter.”

Eliza, who had not seen her mother’s words coming bit her lip, apologised by way of saying she was only afraid for her before she went on: “Besides, I get such horrible backaches in carriages they are so bad I can hardly tolerate them- and hardly worth the journey. I grow old, I fear. Ask Edmund and Mrs Strong, they even have witnessed it on our way here.”

Barnett and Eliza looked at each other for a second too long, almost as if they were exchanging words that went unheard by the other three members of their company before Eliza spoke again.

“Well, that didn’t work out”, Eliza hissed into his ear, as he took her aside in the adjoining room after tea had concluded on a somewhat uncomfortable note.

“You are the worst actor I’ve ever seen, and that includes my great personal tragedy of being forced to put on Christmas plays together with Edmund as a child.”

“And you offended your mother, which did not help us either”, Alexander was helpful to point out.

“That was entirely unintentional. The question is, what do we do now? Are not you, Captain, supposed to be a tactical genius?”

Alexander snorted. “believe me, it is easier to teach a group of utter blockheads to form lines and aim at the enemy than to make your brother and Mrs Strong spend time together.”

Now it was official, both his sister and her beau were mad and would best be kept in Bedlam. He couldn’t tell what they were up to, but it was evident they meant no good.

Barnett was too cheery, although he generally was a man whose character resembled that of his sister greatly, he had been uncharacteristically enthusiastic, pompous and downright irritating and his sister, oh yes, he knew whenever she was up to something. He had known her all his life, she had no chance of fooling him.
Squinting his eyes at Eliza to signal he was eyeing her closely (even if he was just about to leave, which probably gave it all a somewhat initially unintended ironical air), he left only to see the hem of a skirt disappear just out of his field of vision at the bottom of the staircase- apparently he was not the only one who needed to get away from these two utterly insufferable individuals.

Still contemplating whether he had been given a second chance after having almost joined Anna in the stables or if it was a chance at all, he set his feet into motion, not upstairs to his room but downstairs. This time, he did not try to conceal his presence, no, his feet trod the staircase more self-assuredly than his heart felt and made marked sounds whenever one foot was set before the other on the stair below the last.

Anna had heard him, for she had paused and turned to see who it was descending the stairs so shortly after her.

“Edmund”, she greeted him tentatively while labouring hard to evade his eyes and put her hands to her somewhat ill-fitting skirt, where they smoothed the fabric, a clear gesture of insecurity aiming at busying her restless body for at least a short amount of time.

Tugging at his necktie, under which he had suddenly grown uncomfortably warm, he replied, “Anna, ah, how… good to see you”, and nodded in her direction.

He was an utter cretin. He had sat at the same table as her for many, very long weeks and saw her every day- good to see her? Pshaw. Clearly, he should have sought out the company of John André before the latter had met his untimely end because even though he had no personal love for the man and had thought him somewhat unfit for his position based on his inflated ego and narcissistic streak that should have warned of being destined to making a fatal mistake based on personally motivated decisions one day, André had been a ladies’ man.

What only yesterday he would have viewed as a vice and immorality that only showed how standards of conduct, moral conventions and gentlemanly behaviour had declined over time, he now envied the hanged man for.

Not that he wished to flatter Anna or craft elaborate strings of compliments for her, but André, it had been said, had had an easy way of charming elegance and ease that had not only been able to bewitch and enthral his superiors who had basically let him have free reign in his endeavours, but had made him particularly successful with women of all walks of life, as the entire city had known.

But then, André had had resources to draw back on to; not only had he had a father who contrary to the late Edward Hewlett had grown rich in business instead of declaring bankruptcy, André had also had had a pleasing face, blue eyes that he supposed must be appealing to members of the sex, a fine set of features and an engaging smile that could never be achieved with the mouth of a frog or toad, a striking resemblance not particularly well-meaning classmates had helpfully pointed out to him while in school.

Compared to André, he had nothing, no attributes that could either please the eye or the mind.

Although of the same parents, his sister had, to her luck and contrary to him, inherited certain charms that might not be the paragon of what was perceived beautiful or fashionable, but she had in their youth allured more than one lad with her greenish eyes, fair complexion and dark hair, a combination that had amply made up for her slightly too wide mouth, which appeared to be a hereditary curse.

He by contrast had been born a veritable frog and croaked like one too when he was nervous.

“I am, ah, I mean to say, I am relieved we have escaped the table”, he managed to bring forth,
though not without stumbling slightly over his words a few times.

“Yes”, Anna nodded affirmatively and then looked at him, waiting for him to say something again. In a way, it was like during the time they had first come to know each other, when awkward silences had ruled their early conversations before he had let her in on more secret things- and what good it did to me in the end, he added bitterly in his thoughts.

“I need some air”, he announced after a silence so long he was certain a decade must have passed because it was the first thing to come to his mind and because it was true.

In order to prevent Anna from seeing he had blushed at his own incompetence, he made his way to the door with his head bowed and had already reached it when he turned around.

“You can of course join me, if you like”, he offered and tried to sound composed and calm.

When Anna answered him, she sounded quite surprised but agreed.

As she followed Edmund, a thunderstorm took possession of Anna’s thoughts and made them whirl and swirl like leaves torn off a tree in the wind and rain until she could not think straight anymore.

The familiarity of being with Edmund mixed with their more or less recent past, the former happiness with the unhappiness of not too long ago and the polite distance they had upheld for a short while now.

“My sister and her, ah, beau, they-“

Anna shook her head.

“They’re well matched.”

“That certainly is one way to put it”, Edmund answered. “I hope they did not inconvenience you as I am aware their presence can be somewhat, ah, tiring, to say the very least.”

“No harm done”, she assured him and tried a lopsided half-smile with the answer.

Edmund reciprocated it, nodding before after a short pause, he continued:

“Well, I was merely asking because you- you look distressed recently.”

What could she answer him?

“I am alright”, she gave him the polite, though not necessarily always true answer that one expected to be given at asking such a question.

“No you are not”, he replied bluntly, “it is visible to all. You lied to me again, Anna”, he added with a bitter tone in his voice.

“You are right”, Anna said quietly.
“You miss home, I suppose”, Edmund then stated rightly, “you could of course return, but you know you would likely not be welcomed with open arms by all. You might face being seen as a traitor when it becomes clear you have been to Britain and in the company of a royal officer. As for Setauket, its people have always been hostile to you, so there is nothing you could want there. You have a few friends, but you do not wish to be a burden to them as you feel you are to this house already. So, I assume, as you must have concluded yourself, you will stay here, even though you do not like it.”

Edmund’s cold, scientific analysis was correct.

“Yes”, Anna answered, “you are right.”

In silence, they passed by a little bench put there to rest and admire the gardens, which at this time of year were not in the splendour of full bloom anymore, and Edmund bade her sit.

Stiffly, Anne settled down beside him, sitting rigidly upright, a posture she had adopted in imitation of Charlotte and Eliza while at table, aware of the fact her “Americanness” was showing through the lack of supposedly more polite patterns of behaviour and conventions of the British upper classes.

“You should write to them, your friends, I mean. I am certain they would like to hear you are safe and well. If you find yourself lacking the money to send-”

“I can pay for my own letters. I don’t want any more alms”, she interrupted him.

“I did not mean to offend, I was merely trying to help, as your friend”, he answered, but it was evident from the look in his eyes he was somewhat offended.

“And on the matter of alms, I think you have well deserved everything you received in this house. Given that I was responsible for, ah, you know, the attainder- it was the least we could do for you.”

Sitting next to each other in silence, Anna could not help but ask herself how they had ever arrived at this, how their politically motivated motions to destroy one another had led to the love that once had been between them.

Could you hate someone so much you somehow started to love that person?

He’d been the perfect picture of everything she despised from his carefully powdered wig to the toes of his shiny boots and she must to him have been the epitome of why the colonists needed so-called Mother Britannia to watch over them.

“Write to your friends”, Edmund suddenly insisted a second time, “and, to some extend at least, you might find some distraction and merriment in traveling as good Captain Barnett suggested. I could ask my sister in earnest if she were willing to go to Edinburgh with you, or London, in case you would prefer that.”

“I am fine”, she assured him, “I am fine here.”

“If you say so”, Edmund replied doubtfully. “I have found Duncleade too narrow on many occasions, even in days before I had travelled much with the army. Small towns such as this one can be, ah, suffocating. Especially to a keen mind not shackled to local traditions or born into a family native to that place.”

“Is it too small for you now?”, Anna asked, not knowing why she did.

“It is.”
For a moment, they looked at each other before Edmund rose and helped her to her feet, even if that was not strictly necessary before they returned to the house in silence, each thinking about the other’s words.

“What is that we’re witnessing, your proposed Taming of the Shrews?”

They had taken cover inside a mighty rhododendron shrub that even hid the scarlet of Alexanders’ uniform well. Having followed their targets at a safe distance, the large bush with its big leaves and almost hollow interior was the perfect place to hide.

Too far away to understand anything, yet close enough to see well, all they could do was observe and interpret what they saw, lest they should be discovered.

To be frank, what they did there was a little childish to say the least, but both of them had been simply too curious not to know what Anna and Edmund were up to and anyway, Eliza felt she had the right to know after putting up with her pouting, gloomy little brother for so long.

“No. I think the shrews are taming each other”, Alexander whispered. “That’s not a play, though.”

“Then write it, give up your profession for Drury Lane.”

He turned to her with a sly grin.

“Only if the renowned Mrs Cooke of York City will feature on the play bill”, Alexander riposted, causing Eliza to suppress a hearty snort before she gave him a playful shove and said he would better set his pen to paper sharply then, because she was not getting any younger or more beautiful, and nobody wanted to see a shrivelled old onion on stage.

“What if I like shrivelled onions?”’, he teased her.

“You must be mad.”

Chapter End Notes

"A Tragedy Rehearsed": subheading of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s play "The Critic”, first performed in 1779.

"The Taming of The Shrew" by Shakespeare has attracted much criticism and controversy due to the "taming" of Katharina in the play, which is alluded to by Elizabeth in the story.

“Rainy marching in the painful field”: Taken from the famous St. Chrispian’s Day Speech from Shakespeare’s “Henry V”, act IV, scene III.

"Mother Watkin's Ale", sometimes "Watkin's Ale", is a bawdy song from the days of Good Queen Bess concerning a young woman "afraid to die a maid" and a young man
who then leads her "where she was not spied", giving her "well of Watkin's Ale". In the end, she becomes sick of said "ale" and it gives her an, ahem, 'beer belly' for nine months, leading to the advice for ladies that "it is no jesting with edge tools"... I think it's pretty evident what "Watkin's Ale" is a euphemism for; to close with the last verse of the song: "if any here offended be, then blame the author, blame not me."

Petticoat rule: 18th century derogatory term for a man who is suspected of being "governed" by a woman, in most cases his wife, indicating the accused is unable to be the patriarch of the family, lacks leadership skills, is weak and cowardly, basically "less a man" than his wife, if you will. One man accused of being a subject of "petticoat rule" by a contemporary was Simcoe.

Red mullet: perhaps the worst pun of the century. Kudos to the seafood restaurant I passed by the other day. Until then, I had no idea there was a fish describing Simcoe’s hairdo.

I have not made up the height difference between the two (future) Simcoes. He is said to have been 6’00” (for my fellow users of the metric system: 1.83m, though Samuel Roukin on TURN is even taller at 6’2”/1.91m) and she 4’9” (1.49m), which was even in the late 1700s comparatively small.

Funny thing is, Elizabeth generally didn’t like tall people, or rather people being markedly taller than her, but she was able to make an exception. Oh, and “Infant Graves” was Simcoe’s real nickname given to him by his godfather as a baby. He likely used it to be able to distinguish between Infant Graves and his father in letters as they shared the same first name.

Christmas play: home-made theatre productions on Christmas for and with all the family were a thing. Eliza can consider herself lucky she only had Edmund as her co-star in what was probably something boring from an old book her governess selected. Depending on the fierceness of the Christmas spirit in individual families, the whole thing could get somewhat out of hand with papa writing and directing the play, mama as head of the design department and all the kids old enough to walk and speak plus their friends being forced to dress up in togas and enact the parts of dead Romans with an after show party lasting until 2AM. You couldn’t make this sort of thing up. I leave it to you to guess whose family it was.

Bedlam: London’s Bethlehem Royal Hospital was founded in 1247 as a priory and became a hospital in 1330. It was the place where all those deemed unfit for society (usually "mad" or otherwise classified as mentally ill in the terminology of the day) were sent to live in often harrowing conditions. Bedlam as an institution survived the centuries and is still in operation today.

Alexander's buffoonish performance at tea was a little bit inspired by Hugh Laurie as Prince Regent in "Blackadder", one of my favourite comedies of all time. Contrary to the la-la-la-la-lucky prince however, he never rigged the Dunny-on-the-Wold by-election or permanently loses his socks. ;)

The sex: 18th century term for women.

Rhododendrons were introduced to the British Isles in the 1760s and have since become an invasive species. One Irish politician stated in Dáil Éireann last year that "the rhododendron situation in Killarney National Park" was so grave "nothing short of calling in the army is going to put it right". They grow extremely fast and can get very
tall- the perfect hideout for amateur spies.
"...and the bells are ringing all for Christmas Day..." ;)

Happy Christmas to all of you (and of course, if you don't celebrate, a happy and most wonderful day to you, too!)! As every long-running serial needs a Christmas-special, here's mine- complete with a Christmassy title and everything. I think you can guess my favourite Christmas song by now...

A person who wishes to be known as "The Lector", and who often lends a helpful ear to my writing-troubles, told me I should be nice to my readers on Christmas. While I tried hard, I don't think I reached this lofty goal to 100%, but I daresay you'll like the ending... ;)

Merry Christmas!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I could have been someone

Well so could anyone

You took my dreams from me

When I first found you

I kept them with me babe

I put them with my own

Can't make it all alone

I've built my dreams around you

Elizabeth stood by the window, taking in the frozen scenery outside. She looked as if she was lost in thoughts, as if the latter were running wild like dogs playing in the snow outside, and she stood there watching them from afar.

He had come to look for her, for she had been absent from the festive congregation a little while.

She was grown now, a child no more as her slender figure and elaborate coiffure revealed, even if one could not see her face, which was still turned towards the glass and the nightly darkness outside. Such knowledge stung in his heart and left a bitter-sweet aftertaste in his mouth: in less than a week, she would be wed and leave this house, her home for the past twelve years of her life. He had come to adore the little girl, the daughter he had never had, recalled her running through the garden or gathering flowers with her governess and the endearing imitation of her aunt’s mimic when she thought something absurd or silly.

When he had married Margaret all those years ago he, in his fifties and childless from his first marriage, had believed there would never be a child’s laughter to ring in the halls of Hembury Fort House, but then, she had introduced him to her little ward, the tiny seven-year-old who now (still not very tall) young woman by the window.

“What is this, Elizabeth? It is Christmas, and you are not cheerful?”

She turned and smiled at him, tho’ her smile was not quite so cheerful as she tried to make him believe.

“I am, Uncle. It is just—”

She shook her head. There was so much she wanted to say but didn’t, perhaps couldn’t express.

Gently, he pulled her to him in a brief, somewhat stiff embrace- when she had been a child, such displays of affection had come natural to both of them but now she was quite grown and a lady, wherefore such closeness, even when rooted deeply in the paternal affection he had for the girl whom he had raised for the best part of her young life, did not seem quite appropriate, especially since they were not related by blood.

To his surprise, she returned the embrace, resting a moment against his sizeable form.

John was not there, he’d gone to London concluding some business, which was bound to dampen her spirits since the two were much in love and Christmas is regarded a holiday to gather with one’s loved ones, but there was more.

In less than a week, she would leave this house and be wed; this was her last Christmas in these halls, the end of her girlhood.

Such knowledge stung his heart like the blow of a naval sword; he had grown very fond of the girl, the little orphan he had become as good as a father to through marriage to her guardian more than a decade ago.

John had rented a home for his bride in Exeter not far away, allowing for regular visits, but still, first having seen John leave and grow into a man, leaving for the Colonies and now seeing Elizabeth depart into married life a decade later was quite hard.

“Now, now”, he chided her, “let us be merry on this happy day”, and convinced her to join her aunt and the other guests in the adjoining room. At last, among the two dozen happy faces and fine wine, he managed to forget about fretting about the near future a bit and she soon sat and laughed just as she always had, his little girl who was soon to be wed. With the new year, a new age would dawn.
Whitehall, Setauket, Long Island, autumn 1781.

Autumn shook the leaves off the trees after a magnificent display of red, gold, and amber had set them alight, made them look like they were engulfed in a raging wildfire.

Mary had watched them turn from the sappy greens of summer to the rich hues of October and had continued watching, too, as the trees had one by one shed themselves of their foliage which now formed a brown-grey slippery mass on the ground.

The coming winter would be the first when these trees would be covered in American snow, and spring would make them come into leaves with their first American foliage, while their British ancestors would rot on the forest floor.

All things must come to an end, summer among them.

But while many people would have displayed melancholia over the fact that soon, the sun would not shine so warmly anymore, Mary was not one to grieve. She loved autumn best; it was a time of the extremes, of the woods set alight by vibrant colours, of merciless rainfalls that looked oddly picturesque when admired through the window of a house with a water-proof roof, and morning fog that would dissipate, lose its battle against the golden autumn sun and make way for a clear, bright day.

Change need not necessarily be a bad thing, even if others viewed it so.

Yorktown had been won and Abe now had what he’d wanted. Personally, she would never have become so ardent a patriot had she not feared for Abe, the father of her child and her husband, who was ill-suited to the work he had done for Washington, yet she could not help but acknowledge she had contracted a certain sympathy for them, the rebels.

Thomas, her blond little angel, carelessly sat at her feet, playing with a set of tin soldiers. If Mary recalled correctly, they had either been the elder Thomas’ or Abe’s long ago.

Her son was quite busy with the skirmish he was arranging, mimicking sounds and commands he could well have heard bellowed to the soldiers of the garrison or the Queen’s Rangers every day in the recent past.

At times she wondered what the little boy remembered, would remember later in life of the war. They said children wouldn’t pick up on such things, that they were quite ignorant creatures, but Mary was not so certain.

Thomas would, for example, refuse to be alone in a room with Richard, who was greatly vexed by his grandson’s behaviour or hum a little melody that sounded somewhat like the British Grenadiers when he was playing, a little broken and different, but doubtlessly recognisable. She would have to tell him to stop that.

“Yes, what are you doing Thomas, hm?”, she addressed her son who looked up to her and explained the scenery he had set up:

“The Wicked Men wanted to come, but the Green Man made them go away”, before resuming his game.
Thomas, so slight and slender for his age and not exactly the most talkative child, had recently started to speak more frequently and when he did, he usually said something of importance.

“Who are they? The Green Man and the Wicked Men?”, she asked, curious as to the meaning of his game, but Thomas only shrugged and continued to play, leaving Mary to wonder and guess.

Abe was joking that Thomas was turning out very scholarly very young like the uncle he was named after and had never met, which left a foul aftertaste in Mary’s mouth and reminded her of the fact that, had Life gone as one had initially supposed, she would have been married to the aforementioned, not to Abe.

But Thomas Woodhull, her one-time fiancé, lay dead encased in cold clay in the graveyard by the church and she had accepted the second brother instead, the sealed by a handshake between her father and Richard Woodhull.

Although her relationship with Richard had been strained, it had improved when Abe had started to spend longer and longer spells in York City, studying law again, which caused him to neglect his crops and the family income to some degree.

Mary was thankful for Richard’s support, who found himself in the predicament of wanting to approve of Abe finally growing to be the man he had envisioned he would be and watching him neglect his duties as a father and husband. Not that that was new, but as long as they had lived under the same roof, it had not been as evident as it was now.

“Mary”, a familiar voice greeted her from the door.

“Ben”, she looked up, quite surprised to find him there. He had escaped the business of Washington’s inner circle for a few days in order to be with his father for a few days, whom he had not seen in a long while.

“I have received a letter. I wanted to know if Abe- if he maybe received one to.”

“From whom?”, Mary asked and quizzically and raised an eyebrow.

“Anna. From Scotland.”

Mary had heard all there had been to hear about Anna’s departure and had in all honesty felt a certain relief, coupled with the hope that even if they weren’t well-matched as a couple, Abe might now concentrate on his duties as a father and husband- out of sight, out of mind, or so they said.

Not that he had become a better father or husband in her opinion, but she had hoped so, hopes she had buried since.

“Will she come back?”

“No.”

She was relieved, but also ashamed she felt relief at hearing Anna did not intend to leave her self-banishment. She would pray for her happiness there, just like her own self when she had given in to her father’s sweet-talking and assurances and agreed to marry Abe.

While she did not particularly like Anna for obvious reasons, she respected her for carrying the cross of a poor decision born out of lack of judgement with her head held high.

When a week later Abe returned for a few days, she mentioned nothing to him about Ben’s letter, not
a single word passed her lips.

No letter from Anna Strong ever arrived at Whitehall; after years, it felt as if the first of the ghosts of the past infesting that place had gone, molten away like the frosty patterns on the windowpane did in the morning once the fireplace was ignited.

**Duncleade, Scotland, October 1781.**

Just one more letter, and he would go to bed. It didn’t matter he had promised his weary limbs and eyes the same over and over again over the past few hours, he needed to get it done. At three o’clock in the morning (he could tell not because he took a glance at a clock but because he look at the starry sky outside his window told him all he needed to know), he had arrived at this curious, special place he supposed must be known to scholars and scientists only; the body is at a critical point of physical weariness, arms and legs heavy, eyes threatening to fall shut, but the mind is wide awake, forcing the weary eyes and hands to work on, urging them to bring to paper its latest thoughts.

He would never have believed it, but the somewhat more agreeable climate in the house did him good. Since he no longer avoided Anna Strong wherever he went, he felt somewhat lighter, less determined not to see anyone, even though that was the current state of things since his project demanded his full attention.

It made him happy to employ his energy and thought in this manner and whenever he wrote a page, or a sentence that stunned him for its brilliance or ability to explain a complex matter quite comprehensively, he felt triumphant, very good, and his good mood then in turn reflected back on him from those he lived with.

How refreshing it was to be no longer subjected to glances of concern or frowning scrutiny, to receive a smile from another person- especially Anna.

If she were to go away, her absence would be noted, he realised one day not long ago. She made the old house livelier with her presence and everything.

While he had come to the conclusion he had to finally let go of his past, that was restraining him in so many inconvenient ways both personal and academically, he refused to ever think of Anna in any other way than of a friend. They were friends, or had to be, for more could never be again between them- some wounds could not be mended so easily and even if, given time, they would find a platform of close friendship again, neither of them would be foolish enough to dream of things that, as the past had proven, could not be.

She had saved him, and he found his heart weary; weary of the war, weary of fighting, be it in his capacity as Major Hewlett or on the personal field of his heart.

Such negativity had clipped the wings of his mind and instead of flying sunwards like an eaglet, he had hidden in his shell like the oyster in his rather rude cognomen acquired in America.

He was finished with it all, the Army in particular. For years, he had denied himself the academic pursuits he had once aspired to and was no longer willing to hold back, especially not now.

The Army’s defeat at Yorktown had been critical; clearly, if one believed the rumours, peace negotiations would soon commence. The rebels, the Americans, had won. And with the war as good as ended, there would be no need anymore for the excess of men and officers currently still
employed by the Army. He should hate to lead a sorry existence languishing in his mother’s home (since his father had made her his sole heiress in his will, he, the eldest son, had not inherited at his death) on half-pay, which was notoriously small and the Army had never been his chosen profession anyway.

Lately, studying the newspapers, he had come to think a lot of what would come after this war, for he could barely recall what had come before.

Everything, his whole life before being shipped to the Colonies appeared to him dream-like, washed pale by the crushing waters of time, whereas the crimson coats and shrill fife and drum music had engraved themselves upon his mind.

There had to be a future away from his uniform, somewhere. In the past, he had thought about selling his commission, but presently, he didn’t expect many would like to have it.

Now, with the prospect of peace glimmering faintly, yet promisingly on the horizon, he felt readier than ever before to attempt shedding his major’s uniform, and with it, the ghosts of the past.

Hours he had spent sitting over his papers and had come to nothing as his mind had roved to dark places, to regrets- it was then he had realised that perhaps, although he had come to reject the entirety of the principles he had once held dear, there was such a thing like Men of Reason and Men of Blood.

Though he had primarily tasted his own blood from licking his wounds, he had not been able to do anything else, had not been able to create, only to destroy- and who, what was he without his astronomical studies?

All his life, he had wanted to be a scholar. Perhaps the time to become just that was now. Perhaps now people would realise that tho’ military men were needed, the world needed other men also, men of reason, not solely men of blood.

He could not quite pin-point what had encouraged him to actually finish this project, but he was determined to and had sent outlines to people, hobbyists and scientists alike, of mutual interest and was heartened by their encouragement and generally favourable reviews.

They said his work looked promising, and perhaps, if he could sell it to the right people, it might aid him. William Herschel had come from Hannover to England as a musician, who had started observing the stars for a past-time after nightly concerts; and where was he now? Compared to Herschel, he had a sizeable head start as he had begun reading maps of the sky and observing the heavens with increasingly more precise tools when he had been in his early teenage years, which on at least one occasion had led to an awkward encounter with his sister and her beau, a sight for which his young brain had not been prepared.

Apparently the meadow was as good a place to lie and, ah, well, do certain things as it was for stargazing.

Although he longed to escape the close confines of Duncleade, it had at least one advantage Edinburgh, London or Bath could not offer him. Its relative darkness at night and the lack of extremely tall buildings meant he could observe the skies without any greater disturbances (other than Mother wishing to see him and calling him to come downstairs).

A few more nights of observations, a few more letters, a few more hours before his manuscript and he would be finished- it was a most satisfying feeling, knowing the end of his work was nigh and filled with anticipation, pride and contentness, he could scarcely await to present his work first to his
family, then to others.

He did not expect Mother to understand exactly what he was doing as she had, tho’ a lady of great education and wit, never shown much of an interest in his field, but he knew she would be happy and proud to see his achievement, which would make them both happy.

Eliza had every now and then taken some interest in what he was doing, watched over his shoulder as he designed his own maps or wrote excerpts of relevant works and might realise the importance of his work.

Smiling to himself, he was just about to bring his pen to paper once more, when footsteps in the corridor woke him from his self-centred trance. When at last someone knocked, he was as wide awake as can be within seconds.

“Good evening Edmund”, Anna braved herself to say when the door opened in front of her. She had been awake all night, finally reading the letter she had received back from America. That was something she wanted to do on her own, wherefore she had waited for the night instead of opening it in the daylight where someone else might interrupt her or want to see what she was reading.

What she had read (or not read) had kept her up and awake all night. She had written to both Ben and Abigail, but had only heard from the former. Ben was well, or so he wrote, but could not disclose to her anything she would not read in the newspapers soon enough, for fear the letter might be intercepted or its contents otherwise divulged. To some extent, she felt hurt- had she not been a part of the Culper Ring, too? And perhaps even more than just a part, she had hung the petticoats and handkerchief, she had been their signal, their beacon, without whom their proverbial ship would have run aground.

By no means did she have in mind to belittle the efforts and sacrifices made by her fellow intelligencers, Robert, who had been surrounded by redcoat officers day and night, Abigail, whose help had led to the capture of André and Ben, the man who had the General’s ear, but she had done her bit and thus felt somewhat entitled to hear what was going on behind closed doors as so many questions remained uncertain- who would lead the country, what would Washington do, but most importantly, when would peace negotiations start?

On the other hand however, a certain warmth, just like taking a swig of brandy after coming inside from a midwinter walk, spread through her body when she read the parts of the letter not devoted to matters of politics and the fate of the country she had helped to birth but would only get to see grow up from afar: Ben was talking of a young woman he had met, whom he hoped to see more often and also reported of Caleb, who had bidden him to convey his most heartfelt “big hugs for our Annie, as hard and joyful as you can imagine”.

Wistfulness had momentarily fogged her brain as she had sat down by the dying embers of the fireplace in the drawing room to read. She longed to feel Caleb’s hugs and to speak with Ben and all the others. Never, until the end of time could she forget her friends and would continue to write.

When she had jumped into the ice-cold waters of the harbour, it had been her instinct to do so, mixed with a distinct but forlorn hope Edmund Hewlett would reciprocate the love she still felt for him.

That had been wishful thinking on her part and now she was here in Scotland, living with him and his family without really knowing what she would do if Charlotte Hewlett had not been so kind as to take her in and treat her like one of her own.

Sometimes, she tried to ponder on what she would do had she remained on homely shores, but could
not find an answer, if it would be a better life than sitting all day and pretending to naturally belong to the life of the (although quite impoverished) landed gentry with visitors, church attendances and sitting by the fireside to embroider and sew to do all day.

When Selah had still been alive, she realised all of a sudden, and Strong Manor had still been hers, she had had a life like this, perhaps even better, even more comfortable.

Strong Manor seemed so far away- not measured in miles of travel by land and by sea, but in her recollections, it had started to pale and whither like shreds of long-lost childhood memories; she could barely believe she had ever lived there.

In the time that had come to pass since then, she had dirtied her hands both figuratively and most literally speaking and had regarded herself so little she had preferred losing not only her face, but what little of a livelihood she had had to save the life of the man she loved.

She had loved Edmund, truly.

But it couldn’t be any longer, this was another life. A new age was dawning, and the past was the past; it was good they could now regard each other with kindness and politeness.

Sighing, she had folded the letter and slipped it into her pocket; she had held it for a good long while after she had finished, watching the darkness outside through the window.

Once upstairs, she had seen a sheen of light escape beneath Edmund’s door and she had wondered- had been curious- why had she knocked?

“Ah, ehm, Anna, I-“

Wrapped in his purple banyan and with what she secretly called his scholar’s hat on his head, he reminded her of the night he had taken her to see his telescope- even the slight blush on his cheeks was the same, Anna noted, surprised and with a curious sensation rising in her stomach.

“I just came by your room, I was reading a-“

“Why, you are still up as well”, he interjected, “I take it we are both merely more inclined towards nightly pursuits, ah, I mean of course, working at night. What have you been reading?”

“A letter, from America.”

Edmund’s mouth was only seconds from distorting in a manner as if he had just taken a hearty bite of a ripe lemon, but he caught himself and only nodded with great seriousness.

“I hope your friends are well?”, he asked stiffly.

“They are”, she affirmed, leaving out the details Ben had sent her. Many of them, Ben included, shared some piece of their past with Edmund and as the British officer in charge of the Setauket garrison, in most cases, their encounters had not been pleasant.

“And you, Mrs St-, Anna, are you well?”

“I am.”

“Why don’t you come inside?”

Completely taken aback by his sudden question and all it could imply, Anna’s feet rooted themselves to the ground. Edmund must have notice some of her hesitation on her face, for he elaborated: “I have, if I may be so humble as to say that, concluded a work of scientific significance which I hope
to see in print very soon. Would you care to see it?”

He beamed proudly at her when she followed him inside where he shut the door to allow them to graduate from whispers to speaking lowly.

“Over here”, he gestured pompously to his heavily cluttered desk and pulled his chair back for her to sit on. In front of her on the desk lay a manuscript consisting of many pages of paper covered in a neat and very exact handwriting.

“Edmond Halley’s *Astronomiae Cometicae Synopsis*, with additional observations and calculations concurrent to the latest scientific discourse, by Edmund Hewlett.”

As he spoke, Edmund, his back turned to her and freeing a stool of a heavy load of books and papers presumably to have a place to sit, too, sounded very confident, happy.

Anna did not quite understand why he was showing her of all people his work as she had no understanding of astronomy whatsoever, but was happy for him.

Allowing her eyes to wander for an instant, she took the “organised chaos” as she had heard Eliza call it of Edmund’s desk in: ink bottles full and empty, books, papers, piles of letters and maps were arranged around a small enough space for a person to sit down without knocking anything over. Curious, she glanced around; in the old days, back in America, she had admired him when he had shown her his telescope and talked to her about his interests, partly because nobody she had ever known has such a keen and scientific mind. It had amazed her how much he was fascinated with something so far away, so indescribably different from farming cabbages and recording the weather to see if it had been more favourable to sow wheat last year.

Half-smiling to herself, her eyes caught the topmost letter on a sizeable pile and without really knowing what she was doing or why she was doing it, she began to read:

*Dear Major Hewlett,*

*I am very happy we had the Fortune to be introduced to another through my Brother and even happier we are now corresponding regularly.*

- Corresponding regularly?

Jolts of hot and cold stings stabbed Anna’s abdomen from within. She couldn’t keep reading, that would be too obvious, so quickly, she skimmed to the end of the letter to see the signature-

*With my best wishes, my dear Sir, I remain*

*Caroline He-

Anna looked up from the paper, she had seen enough.
“…and this is the new part. Quite, ah, I daresay revolutionary, don’t you think?”

Anna nodded mechanically as she turned to acknowledge and pretend to have heard and understood what Major Hewlett had tried to explain to her. He looked happy, very pleased with himself and the somewhat daring joke, she was at a loss- why was he inviting her in, being so kind to her when- Her heart sank. She should have known, and it was by no means much of a surprise. Too much had transpired between them to ever allow for just so much as a pure, unadulterated friendship. Perhaps by his kindness, he tried to show her he still had the upper hand morally, or wished to inflict pain on her, because for certain, one day he would present this Caroline to his family.

“It’s getting late, Major”, she interrupted him mid-sentence as he went on and on about his book, his pride and joy, rose and hastened to the door. “Goodnight”, she called without even turning around for the last time before the door fell shut behind her.

What had he done to her? All he had wanted to do was show her his finished manuscript, what had he done?

Maybe the answer was a lot simpler than that, Edmund thought and wearily rested himself on the edge of his bed.

He had been cold, unfriendly and uncaring towards her for quite a while. It was only natural she would not want him to be her friend, not anymore. There could be no friendship between two people who had been scorched by Love, he saw that now.

He was too late- had he not shown her such coldness a while ago when he had struggled to comprehend why exactly Anna had followed him to Scotland, why she would torture herself and him so.

Now it was too late, it seemed. His heart had been sore, inflamed and infested with feelings he could not quite align with his beliefs, but he had changed, just like the world around him. Perhaps he had changed too slowly. The pace of the world was to him like being forced to dance at the social gatherings he was at times forced to attend; terribly out of step and tune, he was inconveniencing not only his poor partner, but everyone around him.

Had it not been for the neat stack of papers in front of him and knowing their scientific worth, he would have deemed himself inutile, superfluous to this world.

With a feeling of broken-heartedness he had forgotten he was able to feel, he crept beneath the covers, extinguished his candle and tried to sleep.

Summer had left without a fond farewell and within weeks, mid-September had started to turn the leaves yellow and brown.

By mid-October, the trees were almost bare and the air crisp and cold and in the morning, the fog would hang persistently in the village.

To Eliza, the change in weather had brought a change of personal circumstances as well, if one could
call it that. A week earlier, Alexander had first said The Word, told her that he loved her.

For a long while, she had already felt the same but never mustered the courage to say it, fearing he would misunderstand her, that it was wrong, or the moment was ill-chosen- in that regard, she scolded herself while glumly staring into the mirror and fastening her favourite fichu with a brooch her late husband had given her to the front of her dress to keep the cold from her neck and décolletage, she was no better than her mumbling, stuttering little brother who could not tell Anna Strong he was still quite fond of her.

She should have been braver, bolder, but in love, all Hewletts appeared to be terribly awkward. Had she been like this as a teenager as well? Had she blushed at the sight of James appearing under her window and having spent whole nights under the stars in the summer, lying in each other's arms, kissing and fondling like turtle doves?

Perhaps she was just growing old. The wrinkles in her face surely indicated such and at more than forty, nobody expected a woman to be flirtatious and handsome anymore. Many even didn't grow that old, died in childbed or of sickness. The strand of grey she had detected in her hair and which she tried to hide in among artfully arranged curls, had grown thicker too.

Alexander said he liked it, that it suited her, but she had only shot back that he, being blonde, was undeservedly lucky with his hair for the few grey hairs he had were almost invisible and most of the time hidden under his cocked hat anyway.

“I told you I was a shrivelling old onion”, she had said to him when he had pulled that particular strand of hair from her coiffure to toy with it.

“Pshaw, give it a rest for once, will you? You are pretty and above all, the wittiest person I know”, he had complimented her and drawn her into his embrace so her back would rest against his chest.

Their love was not as fiery, passionate as her youthful love for James had been and not as cool and calculated as her relationship, or rather mutual arrangement with Mr Greenwood had looked like, but it felt right, and that was the point of it.

In her forties, she was wiser than she had been in her teens: not all love required to be extremely passionate, breath-taking kisses and breakneck midnight riding like Paul Revere though the countryside.

There was so much beauty, symmetric harmony to be found in the most mundane situations: a glance exchanged over the table, a joke private to only to the two of them, a little gesture, a brush of the hand.

To know someone so deeply to find delight in the everyday, that was to know love.

Their happiness did of course not pass the people of Duncleade by without comment and many long-standing members of the community, especially women who considered themselves respectable commented on how she was spending a lot of time with a captain, implying she could do better than Alexander when her brother was a major.

Naturally, she did not give much thought to these doubtlessly well-meant hints and comments, but kept her eyes well peeled whenever Alexander and she thought themselves to be alone somewhere to avoid the gazes of prying eyes attached to wagging tongues.

“I haven’t seen your brother in a while”, Alexander said one afternoon when they were seated in the drawing room taking tea together sometime in late October or early November, against Mother's
sensibilites seated on the same sofa, “does he not ride anymore?”

“Not at present, no”, she shrugged, “nobody really knows what’s going on in the brain of Major Edmund Hewlett. He makes his rare appearances usually late at night or early in the morning, which is the same time, really. He sometimes orders a plate to be brought to his room and if I wouldn’t hear him pacing on the floorboards sometimes, I’d probably fear he died alone in his room. “

“Has this to do with Anna Strong?”, Alexander wanted to know.

Now that was a good question. She couldn’t tell. Perhaps yes, perhaps no. He had perfected his self-indulgent suffering into an art form, that was for certain, but recently, he had also warmed up to Anna again, to everyone around him even, at least somewhat. She had long stopped pretending to understand the workings of her brother’s brain.

“It’s hard to tell.”

“Or perhaps it is something else? I was happy to have escaped the war and was posted to Scotland instead”, Alexander confessed in a tone that revealed he thought it shameful to say what he was saying and would not repeat it in front of anybody else, “for me, there was never another option than to join either the Army or, which had been preferred, the Navy to follow the proud.” he gave an ironic snort, “family tradition. The truth is, I would not have liked to go to the Colonies, not at all. When you hear or read about these battles- it makes you wonder what he may have seen, what he might see still.”

A heavy pause hung between them like a cloud just before a thunderstorm.

“They called him the ‘Oyster Major’ for his easy command of a backwater garrison, at least that’s what he told me. But I can tell there are things he does not wish to share with anyone, but I will not push him to tell me what they are, especially concerning his time in captivity. And about his second time over yonder, I have told you everything.”

A picture of her own hands, ruby red with the blood of their dead assailant, the blood still warm even, forced itself to the forefront of her mind. She would never forget what happened that day, she realised, shuddering.

“Or maybe”, Alexander said with an indiscernible look on his face, “it was something entirely different.”

From the inner pocket of his coat, he pulled a letter, unfolded it and smoothed the page, which had suffered a few creases being tucked away so close to his body before he handed it to Eliza to read.

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**Dear Sir,**

You are hereby kindly invited to attend the nuptials of my Niece, Miss E. Gwillim, and my Godson, Lieut.—Col. J. G. Simcoe at Buckerell Parish Church near Honiton on 30th December of this year. I trust you are in good health and enclose my kindest regards to Your Father.

* I am yours &tc.,

* Sam Graves
“No.”

Visibly amused, Alexander watched the disbelief on her face.

“Yes”, he replied, “I don’t believe it, either. Do you think he might have been invited, too?”

“Never. Unless it’s a trap.”

“Cannot be, I received mine directly from the Admiral. The man was always kind to me when I was a youth- more understanding usually than my parents, and quite nice to be around as long as his august godson wasn’t there, too.”

“So Simcoe is getting married”, Eliza repeated the unthinkable, isn’t it all a bit rushed? How long can they know each other? A handful of months?”

“Perhaps she’s pregnant”, Alexander speculated, “they say that does sometimes happen when a lady and a gentleman are very much in love but haven’t been to church yet.”

“I wonder how this nasty piece of work found a woman in the first place.”

There was something very, very infuriating about the fact that someone so undeserving, so unpleasant, evil almost, had found happiness in so short a while whereas Edmund, who after the struggles of his youth, after everything he had gone through, deserved some rest and peace and couldn’t find it.

“Mutual happiness is not always a reason to marry. She’s rich, little Lizzie Gwillim. Rich and very young.”

“You mean-“

“She is quite a catch. Tho’ the hunter should take care that this particular vixen is not so easily pursued and persuaded.”

He grinned mischievously and leaned forward, ready to impart the secret lingering on his lips with her.

“Dickon”, he started, stressing the first syllable of the name with particular gusto, ”as he is known to me, one of the Admiral’s nephews, tried his luck a few years back- a spectacular disaster ensued. I don’t have the details, but apparently, his advances ended in a terrible row between the two and now he cannot bear being in the same room as she! Quite a feat for a young lady scarce five foot tall to scare off a naval officer so profoundly he avoids visiting his uncle whenever she dwells in the house, don’t you think?”

Eliza had the strange feeling, even without knowing the future bride, that she and her bayonet-enthusiastic fiancé were a match made in heaven. One could only hope they wouldn’t procreate and populate Britain with a new race of blood-thirsty, flame-haired children out for world dominion.

“Will you go?”

Alexander shook his head.

“Good grief, no. I am touched Admiral Graves thought of me, but I shall decline. Simcoe and I did not get along as boys and knowing what happened in America between you and him, I don’t think our relationship will much improve as adults. I have no reason to attend other than the Admiral’s friendship, which I think should survive politely declining his invitation. Instead, I shall pay him a visit the next time I travel south, he will like that I am sure.”
From previous conversations, she had come to gather Alexander, whose relationship with relatives had always been strained due to his dislike of the Naval Profession, had always been welcome in the Admiral’s house and had once stayed there even for a week when he and his father had fallen out. The elderly gentleman, despite his reputation as a strict officer, had a soft spot for young people: twice married but childless, he had taken to taking not only nieces and nephews both by blood and through marriage under his wing, but had also decided Alexander was in need of his attention.

“You can go, if you like-“

“As I said, I have no desire to see the groom. It would be a waste of good tablecloths if the blood of either of us were scattered on it. Besides, I would hate to leave you here, but could just as badly take you with me.”

Chuckling, he reminded her once more of her heroic deed in trying to rid herself and Edmund of Simcoe and expressed a vague pity she had not succeeded, even though he would now pray, though only for the sake of Miss Gwillim, that he would live a happy and full life.

“He has all the happiness Edmund deserves”, Eliza observed bitterly and crossed her arms in front of her chest just like a petulant child outlining the unfairness of having to go to bed earlier than her elder siblings.

Eager to console her, Alexander inched closer to her to draw her into his arms.

“As long as you are happy”, he breathed into her ear. His breath made the little hairs at the back of her neck rise and prickle deliciously.

“I am. But my brother-“

“Doesn’t seem too unhappy these days I daresay. On the few brief instances I have seen him in the recent past, he didn’t look unhappy to me. Ink-stained fingers, only leaves his room after dark to find himself some cold meats and bread to devour over his books- I believe he lives the ideal life any scholar dreams of.”

True that, Edmund was working much, and to see (or rather, not see) him doing something he evidently devoted his energy to with great zeal made her happy, but there always remained certain doubts in her heart.

As his sister, she knew him too well to believe all was right in his world. He was no longer the cynical shell of her little brother they had gotten back from the Colonies, but it had taken him a while to arrange himself with Anna’s presence, to even be kind to her. Lately, that was changing, too, and he was beginning to be quite friendly and cordial with everyone including Anna, but something was still not quite right; and telling him about Simcoe’s newfound happiness would not improve his mood or constitution.

“Let us not tell Edmund of your invitation”, she told Alexander, who smirked.

“Under one condition- permission to speak, General?”

“Permission granted.”

“A kiss!”, he exclaimed theatrically, “my kingdom for a kiss!”

Never had she obliged any demand more eagerly and when their lips finally separated, she was quite certain Alexander would not spit out a single word.
A few days after she had discovered the letter, the Major was sighted by daylight, which was news in itself, and of good spirits when he joined the exclusively female company at the table for supper.

“Mother, Eliza- Anna”, he opened his speech before clearing his throat, “today, I would like to convey to you a piece of good news: I have finished my manuscript.”

He then proceeded to outline his research and enthusiastically informed them many of his correspondents had written him letters of accolades for his project and the limited results he had given them to review prior to finishing his work.

Anna could not bear to listen and instead focussed on keeping herself from absent-mindedly pushing pieces of her food from left to right and back again on her plate.

“I am intent on going to Edinburgh next month to present myself in scientific circles. And if anyone here would like to accompany me, I would be happy to oblige you.”

His eyes rested uncomfortably searching on her face. Anna looked away. To her relief, Charlotte, transported into realms of joy by these good news, bade her son come over to her and hugged him as if he still was the little boy he had been three decades or more ago.

“I am very proud of you, Edmund.”

“Thank you, Mother”, he replied, a little bit embarrassed by her extremely eager display of affection yet moved also.

“I shall leave in December, and stay for however long it takes me to make contact to the right people, there and in London, or my money runs out.”

“Don’t worry, you still have your commission and as long as the war isn’t formally concluded, you’ll receive full pay”, Eliza tried to raise his spirits.

“Which is the only reason I still have it”, he replied, “at the moment, I suppose I am better off still owning my commission, which is not worth much these days, and profiting from the fact that the Generals are hesitant to give me a new command. I receive my pay without having to do anything for it. There are worse things to be sure.”

“See? Be of good cheer. And when the war is over and your work successful, you can give up soldiering for good. Is that not a prospect to look forward to, Brother Mine?”

“It is”, Edmund conceded. “As I said, if any of you-“

“Anna”, Eliza interrupted him loudly and rudely, “wouldn’t you want to see more of Scotland than this damp little village? Edinburgh mightn’t be London, but there are amusements, there is the theatre and very many learned people who hold salons and gatherings. It is quite different and very exciting.”

Had she not given up hope yet? Apparently, Eliza was trying her best to convince her to accompany the Major to Edinburgh.

“I’ll be fine here”, she tried to decline, Eliza however would never take no for an answer.

“Do you wish to spend the rest of your days here? Give in to your curiosity and go with him! You will see, you shall like it there.”

The offer was tempting- a city far bigger than Setauket and Duncleade, perhaps even bigger than
York City, there would be so many things to do in Edinburgh- and nobody would know her there. This thought was particularly tempting- to be Nobody for once, or rather, Just Someone Else among a crowd of people.

Duncleade was not the most exciting place on this earth, which had its good and bad sides to it; its smallness meant it was quiet, peaceful here and since the people had started to accept the American in their midst, quite nice and cordial, even though they at times still made her feel like a total stranger to this part of the world, which she was.

It also meant she had not many opportunities to spend the money she earned on the side mending and embroidering things, which made her a little proud because slowly, she started to come into a little money of her own again.

“O do come on”, Charlotte interjected, tho’ you are technically not wed, it should not reflect badly on your virtue if you accompany Edmund. You are a widow, and a capable housekeeper, I suspect, which is what people shall believe you are and thus, your reputation shall remain intact.”

His _housekeeper_. Anna gulped to swallow tears and indignation.

“Mother.”

Edmund reached for her hand and shot his mother dagger-like glances.

“Anna is not my housekeeper, nor is she yours. Her help in this household is much appreciated by both my sister and I, and in helping with the upkeep of our house and lands she has done us a great favour. Which I would like to reward- will you come with me, Anna?”

His hand felt as heavy as a rock on hers and left her wondering if he had touched Caroline’s hand in this manner, too.

“Anna, now really-“

Under the onslaught of three Hewletts, Anna finally gave in, if only to gain a moment of peace.

“Alright”, she nodded, hoping she hadn’t made the worst decision in her life as yet. She would live under the same roof as the man whom she had loved, and who was only kind to her because he felt obligated to be so while he had set his eyes on someone new.

She wanted to be happy for him, but found she could not be, even if she tried very, very much.

Their departure was delayed by heavy snowfalls until mid-December, which Eliza in particular viewed as a good thing; from her friends, the elder Hewlett sibling had procured gowns, fabric and the like to outfit Anna properly for the city.

To her surprise, a few things fitted remarkably well (the rest was altered and thanks to Eliza’s diligence and enlistment of an additional pair of helping hands from one of the more skilled girls in the village, finished just in time) and with the aid of a few bows and ribbons, a hat passed down to Anna from one of the Stretton-ladies was transmuted into a quite fashionable accessory.

“There, every inch the City lady”, Eliza said the morning she had helped ready Anna for travel and acted the part of a ladies’ maid, something Anna hadn’t known since the days Abigail had attended to her.
With her hair curled and crowned by a hat of navy blue with matching ribbons and even some feathers, Anna did not resemble the woman who had come to Scotland anymore. She looked proud, perfectly like a woman of the gentry going to town, and if one passed her by on the street without hearing her speak in her native accent, she looked like a fashionable British lady of good, but not exceptional station.

“Save travels!”, she exclaimed as Anna and Edmund had mounted the carriage and continued to wave them until the carriage was out of sight.

“Anna, I am very happy you have chosen to accompany me”, Edmund said, sitting opposite Anna in the carriage. His smile however could not move her stony face, just like everything he had tried in recent weeks to make her smile.

They might not be in love with another anymore, perhaps even friendship was as impossible as he had come to suppose of late, but he still wished her no ill, and her sudden reclusiveness and the sad air surrounding her like a cloud of strong perfume had given him much food for thought.

When she fell asleep, it was almost a relief to him as he no longer had any reason to try and make conversation.

**Edinburgh, Christmas Eve 1781.**

After a week in Edinburgh, Anna could not quite say if she liked it very much. All cities were the same to some extent, although she had to admit she had liked the evening Edmund had taken her to see a play. Momentarily, she had forgotten the thoughts troubling her and allowed herself to become immersed in the story.

Since it took quite some time to set up their little household in rented lodgings that came with a maid, not much had as yet happened on the scientific front, though Edmund sat on his desk every night and wrote letters that were a lot longer than his manuscript.

He was friendly at all times, encouraged her to go and explore the town when he was working, she could go and take a look around, see the market or the cathedral, but Anna seldom found herself in the mood to do so.

Instead, she spent her time reading- among two chests of clothes, they had taken with them a sizeable amount of books.

Each night, they would sit and eat whatever the girl, whose service was included in the rent, brought them from a local tavern.

The Scots were not renowned for their cooking, which showed in the often greyish-coloured food, to which Edmund put a stop after a few days and said he’d rather pay more for meat that wasn’t suspiciously grey in colour and wine that wasn’t sour.

In a way, Edinburgh felt freer, more open than Duncleade, a city in which a stranger did not raise eyebrows, where even she could move around without being looked at twice, on the other hand, she
longed for Charlotte Hewlett’s company, even for Eliza.

She could not make head or tails of Edmund, of his behaviour, and Caroline. She had been The Woman who wasn’t the wife once before, and she had no fancy to be that again. If he loved Caroline, he should tell her so, tell her about her in general rather than smiling at her whenever they sat together or complimenting her hat or dress, telling her she blossomed in the city or giving her books- there was never a time when he didn’t return from the bookseller with something for her, too.

Anna almost felt courted, but could not reciprocate his behaviour, asking herself why he did what he did.

Two weeks passed so, until all of a sudden, she heard the bells ring on Christmas Eve. People seemed merrier at this time of year, light-hearted and happy. Perhaps it had to do that the winter solstice had just passed and the promise of the days getting longer again and the sun warmer had everyone in a state of joyful anticipation, or it was indeed the spirit of the birth of Jesus Christ that drove people closer together, huddled around fireplaces and in churches.

As they both had barely remarked on Christmas approaching, they hadn’t made any special arrangements. It would be a day just like any other, only they would go to church together in the evening.

They would not exchange presents, but perhaps share a more sumptuous meal than usual, if something of the sort could be procured.

In the evening, as they had agreed to do, they went to church. Anna dressed herself carefully in one of her new dresses and warm cloak, aware that she would be seen by people who did not know her, who would judge her on her appearance rather than knowledge of her past, of how she had arrived in Scotland.

What a difference a town of a certain size could make, she thought for what must have been the thousandth time since arriving there.

As the evening was quite agreeable even for winter, they decided to walk, her hands preserved in warm gloves she had been given as a parting gift from Eliza and her head shielded somewhat by a hat.

“Shall we, ah, go?”

Edmund offered her his arm, as gentlemen did to a lady they accompanied. The gesture itself was one of curtesy, as this was what gentlemen ought to do and yet, there was something else, too- it felt good clinging onto his arm and his arm drawing her closer to him, even if it shouldn’t.

The sermon was not remarkable in itself, and in truth, she didn’t pay much attention to it, instead marvelling at the wondrous sight the cathedral was, so big and so imposing with its high ceilings and windows, and the effect was even increased by the hymns being sung and the masses of people in there with them.

In complete silence, they walked back to the rented room after receiving the message of the birth of Christ. The day was overcast, the sky of a dull grey that now faded into a bluish darkness with no snow to make the scene prettier, and the houses even greyer than the sky above.

A beggar on crutches hobbled towards them, one of his legs missing. A cannonball, he informed them, during the war, somewhere in the Carolinas.

Out of charity, Anna gave him a coin, knowing even though now her mind could feel at peace for
having done her Christian duty to her neighbour, the man would not live better or more lavishly now
from her small present.

She thought of how many men on both sides had died and suffered. In camp, she had seen a good
deal of horrific injuries. Wounds made by muskets, when in the body, not the head, she had been
able to stomach; but seeing brain matter scattering around a man’s head or watch him cry, plead with
God for his long-dead mother because the pain from an arm ripped off by a cannon-ball was so great
sometimes came back to haunt her.

Most times, she managed to push these pictures into the back of her mind and tried not to think of
them, but in moments like this one, they came to the fore again. Having helped with the injured, as
had been expected of the women in camp, she had seen her fair share of blood, death and dying and
found that she had enough for the rest of her life. Seeing the ragged one-legged wretch in the street, it
had not mattered to her that he had served with the British- in war, all soldiers were equal and she
took pity on him based on the things she had seen for herself, hoping the ha’penny she had tossed
him would at least buy him something to eat this Christmas Eve.

Edmund had seen the man, too, and dressed in his regimentals, tipped his hat to him as if the wretch
on crutches was a general.

It was then Anna remembered that in Edmund’s boot, there was a foot missing three toes and she
wondered if he felt guilty for having escaped so relatively unscathed in the face of this other man’s
misery or if he felt lucky for the same reason.

When they arrived at their modest abode, she was intent on going to bed early after they had almost
silently supped on the cold remainders of their mid-day meal. They had briefly exchanged their
opinions on the sermon and the singing in Church, the drab weather, but nothing of substance. Later,
Anna mused, Edmund would most likely still want to work on his correspondence or something else
related to his latest attempts to make his name as an astronomer and in his study, he was best left to
himself.

Besides, for some reason, Christmas Eve made her very melancholy and all she wanted was to be to
herself a while. It truly was the time of year to think about one’s loved ones, about absent friends and
family.

She was too young to remember a Christmas with all her family, her mother, who had died early
included, and did not miss the Christmases spent pouring drinks for Setauket’s lobsters. The evening
was just like any other to her, even if she knew to most others, this night was very special not only
for its religious significance, but also for the family gatherings, the food and entertainment.

She might go to her room and read a while, and then fall asleep to rise early and prepare breakfast for
the two of them before continuing to work on some commissions she had secured.

“I’m going to bed, Edmund, good night.”

Anna looked at him with a small nod and an indiscernible expression on her face. Perhaps she
thought she looked relaxed, at peace, but beneath the façade of her face, he could read in her eyes
that she was not.

Neither was he.
In this moment, it dawned on Edmund that he had to make a decision, a decision upon which depended the world, his world, Anna’s world.

He could say “yes, goodnight” and let her go or he could call out for her to remain here with him a few moments longer.

These past weeks, he had felt as if he had let her go bit by bit, as if she had been slipping away from him. For what reason, he knew not, but he had done everything he could to make her happy and feel comfortable, and it saddened him that she would not tell him what was wrong, so they could together devise a plan or a way in which he might help her.

The decision had to be made imminently, which went against everything he stood for: he was a man of carefully laid plans, of weighing advantages against risks- he was no heady, impatient man who would use force to get his way.

He was no Simcoe, he was a man of reason, of thought, of manners, all of which he should consider before making a decision in this case- but alas, he couldn’t, was aware of the fact that within the next five seconds that felt like hours, he had to make a decision.

Scenes of his life before this moment, of America, of Anna, forced themselves upon his mind’s eye, as reportedly happens when one lies dying. And if he was true to himself, something had just died within him, a little creature that had resided in his ribcage and eaten away at his heart and organs.

There still was a distinct sting when he recalled how Anna had jilted him, her trembling features when he had asked her to tell him she had loved him, not to mention her conduct in the past few weeks, but it was unlike the feeling he had had before: it was the difference between an open, festering wound and an old scar hurting in bad weather.

The battles in which he had received these wounds had been fierce, trying, had almost consumed him, body and soul.

No action he had seen when in active military service had been fiercer than the battle fought in his heart over Anna Strong, the Patriot Spy.

As an officer, he had earned a mocking epithet for his reluctance to engage in direct military action with the enemy and his relatively secure, safe command of overseeing a small backwater town, but all those people who had called him “Oyster Major” were wrong. His battles had been, were still, battles of a very different kind.

He never would be a brave man, so much he knew, the decision at hand however required bravery. Simcoe’s manic, mocking voice resounded loudly in the bone of his skull, making his brain shake and his body shiver. “Oyster Major”, the rabid captain, white wig askew and his face bloody from shooting an elderly civilian had taunted him with two icy blue glass beads staring emptily at his face, his mouth distorted into an insolent grin, like something animalistic, inhuman, and haunted him still.

He wasn’t the Oyster Major. He was Major Edmund Hewlett, and Edmund Hewlett had to make a decision- to advance a step or to retreat?

He wasn’t the Oyster Major.

Not anymore.

“Anna?” he managed, causing her, who had already taken a step towards the door, paused and turned.
Evidently, she expected him something to say now, but his tongue was tied. He didn’t know what.

“I, I ah- stay. Please.”

How he had done it, he would never be able to tell. Boldly, he extended his arm and brushed her hand with his, beckoning her to remain in the drawing room with him.

In response, Anna made another step toward him, looking at him without saying anything, likely as lost for words as he.

Instinctively, he reached for her hand, this time to take it in his, closing it around her slender fingers.

Anna’s hand was warm and very soft where the hard work in the tavern and later in camp hadn’t left her with strong patches of callous that wouldn’t go away, just as he remembered it. In a way, her hands mirrored her personality: gentle and hard-working, delicate and steadfast, her palm rested in his.

“Please don’t go.”

“Edmund, let me go. Miss Caroline would not like it, and my days being with a man promised to another are over.”

Confused, he knitted his brow —

“Caroline?”, he echoed before the name ignited a lightning bolt in his heart and caused a smile to illumine his lips.

“Caroline, Miss Herschel, that is, is a good friend, but nothing more. She is ah, a, luminary in her field. Sister to Mr William Herschel, her occupation are the stars also and like me, her research revolves around comets. It is only natural we should correspond- but pray tell, how did you-?”

“In your room, the night you showed me the manuscript. There was a letter on your desk and I assumed-“

He knew exactly what she had assumed, which explained her behaviour. Anna had held him for a vile cad showing her kindness while entertaining another close acquaintance, which could not be farther from the truth. Never, never could he- no, never.

“No, Anna. Never.”

Anna’s face changed between expressions of surprise, guilt and shock, before she managed to say she was sorry for having wrongly assumed Miss Herschel was his dear friend.

“Edmund, I didn’t know- I am sorry. I should not have assumed anything, but asked you instead.”

“Hush. It is done now, it is quite natural you were hesitant to address this topic and I have no mind to dwell on the past.”

Edmund exhaled audibly, not knowing what else to say. He could have phrased his feelings in volumes, unhandy tomes nobody would ever pick up and read afterwards, if only he had had the time to think about how to express them, the exact phrase, grammatical construction and choice of words.

But he couldn’t and so, his speech that would otherwise have covered the topic of their lives and how they had intertwined, including all the ugly, hurtful truths of their separation, was reduced to its
most important message.

Anna, whose hand he still held, shook her head and looked him in the eyes. Her chest was heaving heavily and a slight tremble was detectable in her hand enfolded in his as she, pausing a moment (did she think about the same things he had thought about mere seconds ago, had she come to a similar watershed?), at last shook her head.

“No.”

“Anna.”

He wanted to laugh and wanted to cry over the nature of their misunderstanding which reminded him more of a Shakespearian play than real life, but neither reaction appeared to be the right choice to make. He wanted to say something, but didn’t know what.

Words were superfluous, for there was nothing else to say between them. They knew everything of the other, each darkness and ray of light to be found in the shadowy human soul already.

Later on, Edmund would not be able to recall how he had mastered this feat, how he had ordered his body to move when he had felt utterly petrified, but he extended his free arm and brought it to Anna’s back and carefully drew her to him. She followed until their bodies were very close, leaving less than an inch of air between them.

“Don’t ever go away again. And don’t ever believe I could ever set my eyes on anybody else, because I cannot. I have loved you ever since the day I saw you swimming towards me.”

“Which time?”, she asked and almost made him smile.

“The very first time, in fact, in Setauket. When you returned to perform your duties as a spy in Setauket rather than leaving with your late husband.”

“Oh Edmund.”

Anna’s voice quivered, no *shook* with the force of a stiff winter gale, bearing testimony to her inner agitation.

His head intuitively fell forward to rest his forehead against hers. Almost immediately, he felt her forehead reciprocate, pressing her head against his.

For a moment, they froze in this pose to exchange glances directly for a long time- how long had he not been able to look her in the eyes as he did now, to behold them without the tainting aftertaste of stale blood from a battle long fought?

Yes, they had fought many battles, for acceptance from their environment, over their hearts beating not only for themselves or each other, but contrasting political views as well and on grand battlefields, too with the entire town of Setauket and surrounding members of the local Quality in attendance or at the harbour, under the noses and watchful eyes of hundreds of people curiously eying the spectacle Anna had given them, jumping into the water.

Yet no battle had ever been decisive. This was not the late war, which he had followed over the past months only through the belated reports in the British press, no one would paint large panels showcasing their fight, which had for the most part taken place unseen within their hearts, no one would laud either one or the other side and wave flags or place laurel wreaths on their heads.

This was between the two of them, and after years of struggle, he wasn’t even sure if there could ever be a victor, and if so, if that title would mean something to either of them.
And then it just happened. All was natural, felt right when he made the ultimate step, burning up inside, dying to feel her close as close can be and pressed his lips to hers.

A sigh, a little sound of astonishment asking if this was real fled her lips before she reciprocated his bold advance and kissed him back.

One of her hands came to reach around his shoulders, drawing their bodies even closer, which he took as an invitation to enwrap her in his arms, too.

Clinging on to the other’s form, their kiss deepened, their mouths open to another to create a most intimate moment; Edmund doubted they had ever kissed quite so passionately before.

Once, perhaps, when they had talked about Scylla and Charybdis, but even then, there had been some restraint, the feeling someone at Whitehall might see, the repressed fears and feelings each of them had tried to hide.

As the heavy load of the past weeks and years fell of his back, he reasoned that they had stripped their souls bare to another during their time in Scotland, especially in this very night. There was nothing left to know, he knew Anna, wearing clothes that were not hers and trying to earn a little money to not depend entirely on the charity of his family and she knew him fighting the cold disdain and pulsating pain in his heart that had prolonged his estrangement from her.

They knew each other, knew the other’s most unfavourable aspects, and there was still love between them. It hadn’t died, as the euphoric, ecstatic nature of their kiss proved, had not withered away as he had hoped it would in days past.

“Anna”, he breathed, hardly able to believe what was happening was reality.

That broke the spell. They were transported from their little corner of timelessness back into the real world; there were footsteps pacing in the lodgings one floor above and indistinct chatter in the street below and the room smelt of firewood.

Their faces drew apart, but their hands kept holding on for a moment longer, reluctant to let go.

“Edmund”, Anna shook her head, “this-“

“No”, he replied decidedly at sensing her regret for what had just happened.

“I am past regret. In fact, I have bid farewell to it all. The past. Setauket. The War. It is liberating to let go of these things. Yet I find there is one thing, one person, I cannot let go of.”

He paused meaningfully and looked her straight in the eyes. Later on, he knew, he would ask himself where he had taken such great courage from.

“You, Anna.”

“Edmund-“ she protested, her voice shaky. “Don’t say something because you feel bound to by honour.”

“Honour”, he scoffed, “is fleeting, perhaps even non-existent. My time abroad taught me so. What I say, I say because I mean it. I cannot play a game of pretend any longer, do not wish to play the part people expect me to. I speak to you not as the Oyster Major, or Edmund, the Scot of Duncleade, I speak to you as myself, Edmund Hewlett, no more and no less, and ask you if you would have me again.”
“Have you, Edmund?”

“Have me.”

Tears gathered in Anna’s eyes as she gulped to suppress more vocal expressions of emotion before she spoke.

“I would never have thought-“

“And yet you held on to believing in a miracle when you followed me to Scotland.”

“Perhaps I did”, she answered affirmatively, though her voice revealed to him she had not always harboured the flame of hope in her heart throughout these past months, either.

“I have caused you pain, I see that now”, he murmured, unable to face the full reality of the cold treatment he had afforded Anna by saying these words in a firm voice.

“I was hardly a gentleman at a time when you were in terrible circumstances. Far away from your home, penny- and friendless- and I made you believe I was a vile lecherous man preying on you while entertaining another close acquaintance-“

Anna shook her head forcefully at these words.

“No. We have both done things, for reasons we considered above our personal happiness. We were at war for very long, and caught in it as in a spider’s web.”

“Scotland”, he gestured to the window overlooking the drab little street, “is at peace. So tell me, are we?”

“We are.”

Without another word, for he did not know what else could be said, he put an arm around her and drew her close to his side.

The feeling of Anna’s body so close to him was equally familiar as it was oddly new. He had known her for so long, knew the softness of her hair and the comforting familiarity of her scent, knew even how her lips tasted on his, but in this moment, it was all new to him again, as exhilarating and confusingly beautiful as the day they had first held each other in a similar manner, many moons ago across the ocean.

Without a word being said, they held each other in that manner, her head resting on his shoulder and his head inclined towards hers, their arms wrapped around the other.

Never had a moment been more beautiful, more sincere or pristine, and never, not even as a little boy when his father had been alive and the family had entertained lavishly with plays, merriment and presents had Christmas been so wonderful.

That year, he had been given the greatest gift and as he stood there, Anna in his arms for the first time in so long and painful a while, feeling the warmth of her body, her hands holding him in a firm embrace and the brush of her miraculously soft hair against his cheek, he vowed he would treasure this moment and above all, Anna, for the rest of his life.
The timeline: as some of you might have noticed, there are historical events in the story that can be pinned to exact dates (e.g. the Gwillim-Simcoe wedding on 30th December 1782), but as I stated ages before in a previous notes-section, I am trying to work with TURN's far from accurate timeline and portrayal of events where Yorktown, reduced to one single battle, takes place in spring, not in September to October, thus skipping the best part of one year.

Therefore, I've moved the wedding and the (historical) birthdays of the (historical) characters each one year earlier- Simcoe is born in 1751, Elizabeth Gwillim in 1761, Admiral Graves in 1712, Margaret Graves in 1726, the wedding takes place in 1781... you get the idea.

Astronomy: I have remained very vague about what Edmund is writing about exactly, mainly because I don't have the knowledge needed to produce something more scientifically intricate than what I came up with and I didn't want to "steal" a real scientific discovery from someone else and pin it onto Edmund either.

Caroline Herschel appears since she made a guest appearance in the last episode (and really, SHE should have shown HEWLETT how to use a telescope, not the other way around- she was a full-time scholar and would doubtlessly have been a greater expert in the field than a mere enthusiast). Her speciality were comets, so it was only fitting she should correspond with Hewlett. Since we know from season two he knows William Herschel and the latter endorsed his sister's work (I once had the great opportunity to hold one of his letters concerning Caroline's work in my own hands while visiting an archive in which he acts as arbitrator between her and the Royal Society, presumably with the goal to get her findings published in their journal- complete with a greasy thumbprint (Herschel's?) on the page), it seems plausible to me that he might have connected the two for the purpose of scientific discourse.

Samuel Graves signed letters to people he liked as "Sam Graves", even in official correspondence. His way of caring for other people's children in the face of not having any of his own is not fictional, either; when Simcoe was still a baby, he called him "Infant Graves", which implies he might have thought of him as "his" child to some degree. Elizabeth, who came to live with him (and to some extent her best friend, too) aside, he also took great interest in at least two nephews and showed shameful preference to any young man with his surname under his command.

The story about Elizabeth Gwillim scaring off Richard Graves (1758-1836) so profoundly he was afraid of her is not a product of my imagination, either- according to legend, Samuel Graves tried to acquaint the two (hoping for them to get on well and ultimately, married), but his plan backfired spectacularly: the two got into a serious fight and Elizabeth gave Richard a piece of her mind.

When Elizabeth and Richard must have been in their 30s/40s, they apparently put their youthful disagreements behind them enough for Richard to be invited over to Wolford Lodge for festive functions. On one such occasion however, Elizabeth (mind you, not her tall, imposing military man of a husband) is said to have personally kicked him out in a rather undignified manner for talking badly about her family. Eliza is right in her assessment of the situation (and Alexander in the interesting way he stresses Richard's name ;)

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Old Ends and New Beginnings

Chapter Summary

Edmund and Anna surprise another, a bad surprise for Captain Barnett turns out to be very good- in a way and poor old John Graves is in for a surprise (or several) too...

Chapter Notes

Hello there! I’m back with a new chapter- I hope you enjoy it! Since I do not think a solitary instance merits a general update of the rating (yet), be warned this chapter contains some E-rated moments. “What? Why? Who?”, I hear ye ask- well, obviously, I won’t tell you. Read and find out. :) Also, allow me to add a recommendation to all of you who enjoy (original) Revolutionary War fiction and speak German (or alternatively have fun experimenting with translating programmes): I recently stumbled across a fic called “Und dennoch hoffe ich auf morgen” (“And Yet I Still Hope For Tomorrow”) by Nordlichter. It revolves around a young man of German descent called Friedrich Deegen joining Washington’s Army in the famous winter of 1776. It has everything you might enjoy if you like “Roses and Thistles”: really interesting original characters, lots of historical figures and very detailed footnotes! Please drop by and give it a read. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I did!

Edit: more notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My love is in a light attire
Among the apple trees,
Where the gay winds do most desire
To run in companies.

There, where the gay winds stay to woo
The young leaves as they pass,
My love goes slowly, bending to
Her shadow on the grass.
And where the sky's a pale blue cup

Over the laughing land,

My love goes lightly, holding up

Her dress with dainty hand.

(James Joyce, *Spring*, published 1904)

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Duncleade, Scotland, early spring 1782.

The hand on his shoulder was warm and radiated comfort from where it touched him throughout his body.

She stood silently behind him as he kept his head bowed over the letter laying in front of him on the table.

“I am very sorry”, was the only thing she had said over the last half an hour since he had staggered into the house without having announced his visit and had promptly been transferred to the drawing room, where he had been made to sit down and given a cup of tea. When tea had not sufficed anymore, she had called for some whiskey and two glasses.

“That’ll help”, the dark-haired woman had commented pouring their glasses and trusted one into his hands.

“To your uncle-“ she paused here to make room for a name she did not yet know.

“Captain Richard Barnett”, he filled the pause.

“To Captain Richard Barnett, wounded and died aboard the *Preston* at Spithead”, Eliza said in a very solemn voice. “May his troubles be over and his soul with Our Lord.” They toasted and downed the almost clear liquid in silence.

“You know, with the war going on, I would never have thought it would happen like that, here-“ he shook his head, not quite understanding how in the world his uncle had died off Spithead in a silly, meaningless accident on board his ship. How did such things come to pass? Why did such senselessness exist?

Alexander had no answers. Instead of a heroic death in battle, as he knew his uncle would have aspired to, he had died after taken a fall on the quarterdeck during a stiff gale that had tossed the ship about a bit. He had looked right as rain and even got back up onto his feet all by himself, but when he’d gone to bed in the evening, he hadn’t risen in the morning.

An aneurism in his brain, caused by the fall, or so the doctors had concluded, had proved his undoing.

“Life can be so fickle at times-“

“He was an officer, your uncle was prepared to die-“

“No”, he cut Eliza off, knowing she only meant well, but she did not speak the truth. “I am an
officer, and I certainly have not made peace with the prospect of death. I was awfully glad my regiment remained on British soil when so many other men spoke of the great glories that supposedly awaited them in the Colonies—‘he shook his head when words failed him.

His lady’s arms embraced him from behind and he let her. She was in the wrong, but her eagerness to make him feel better was greatly appreciated.

“Admiral Graves is a kind man, it was nice of him to write you even though he had to suppose your father would, too.”

“He is a true gentleman”, Alexander affirmed and compared the lines he had received from both men, his father and the latter’s old friend, in his mind. The sober précis his father had sent him, a very short letter all in all that did not tarry much on prefacing the reason he was writing with phrases demonstrating even feigned condolences was contrasted by the old Admiral’s quite long letter detailing the latter’s sorrow at hearing the news and his immediate thoughts for his deceased brother officer’s nephew, who had to be very sad having lost an uncle like Richard Barnett, a man of the highest character, great integrity and an intrepid nature.

 Granted, in his ears Graves’ praise for his uncle sounded somewhat foreign, having known him on most days as a man who was not very taken with his nephew’s path in life, but the sentiments expressed were genuine. And truth be told, even if Uncle Richard had not approved of his choice of career, he had made a greater effort towards him than most of his relations— he had not been half as bad as he had pretended to be, which was the reason Alexander was quite sad when he received the melancholy news.

“My father also says that I must come and visit at once, for my uncle left a will”, he said and looked up to Eliza.

“Then you must go”, she answered immediately, but her voice betrayed regret.

“I must ask for a temporary leave to attend to my uncle’s affairs, get my things in order— they would not want me there if I would not inherit something. I would not consider it out of my family’s cunning to have invited me to watch as I am bequeathed a single shilling when the will is read, but Uncle Richard— well, I suppose I have to see.”

To talk about the inheritance seemed impious to him; he was disgusted by his words as he heard his own voice explain to Eliza the proceedings of the coming weeks— he had no reason to expect benefiting from his uncle’s death, nor would he have wanted to. Richard Barnett’s corpse was barely cold and his mind was already set on the question of who would get what.

“You will be missed”, Eliza told him, trying to make him smile in his confused state of grief and self-disgust.

“I am sure the Major can spare you for a while.”

Eliza hid her true feelings from Alexander when she bid him goodbye as they waited together for the stagecoach to pass through and whisk him away from her, southward-bound.

There was a certain irony in it, watching him leave when she had gone and crossed the ocean
without him but things had been different then. Not as solid, not-

She had known and loved him a little already, but her true feelings for him had blossomed after she
had returned, when his absence had made her aware on cold American nights in what effectively
was enemy territory of the lack of his presence.

He had helped her, without him, she would never have gotten Edmund back alive- and Anna, too.
Alexander Barnett had been not only a great friend and ally who had done her family a great service,
he had become the man she loved, too.

But after two ill-fated attempts at marriage, she was willing to believe God had not allotted the joy of
eventual marital bliss or anything akin to domestic happiness to her- and not that she had minded it
much after her marriage to Mr Greenwood, a decision of Sense, not of the heart, but now with Alex
in her life, she had begun to dream- not that she had told him of course.

At last, she could hear hoof beat in the distance; the coach, still a dark spot in the far distance, was
approaching at good speed and would soon be there.

“Stay safe”, she told him and righted his collar, which made him smile.

“I will”, he promised and kissed her, for there were no more words needed between them.

The coach stopped by their side and quickly (Alex being the only passenger at this stop), the
baggage loaded up.

“Oh, one last thing”- Alex looked at her with a serious mien.

“I love you. And I will return to you.”

“…Say all the soldiers in the songs”, she muttered feebly, trying to still be happy and cheerful even if
his decision to leave her was not what she would have wished would happen.

“But I will”, he replied determinedly, “because I’ll always come back to you. Always.”

He pressed her hand and then was gone, mounted and seated inside as the coachman smacked his
whip, causing the horses to veritably fly across the road and away from her.

Without Anna, Edmund and Alexander near, Duncleade had become very quiet.

Edinburgh, Scotland.

Since Christmas, things had changed considerably and at such a rapid speed Anna could hardly
believe this was reality- she and Edmund had devised a daily routine that suited them both; in the
morning, Edmund would work or answer his correspondence and she would sit with him, the two of
them spreading their work on the dining room table, while she took care of their finances, filled in the
ledgers and decided what needed to be bought, replaced or mended, running their small household
with the same efficiency as she had the tavern in Setauket.
Edmund had offered her payment for her “valuable help”, but she had refused. As she was already living under his roof and eating from his table, she did not wish to accrue even more financial and moral debts, wherefore she preferred to keep taking on the mending and sewing work people brought to her to earn some modest coins that were not alms of the Hewlett-family.

In the evening, after they had supped together as it had become their wont and remained seated to talk a bit more about the past day, the weather the neighbours and all sorts of things, Edmund often reached over the table to stroke her hand and she beamed at him in reply, still in utter disbelief about how all of a sudden, their world had changed.

Sometimes they were still a bit awkward around another when memories of the past surfaced too suddenly to immediately suppress them, but all things considered, Anna could not help but feel her heart flutter whenever she saw Edmund, whenever they walked together or attended parties, at which they introduced another to strangers as “old friends”, a compromise they had reached in order to at least try and keep the wagging tongue of gossip off them.

To her infinite surprise, Anna had found the free-thinking élite of the educated of Edinburgh rather welcoming of an American, not at all hostile and often at gatherings, she was at the centre of conversations, although she at times met objection and raised eyebrows when she answered to questions of her personal identity in these changing times that she was American.

She had quickly learned that most were just curious of a place they had never been to and a war they had only followed in the papers, and even more excited to meet someone from this place, asking her questions which she answered patiently, yet not always entirely truthfully, depending on the political climate of the company she found herself in. Most times however, she managed to find a way in which not to have to betray the country she had fought for and not to offend her British conversation partners at the same time- “a true diplomatic feat”, as Edmund called it. According to him she was “America’s first and foremost ambassador”, which made her smile. Although they still could, and likely never would, agree on politics, they would not fight over the country of her birth anymore.

On this very night, a gentleman of called Mr Bentham (his name had sounded vaguely familiar) had approached her to commend her for the great Sense she had had for abandoning the “experiment bound to fail” as he had called America. Having gradually become surer of the ground she trod in society, she had told him that her reasons had been of an entirely different nature and that, quite frankly, she supported General Washington and the rebels.

Mr Bentham had looked quite aghast.

“My dear Madam, I appraise your decision of having taken your fate into your own hands whatever the cryptic reasons you do not wish to reveal, but surely you must see the lawless folly, the stupidity-“

“No, Mr Bentham I do not. And I beg you not to offend my country as I would not offend yours.”

“Since it is obvious to me that I cannot change your mind, can I direct you to a publishment of mine? My Short Review of the Declaration, which in all brevity outlines the principal wrongs to be found in the Declaration of Independence alone-“

Ah, this was why his name had sounded somewhat familiar. Upon hearing the title of his so-called publishment, she recalled Captain Joyce reading it aloud to a well-filled taproom full of redcoats who had cheered, clapped or otherwise made their approval known in order to please their superior.

Edmund had stood a few feet away and curiously observed the exchange, but held back on his opinion on what he had heard until they had returned home late in the evening.
“I thought you fared admirably”, he smiled. “Although I have to admit I share Mr Bentham’s views, I am quite in awe of your, ah, steadfastness and diplomacy.”

“I’ve spent years of my life persuading raucous drunks, many of them British soldiers, to leave the tavern and go to bed at odd hours”, she reminded him, “one might say I have ample experience in handling British gentlemen who had had one glass or several too many.”

Edmund laughed at her comment half intended as a joke and rose to say goodnight.

Anna rose, too and on a whim, finding his smile so very, very beautiful, she felt the urge to feel it on her own lips.

They had kissed a couple of bashful times since Christmas, almost always initiated by either of them awkwardly, but never really had talked about what they were doing and why they were doing it.

With the slight aftershock of an evening of fine claret giving her courage, Anna leaned forward to kiss Edmund who, to her surprised joy, parted her lips eagerly with his own to kiss her back. Their sudden kiss tasted wonderful, perfect even in its spontaneity and the passion both of them put into it.

Perhaps it had been the wine, perhaps a sudden bout of boldness such as the one he had had on Christmas Even when he had bared his true feelings to Anna that allowed Edmund to kiss Anna so passionately for a few moments, before he became acutely aware of what they were doing.

Embarrassed by the arousal he felt and reluctantly acknowledged feeling he drew away as if he had been burnt.

“No, please.”

In order to encourage him, Anna kissed him more fervently and he reciprocated the kiss in equal measure.

“Anna”, he groaned as the wicked vixen smiled at him with roguish desire, “I fear I cannot-”

“And I don’t want you to. We have us, Edmund. More I don’t need to know- we’ve lost everything before and now, I am inclined to have it all.”

To hell with all his propriety, his manners and everything, the concepts he tried to deny he still subscribed to but in all truth, always did and always would, especially when it came to matters of love.

There was no way he could have said no, even though a proper gentleman should have. He should have cared for her reputation, even if she insisted she did not care for she had none left, but he didn’t.

Instead, he roughly pulled her to him in an instinctive motion that made him fearful he had hurt or startled her- but no, Anna moaned, mid-kiss, and leaned into his body, causing him to take a few steps backwards under their combined weight.
The bedroom.

His usual rational thinking became very abridged, reduced to commands which his body had to exercise.

Ridding himself of his banyan on the way and, against his habitual fondness of order, he let it slip to the ground while Anna eagerly unbuttoned his waistcoat.

Too long had he viewed her delightful breasts restrained by stays and hidden under fabric, hidden in plain sight. Eagerly, he reached for them, trying to lift them out of their cage but her stays were laced too firmly.

“No”, Anna interrupted him as his fumbling with those blasted laces and stays, dress and whatnot became too much for her and she too impatient with him and quickly undid what needed to be undone herself before she stood before him in only her skirts and shift.

Edmund was a little embarrassed, for clearly, he had just revealed to her he had not been as, ah, promiscuous as other gentlemen who could do these things in their sleep. But then, he hoped she had always known he was not a charming rogue, nor that such talents could be expected of him. He had always considered himself rather lacking talent in about any field, a failed major of whom only his unflattering cognomen would make it into the annals of history, if anything at all, and a dilettante amateur astronomer.

Anna on the other hand, as the entirety of Setauket had known, was quite well-versed in the art of love-making- for a brief moment his heart, stinging with wild jealousy, wondered if Abraham Woodhull or the late Mr Strong had shivered so, had felt pleasure rise in them in the same manner as he did in this moment as Anna undressed him. He would do better than them. He would make her forget the world around them for a short while, he would give her everything of himself, he would make her forget all the other men until all she would remember was his name-

“Edmund”, she smiled and called him from the dazed trance he was in to attention. “You are lost in dreams.”

“Not dreams, Anna. I am lost in you. And if I ah, understand the laws of physics correctly, you are made up of atomic matter, and therefore very much real.”

Her adoring glances were the sweetest thing he ever saw. She was only dressed in her shift and stockings now and in one single alluring motion of her body that reminded him of exotic beauties from oriental tales, she pulled it over her head.

At first, he didn’t know where to look, if he should look at her or direct his gaze elsewhere, which he found hard to do as Nature urged him to take in her beauty, to view Anna, more beauteous than Venus and a greater temptation than the dancing Salome in her natural form, but felt that he could not resist any longer and, although he had quipped before that he knew her to be real for her body was made up of atoms, he was not so certain any longer- could a woman so beautiful inside and out truly be real?

Her skin was soft under his touch, incredibly soft and warm and Edmund unable to liken the experience of touching her to anything else- poetically, perhaps others would have likened their lover’s skin to costly silk or satin, but he felt such was not possible because it just wouldn’t do Anna justice, who was far more exquisite than anything worldly ever could be.

She was the brightest star in the universe and yet, she was also a woman of flesh and blood and most inconceivably, she appeared to desire him, as he gathered from her fingers that had hungrily hooked
themselves in his hair and the passionate kisses he received from her.

Intent to worship her and putting all doubts about his own abilities to please her and moral reservations behind him in order to commit fully to this moment, to their love, he stepped out of his breeches, the flap of which had been opened by Anna and pushed down low on his hips to reveal as much of him to her as was visible of her to him and directed them both to the bed, half-mad already from Anna suggestively pressing and rubbing herself against him.

Her eyes dazed with desire, she let herself fall on the mattress behind her as he followed suit, propping himself up on his elbows on either side of her and used this position to worship the goddess splayed out underneath him with greatest diligence, kissing every part of her from her clavicles to her breasts.

So often he had wondered what it would be like in their days in Setauket when he had seen Anna attend to her daily chores, wondered if she knew that the tavern-wench of Setauket was more beautiful than even the wealthiest ladies in the land decked out in fineries- not even the celebrated Mrs Arnold, who when still Miss Shippen, had been declared the paragon of beauty, was as beautiful as she. Often had he thought of her, of how they would meet, confess their love and then proceed to lie down on his bed, a meadow, wherever his momentary fancy had taken his imagination, but had always dismissed these thoughts immediately for they were most improper and rude.

There was nothing improper or rude about it, he found now that they rolled across the mattress in attempts to find ever new ways of giving the other pleasure and when Anna at last reached for the part of him that had yearned for her attention the most, he read it as an invitation to do the same to her- so far, he had rather tamely refrained from touching her between her thighs, for fear she might think him too bold in his advances and waited for a sign, which he considered given.

Anna let go of him with a pleasure-lost sigh as he braved himself and inched her legs apart so he could slip two fingers into the rosy depths of her sex.

“Oh Edmund”, she moaned and smiled, her eyes half closed, and that was it, he was done for.

Without ceasing to stroke and tease her, he searched for her eyes, seeking to discern if she truly willed him to do what he wished to, at which she breathed a husky “yes”, and he aligned himself to thrust inside her.

An animalistic intuition told him to move, to finally be allowed to feel this most delicious pinnacle of pleasure, but Anna groaning, gasping, interfered: “please, slower, Edmund.”

Fearful he had done something wrong, he slowed his movements, drew them out and was instantly rewarded with a hearty, guttural moan.

“I don’t want it to be over any time soon”, Anna breathlessly explained and undulated her hips in a strategic move he was certain she knew was destined to drive him mad and hooked her legs behind his back to press him even closer to her.

It was not long until he spent, pulling out hastily for fear of certain consequences and rested himself next to Anna who lay boneless and slack from her own fit of greatest delight on the blanket, her hair a mess and her legs slightly open.

Never had he seen more beautiful a sight than her, her face flushed, taut, elevated nipples bearing testimony to his attentions and her chocolate-coloured eyes a-glimmer with Desire Saturated.

“I hope, ah, I hope you, ehm- I hope it was to your liking”, he said, feeling pressed to say something
into the cloud-like silence hanging over the canopy of the bed, and scolded himself for the awkward formality.

“Edmund, I- it was wonderful.”

She had not lied, it truly had been wonderful- not to forget she had vowed never to lie again to a man who had never lied to her- and yet, Anna could not help but question if what they had done was right. In a fairy-tale world, she would now ask him to draw the blanket over her, rest her face by burying it in his shoulder, inhaling his comfortingly familiar scent, but that was not to be.

They had advanced so quickly from almost having become strangers to another to having slept with another in a moment of mutual desire.

Edmund had been a kind and generous lover, attentive to her wishes and needs, not like Abe who had never outgrown the phase of the clumsy, youthful lover and whose disregard for her satisfaction and insistence of spending first had gradually put her rather off him, even though she had still felt love in her heart for him, for the boy he had been and whom she had loved when she had been but a girl.

But people change; and just as Abe had changed, Major Hewlett had, too- there had always been a certain something, perhaps the vulnerability and kindness in his eyes even when he had played the hardy officer in front of his men that had intrigued her (even if at that point, she would have point-blankly denied it) and drawn her to him, however this was hardly the same kind of attraction they had both acted upon only moments ago. Edmund Hewlett was a brave man, a kind man and he loved her and she loved him very much, too.

She should be happy, Anna reasoned, do as she would wish to and ask Edmund to hold her, to fall asleep together in order to wake up in the morning and enter another round of breath-taking intercourse, but she could not, their history was in her way.

Was this to be the last chapter of their story?

And all was well?

Could there be such a thing after so much pain endured by both of them? And how would they, now that the last barriers and inhibitions had fallen, continue to live together? Would they still be able to look each other in the eyes again come morning?

Suddenly, she felt oddly exposed and cold. Anna shifted and slipped underneath the blanket that bore the evident marks of their love-making and drew it up to her neck.

“What is wrong?”, Edmund asked gently and moved to the head of the bed. Despite the room being somewhat cold (something she had only noticed now), he made no move to join her under the warming blanket.

Honesty, Anna found, was the best policy, especially after their painful past made up of lies, deception and conflicting loyalties.

“Where do we go from here?”, she asked. “We have gone on a journey, in a proverbial sense, but
Edmund’s mouth twitched at the latter bit of the sentence and shook his head, his still fairly novel dark mane falling to his shoulders.

“We, ah, could we not continue to live on as we do for the time being. You like it here, do you not?”

“I do.”

“Then it is settled”, Edmund sighed tiredly and at last crawled under the blanket next to her. Contently basking in the aftereffects of sexual satisfaction, he was about to fall asleep when Anna, rising to blow out the taper on the nightstand asked into the darkness if he was still awake.

“Yes, ah, a little bit, I suppose.”

“Tonight- please just hold me, Edmund.”

She could not bring the words out, could not bear to say the things she needed to say. She was afraid that their gently-developing friendship could be negatively affected by their night together in Edmund’s bed, that from tomorrow morning on, they would return to ashamedly evading each other’s eyes when they talked and pushing the other away.

They had been separated far too long and believed they could never love the other again truly for far too long, until fate had stepped in and through a series of almost incredible events and Edmund’s enterprising elder sister had proven them wrong.

Edmund complied drawing her back against her chest and made her feel his comfortingly warm and (as she had discovered unclothing him) surprisingly well-proportioned body, which he had likely obtained through riding and occasionally tending to the horses and stables at home in Duncleade himself rather than from his previous occupation as an opinionated office-clerk dressed up in lobster red.

His arm snaked around her body and splayed its fingers on her stomach in a gesture that was comforting and frustratingly arousing at the same time as his thumb began to lazily stroke the underside of her breast.

They shuffled a little with Edmund burying his face in her hair and Anna inching even closer to Edmund until there was not even the tiniest bit of space between them left before they finally fell asleep. Little did she know the next morning would bring news that would force them to part ways a second time.

Duncleade, a week earlier.

With shaking hands, Eliza folded the letter she had just received.

Originally, she had planned to leave for London in a few days to spend some time there enjoying the amusements and intellectual stimulation the capital city had to offer, but those plans would be halted now.

My Dear and Most Lovely Eliza,
the letter had started,

I write to you because I miss your Companionship and wish to tell you of the latest developments in the case of my Late Uncle’s affairs. It appears he left everything tout en ordre, with his will having been read yesterday.

He was a childless man with few relations, and it was to be expected he would leave portions of his wealth, estate or valuables to my brother and me, but what I am going to tell you was totally unexpected: arguing my brother would receive our parental estate, he, left his own estate to me alone, with my brother receiving £1,500 and the contents of his library. The rest is mine- I am now owner of lands in Devonshire, Somersetshire and some small and remotely situated Buckinghamshire mansion I have never heard of before, but which I plan to rent out.

My Seat will no longer be my parental house- I am now a gentleman in possession of a large house of my own called Ashcome House in Devonshire, which I can hardly believe- my uncle was a kind man, one of the few relations whom I truly liked, but that he would be so generous to me and me alone I would never have dreamt.

Can you feel it too, Eliza? My wonderment and elation at suddenly facing the fact that I am now very unexpectedly quite well off and the sadness at my uncle’s passing?

It feels wrong to take possession of his house and home so immediately after his funeral, but I would hate to draw this out, keeping in mind that my uncle’s servants and other employees are now dependant on me and my decisions, too, and I must come up with a way to manage my estate.

I have applied for temporary leave so I might manage my affairs and have been granted it and will now attack my new task with as much vigour as Marlborough did the French at Blenheim.

Now to my question: my dear, my most sage friend, would you consider joining me in Devonshire? I think you would like the change of scenery- but of course, my motives are not of the selfless kind. It is simply that I would like to have you here. I do not miss much about Scotland, least of all the weather and the cold, but when I think of you, my heart yearns for the North. O do come, fair woman and visit me here in the South. I do not know if I ever told you in person and if I have not done so it is Personal Cowardice that has tied my tongue so far, but I love you. You are my favourite, my dearest friend and the loveliest apparition that ever graced my eye. Now that I can aptly provide for you as befits a lady of your lineage-

I am rambling, torn between the guilt I feel at my elation over my inheritance and sadness over my late uncle’s death. If I have been too forward in my letter, you must excuse me on grounds of the reasons given above.

Come see for yourself Captain Barnett’s sudden progress in life- he would greatly appreciate it.

Ever most truly yours

(and yours only)

P.S.: I met Adm. Graves at the funeral, the notorious Red Johnny’s elderly godfather, the one who invited me to attend our dear friend John Graves’ wedding to his niece. He talked of the two of them and made a most curious remark about a horse called Salem- is that not the name of the beast Anna Strong and your brother brought with them to Dunicleade? Apparently, our dear friend made enquiries if his horse was still in York City, but could not find a trace of him. From what you told
me, the Admiral is speaking of the very same horse you currently house, eating your hay and
grazing on your meadows- if you, or rather Mrs Strong, are willing to rid yourself of the financial
burden the unexpected equine puts on your purse, might I suggest you offer him to his former owner
at a good price?
Take him with you as you visit me (if Mrs Strong agrees)- the Graves’ residence (and alas dear John
and his wife as well) do not live too far away- I hope that if my words could not persuade you to
come to visit me at Ashcombe, this thinly veiled pretext can.

The letter was nothing short of a proposal. She had almost immediately read it to mother, whose eyes
had lit up: “Accept him. You cannot hope for someone better at your age. He has an estate now and
some money, looks decently enough and has manners.”

“Mother!”

“What”, the old woman replied dryly at her daughter’s somewhat scandalised exclamation, “I am a
realist whereas your brother and yourself are more inclined towards the romantic. You can have
both, the reality of his wealth and the romance this man evidently kindles in his heart for you. No
match was ever more ideal.”

“Well, he hasn’t asked me yet in person”, Eliza answered in a strong and steady voice.

“Trust me, he will- if you go.”

“And what of the horse?”

Mother smiled knowingly- asking what should be done with Salem implied she continued going.

“He belongs to Anna, she must be asked and you must write to her today- we cannot waste another
day my child, lest you should be fifty when you wed for the second time.”

Eliza scowled at Mother to let the old woman know she did not like being made almost ten years
older than she actually was and left the room in quick steps to pen her letter to Anna, her heart
beating wildly at all the prospects hidden in Alexander’s letter, leaving her to feel nervous, happy,
joyful and somewhat fretful all at once.

Edinburgh, a week later.

For the first time in her life, Anna awoke next to Edmund Hewlett, her lover, her beloved to the soft
dimming of the day in the early morning. He still held her, although they had both changed positions
while asleep.

She was still tired and in her state of drowsiness utterly impervious to rational thought and
susceptible to a hedonistic stream of semi-conscious thoughts that persuaded her to renew the blissful
experience of falling asleep in the arms of the man she loved, and then promptly did so.
The second time Anna awoke, Edmund appeared standing and dressed in his banyan (and his banyan only) in her field of vision.

He looked shaken.

A thousand thoughts raced through her brain- what if he regretted their night together? What if her greatest fear would come true now? They shouldn’t have done it, but they had.

“Edmund-“, she started in her habitually husky voice that was made even huskier by her sleepiness.

“Anna, good morning”, he greeted her warmly, “a letter has just arrived, addressed to us both- well, Eliza intent on saving us the money for the postage, has enwrapped a sealed letter to you in a letter to me and- but I suppose you must read for yourself.”

With disbelief written all over her face Anna devoured the letter Eliza Hewlett had sent to her.

Simcoe, marriage, horse, inheritance- the words threatened to slip away in front of Anna’s eyes, so deep was her disbelief at what she was reading in Eliza Hewlett’s letter.

“And?”, Edmund asked when she had finished, “what will you do?”

Holding the letter between them, Anna was sure Edmund was staring at exactly the same line as she- it was quite unbelievable someone like Simcoe should have found a woman who would love him back and with whom he was leading a quiet life in the country.

“I have no use for Salem. But I don’t want Simcoe’s money.”

Never, not in a thousand years would she take anything from this man.

“If you were to- to return him to his rightful owner, I have decided I would accompany my sister south in that case. I would not let her enter the proverbial dragon’s lair alone- or with her beau- just to make certain all will be well.”

Anna doubted Simcoe would be happy to see him, but what could she do? Tell him no?

“You can come with us, of course.”

At that, Anna shook her head.

“I never be going near Simcoe again.”

She shuddered at the mere thought of the man, his revolting, roving cold eyes and his hair-raisingly long- and thin-fingered hands that bore a striking resemblance to a pair of disconcertingly large albinotic spiders, not to speak of his voice.

“You could stay at the house-“

“Knowing he isn’t far would be enough, no.”

Shivering all over, Anna excused herself for one moment and went to fetch her dressing-gown and slippers.

Both dressed most informally, they waited for the servant girl to make it to their rooms and bring the more or less disappointingly weak coffee she brewed every morning to waken their spirits.

“If I were to go with my sister and promise to return post-haste-“
“Go. I will stay with your mother for the time being, be her companion.”

“I will return at once as soon as our business is finished.”

They discussed what they would do, if they would move back to Edinburgh after Edmund had concluded his business in England or if they would remain with Charlotte Hewlett in Duncleade. In the past weeks, as she had become more and more well-known as The American in the intellectual circles she had been introduced to, some had found out she and Edmund, though never letting their closeness show, shared a set of rooms, which had nurtured a whisper of impropriety, which would perhaps be able to be quenched if she were not to be seen in Edinburgh for a while.

Charlotte, who had often written her letters, had become a good friend and although she knew she would miss Edinburgh, or rather the changing company and the relative anonymity one enjoyed when walking in the streets, she would not resent giving up this new and somewhat exciting life for a while to retire to the quiet countryside- perhaps she would have the time to think there, on her own.

Somehow, both Edmund and she mustered the courage to fall into each other’s arms again that night before they would voyage to Duncleade the coming morning. It seemed they had silently agreed they were making love as an act of saying goodbye- but it didn’t feel like saying goodbye. It felt like a promise.

Duncleade, a few days later.

“This family provides amply for the neighbours’ gossip with the many comings and goings occurring within the shortest periods of time”, Mother observed. Although her tone was serious, Edmund could tell she was jesting.

“I am quite happy we shall be rid of that horse, he was adding to our costs quite a good deal.”

Salem, to be ridden south by a local youth who was overjoyed to have been granted this first adventure of his young life while he and Eliza would travel ahead using the carriageways.

“Goodbye”, Anna said affectionately to the horse who had, as per what she had told him on their long evenings together in Scotland, helped save her life and bring her to him.

She had told him the story of Simcoe dragging her from the water, of his delusion of keeping her by his side and his surprising decision to let her go- it intrigued him. Coupled with the knowledge the most terrible man in the Kingdom was recently wed, he was undeniably curious to see what had become of his former subordinate, a morbid curiosity of sorts if the ghost that had haunted his every waking moment and nightmares in Setauket had been exorcised from the shell of a tall, red-haired man. Perhaps he did not only act upon his conscience and protective instincts as a brother when he wished to accompany his sister delivering the horse to his old master, but saw a way of breaking with the past in it, finding closure through facing his demon.

They arrived several days ahead of Clarence, the Duncleade youth, and Salem in the shockingly large driveway of Ashcombe House. It was a larger structure than what the Strettons had built for themselves in Scotland, not too old and well-furnished with a landscape park surrounding it that might have been designed by Capability Brown.
He had asked Captain Barnett but he had only shrugged, saying he barely had come to know the house well enough to find his way downstairs from his bedroom, so he had had no time to review the gardens thoroughly yet.

Salem too must have liked it at Ashcombe, for he was in the good company of two fine carriage-ponies and three riding-horses.

They decided to give him a little rest after his strenuous voyage south before presenting him to Simcoe (Edmund had put it in his mind Salem had to look his best on this occasion- after all, *he* wasn’t a savage and loved horses). His sister and her beau, who had greeted her in a very familiar manner, which he found a little odd watching, visibly enjoyed these warm spring days with their blue skies and greening nature while he watched on, wishing himself in the extreme north were spring was still only hiding in the first little buds on the trees and the winter cold hadn’t fully subsided yet. O, if only he could return to this dreary climate immediately- because contrary to what he had been taught about the movement of the sun, *She* was to be found in the north, where she resided in his mother’s home, radiating light and joy with every smile and every touch.

Eliza cautiously enjoyed the days spent in Alex’ company- they hadn’t talked about anything his letter had implied yet, but their mutual affection for another and his sudden good fortune more than suggested a union.

Alex, in high spirits despite officially wearing mourning colours, was proud now that he had thrown off the curse of the second son and was quite rich (although he never called himself that in exactly these words), in his eyes now in the position to take a wife.

He played the grand country-gentleman for her, asked her which colours he should pick for the new dining room drapes or if in her opinion, a refurbishment of the sitting room was necessary and took her riding.

Contrary to what he had claimed though, he knew the area rather well already: “No, let us turn left. That way, we will get to the ruins at Dunkeswell Abbey.”

“Are they not of historical interest? Or at least picturesque?”

“Not worth seeing at all, trust me. It has some *unconventional* sceneries, sometimes.”

Before she could ask him what he had meant, he had engaged her in a race and they had sped through the countryside calling out to another and frolicking like children.

Those were bright days, full of alacrity, even if neither of them managed to address the topic that ever seemed to float between them like a large 100-cannon first-rate ship of the line.

Finally, the day approached on which they had decided to take the horse back- it would be a surprise visit, which would at least ensure Simcoe would not be armed to the teeth (hopefully), waiting for them or setting an ambush on the road before he would even have heard them out.

He didn’t know her to be Edmund’s sister yet, and she doubted this would do any good. It would be an awkward reunion of old foes at the very least.

“I shan’t be coming with you”, Alexander had announced, “we need not make matters worse by adding me- I have reason to doubt he would like to see me.”

“For bravery, I must rely on my brother then”, Eliza had smirked.
“No, not at all— I thought you were the brave one, who had almost killed Simcoe in cold blood.”

Alex smiled with adoration and admiration for her in his eyes.

“No, not at all— I thought you were the brave one, who had almost killed Simcoe in cold blood.”

“A quick kiss was exchanged when Edmund wasn’t looking and they set out on their way to the house described to them by Alex as being not too far away.

Indeed, their hack on the back of Alexander’s fine horses was not long; the house was prettymodestly sized, not too big, and not too small either. Had she not known this was where they were headed, she would have passed it right by without a second thought.

The flowerbeds were well-maintained, the hedges meticulously trimmed. The master of this place certainly wished to uphold certain standards.

“The lindworm’s lair”, Edmund smirked before his face darkened again. They hadn’t even discussed how they would do it, Eliza realised nervously. Clearly, they were here to give Salem back to his master, but no one could tell how Simcoe would react, what would happen-

Before she could finish her train of thoughts, Edmund had dismounted and handed her Salem’s reins and those of his own horse to go knock at the door.

A servant opened, to whom Edmund cited his rank and that he had come to see Colonel Simcoe on urgent business, nodding towards the horse.

Relieved of Salem and their mounts by a stable boy who was to water and give them some hay, they were bid in and made to wait in a very welcoming parlour with tasteful drapes and matching sofas and carpets. Flowers in big vases accentuated the elegance of the room even more and everything was spotlessly clean.

Confused, Edmund looked around.

“Is there something wrong?”, Eliza wanted to know, uneasy what Simcoe might get up to. Had Edmund spotted a hidden crenel somewhere in the wall, behind which the occupant of this tastefully furnished home lay in wait, pistol at the ready?

“It- it- I can’t quite explain”, he whispered back, “it doesn’t look like Simcoe.”

“What does Simcoe ‘look’ like then? A dark, gloomy room with preserved eels, shrunken heads, rat kings and two-headed tortoises in jars lining the walls?”

“Quite right, but still- the flowers- the- Simcoe always was a lot more Spartan in his needs for, you know, living quarters and the like. It simply doesn’t look like him.”

“He is married now, you know that-“

Here, Eliza was cut short by the appearance of a woman in the door.

At first, Eliza had mistaken her for a child because she was quite small, a good deal smaller than herself, but the body beneath the extremely fashionable gown with a bold floral pattern that certainly did not suit many as favourably as it did her and, as she drew closer, the youthful, yet far from childish lines of her face revealed her to be a woman, not a young girl.

The petite vision smiled at them benevolently, her stride self-assured and regal. She would not have
been out of place at the royal court- on the throne. The young woman doubtlessly looked and acted the part of a queen regnant.

“Whom have I the honour of welcoming at this hour? We did not expect visitors today.”

They introduced themselves to her, upon which she graced each of them with another one of her cool, distanced smiles and in turn addressed them to let them know her name.

“Mrs Elizabeth Simcoe”, the head of impeccable dark, only lightly powdered tresses peeking from under a fashionable cap announced, “but I must say, I am greatly confused by your sudden and unannounced appearance as well as- oh.”

Here, she paused and allowed her hazel eyes to settle on Edmund.

“You are from the army, is it not so? You have come to see my husband, then? He is currently out on matters of business, but should be home well before tea. Pray tell, did you know him during the war?”

“I did”, Edmund rushed to answer. And it was curious indeed- the queenly apparition might, judging by her size (which she seemed to enhance with the clever arrangement of her hair and heeled shoes that peeked from under her skirts), be a fairy who had lured them into her lair, but surely such a delicate porcelain-doll of a woman was not married to Simcoe, who was the exact opposite of her in all aspects- towering, broad and the embodiment of physical strength.

-Perhaps, exactly these aspects of him had drawn her to him, Eliza reasoned as she covertly tried to eye her namesake without appearing to be rude or staring.

Mrs Simcoe was pretty indeed, not in the way of a Grecian statue, more in a very different, inexplicable way. Some might call her too small, or her chin too pointed, but on her, neither of these things appeared to be a defect but rather to enhance her general air of grace and beauty.

Over the tea that was served from fine nankeen cups and observing Mrs Simcoe converse with her brother, Eliza could not help but ask herself why Simcoe had chosen this young lady, whom she presumed to be some ten years his junior, as his bride. Had he wanted a biddable young creature he could mould to suit his desires, a house-keeper by day and a willing plaything by night? That didn’t sound like him at all, had he not shown a distinct attraction to the truculent, unbridled, rather than to meek obedience? Surely Anna hadn’t been anything like that and in the beginning, her rejection had, as she had come to know by now, only fuelled his desire to be with her.

Was it her looks? Dark-haired and dark-eyed, Simcoe appeared to fancy a certain type of woman- was she a politely English, well-bred, domesticated version of Anna? No, she found; where Anna’s eyes were dark as the night sky and round like those of a doe, which made her look dream-lost at all times (although this of course was on most occasions not the case) those of Mrs Simcoe resembled a vixen’s, restless wit and quickness oozing from her hazel stare. Her hair, too, was nothing like Anna’s, which fell more unruly than the carefully arranged and cap-topped curls of Mrs Simcoe and the distinct lines of her face bore no comparison to Anna’s much softer features, either.

Besides, Mrs Simcoe did not appear anything like a mousey wife at all, who only lived to do her husband’s bidding; her step was self-assured, her voice steady and her deportment, as noted before, that of a person knowing the world’s their oyster. If anything, she would hazard a bet Simcoe was the more submissive party in their marriage, judging from the furnishings of the house and especially after having found out what he liked-

Shuddering at the thought of this particular memory, she returned to the conversation and smiled
every now and then or answered in a manner as civil as possible when a question was sent her way.

Edmund fared admirably. Without letting on too much of his and Simcoe’s shared past slip (one had to wonder how much of this Mrs Simcoe had been told and certainly neither she nor Edmund would have liked to find themselves in a position to have to lay open why exactly their relationship with her husband was, diplomatically put, *difficult*), he spoke rather pleasantly with her and the much younger woman seemed interested in his talk of science, which usually bored most people, and with great pride made sometimes an argument for or against his opinion.

Clearly, she was not only a fine specimen of Englishness bred to perfection like a fine rose blossom, Mrs Simcoe also appeared to be quite the bluestocking—learned and more than fashionably opinionated, perhaps even more so because she sat in her own parlour, over which she presided and ruled.

Not that she looked like the kind of woman who might actually wear worsted blue stockings, but she fit that category (in which Eliza quite often found herself put into, too, sometimes with ill intent).

“Major, the horse you spoke of, the one you brought—on the pain of appearing terribly inquisitive, why have you brought it?”

“It is your husband’s. I merely wished to return it. Salem, that’s his name, served your husband well during the war. By chance, he came into the hands of—“he paused, not knowing what to call Anna, “a very dear friend, who gave him to me to care for. As he does not belong to me, I wished to right this matter by returning him to his master.”

“You are a very kind and honest man, Major.”

Appearing truly moved, Mrs Simcoe’s smile turned genuine for the first time. For some odd reason, she reminded Eliza of Mrs Arnold of York City.

“It is the right thing to do”, Edmund replied stiffly, “everything else would be theft.”

Mrs Simcoe nodded with a facial expression Eliza found to be disconcertingly attentive. Clearly, she too had remarked upon Edmund’s stiff manner of speech and laborious way of expressing himself and was drawing her very own conclusions.

But instead of saying anything more on the matter, a dark shadow suddenly appeared in the door like an evil spectre in a Gothic tale.

-She’d almost forgotten about Simcoe.

There he was now, looming in the doorframe and looking down on the scene from his considerable height. He was still dressed for the outdoors, but had already rid himself of his greatcoat and hat; in his left hand, he held a pair of black riding gloves and his boots still had clumps of mud and grass attached to them. The humidity of the day had not done his hair a great favour and made it stick up at all angles, which even increased the almost terrifying effect his sudden appearance had had, making him look like the madman many who had known him in America said he was.

For one moment, he seemed shocked, processing the scene before him before his eyes widened with rage and his upper lip twitched; Eliza feared he would attack Edmund and quickly looked around the room to find something she could use to their defence (a vase to the head seemed like an effective option), but he only crossed the room in two big strides and put his body before his wife, who had risen to greet him, as if he had reason to shield her with his life from an imminent attack.

Well, he had definitively recognised them both and learned the shocking truth about his Holy
Poor Mrs Simcoe- she was the only one in the room who seemed not to know what was happening, or rather, why it was happening. She emerged from behind her husband’s imposing frame by gently, but firmly, pushing him to the side as one would a horse unwilling to move while being groomed and straightened herself to her full height (which frankly looked somewhat amusing, given the at least twelve inches that separated them) in front of him.

“Colonel”, came her greeting, “the carpet.”

With loving sternness she looked down to his boots, which had already left several unsightly stains on the doubtlessly costly Axminster carpet.

“Now please go and exchange them for a pair of dry shoes, and then return and re-join me and our guests. Major Hewlett here has come to see you and I dare say, he has brought a most pleasant surprise, too.”

Simcoe visibly doubted the bit about the “most pleasant surprise” but then momentarily looked like a big dog scolded by his master as the admonishment seemed to trickle through his unharmed ear to his brain, apologised, head hanging (or bowed down? It was hard to tell.) and briskly left the room, leaving a trail of wet stains behind him, which were immediately removed by a servant maid called to attend to the task.

“I wonder what it is with the Colonel today”, Mrs Simcoe wondered aloud, “he has his particular moods at times, but that you probably know, Major, since you have known him for longer than I do.”

She smiled pleasantly, enough, trying to relieve the tension of the situation whose roots she did not know, but understood and navigated only too well. Doubtlessly, “the Colonel” was in for a round of questioning that night.

“The Colonel” returned in double-quick time in a pair of pristinely white stockings and polished buckled shoes. The rest of his attire had changed, too, Eliza noted; perhaps getting dressed quickly yet accurately was deeply instilled in him as part of military drill. He wore a matching ensemble of black breeches and coat, which both, although modest in their cut and colour, were made of fine fabric that had certainly not been as modest in its price as it was in its appearance. The ruffles of his shirt, no longer hanging limply after having been subjected to the dampness of the countryside on a day with less than favourable weather, stood crisp and proud from his green, silver and black-striped waistcoat. On his way, he must have found a comb for his hair, too, for now, no longer braided, it elegantly fell to his back with a big black velvet bow at the back of his head save for a few terribly unruly strands at the very front that had managed to escape, serving as testimony to the character of the head they grew on.

All things considered, he looked uncommonly civilian and at the same time extremely martial.

Both she and Edmund had dressed more or less for travel and the ride in the carriage had left traces on their appearance- small crumples here and there or a strand of hair that did not quite enjoy being subdued into a coiffure and the like.

He by contrast was dressed as meticulously as if on parade. Clearly, Simcoe was ready to fight, leaving Eliza to wonder if such an elegantly-tailored coat allowed for the concealment of a weapon which he would draw at any moment or if he intended to attack with one of the doubtlessly costly porcelain figurines scattered across the house.
With a nod of the head in their general direction, he seated himself extremely close to his wife, taking her hand in his while piercing Edmund’s eyes with his frosty stare as if to signal he would shred anyone to pieces with his bare hands who dared come too close to her.

After a while, Mrs Simcoe withdrew her hand from his and gave him a glance of true adoration before she turned to their guests once more.

“The Colonel was out reviewing property today. We have our eyes set on some land near here, but are not quite certain if we should buy. We are not long wed you must know, a mere few months now, and have been renting since but should like to have a home of our own.”

Eliza at least could not find fault with the house they were sitting in, but then, she had been forced to become accustomed to more modest standards of living in her youth and had soon found out that she would not be a happier person for pining for the luxuries she was no longer able to afford and had since not made any motions to live considerably more lavishly - the fear that misfortune could strike her unexpectedly like it had her father affected her too deeply and she therefore preferred to economise rather than spend money on ostentatious dresses and other follies - though every now and then she granted herself luxuries she could and would not have a few months ago.

Simcoe smiled at his wife and once more protectively put a hand on her arm.

"Colonel, would you please remove your hand? Otherwise, it will be quite hard to take one's tea", she grinned at him, causing "the Colonel”’s head to redden like a radish.

Would he have blushed too, if Anna would sit in Mrs Simcoe’s place, or rather be Mrs Simcoe?

The scene would, could have been sweet to behold had it not been John Graves Simcoe, and had they not shared so dark a past. She could barely believe this was the same man who had ordered men to kill Edmund, that this man, whose head turned positively red at the smile of his young wife and who seemed so extremely biddable under her headship had done so many terrible deeds. His hands, lily-white and even his fingernails spotlessly clean, were steeped in blood.

“Now, now- I must be very cross with myself”, Mrs Simcoe announced, “I did not offer you tea yet-surely, you must take some refreshments with us before we can show my husband your surprise.”

Oh no. Poor, little Mrs Simcoe could not know what she had just proposed, forcing her husband and Edmund to gather around the same table. Uneasily, Eliza acknowledged that Simcoe was just as happy to see her as he was to see Edmund and that the presence of Mrs Simcoe was the only thing that stood between the Colonel and the two of them being hastily buried in a shallow grave in the back garden before the day was done.

The cake was brought in, which a diligent maidservant was quick to distribute to all but Mrs Simcoe.

Eliza kept herself from rolling her eyes at the last second. So that was her secret- remaining hungry while watching her guests fill their bellies. How typical of these pretty, little modern things to keep their figure- some twenty years or so her senior, Eliza had no mind for fads of that sort. She was not particularly rotund, but she was not the epitome of slenderness either- besides, at her age, the skin that had at twenty firmly accentuated her forms now started to fit a little more loosely. While she did not like it, it could not be avoided as such was quite simply the course of life. One day, young Mrs Simcoe would find out there was no cure against age, too.

To her surprise, Eliza then noticed how Mrs Simcoe was being served a plate with pickled gherkins instead.
Smiling, the lady of the house, who had apparently noticed her curious glances, offered an explanation: “Many quite enjoy sweet dishes at this time of day, but I must say, I cannot indulge in such sugary delights presently- it is a personal preference I have recently acquired to eat pickled things in the afternoon and I find that it much improves my health and general well-being.”

And with that, she ordered a helping of clotted cream intended to be eaten with the cake to make it more palatable for being a day old (it was a little dry, but still good enough to eat it without any additives) and dipped her pickle into it as if it were the most common sight in the world.

Eliza curiously noted her namesake’s odd choice of food and shot a glance to the latter’s husband. When he did not even lift an eyebrow, Eliza decided to say nothing.

Apparently, Mrs Simcoe had put it into her head to be the consummate hostess, which was at odds with their plan to deliver Salem and be gone quickly so after receiving tea and cake, it was decided to sit and talk for another very uncomfortable while until the Mistress of the Ceremonies decided it was enough and her husband and his guest ought to review the horse (the privilege of announcing the nature of the surprise had been hers of course, too) while she would provide the feminine entertainment.

With a stiff nod, Simcoe followed his wife’s orders and motioned Edmund towards the door, through which the latter stepped, looking uneasy at the prospect of having John Graves Simcoe in his back without being able to keep an eye on him.

Smiling, Mrs Simcoe waited until the door had closed behind the two men when she rose and told Eliza to come with her, leading her to an upstairs room that was furnished as a boudoir. “This window oversees our stable and what little of a yard we have until we can move into our own home”, she explained, making it perfectly clear their current living-arrangements were not to her liking and idea of a home for a woman of her station.

“He is beautiful, your brother has kept him well”, she went on as the boy from earlier led Salem into the yard. “He is quite old, you see that, but of a stately height and well-trained, according to my husband. He has a horse now of course, but we should be happy to keep Salem. It is the least we could do for him in honour of his service.”

But for all the friendly chatter, Eliza could not help but feel Salem was not Mrs Simcoe’s primary motive- her hazel eyes remained ever-fixated on the two men and her hands were folded in front of her belly in an attentive-looking subconscious gesture.

“You have kept him well”, Simcoe said as he circled Salem, likely to search for a reason to gut him under the pretence of having found a Wrong he had done to the horse, which again reminded Edmund of the uncomfortable fact that he was unarmed.

“It is most curious Mrs Strong has brought him with her”, he observed, his attention fixated on the horse, rubbing the big beast’s forehead.

For a moment, Simcoe and his horse offered a picture of tranquillity and unity, master and horse connected by an invisible bond Edmund knew could only be between an equine and a person who had forged said bond over a long time. But with everything pristine or wholesome, Simcoe managed
to break it within seconds when he asked:

“How is she?”

Suddenly, his old rival looked up and the cold daggers of his eyes pinned Edmund into place.

“An- Mrs Strong is well”, he answered and secretly scolded himself for his slip of the tongue which Simcoe, attentive as always, had visibly noted with a brief frown.

“Splendid”, Simcoe tried to chime lightly in his high little voice that always sounded somewhat insincere no matter how hard the man tried and turned to Salem again, first pulling the horse’s jaws apart to see if his teeth were fine and then patting him on the shoulder for enduring the examination so patiently.

Next, he knelt down to inspect Salem’s hooves individually- an unnecessary task, Edmund had made it his goal to present Simcoe with a faultless horse and had had Salem shod anew before leaving south and yet could not help but sympathise with the man’s exactness- were their positons reversed, he would do just the same.

“I take it then the two of you have renewed your courtship”, Simcoe, who either did not notice or did not care about topics one ought better not address, continued without looking up.

“I did not say so-“

“Oh, is it not the natural consequence of matters?”, Simcoe asked. “She is a beautiful woman and you not impervious to her charms.”

He rose briefly, used the moment to smirk down on Edmund from the lofty spheres of doubtlessly thinning air his head dwelt in before kneeling down again and issuing the command to Salem to lift his left hind leg.

“Mrs Strong is none of your concern”, Edmund snarled, finding his patience thinning dangerously. Horses could be a weapon, too- should Simcoe attack him, he could perhaps spook Salem, much as spooking a horse went against his natural love for these animals, and create a diversion or have the sizeable stallion trample Simcoe to death-

“No she is not”, the other man eagerly agreed, “I can freely admit I found her charming once, for these words state a mere fact that forms part of my- our- past. They have no meaning to me anymore, for I have a wife- and I love her more than anything.”

Simcoe’s voice shook as he spoke thusly, and for a moment, he would almost have felt Simcoe’s evident happiness resound in his own breast, had the terrible, ever-provocative man not shot him a broad grin to showcase the extent of his happiness to him, knowing he had bested him in the category of domestic happiness.

“You should try, you know. It is a marvellous thing to have someone to share one’s days with.”

For once, Simcoe’s voice sounded almost honest.
“They’re not talking about the horse”, Mrs Simcoe stated and evidently tried to make out what they were saying by squinting her eyes and trying to read their lips, which was impossible to do as the distance was too great.

“Your husband and my brother probably discuss the old days”, Eliza tried to continue the conversation, keeping in mind Mrs Simcoe had so far been left in the dark about what exactly had happened in the Colonies between the two men.

The small woman however did not react as Eliza would have thought and looked her straight in the eyes with her chin jutting out:

“‘I know there is something going on, don’t pretend with me. I am a keen observer and I know of my husband’s reputation. He is a kind man, or can be- he is inclined to great emotionality in his actions, which is his greatest strength and his greatest flaw at once. He will write a lament mourning the corpse of a butterfly found on a walk but will, in an angry mood, promise to conquer the world alone and make everyone suffer who stands in his way. And I know he has tried that before, during the war.’”

Her knowing eyes told Eliza Mrs Simcoe had assembled the pieces of what had until this morning been a mystery to her together correctly.

“My brother was his superior for a while, they did not get on at all.”

“Was it because of that woman? I have heard about her. John confessed a previous affection for an undeserving rebel strumpet to me.”

The way Mrs Simcoe spoke about Anna indicated she did not like the idea of another woman with her husband at all- even if the one-sided obsession Simcoe had had with Anna lay in the past.

“Mrs Strong never reciprocated your husband’s feelings. He saved her life once, for which she is grateful, but their general acquaintance was poisoned by Colonel Simcoe’s renewed attempts to win her when she was in no way willing to enter a liaison with him.”

“John does not care for liaisons”, the still-newlywed frowned, “he cares for love only.”

Eliza wanted to retort and say that she was still very young, she hadn’t ask because she considered it rude to ask for someone else’s age but the woman beside her could hardly be more than twenty-five years old and only wed for a few months- what did she know of the world? And yet, a strange look in her eyes told her that her knowledge of Simcoe, shorter than Edmund’s and perhaps even hers was more profound than theirs would ever be.

“And he loves you very much. It is visible in your every interaction.”

Eliza tried to steer the conversation into a safer harbour (particularly because she had good reason not to want her own involvement in the murderous relationship between Edmund and Simcoe brought to light- Mrs Simcoe was small and lithe, but Eliza, and not only because she had seen how obedient the fear-inspiring commander of the Queen’s Rangers became a tamed tiger, a big cat eager for affection under her dainty touch, was certain this woman had either a dagger hidden about her or could kill with her looks. Mrs Simcoe was not a woman to be crossed with, and she had no mind to provoke any such confrontation), hoping Simcoe and Edmund would be done soon. Both men now stood, facing each other, with the horse between them.

“I pray you can forgive my impertinence, but you say it which such certainty I wonder if you know the look of married happiness from experience”, Elizabeth Simcoe replied with a question artfully
veiled in a compliment.

“It is more complicated than that. The late Mr Greenwood and I were a match of convenience after my fiancé fell from his horse when I was quite young, not even twenty. We loved each other very much.”

“I am sorry”, the younger woman said and brushed Eliza’s hand with her own in a gesture that was heartfelt and seemed not to belong to the repertoire of propriety the younger woman wished to put on show for her guests, “I could never imagine-“ she shook her head and looked at her husband outside.

“Mere months ago, I did not know I could love someone so badly- to lose him- I don’t think I could bear it.”

The younger woman’s voice had grown dark like the foreboding thunder right before a thunderstorm.

“You needn’t worry. You’re both young still. And I am quite well- as with all wounds, Time proved the best healer. Life continues around you even if you think yours stopped. You are a like a clock that has lost its rhythm, but you find it again as you listen to the other clocks around you. And one day, you might even be able to love again.”

Alexander’s face smiled at her in her mind as she spoke and reminded her of what he had offered.

Mrs Simcoe meanwhile looked doubtful.

“I don’t think you can love somebody as much as the one person you are truly made for”, she opined, obviously misreading Eliza’s words as seeking a replacement for a deceased loved one once some time had passed.

“Trust me, you can.”

The words had escaped her before she had been able to think- to her horror, Mrs Simcoe looked very offended.

“You do not know me and yet you judge my character? If one would be willing to, one could read your diction as implying you think I might prove unfaithful to my-”

Eliza was quick to cut the other woman off, shaking her head more vigorously than strictly necessary, “no, this is not what I mean- so do you not know yet?”

“Know what?”, Elizabeth Simcoe almost snapped.

“You-“ Eliza motioned to her belly and continued in a hushed tone, aware a servant might listen in, “I noticed at tea. Perhaps I am mistaken-“

“Mistaken about?”

“I had supposed your strange diet might indicate a pregnancy”, Eliza confessed. Mrs Simcoe was white as a sheet and reached for the windowsill to support herself.

“I- I wouldn’t know, I hadn’t thought-“

“It was not my wish to upset you”, Eliza assured her and helped her to sit on a divan. “Maybe I am mistaken, if so you have my full permission to scold me for having upset you.”

“No, not at all”, her younger counterpart, now even smaller half-sitting shook her head, “you are-
were a married woman. I am sure you know such things.”

“I don’t have any children, if this is what you mean”, Eliza explained, “but have attended births, seen others around me first bear and then raise theirs, if that is authority enough for you.”

Mrs Simcoe didn’t look quite satisfied, but nodded.

“It makes sense now”, she seemingly muttered to herself, “I haven’t bled in two months- I thought I was just being irregular, as it often was so when I was younger-“ she broke off, letting her hand roam over her belly. “And coming to think of it, I thought I look rather fatter of late.”

At this, Eliza couldn’t help but snort as there was nothing fat about the willowy Mrs Simcoe.

“Pshaw, not yet- but it will show soon.”

“John will be delighted”, Mrs Simcoe replied pensively, quite overwhelmed with the news still. “He always speaks of having many children.”

Eliza could hardly imagine the man she had almost killed had not an accidental fire come in the way, whom she remembered as a man who enjoyed hurting others and killed for the thrill of it, as a responsible father, but then, so many things had been surprising about this day.

“My mother always says that she did not know true love until she had my brother and I.”

“I would not know, my mother died young”, was Mrs Simcoe’s reply, one nervous hand toying with an ornamental bow on her cap.

“Mine is alive still, and although she can be horribly outspoken and never ceases to amaze in her bluntness, I love her dearly.”

“She sounds just like Mrs Graves, the aunt who raised me”, Mrs Simcoe half-smiled. “She will be beside herself.”

Leaving it open which emotion the aunt would erupt in, Mrs Simcoe called for the misfortunate servant-girl to bring two glasses and some of the “good” champagne.

“To new beginnings”, the young woman proposed a shaky toast and Eliza reciprocated, and would continue to hear its echo ring in her ears on the long way back to Ashcombe.

“What do I owe you?”, Simcoe asked outright, startling Edmund.

The taller man held the horse’s reins firmly in his grip and Edmund almost felt uncomfortable being subjected to two pairs of eyes looking at him with curiosity.

Simcoe owed him a lot- the man had done things to him for which no earthly recompense could be enough.

“It was a question of Duty and Honour to return your horse to you”, he forced himself to say in his best Major-Hewlett-voice.
“Nonsense. I thought you and I were past pretending.”

Simcoe raised a doubting eyebrow.

“You had a horse once, Bucephalus, white Andalusian, was he not? I would want recompense. Revenge even, perhaps.”

Edmund could see in the arctic blue of Simcoe’s irises the horrible methods of punishments the madman would use on any person who would so much as accidentally rip out a single hair of his horse’s mane while brushing it.

“And what is your recompense?”

“My bloody methods are not mine”, Edmund hissed through gritted teeth.

“Those were the methods of war”, Simcoe explained like an eager school-teacher questioned about his favourite topic, “I did what had to be done to arrest these rebels. Your belief in the inherent goodness, yet misguidedness of the colonists caused you to be blind for the realities of war and the things that had to be done. In bringing the war to you, I hoped to make you fight. But you are not a fighting man.”

Simcoe shrugged with almost theatrical belated disbelief, then continued: “I resent I had to resort to exercising cruelty against an animal. I even did then.”

This was the closest of an apology any man would ever get from Simcoe, Edmund realised. It was not the offer of an olive branch or even a true apology, but he realised how hard it had been for the man to say even so much as what he had said.

“I have moved past the war. I will not forget it, nor will ever forget you and you despicable actions, but I shall not let the past govern the present.”

“Wise words, Major”, Simcoe agreed and pulled some coins from his pocket, counting a considerable number into his hand.

“I have fifteen pounds on me. Salem is worth not even ten, however I do not know how much it cost Mrs Strong to take him to England. I will send you more if you-“

“No. I do not want your wife’s money. And neither does Mrs Strong.”

Simcoe chuckled amusedly.

“You think I find this insulting? Are you intent to wound my pride? My wife is rich, yes. The richest heiress in the south, if I recall correctly, but you forget I lived very modestly before my marriage. Not like the likes of Cooke or André.”

“Your money means nothing to me.”

“It does”, Simcoe contradicted him, “you think you would lose your moral high ground if you would accept my offer. You still ride the ghost of your high horse.”

He gave an amused little chuckle that stoked the urge in Edmund to lunge for the man’s neck and strangle him, but he kept himself in check, even when Simcoe indicated he was not quite done with him yet: “One can only hope Mrs Strong will not grow tired of the self-righteous moraliser, it would be cruel if her hopes were turned to dust finding herself in a bleak marriage with a man as bone-dry and more sanctimonious than a Catholic priest after a year of marriage, after all her sacrifices.”

“How do you suppose I would ask her ag-“
“You would be a fool not to, Major.”

Simcoe held his gaze and this time, there was neither malice nor even boyish mischief in his features. He shook his head.

“And now I bid you adieu, Major. I do not think it would be conducive to our renewed acquaintance if we allowed our views to clash again. I would prefer parting in this manner, if you are not against it. My wife need not grow more suspicious as she doubtlessly already is of your visit, and must not be burdened with the details of our lamentably unfortunate past. My compliments to Mrs Strong and your charming sister, I hope my wife entertained her well.”

A quarter of an hour later, they had bid the Simcoes goodbye and found themselves on the way back to Ashcombe.

Edmund’s heart was lighter than it had been before, yet he could not hide his confusion at Simcoe’s tameness and the odd face Mrs Simcoe had made when she had embraced his sister like an old friend saying goodbye.

“Womanly matters”, the latter had only smiled, “I daresay Colonel Simcoe will soon be confronted with a greater surprise than his old horse.”

Before he could ask what she meant, his sister asked: “And you?”

“He offered me money for Salem, which I refused to take, and he told me I would be a fool not to ask Anna for her hand.”

“For once, John Graves Simcoe is right”, Eliza laughed before turning more serious again: “And the two of you? Have you talked about-“

“We have”, he affirmed, “he is not very repentant, but that was to be expected. I feel however that he wanted peace, well, not peace perhaps as I fear this word will never enter his vocabulary, but a truce of sorts.”

Deep down in his heart, he knew this was what his former subordinate had wished to express, even if his proud mouth would never be able to form the words when he had shaken his hand before mounting the carriage.

The man had caused him and many others enough trouble to fill several lifetimes, having returned his horse to him had felt like closing a book he was never to open again.

The mental image of a dusty, heavy book closing faded into a picture of cream-coloured paper laid out on a desk, a quill and ink next to it, inviting to be filled with words.

Edmund smiled.

Chapter End Notes

The HMS Preston is a little Rev War Easter Egg in navy blue some of you hopefully found- let me know in the comments! ;)

The man Anna meets at the party is of course the father of modern utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), whom some of you may know as the inventor of the Panopticon or for his so-called auto-icon. To my knowledge, Bentham wasn’t in Edinburgh in spring 1782, but for the sake of the story, he was. He indeed wrote a "Short Review of the Declaration" in 1776. Bentham supported equal rights for men and women (he still believed women were inferior to men, though) and was one of the first people to speak out for animal rights.

Ashcombe House is entirely fictional, as almost everything about the Barnett-family.

"... will now attack my new task with as much vigour as Marlborough did the French at Blenheim": obviously, Alexander is talking about the Battle of Blenheim (13 August 1704), a major battle of the War of the Spanish Succession. I will not bore you with the particulars, the bottom line is France and the Electorate of Bavaria lost (against the allied forces of England, Scotland, several states of the Holy Roman Empire, the Dutch Republic and a few Danish auxiliaries- but don’t be fooled by the enumeration of states, their army was smaller by 4,000 men and 23 field pieces). Half of the French army under the command of the Duc de Tallard had been exhausted already as they had trekked from west to east through what is today's southern Germany and had been futilely laying siege to a town in the Black Forest for a week before moving on to Bavaria.

The allied troops under the command of John Churchill (ancestor of Winston Churchill), 1st Duke of Marlborough, won and Marlborough got to name his new house, paid for by the money he had received as an expression of Queen Anne's gratitude, after the battle.

Fun fact: Blenheim (the battle site that lend its name to a famous palace) is actually called Blindheim. And in Germany, it's not the Battle of Blenheim or Blindheim, it's the Second Battle of Höchstädt. ...You might see right from the spelling why the English and Scottish decided they preferred the tiny village of Blindheim as the name for the battle over the bigger Höchstädt- whoever is not a native German speaker and can pronounce the combination of ö and ch gets an imaginary cookie from me!

Why Alexander didn’t want to accompany Eliza and Edmund: those of you who read “The Colonel’s Portrait” or have otherwise come into contact with the historical Colonel and Mrs Simcoe’s unusual courtship will know that Dunkeswell Abbey was a favourite place of the two, especially when they were still living under the roof of his godfather. The two quickly managed to put chaperones off and were, reluctantly, allowed to go off alone without a third party. Officially, they would go “sketching” at Dunkeswell, but, you know, two people freshly in love in a remote, picturesque medieval ruin… It certainly leaves ample room for speculation. …In Alexander’s case, when he was out innocently getting to know the surroundings, well, it wasn’t just speculation…

Elizabeth Simcoe's reaction to Eliza trying to tell her how life goes on even if you think it won't is foreshadowing of what she will be going through in 24 years. When her husband died in 1806, Elizabeth Simcoe, according to a household servant who clocked up more than three decades of service to the Simcoe family from the days of the late General to the middle of the 19th century (with an intermezzo of going to sea), the vivacious woman who loved to dress and dance never attended a ball or other cheerful social event again. Sadly, within six years she lost not only her husband, but the aunt who raised her, her best friend and her eldest son as well. She lived to almost 88, having buried her husband, five of her children and a grandson, dying in 1850 after 44 years of
widowhood. She maintained an active lifestyle though, retained an eager interest in Canadian politics and the latest technology of the day- at more than 70, she rode England's first passenger-transporting railway line in the late 1830s the year it opened.
Chapter Summary

Under the watchful glances of the gallo-roman goddess of horses and Fortune herself, this chapter contains more than one gamble, and not all are on horses. And to keep with the theme, just like Ladies' Day at Ascot, this chapter has fast horses and ladies in hats—and sometimes, not much more...

Former actress Philomena Cooke has a bet with an Earl, Eliza is being interrogated about her private life like she’s a rebel spy and Edmund does something incredibly sweet, only to do something very dangerous next.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone had a happy Easter (or is still having it). The (plot-)bunny has visited me with fresh ideas for this story, and I hope you enjoy this installment!

A very special thank you goes to the wonderful Tav for her pep talk on finishing this chapter- it helped a great deal.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Do you remember still the falling stars
that like swift horses through the heavens raced
and suddenly leaped across the hurdles
of our wishes—do you recall? And we
did make so many! For there were countless numbers
of stars: each time we looked above we were
astounded by the swiftness of their daring play,
while in our hearts we felt safe and secure
watching these brilliant bodies disintegrate,
knowing somehow we had survived their fall.

(Rainer Maria Rilke, Falling Stars, 1924, Translation: Unknown)

London.

Philomena stood uneasily behind her husband’s chair, wishing herself back to New York. Marrying Jonathan had been less an act of love than an act of saving her skin. Having entertained British officers for the best part of the war standing on the stage and in the horizontal fashion, she knew she would not be welcome in the city anymore once the Rebels would take over after how they’d defeated the British at Yorktown.
Not wishing to spend the rest of her life with the invisible brand of Whore to All England on her forehead, she had not said no when that old, rich fool had asked her to become his wife.

Whether he knew she had only agreed because he was offering her a life in peace that would have her more than comfortably placed for as long as she lived, she could only guess at, and arrived at no conclusion; sometimes she was sure Jonathan Cooke was fool enough to believe she loved him tenderly, on other occasions, she was beyond certain he had picked her for her looks, for flaunting her in front of his equally old and un-handsome pals and, when she was out of earshot, brag about her abilities in the marriage-bed.

Before, he’d paid good money to see her perform in the theatre and after that in his bed; now her payments took the form of new hats, a puppy dog and all sorts of assorted trinkets and items of fashion or luxury she only needed to point her finger at.

His money and the things he could buy could by no means alleviate the boredom she felt when confined to his Surrey estate with only the sycophantic, hypocritical wives of the local gentry for company in that dull green sea of fields and trees.

Dumpling-shaped elderly wenches that had been young in the times of Good Queen Bess and could imagine nothing more delightful than flaunting their good deeds for the parish and personal devoutness (which they viewed as a competition in which they all tried to best each other, usually in the most un-Christian way of talking badly about the others) gave her quare looks and snubbed her for being “an Actress”, “upstart” or, “a woman of pleasure”, while their sprightly young granddaughters cohabited with militia officers scarce two nights in town up against the wall of the pigsty in the middle of the day.

She had not lived the life of a respectable woman, but at least she had found some enjoyment in the acting and, depending on the cully, had not resented her work in the hours after the curtain had fallen, either. To say she was bored with the life of a country wife was a blatant understatement.

Therefore, she was usually quite happy to be in London, where life offered more amusements, but not on this day.

When she had placed her bet on those whom she still called her fellow countrymen –the British- and lost.

Now, she had to fear her husband would place his bet, and with it, a small fortune, on the wrong cards.

He wasn’t a particularly adept player of any card-game, least of all faro and could, enthralled in a cocoon of flatteries and empty promises be led into doing almost anything. He liked to believe he did not reside in Queen’s Street, but he did. The trick was not to let him know that.

“My dear”, she tried to coo and let her hands roam over his shoulders, as if to undo the tenseness in what little muscles he had hiding under the fat of old age. Colonel Cooke was hardly a handsome man, but at least he had more decency than John André had had, twice and thrice over and she respected him for that.

“Not now, Philomena”, her husband grumbled and put her hands away. “I need my wits to win this game”, he declared and shot his usual avaricious grin at the men he was seated with, who nodded in agreement and did not even try to affirm his diction by tilting their heads to get an eyeful of her cleavage.

The Earl of Grosvenor played his hand next, and it was very good, making Philomena dread the
gambling-debts her husband would accrue in the course of the evening. Surely, he had made a pretty penny during the war, but the money would not last, not if he played like this.

He should have let her play; she had known the less respectable quarters of York City and knew how to play a game or two, and had learned from a number of gifted card-sharps, but of course the Colonel could hardly let his wife play with his illustrious company, could he?

Grosvenor won the next round, and it was unanimously agreed among the gentleman that he had had the luckiest hand that night, and should consider himself blessed.

Philomena had understood right away when she had first seen him why his wife had no interest in him, and she wouldn’t even have needed to know the many stories about his escapades. He had the face of a man who liked to cause a stir and revelled in depravity.

In his fifties, he was far from a dimber fellow, but his purse was heavy, partly from having had his ancestors accumulate the wealth for him and partly from his racehorses, which made up for a lot of things, it seemed.

Well, he could pay for what he liked, she had no more money to spare, her august spouse would have to call it a night, now.

“Jonathan, dear, I am very tired. You should stop now. Would you not help me to bed?”

She pouted at him, signalling in no uncertain terms that would he take her to their lodgings, she would lie with him tonight, and give him the things he usually wanted from such an experience.

Jonathan wanted to say something and probably tell her to join the ladies in the adjoining parlour again and not worry about a thing, when a young man, a sea-captain whose name she had forgotten and whose place at the table was only secured by his aristocratic connexions, not personal merit, commented that “fillies like her, who do not obey their husbands, should be broken like young colts into submission” and then proceeded to ask Grosvenor, the horse-connoisseur for his opinion.

A fearful look to her old, but definitively not wise husband told her he was in the process of getting very angry; theirs might not be a love-match, but he had enough decency in him to defend his wife from such foul speech. His head bore an uncanny resemblance to a wrinkly old horseradish dressed up in a wig and his fist crumpled the cards he was holding in a manner that was almost theatrical.

Grosvenor laughed at the young captain’s remark and shot her a glance that let her know he regarded her the same as the common whores he was so frequently cohabiting with.

To let her husband settle the dispute (the old fool would probably call for a duel, take on first the captain and next Grosvenor, only to find death by accident through his own pistol and not his opponents’; as quartermaster, he had spent the war in safety and security sitting on his flabby rear and doing not much else, certainly not shooting or fighting) would be dangerous, foolhardy even—she would do it. Not that she considered her honour much blemished (she had heard worse during her active acting-days), but perhaps it was time to win some back from Grosvenor. The boy in blue calling himself a captain had likely scarcely a penny to his name that did not belong to his father, but Grosvenor was another matter.

Calling for another round of distilled, liquid merriment for her already mellow husband, she managed to distract the latter enough to go over to the other side of the room and talk with General Clinton, who, as he had told her, owed him money borrowed privately for some reason or other.

He tottered off, cards still in hand, making a continuation of the present round impossible.
Taking up her husband’s vacated spot, she smiled at the gentlemen present, but in particular at Grosvenor:

“If you think so of me—“

“I know what I speak of, I am married to one of the very same breed”, he jested at the expense of his estranged wife, making Philomena wonder why he would insult his favourite animals so if he compared them to his least favourite individual.

“I thought she is the jockey, based on the rumours one heard- was-, perhaps is, it not she who is riding a great many strange stallions, even from the royal stables—“

“How dare you?”, the gentleman, who had only instants ago slighted her, hissed with wounded pride he had expected her to simply swallow beforehand. Apparently, the stir countess Henrietta’s affair with the Duke of Cumberland had caused still smarted him when addressed among his eminent friends.

“A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!” she proclaimed in a mocking tone, recalling the line from a play in which she had usually been cast as the tragic wife prettily mourning her misfortune- this time, she would play the king’s part.

“Shut your gob, woman, I warn you—“

“Warn me?”

Philomena chuckled dryly and helped herself to his glass, taking a sip of his wine. After all she had been involved in, a man of around fifty feeling offended could not scare her. She had been a secret agent, after all and knew the tricks it took to eventually bend a man to her will without him realising it.

“I warn you. My husband might duel you if you will not treating me so cruelly”, she pouted, knowing full well Jonathan Cooke would not cut a fine figure with a pistol in his hand and actually firing it.

“I propose we settle this dispute entre nous”, she proceeded to say in a tone she had previously reserved for business, “I should be perfectly satisfied with an apology and the refunding of my husband’s losses tonight.”

Grosvenor shook his head and laughed, saying he had won the money fairly and she was just a greedy, grubby woman of ill repute who had made the jump into society by seducing a rich old man.

“If you are so keen on my money, may I propose bet, perhaps, Mrs Cooke, a bet that requires daring. Be of good Cheer and listen: I wager my best horse, Potoooooooo, who has only this year won the Jockey Club Plate, can run ten miles before you can undress yourself entirely on your own. Both of you compete in what you do best, which I think is more than fair, though I must warn you that stallions usually beat even the most eager fillies with ease.”

That vile toad smirked at her and Philomena knew she would accept. She was a lady now, a respectable Mrs, but her reputation had followed her across the Atlantic. If this was the regard in which Grosvenor held her, fine. She would make him pay.

“And what is the wager?”

“The wager”, Grosvenor announced in a booming voice to his companions, “is that, if I win, you must spend the night with me and allow me to take the reins”, he smiled lecherously and contently
leaned back in his chair.

“And what if I win?”, Philomena smiled, not wishing the man to see her disgust.

Grosvenor paused for a moment, not knowing what to say.

“The you get the horse”, he answered, chuckling.”So you have a conspecific to socialise with.”

The bet was clearly intended to tarnish her name, and her husband’s and make her a laughing stock. However, he had not thought about one thing.

“And I can bring my own things to wear?”, she asked.

“Of course. What is it to me if you prefer peeling off your anglaise or your française or your polonaise or whatever it is the ladies are currently wearing?”

“Very well. Then let us shake on it.”

They shook hands. The bet was set.

Ashcombe House, Devonhire.

It was soon after the transaction of Salem had occurred that Anna and Edmund decided to return to Scotland as they had no desire to inconvenience Alexander and overuse his hospitality, which he insisted they were not doing.

Eliza however had decided to remain in the south for a while longer as Alexander was relying greatly on her help with the house and lands.

Nobody knew her there (except for their rather unfortunate neighbours, the Simcoes and through Alexander, the Graves’) and it was refreshing to meet new people.

Years of managing what had remained of the Hewlett-lands and tenants had made her rather skilled at all the things Alexander now had to learn and she was happy to see him taking to his account-books and ledgers with great zeal.

He barely needed her help anymore and was very enterprising- the estate supported itself well and there had only been a few minor reparations that had needed doing.

The soldier had become a man of means, a landed country squire who had quickly won the love and respect of his new neighbours and was a favourite at gatherings of all sorts. His introduction into Devonshire society had been facilitated greatly by Admiral Graves, a sociable elderly gentleman who reminded her in form and spirit of a motherly duck, waddling along the garden-path with a flock of ducklings under her wing.

His godson had the good sense to either remain at the opposite end of the room whenever they met or be civil, choosing his wife’s mode of peaceful coexistence rather than shooting daggers across the room (luckily only in the metaphorical sense, but one could never know with him).

Mrs Simcoe, now very visibly pregnant and making a celebration of it by wearing clothes skilfully
accentuating her plumping belly, was very interested in the works being done at Ashcombe, perhaps because she wanted to know what, once they had found the property they were looking for, would try to outdo.

Ashcombe was beautifully situated among a garden landscaped by Capability Brown and maintained by a gardener and two hands working under him. The house itself was a stately structure set up on the ruins of an old Tudor mansion, which in turn was said to have been erected in part on the foundation walls of an ancient Norman tower house, a rarity in Devonshire. When the present house had been built and the derelict remainders of the former Tudor homestead taken down, underneath the two hundred years old, rather plain flooring were found artefacts of said time, some broken pottery, a few hammered silver coins with the stylised portraits of medieval kings on them which an expert had identified as William the Conqueror, Henry I and Stephen and a few other assorted objects of interest, which had been preserved and were frequently shewn to travelling visitors interested in the antiques of England.

Presently, Eliza’s thoughts were occupied more with things less old, namely the house’s furnishings and general interiors.

There was no denying Alexander’s uncle had been a man of some taste, though not necessarily one many beside himself would subscribe to. It had been Alexander’s wish to employ her aristocratic lineage and female taste in the refurnishing of his new home, which some were demurring was happening too quickly after the death of Captain Barnett, but neither Alexander or she found alarming in the least- the house needed to be run, there were servants employed there paid to work, not to idle and it was the heir’s right to do with his inheritance as he pleased- besides, a few terrible carpets and other assorted dusty things aside, not much was thrown out- for the moment, they had agreed to rearrange rather than refurbish entirely as doing so would only be very costly for no greater benefit to be had than the local ladies’ approval of the drapery or sofas.

Alexander was pleased with her works, and said she had a great eye for detail and style, which he would follow blindly.

A few days earlier, she had banished a horrible painting to the attic which depicted a battle at sea in poor craftsmanship.

Instead, she had ordered one of the ancestors the previous owner had thought unimportant and left in a corridor where it would not be remarked upon to be hung in its stead as she had reason to believe from its style it might have originated from Sir Godfrey Kneller’s workshop.

She had made a few sketches of the improvements she had done on Alexander’s behalf to send to Scotland, so Edmund and Anna would be able to gain some idea of how the house they had last seen as a bachelor’s den taken over by another bachelor had transformed into.

Aforementioned sketches had only lately been praised by a surprise visitor on horseback, “just passing by”.

Mrs Simcoe, a sketchbook and roll of pencils in her hand, had been led into the old library, of which Eliza had been drawing up an inventory, her arms and sleeves covered in the dust of what felt like a century.

“My dear Mrs Greenwood”, the younger woman had announced herself and strode into the room as if she was a princess of Royal blood, “how pretty you have made this place! I recall it not having always been so tastefully fashioned.”

She thanked the younger woman, who seemed not in the least to be inconvenienced by her now
slightly showing condition and with great interest went through a pile of books Eliza had set aside as they were very old and wanted special care and wiped her hands on the apron she had tied around her waist to preserve her dress before greeting her visitor properly.

She had tea brought for them to the drawing room overlooking the garden and Mrs Simcoe seemed glad to be seated, even though she tried to hide the little sigh of relief she gave as she sat down.

“Now tell me, how is your brother?”

“He is well, thank you very much”, Eliza replied and pre-emptively added: “And Mrs Strong is, too.”

“Mrs Strong still?”, Mrs Simcoe asked with feigned disbelief. “I would have wagered they would be married soon. Spring weddings are delightful.”

“Pray tell, how are you and your husband”, Eliza tried to end the conversation by introducing a new topic and poured Mrs Simcoe another cup.

“The Colonel is delighted with the child and much pleased to see it grow, tho’ very protective of me, thinking I must rest and cannot do anything, for fear of the health of our child and I”, she smiled, visibly enchanted with her husband’s protectiveness in the same manner one finds it charming when one’s dog performs a trick on his own to please his master.

“It gets quite tiring, telling him I can be left alone and walk perfectly fine unattended, but he is a careful man and shall prove an adoring father I am sure.”

Eliza only registered the Simcoes’ domestic bliss in passing with a few standard words of congratulations that were more hollow shells of curtesy than anything else; curious and perhaps a little bored, the younger woman’s interest in the private lives of the Hewlett-family; in truth, she had no idea where Edmund’s and Anna’s lives were headed.

For the time being, they had returned to Scotland, but where their love, their relationship stood was beyond her knowledge.

They were doubtlessly in love, but tried not to show it in the open- even Alexander and she were not supposed to know, even though it was evident to them Anna and Edmund had only eyes for another.

It was understandable; their path had been a rocky one, full of hardships, they had almost lost each other and only lately permitted their hearts to find love in each other again.

Naturally, they would not hasten any decisions to be made; they would take their time, and it was good.

“And you, Mrs Greenwood? You are planning to stay at Ashcombe, it seems?”

“I am helping sorting the affairs of the late Captain Barnett”, she clarified diplomatically, but was countered swiftly with “well, given you have fashioned the house to your liking already, such was the only logical consequence- you see, sometimes in age-” (as if she, who was almost more a girl still than a woman at barely more than twenty, would know) “one finds love- or love again, I suppose? Mrs Graves, my aunt, must have been your age when she decided to take my uncle’s the Admiral’s offer.”

The girl was clever, too clever for Eliza’s liking- her husband might have been a warrior with his strength and cunning tricks in battle, but she was just as lethal as he, only far more elaborate, slaying her victims in the middle of a drawing room on an expensive carpet without even leaving any traces
of blood behind.

Eliza however was, despite feeling touched in an odd place inside her by the insinuation her counterpart had made, no beginner in the game of Politeness and simply stated how happy she was for the Admiral and his wife, who were very well-matched certainly.

One heard much about the two fighting often with more malicious voices claiming they enjoyed it on more levels than one, this detail Eliza decided not to put on the table— one should never antagonise one’s neighbours, especially if one was skilled with the bayonet and the other just as skilled slaying their enemies in society.

Instead, she poured the other woman another cup of tea and offered her a sandwich “as you’ve to feed two at present” and watched, satisfied, how the cravings of pregnancy were satisfied with a thick slice of roasted ham, butter and pickles wedged between two slices of bread, which coincidentally had the convenient effect of busying Mrs Simcoe’s mouth with a task that was not interrogating her host.

**Duncleade, Scotland.**

All the way home he had wondered what it would be like, returning, impatient to come home. The mail coach was slow enough in its progress, and when bad roads had prevented his travels norward from Exeter and delayed him thanks to incessant rainfall, he could not enjoy the cathedral city one bit, nor its various entertainments, but confined himself to the cheap room he had rented from a reasonably respectable innkeeper and reviewed pages of his manuscript instead, which he thought on offering to the Royal Society.

Finding mistakes in spelling where at night his eyes and mind had tricked him in a dreary daze and correcting minor phrasings, he waited and found his brain not fully focussed on the task in front of him as he found himself constantly thinking of somebody who certainly was not Edmond Halley.

Said person was far prettier, with long, dark hair that would cascade over her shoulders when not done up or hidden under a hat or cap, and large, black doe-eyes.

He thought of how he had held her, how she had instructed him to make love to her, how for those few days in Edinburgh before the arrival of his sister’s letter, everything had been beautiful and ridiculously easy.

Neither of them had questioned anything, there had been no regrets, only love, tender, sweet love.

-And by the evening, he was intent on renewing the love between them.

The last miles were, as usual, the longest, stretching the road to thrice its length, even with the horses going at a decent speed.

Once in Duncleade, he found a boy at the tavern to take care of his luggage and immediately hastened up the road lined by old ash trees to the Hewlett House, which was situated fashionably apart from the village which it had once governed before his father had sold the land and the rights coming with it to the Strettons.

His mind invented many picturesque pastoral scenes of bucolic qualities in which his Anna was waiting for him sitting in amongst the snowdrops he knew would be flowering in the woods behind
the formal garden, her glossy tresses falling over her chest and back in an almost witch-like fashion as she reclined seated on the forest floor with her back to an old tree and the drops of sunlight falling through the still bare branches on her face.

-Or Anna hanging out the washing, white linen shirts and sheets dangling neatly on the line, as he had seen his sister do in times when the family had been so badly off they had had to do their own washing (which had luckily only been a while until his mother had by some ways and means which she continued to keep secret from her children found a way to appease one of their minor debtors and their fortune had improved somewhat again). He had seen her do it in Setauket at times, too, hanging up handkerchiefs and petticoats to dry in the sun, overlooking the bay as she worked and every now and then brushing a strand of her unruly hair out of her face or tucking it resolutely beneath her cap.

In the end, none of the scenes he had imagined came to pass; nobody was waiting for him by the door, no fair dark-eyed spirit flung herself into his arms from the staircase as he entered; as he had not been able to give any more precise date of his arrival safe for a “sometime within the week”, no committee of welcome had formed.

He told the maid who had opened the door to lay out some new clothes for him so he could make himself presentable for the women, and ordered her not to tell anyone yet.

With his boots in his hand in order not to make any noise, he, silent as a cat, managed to tiptoe to his room without being seen.

Triumphantly, he closed the door behind him and waited for the maid, who had found a tolerable suit for him and on a second errand brought some warm water for him to wash his face and hands.

Sufficiently refreshed and changed, he took a glimpse of his attire by looking at his own reflection on the back of his pocket watch.

Before going downstairs, he quickly went through the mail piling up on his desk- there was nothing of real importance, as he had predicted, save for a letter from Miss Caroline Herschel (as he recognised by the hand in which the address was written onto the yet unopened letter).

Uninterested in anything else, he told himself he could still open his letters later; for now, there was someone he longed to see quite badly. Paper was patient and could wait for centuries undisturbed, Anna could not.

When he entered his mother’s parlour, where he had guessed he would most likely find the women on a fine afternoon in spring with good light for any activities such as sketching, embroidery or sewing, his hopes of surprising them were even surpassed when Anna, an old dress on her lap that looked as if it had belonged to his great-grandmother, jumped so suddenly at hearing his voice that the dress and the small pen-knife she had employed to loosen the lace trim around the neckline fell to the ground. Anna stepped over the heap on the floor rather carelessly and sought his embrace, first almost unrestrained in her happiness at seeing him then suddenly (remembering before he did that his mother was looking on from an armchair nearby) more stiffly.

“I have missed you”, she whispered in his ear, supposing her voice was too low for the old woman, who immediately (and very loudly) confirmed she had heard something, exclaiming: “what? I can hear you, you know. And I can see you, too.”

Mother’s teasing came in good spirits and by the evening, they had settled around the fire together to hear his tales of the South, of Barnett and Eliza (and Simcoe) while roasting some of the last apples from the previous summer in the flames of the fireplace stuck onto the end of a poker, which they then distributed equally among another.
Flanked by his mother and Anna on either side of him, he scarcely knew who to talk to, to whom he should turn his head; even harder proved for him the great feat of not simply reaching for Anna’s hand and taking it in his, or indeed to draw her into his arms entirely and have her rest against his shoulder; so long had he been deprived of her countenance he could barely wait to not only view her, but feel her again.

After using some of Eliza’s drawings of Ashcombe which she had sent home to Scotland and explaining what works had been done, Mother complained of the fading light and her poor eyesight and went to bed, leaving them alone.

Mother had almost immediately taken a liking to Anna as soon as she had set foot into the house, regardless of the suspicious circumstances in which she had arrived, a Patriot widow from the American Colonies, and Edmund had the slight suspicion she had hopes in seeing Anna become her daughter-in-law one day.

Edmund hoped the same, but it was all still so very soon- during the war, things had moved so fast he had barely been able to comprehend what was happening around him, one moment, the woman he had adored since he had seen her jump from a boat into the water to swim back ashore pretending to be a loyal subject who did not want to be associated with her treasonous husband’s dirty dealings, had returned the feelings and even had wanted to marry him, only to abandon him in the next instant and to show to him her cold side, making him believe she had never loved him to keep him out of harm’s way for the remainder of the war by hoping he would, broken-hearted, return home.

He had, but he had also come back to the Colonies. And he had still loved her, just as she had continued to love him.

Their love had never ended, but it had attacked the heart, attached itself to it like a cancerous growth, and for it to heal it had taken long, painful months for both of them.

They had time; as long as they would not show their mutual affection in public and give rise to any untoward rumours, they had time.

This time, he would not rush things; he had almost bullied her into marrying him when he had decided he was past caring for the affronted sentiments of several rural rustics fancying themselves high and mighty within their small peninsular community on Long Island, he would not make the same mistake twice.

He would wait, and Anna would tell him when the time would be right.

Almost immediately once Mother had left the room, aided by her stick and her maid, Anna asked him to sit beside her on the sofa and they, silently, arranged themselves in a pose comfortable for them both, and for a few instants, did nothing but delight in having the other again, in exchanging touches and caresses.

By the rising of the moon, his beautiful rebel kissed him and wicked witch that she was, enchanted him with the fair sight of her bosom once she, grinning wickedly, tugged at her fichu and bared her bosom to his sight.

“You can’t leave again”, she sighed as he kissed her neck, “it has been far too long.”

“O Anna, my Anna.”

He tightened his embrace and silently let a tear drop into her dark hair, hoping she would not notice-thinking of their terrible pilgrimage until they had arrived here, in Scotland, together, of the pain of
separation and supposed deceit he had felt when he had thought she had conned and abandoned him for her rebel designs, of everything that had happened since then, had made him quite agitated.

Never, never again would he let go of her.

They needed not to speak much when they rose and went upstairs; he didn’t think about anything at all save Anna when he did not kiss her goodnight on the cill to her room, but kept holding on to her hand and invited her to his.

How could she refuse? To love, and be loved back in return was so beautiful a feeling and above all, a rare gift. No words were needed when Edmund helped her to undress- she did most of it on her own, given he had never before had much practice with women’s clothes, but left him under the impression he was helping a great deal when she let him tug at the laces of her stays and peel them off her or undo the bow holding her pockets to her hips.

It took them a while, but at last they succeeded, and Edmund had her in her shift. With a smile, she walked over to the bed on her bare feet, swaying her hips as she went, knowing Edmund was still looking at her.

As it was still early in the year and the nights cold, Anna crept beneath the still rather cool covers that would soon be warm with the heat of two people and turned to watching Edmund undress; he had gotten his fair share, now she was keen on getting an eyeful of her own.

She was pleased to see he had not changed one bit during his stay in England; his arms were still as muscular, but not overly so, as she had remembered them, as was the rest of him, his strong chest and belly that usually hid successfully under the veneer and layers of clothes of the gentleman-officer accustomed to have things done for him and indulging a sedentary lifestyle, the slight dusting of dark hair on his chest.

He was beautiful, perfect in all aspects- he was not too small, as Abe had been (who had lacked both in his bodily size and his virile member had been equally disappointing, thinking back on it), or too tall and frightfully imposing as Simcoe, whose brutish, butcher-like physique and immediate strength would cause most women (save for his wife, it seemed) to feel uneasy around him.

Edmund’s body was perfectly suited to complement her own, and she would not wait any longer for it.

Luckily Edmund had shared the same thought as he crept under the covers to her and kissed her again, this time less chastely as his hands pulled at her nightshirt, eager to have skin touch skin.

Anna gladly obliged him and their kisses grew fiercer even when she, unable to wait any longer for the pleasure he was withholding from her, she hooked her thigh over his hip in order to bring them even closer together and increase the heavenly desire that was mounting in her by rubbing herself against him.

It would still take them some time to be fully acquainted to the other, to fully know the other as inside and out, and Edmund still was a little clumsy in his ways, in how he was still too shy to initiate anything save for a kiss, eager to please, but unsure what to do.

She didn’t want him any differently, he would hopefully one day understand.
Never before had she loved like she had loved him, not Abe, and certainly not Selah, and never when she had been with either of them had it felt so good as it had with him.

That night, they made love again, growing a little bolder every second, and Anna had to press a hand to her mouth to stop any accidental noises from leaving her lungs that could possibly wake Charlotte.

When she awoke, it was already late in the morning and Anna found herself alone in Edmund’s sheets that had been neatly tucked around her.

Yawning, she slowly came to and immediately realised rather embarrassedly that she would have to walk to her room through the now very awake house in her shift with yesterday’s clothes hung over her arm.

Gathering the white linen sheet about her and putting it into some form of toga as worn by the ancient romans, the door opened and, to her great relief, it was not the maid but Edmund who had come in.

“Ah, you are awake, dear”, he greeted her with one of his endearingly child-like wide smiles, “good morning. I hope you rested well.”

Rest had not been their primary objective that night, but she was awake enough to see him dressed in his old, worn stable-clothes he wore whenever he was with the horses and did not ride them.

“I have just come in”, he continued his narrative, “wanted to look after the horses before breakfast.”

“I should get dressed then, too”, Anna replied and was about to walk out into the corridor, but Edmund stopped her.

“I think Mother can wait. I, ah, would like it very much if you, ah- yes, just lie down, will you?”

Somewhat bemused, she followed his request while Edmund turned his back on her and rifled through the organised chaos on his desk to find what he was looking for. Armed with a moderately sizeable sketchbook, a pencil and knife to sharpen it, he dragged his rather Spartan chair, a rickety thing made only from wood without the comfort of so much as a thin cushion, across the room until it faced the bed.

He sat down, and Anna understood.

A soft smile crept onto her lips- so far she hadn’t known Edmund was much of an artist. The idea however that he wanted to draw her was, although quite lewd given her state of undress, rather flattering.

Still clad in his sheet, he made her lie on her side, her head supported by her right arm and the cushion beneath it.

In the process of arranging herself in such a manner she would strike the most advantageous pose for the artist, the bed sheet slipped down somewhat and exposed her left breast, much to the enjoyment of the would-be artist:

“Perfect.”

“Rake.”

Half an hour later, the rather nasty prickling sensation in Anna’s arm told her it was slowly going
numb and her neck started to revolt, too.

“We’re almost finished, dear”, Edmund thankfully announced another ten minutes later, minutes Anna had spent thinking about simply getting up and telling him to finish from memory, because she was cold.

“Here”, he held the pencil sketch out to her, “I call it the Venus of Caledonia. Legend has it the ancient Goddess Fiona, as represented in this drawing, appeared to the romans, who in turn allowed themselves to be guided by her, thinking she was Venus, and led them to their doom, causing the entire ninth legion to vanish, never to be seen again. Some say she led them into an ambush of angry Scoti; others say she drowned them in her eyes.”

Well, Edmund was not the greatest artist who had ever lived, but the sitter was doubtlessly recognisable. The bed he had exchanged for an oriental divan and the rather cluttered surroundings of his rooms, books and rolled-up charts had transformed into the outlines of a few Doric columns in a state of artful disrepair.

Anna could not help but laugh, and Edmund laughed with her.

To view her, to be with her was more than he could wish for. Never, even in their first happy days together in Setauket, not even when he had been certain they would marry at Whitehall, had he been so happy.

There is no war to threaten them, no hatred, no Simcoe to breathe down their necks (as his sister writes, he is rather busy playing the lapdog for his tiny wife, a rather amusing image, he finds) and do them ill- they need not fear the war, or anybody else, rebel or redcoat.

He had always wanted a quiet life, one in which he would have become a gentleman-scholar as he had always envisioned he would in his youth before his father’s fortune had been lost in the trade boycotts, living off the land and its tenants while observing the night skies and putting his thoughts and findings into words, which would then be published, and he would become renown as a great scholar and scientist.

In these dream-designs, he had come to notice of late, he had seldom incorporated the figure of a companion of some sort, save the horses he loved so well, not even a dog.

He had always been alone. Now, his dreams were much more modest; keeping the house and remaining lands in good enough order to provide for Anna and his mother and sister, and to live in peace without going to war anymore.

He wanted to see the roses his mother has planted in younger years flower in June, he wanted to marvel at the beauty of the hills all around being coated in silver frost on an autumn morning.

-And throughout everything, he wanted Anna to be with him, walk on his arm in the morning chill or sit by the roses in the garden together in the quietness of the evening with only a few birds to sing overhead.

The wounds of the past have been deep, but they are healing; he had forgiven everything she has done, admired her even for lying to him to save him, but he could not yet be sure if there would ever
be another chance she would marry him.

And perhaps, he mused while his very own muse was busy getting dressed in her own quarters, they
never would.

Marriage, as the example of his own sister only illustrated too well, was more often an institution
made up to accumulate wealth and titles, influence and power rather than the voluntary union of two
people in love. She had married Greenwood only because she thought she would no longer be a
burden on the household, not because she loved him, which she did not. Eliza had told him she had
not disliked Greenwood, who had been a good man, a friend even perhaps, but she had not loved
him one bit.

At least she had made that decision for herself, other women and girls had it infinitely worse, being
pushed by their families into marrying a man they did not like.

-However, they were in love and there was no reason to speak against them entering into married
life- not anymore, not since Selah Strong had died.

Still, their love appeared to be to him as tender and fragile as a new-born foal barely able to stand up.
It was still so new, and they had never discussed it before- quite frankly, even if their time together in
mutual happiness had been thrice the number of months they had shared in the more recent past, he
would still not have dared to ask her for fear of the bad, bad wedding-day they should never have
had in America.

Perhaps she might even feel forced, or obligated to marry him, viewing it as returning the favour he
had done her by sheltering her in his home.

He would do everything to keep their love safe, he resolved, even if it would mean being shunned by
certain people, lectured by clergymen on the unethicalness of living in sin or becoming the laughing
stock of the village and next few villages around.

No scorn and scoffing could be worse than what the Oyster Major had endured in the (now lost)
American colonies, and he would bear it with pride and joy in his heart, knowing he had Anna by
his side, and that was all that mattered.

-But what would they live on? With the war as good as over, and what one heard, peace negotia-
tions underway, he would soon be put on half-pay; perhaps he could try again and sell his commission,
but it was unlikely it would be bought at a good price, not in the current political climate and with the
war lost on Britannia’s part. And even then, the money for a major’s commission would not last
forever, not even very long, and he could not hope to be among the men who would be promoted at
the end of all this, which would at least grant him a little more, not even brevetted.

If ever, ever he should have it in his head to wed Anna again and even now that it looks like she will
stay with them for hopefully very long, forever, he must provide for her; he has seen her work odd
hours and do the most menial tasks, and at the time thought it well and right, but then he had come to
love her, and his whole idea of her had changed; she is brave, and although not by pedigree at least
now a gentle-woman by living in this household.

Mother did her best to give her the genteel veneer of an English lady; being one herself and having
been given an accomplished education, she was well suited to the task to make Anna appear au fait,
as they say, teaches her the ways and little tricks that make a lady accomplished.

Much as he has always been a rustic to London society for his northern home, Anna would also be
seen as a country-woman, less modern in her apparel and ways, but such had to be expected, and
was not the worst thing Edmund could have imagined.

But a country woman needs to be fed and clothed and be comfortably placed like everyone else. An income had to be found- but what could be made of his talents? They were few, and not particularly good. His manuscript was almost ready, and he wished to publish it, which would also cost money- bills he had enough, just no money to pay them. If anybody would be fool enough to hand him £20, he would not in the manner of a Fanny Murray eat it between two slices of bread, he’d spend it quicker than she had devoured it- the roof wanted fixing in a few places, the horses needed to be fed and perhaps with some money left, he could hire a second maid for Mother, who was not getting any younger.

So many things to worry about dampened his previously rather high spirits, which he tried not to show when he and Anna later rode a bit; she was not a good rider, but fared admirably. She was by his side, that was all that mattered.

Ten miles from London, a country estate.

Time and place had been set and Philomena tried not to smile too much as she climbed from the coach that had brought her to the place Grosvenor had named to settle their dispute once and for all through a bet.

Pulling her floor-length cloak (taken from her husband and too sizeable in all aspects) closer around herself, she observed through the window how the gentlemen, two of whom served as witnesses and had been present the evening the bet had been struck, waited for her arrival only.

She was five minutes early according to her pocket watch, but horse, jockey and Grosvenor were already there and waiting.

“Mrs Cooke”, the baron greeted her with a Cheshire Cat-like grin on his face that bared his teeth, “how good to see you.”

He began by explaining her the situation en détail; at the end of the ten miles going cross-country, a gentleman waited to take the arrival time on his watch, while another gentleman would take the time she would need to disrobe on the spot. Later it could then be discerned who was faster by comparing the times the set tasks had been finished and the winner declared.

For the purpose of her disrobement, a flimsy little Chinese screen had been set up that was more a mockery of her modesty than serving its intended function of preserving it.

Very well.

At precisely three in the afternoon, the sound of the church-bell echoing across the countryside from the nearby village served as starting signal and Grosvenor looked smugly on as Pot-8-0s and his rider set off fast as lightning.

The chestnut stallion flew down the path and disappeared out of sight very quickly, which was quite impressive to watch.

“Will you not start?”, Grosvenor asked, puzzled as she watched very serenely as horse and jockey
grew ever smaller in the distance.

“Right away, Sir.”

Slowly, and without hiding behind the folding screen, she opened the clasp of her husband’s cloak and let it slide to the ground, revealing a wrapper underneath, which she then undid very slowly and let it slide off her shoulders, revealing everything not covered by her shoes, stockings and hat.

Grosvenor first turned red, then pale, then almost green in the face.

“You are cheating”, he exclaimed angrily and sought approval from his aides, who had lowered their eyes to inspect their respective shoe-buckles.

“I am not. You never specified what I wear, and I thought you should have known that this sort of dress is rather fashionable among the sort of women among whose number you count me.”

Without hesitating, shivering in the not exactly warm afternoon air or giving a care for her modesty, she discarded of her shoes and rolled down her stockings before pulling out a few pins holding her hat in place and letting her hair, which had been purposefully done up very loosely, fall over her shoulders.

“There, I win.”

Triumphant and rather cold, Philomena wrapped herself up in the blankets she had deposited in her carriage, her prize being ridden by his usual stable boy alongside the carriage.

She had beaten Grosvenor, and what had been intended as a public humiliation of her and her reputation had turned in a great shame on Grosvenor himself.

He would remain silent now on the circumstances in which the horse had come into her possession, lest he wanted to suffer the humiliation he had intended for her- outwitted by an American actress- his friends would hardly let this opportunity to torment him slide.

He would likely insist on claiming he had sold Pot-8-Os and never speak a word to her, or her husband, whom she would have to reform in terms of his gambling-habit.

The wonder-horse she had won would fetch a handsome sum when sold- and she would sell it to anyone who was not Grosvenor, that was her sole condition, even if he had promised her the moon in return- now that was her punishment for him.

After a few discreet enquiries in the following days, she sold him rather quickly to a Lord Farnon in Yorkshire, younger son of the Farnons of Skeldale House, a family renowned for their equestrian successes and owners of a few good thoroughbreds themselves.

She had won. Mrs Cooke, formerly Miss Cheer, actress of York City, had outwitted the little lordling who had considered himself superior to her.

Feeling supremely satisfied with having sold the horse with the odd name, she would rest easy that night and took consolation from the fact that whoever would frown at her, would never know how powerful she truly was.

Indeed, perhaps her life in England might still prove entertaining. Wistfully, she smiled to herself at the simple ingenuity of the trick- taking a man by his word. The fortunes of the gambler, the player
smiled down on her- and perhaps the patron saint and martyr for them all, John André, was looking down (or rather up, given he was most likely not in heaven, rather hell) at her, smiling with envy at her little feat. Perhaps she should have acquired the plans for West Point- who could tell, perhaps Britain would not face the calamitous defeat she did now. Perhaps all the world would be better if men would start listening to women- starting with her very own husband, who would be well advised never to be caught gambling again.

**Duncleade, Scotland.**

During the past week, Anna could tell something was not quite alright with Edmund; he was thinking a lot, too much for her taste. Whenever he thought too much, he would turn gloomy and put on the mask of Major Hewlett again.

On one occasion, she had reminded him that in the old days (as she had begun referring to their days in Setauket) she had resented this man with all her heart, and that it was Edmund she loved, but nothing would work.

He threw himself into various projects, anything that struck his fancy would be done, preferably alone and it took not only her but also Charlotte, her maid and the cook to convince him not to ever try and cut down a tree a recent storm had uprooted to such a degree it was still standing, but unsafely so and threatening to be blown over and hit the house should another one strike, all by himself.

The tree was massive and too much even for two men; where Edmund got the strength from was beyond her knowledge.

In all likelihood he just needed something else to do for a change, something that did not involve sitting quietly at a desk. After all, Edmund had defied all odds and survived alone, barely clothed in midwinter for several days; he was remarkably strong when he wanted to be, and Anna would not have ruled his success out entirely, if they would have let him hack into the thing as if he had to get it done within the hour or else suffer being personally fusilladed by George Washington.

Something was on his mind and weighed down heavily on it.

She did all she could to divert him, took interest in his activities, sat with him and went to his room when he had shut himself up there without telling anyone, usually for hours on end and under the pretence of having to manage the household, put the bills in order etc.

Most of this was arrant nonsense as the household expenses, when at home Eliza’s task, fell to her in the absence of the former, who had told her everything she needed to know- besides, she had managed the books of a tavern and could always ask Charlotte, who had managed the household on her own for years, before her dwindling eyesight had kept her from book-keeping.

What he did was walking up and down in his room, occasionally muttering to himself and drawing up plans which, as he said, were most important for the future sustenance of the estate.

His plans were as big as his pockets empty, which only caused him to despair more.

To Anna, it did not matter much if he was rich or poor- she had fallen from grace, known the life of both the gentlewoman and the tavern-wench; she could hardly find any worse employ here than cleaning up after drunken soldiers.
She could as well contribute as he could, but naturally he viewed this very differently- a lady should not have to dirty her dainty fingers, a sentiment she knew was rooted in his upbringing, in the social class he could only count half of himself to claiming the blood while he lacked the riches to fund the sort of lifestyle some of his peers had, but which she by no means supported.

There were rules, manners and the like, but there was also false pride. If one didn’t have the need to work, what a strike of good fortune, but if one did not, one had to. It was that simple.

The Strettons, whom she by now understood to be the leading family in the area by wealth and influence, might need a ladies’ maid or kitchen girl, both positions she could fill and perhaps her status of near-exoticness in these parts would make her a more attractive hire than others, as she had realised some people (which annoyed her to some degree) treated her rather differently for her accent, which was rather different from that of the Scots, and wouldn’t let her go until she had answered them a dozen questions. Perhaps she could exploit her local fame somewhat to find work- or she could write to someone, Ben, perhaps. He would understand, he would most certainly help her- no, she could not. She could not let Ben give her money she was as of the present moment unsure how to repay, and to bully Ben into lend her money to support the household of a man he had every right to despise was very wrong.

She would have to find another way.

Very likely she was even better-suited to the task- she had none of the shame Edmund felt when he was unable to “do things properly”- how often had she done things in camp nobody of her new neighbours could, would ever dream of?

Some nights, thoughts of the sights and sounds of the camp still kept her awake- memories of women or little children she had seen lingered, and she wondered what might have become of them, if they were still alive, well perhaps even now that the war was over, or if they had died, casualties of hunger, disease or a freezing cold night perhaps, like so many others had.

Her privileged position as a spy had of course come with the safety of knowing she would never go so hungry as to actually starve, but others around her had.

Lying awake and thinking of these days, sometimes even her room was too silent for her, as she was missing all the noises- people talking, a small child wailing, then whimpering in the distances as the mother rocked it to sleep, singing songs for it in a tired voice; men arguing, heavy boots walking by- on those nights, she was happy Edmund was with her, as he often was these days.

Now that his book was done and had been sent in two hand-written copies he had made all by himself to London and Oxford to some eminent experts whose approval (and funds) he hoped to win, he did not go stargazing very often anymore- at least not every day of the week.

More often he enjoyed sharing her bed and had declared the night his favourite time of day, because they would be together then and nobody could come and disturb their time alone.

Sometimes, they made love and tried to be as quiet as could be in order to prevent anyone from hearing them, which did not particularly add to the experience, but rather detracted from it.

It was sweet because Edmund was with her, and because they had been so long deprived of another that any touch set free emotions rivalling in their bubbling intensity a royal fireworks display; they were both hungry and wanting to make up for the time they had lost, wherefore she saw no reason to allow Edmund to squander even more time on worrying himself to death over things he could not change on his own.
He needed help, they needed help. Hewlett House had become her home too, at least for now; Charlotte was lovely and a good friend who made sure never to broach the topic of politics with her knowing they would only disagree and even the local population had, once she had earned the seal of approval of the local gentry, embraced her more warmly than before.

-But what could be done? Any situation she could find for herself would help and contribute, but would scarcely be enough to uphold the household as it was once Edmund faced half-pay; from what she could see and read in Eliza’s ledgers, it was hard enough on full pay.

A little bit of the hay was sold each year, but not enough to make any profit; some grain, too, but that could be procured more cheaply elsewhere, too. They grew their own vegetables, but only so much to support themselves.

One could hope Edmund’s studies would hit London like a meteor, or else their finances for the coming months looked gloomy.

Anna had no illusions; there would be a peace, the talks in Paris would come to fruition, especially now that the Netherlands had declared they regarded the United States as a country in her own right. With foreign powers flocking to the US’ side, Britain would almost certainly be pressured into an agreement that formally declared the end of the war and with it, American independence.

-What great irony indeed that she now dreaded the day she had longed for only a year or two ago; she still wanted the US to be independent, very much, but suddenly, she had found herself on a ship bound for Britain with the man she had thought lost to her forever and who coincidentally was as bloody a redcoat as they come and now was de facto mistress of a minor Scottish country estate dependent on scant officer’s pay.

It had all happened so fast Anna had barely been able to believe it as it happened, and was in some disbelief over the rapidity with which events had progressed from her receiving the first letter from Edmund’s sister to sitting here, in the Hewlett family’s parlour.

Charlotte, Eliza, and eventually Edmund, too, had taken her in with open arms, fed her off their table, had given her bed and board and more than that.

She considered Eliza and above all Charlotte her friends- friends whom she would like to repay for their kindness to her.

Her own money, which she kept stashed away in an old stocking mended one too many times to wear it, was few; it would not even pay for a passage back to America.

In the beginning, she had mused whether to save money for this exact purpose, to leave. Now, she did not think she could anymore.

At home, they would not receive her with open arms- if one could still call Setauket home after everything that she had gone through there, save of course for the friends she still held very dear and with whom she exchanged letters as often as she could.

Apparently Ben was doing very well in Congress, and, much to everyone’s surprise, Caleb had met a girl he was courting. Robert was thinking on giving up his position of serving behind another man’s bar now that his services as a spy were no longer required and toyed with the idea of entering his father’s shipping business.

It was good to hear each of them did so well for themselves, and now it would be her turn. If Ben, who as a child had been too afraid to join her and Abe at play, hiding behind his father’s legs
because he had been intimidated by the rowdiness she and Abe, then about four or five in days when their families had not yet been divided by politics and the eventual scandal of an ill-fated romance in the Shakespearian fashion, had exhibited at that careless age one evening at a party, had managed to become a fearless dragoon and Congressman, if Caleb, the most notorious man in Oyster Bay and most renowned for being a smuggler and general ne’er do well since his boyhood days was inclined to settle down- if such things happened, then surely she would find a way to help her hosts.

Anna began to think, ruminating intensely on what ways stood open to her. Her own work only paid little; she was skilled, yes, but apart from mending the odd frayed buttonhole or re-attaching some trimmings, most of those who considered themselves of genteel or above station bought their clothes in London or at least the bigger cities in the north of England.

For her, there was no other way to contribute.

She thought back on her time as the wife of a land-owning gentleman; they had planted cauliflower, but she was not sure if it would grow in this much harsher climate and besides, they had then relied on the labour of their slaves.

At that, her thoughts turned to Abigail and Cicero, hoping that they were well and safe. Abigail had served her country just as she had herself; she, though ignorant and never having given the institution of slavery a thought before she had come to be better acquainted with Abigail, was of the opinion that she and her son had been comrades in arms, and had fought for the same greater goal whom she wished well.

What could be done? Anna paced up and down in the formal garden that had come to look a little overgrown as it was not regularly maintained in order to save money, no doubt.

Racking her brain for days, it was a visit that gave her an idea of a very different kind; Mrs Stretton had come by to see Charlotte and Anna was required to sit with them in the parlour and exchange pleasantries; she was not very fond of the woman who viewed her more as an exotic house plant than a person, but was intent on not causing any trouble.

“…have you heard? The Earl of Grosvenor sold his famed horse! He is to run for the first time under his new owner’s name at a race in Carlisle- nothing very big, but I suppose it is to test him not too far from home; my husband thinks on going and might be persuaded to take your son with us, if he is so inclined.”
Charlotte nodded in agreement.

“That is very kind of you Mrs Stretton, and please give my kindest regards to your husband, but I am afraid you cannot persuade Edmund to go without Mrs Strong. He would be horribly sad to leave her behind.”
Mrs Stretton made a face, but caught herself immediately.

“Very well. Perhaps we will see each other there then, Mrs Strong?”

“I doubt it”, Anna replied, trying to imitate the haughty tone she recalled Major Hewlett of using when speaking to Setauket’s townspeople, “but I hope you will amuse yourself there.”

-But what if they were to go? What if they would go, if on their own terms? Edmund and she, alone? A change of air and scenery might put him off worrying, at least for the moment.

That night, sitting with him in his room as he adjusted his telescope (he wanted to show her some star
“Edmund?”, she asked, and he turned around to face her. “Have you heard about that race in Carlisle? I heard Mrs Stretton talk about it this morning.

“I, in fact, ah, did”, Edmund confessed, visibly surprised she should talk about horseracing. “I have never placed bets, you see, for I have no money to spare for such vices, but was a follower of such sports since my youth. There was a white one, Bucephalus, which I favoured for a few seasons before he was competing no longer. Middling success, you know.”

Anna knew instantly what this euphemism meant, asking herself if the amateur astronomer and officer against his will had empathised with the failing racehorse.

“Let us go. It might do you good”, she encouraged him, taking his hand in hers. They were soft, not like the calloused monster-like paws of Simcoe that only knew to exert force even when they tried to be tender or Abe’s much smaller, always slightly sweaty and fumbling ones, like those of a very nervous boy; he had not changed at all over the years.

Edmund’s were perfect; long, fine-boned, yet strong fingers that had all their life practiced exactness in all tasks put before them and patient gentleness in their caresses that had comforted his sister after the loss of her fiancé as well as encouraged into friendly submission many a spooked horse.

In the evening light, his skin had an alabaster glow and the golden ring on his finger made it look like the hand she held belonged to the portrait of a medieval king, not a man of the present.

“Where did you get it?”, Anna asked the question that had long puzzled her. Gentlemen usually did not wear rings— not in this day, at least. Before they went to bed, Edmund usually took the ring off for reasons of her comfort when sporting and playing together in an amorous haze, and now that she thought of it, she’d never looked at it more closely before.

“It was my father’s”, he explained, and before him his father’s and his father’s and so on. I believe it, ah, let me see, was made some three hundred years ago. Perhaps a little less, but it was passed down in the family ever since. I ah chose to wear it because it reminds me of my family, my duty. Made me think of the reasons why I had allowed myself to be dragged into this war when I wished for nothing else but to be home.”

During his narration, Anna let her thumb pass over the design etched into the gold; for the first time she noticed the Hewlett coat of arms glittering in the light of the only candle lit in the room to help Edmund set the telescope.

“Do you want it?”

Aghast, Anna looked up at Edmund’s face.

“You can have it, if you like”, he added quickly and pulled the ring off his finger, placing it in his palm, which he then proceeded to hold out to her.

“Edmund, I couldn’t possibly accept.” Anna objected and physically recoiled as his hand drew closer to her in a more insistent gesture. It was so valuable, both rich in memories and valuable for the material it was made of, she could not take it at all.

“I would like to give it to you. You belong here now, too, Scotland is your new home, is it not? Here.”

When she made no motion to take it, Edmund smiled, taking the ring between the fingers of his right, while reaching with the left for her own hand. She did not resist when he tried to slip the ring on
which sat much too loosely on the assigned finger.

“That won’t do”, he shrugged, his cheeks a little reddened, slipped it off again only to put it on her middle finger, which would fill it better with its somewhat stronger base than her ring finger could.

“There now.”

“Edmund-“ Anna tried, but he only shrugged and avoided her eyes at all costs.

“It is for you. You are meant to have it. I want it to be yours.”

“But Ed-“

“It is yours. It looks beautiful on you.”

He proceeded to kiss her to make any remaining doubts fade into nothingness and before either of them could think straight, they were on the bed together, a Gordian knot made up of two bodies.

No stars were watched that night, and as Anna lay next to a sleeping Edmund in a mess of entangled blankets and crumpled clothes, she could not help but lift her hand to her face, inspecting the ring as best as she could in the darkness.

-Only then did it occur to her she had taken off Selah’s ring long ago. Not when she had heard of his death, not right away, but a little later, a week, two perhaps when the reality of his demise had manifested as the truth in her brain, she had taken it off and put it away, first in the pocket of an apron, then with the few personal things she had had.

She couldn’t say where it was right away, and did not really care. The Hewlett arms, now warmed from the combined body heat of two people pressed warmly against her hand. The ring, for its sheer size and weight on a finger not usually accustomed to wearing a ring, felt foreign against her skin, but at the same time comfortingly heavy and present, like a part of Edmund for her to have and to hold on to wherever he might go.

Being separated another time was still her greatest fear.

In his sleep, Edmund turned and pressed his body firmly against hers, subconsciously seeking her touch, and she in turn did the same, encircling him in an embrace as his ring did her finger.

Even though neither had said a word about it, fearing what putting it into words would do to the other, she was certain he had known what such a gesture commonly signified, and she was aware of it, too.

**Carlisle, Race Day.**

With pleasure he had taken his Anna south, not quite as south as south could be, but southward enough to be in England to view the races. She cut a fine figure in a dress of saffron yellow silk she had been given by his mother, one of her old ones from when she had been young, and had altered it according to the fashions of the day as best as she could. He did not care if any of the ladies present looked at her funny for not being dressed to the standards of the bon ton, neither did he, though for the event, he had even donned his wig again after an agonising morning spent getting his hair to fit underneath, which he had only been able to do with the assistance of a servant he usually did not
require to dress in the morning.

To him, they looked very fine, every inch the respectability they usually forewent when she rested in his room and they had to make certain his mother would not find out in the morning.

Eliza had written recently saying she wished to travel home, but was not certain on when; Barnett was intent of selling his commission, it seemed, if he could find a buyer.

She had approved of the idea of going to Carlisle and informed him that a brief sojourn somewhere at least slightly more refined and less small than a Scottish village would do Anna a world of good, who was always welcome at Ashcombe, if she liked, or could come and accompany her and Barnett to Bath in the autumn, where they were intent to travel.

He said nothing in his reply about their shared plans and her behaviour as if she were the lady of the house but took her counsel to heart.

Although Eliza’s way of dealing with matters of the heart were not dissimilar to his in that she showed her love and adoration rather through deeds than words, she had had more practical knowledge of loving, and being loved, than he- thrice engaged and twice married, she was a seasoned sailor of the troublesome seas of love.

Much satisfied with Anna walking on his arm, he had even convinced himself to for once put a bet in- a crown on Pot-8-Os, which would not draw much revenue as everyone thought the fine chestnut stallion would win, but he would definitively be refunded his wager and perhaps a few pence extra, which he could put towards a pair of pretty gloves for Anna or some similar little token of affection.

The horses were off, fine animals all, and it was evident the rumoured winner was indeed the most likely to come first, until a sudden movement, perhaps he had been spooked by the waves and cheers of the crowd, or perhaps it had been one of the things only horses could see, no-one would ever be certain, that caused Pot-8-Os to stumble, then roll over, tossing his jockey (who luckily managed to scramble away before he could have been buried and fatally injured under the weight of a fully-grown horse) before standing up again and rearing to his hind legs, then falling back on all fours with his right hind leg pulled up as if to avoid putting weight on it.

It was a small wonder none of the other horses had come to harm, or harm come to them from falling over their comrade on the ground.

Edmund could not watch. He knew what would happen now. He should never have gone, he should have remained home.

Sometimes, a horse was beyond saving, and it was the most merciful thing in these circumstances to relieve them of their pain forever.

Inadvertently, his hand gripped Anna’s so tightly that in retrospect, he was certain it must have hurt, even if she denied it.

He had been forced to do it himself once. Never would he forget the ugly sound of the pistol going off in his hand, or the sudden silence in the church when Bucephalus had stopped moving and the ugly hole between his wide, chocolate eyes stared back at him, asking him if this had been the only way, if perhaps there would have been a way to save Bucephalus, not to end him-

“No, no, no”, he murmured, “no-“ and stared for a moment before, with surprising agility, he leapt across a barrier, elbowed himself through to the track where the owner, trainer and jockey stood next to the horse, who remained furious, rolling his eyes and all, and was still was unwilling to make use
of his left hind leg.

The young gentleman who appeared to be the owner looked deeply saddened as a pistol was handed to him.

“Edmund- !”

He had no idea how she had done it, but only seconds later, Anna stood behind him, trying to hold him back.

But he could not and freed herself of her arms and hands that were holding on to him with all her might.

The pistol was cocked with a nauseating click and before Edmund could do so much as to reach for the reins, a shot went off.

All he could hear as he lay on the ground were the shrieks and cries of shock from the onlookers, the noises commonly made by spooked horses and Anna shouting before a sudden darkness lowered itself over his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

The Earl of Grosvenor (1731-1802) and his wife Henrietta led a very unhappy marriage and both were unfaithful to another (though it has to be said Richard started cheating first). His wife took comfort in the arms of a string of lovers, one of them the Duke of Cumberland, younger brother of King George III. They were caught, and the Earl sued the Duke, won substantial damages and separated from his wife but didn't give up on his lifestyle.

The bet came to my mind when reading about two gents from the 1730s. One man bet he could drive his horse's through a needle's eye- so what did he do? Built a pyramid with an archway, called it the "Needle's Eye" and won the 10 pound wager- much less than erecting the structure had cost. The structure in Brampton Bierlow, England can be visited to this day. If there is a loophole, use it.

Queen’s Street: (from Grose’s A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 1785) “a man governed by his wife is said to live in Queen street, or a the sign of the queen’s head.”

Dimber: (from the same) “pretty (...)”

Mellow: (from the same) “almost drunk.”

Undressing was, contrary to what period films tend to show, not very easy on one's own for ladies (not female servants).

Pot-8-Os was the son of the legendary Eclipse, said to be the fastest horse of all time being able to run at a staggering 71.2 km/h (44.24 mph). So assuming Pot-8-Os was as quick as his dad and that constantly over the distance of 10 miles regardless of weather conditions, terrain, getting tired and jockey, means it would take him approx. 7.37 minutes to cover them (if I haven’t botched the calculation by mixing up km and miles..)- not enough time to get rid of all the layers of fabric on one's own.

I just could not pass over Potoooooooo, the racehorse with the funny name and had to
give him a fictionalised spot in this story. If you’ve ever watched any tournament in which equines compete, they usually have rather weird and un-namely names- not your average “Susie” or “Pete” from the riding school near you, but Potooooooool must be one of the most glorious and most ridiculous names in the history of people giving their horses funny names.

Originally, or so the story goes, his name was “Potato(es)” (still weird). When one day, his owner told the stable boy to label a feeding bin with Potato’s name, the lad complied and wrote “Potoooooooo” as his master had clearly said “Pot eight o-s”. The owner thought this innocent misunderstanding was hilarious and kept the name, which was often abbreviated to the much more reader- and writer-friendly Pot-8-Os. Pot-8-Os retired after a successful career in racing and later retired to become a stud. He was buried at his last home, Hare Park, where he had died at the age of 27 in 1800.

It was known among friends of the family that the one who was always on edge during each of Elizabeth Simcoe’s pregnancies was her husband- her best friend described him as “despairing” whenever birth drew near. He was great with small kids, too and loved playing with the babies.

The Legio IX Hispana (ninth, Spanish legion) is famously said to have vanished in the north of Britain, but there is only scant evidence to corroborate this, if at all. Some evidence suggests the Ninth might have been posted somewhere near Aachen, Germany or disbanded and the remaining men sent to serve with other legions. There are other theories as to its disappearance floating about and Edmund’s story is obviously made up on the fly in order to flatter Anna.

Brevet ranks (to give a very short and not very detailed explanation) were basically military courtesy titles often given out on occasions of big state celebrations or after a war to officers whose bravery or other accomplishments merited recognition. The correct address would have been to give both ranks, i.e. (to give a TURN-example),“Major and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe”. They were not attached to a command and brevet officers were ineligible for the higher pay of the rank they were brevetted.

Eating money: There was a famous anecdote about the courtesan Fanny Murray (1729-1778) who is said to have been very, very, majorly annoyed one day because apparently she needed money- her husband complied and handed her a £20 note (just as a comparison, in 1775, a private in a guards regiment earned approx. 10d/day, meaning it would have taken him 16 months to earn £20). Fanny was enraged because he had given her so little, then put the bill between two slices of bread and ate it, just to make a point. Bonus: she was the long-term mistress of the guy credited with inventing the sandwich.

Wrapper: garment comparable to a dressing-gown.

Historically, the Townsends owned ships and traded, not living off farming alone as TURN portrayed them.

The race is totally made up and as for the story of the real Pot-8-Os, I might tell it in another notes section- it’s quite interesting.
Fifteen Guineas for the Future

Chapter Summary

The Art of the (Horse) Deal, The Art of Not Asking and The Art of Not Dealing With an Obvious Reality.

Bonus: George is Washing-done with being famous.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm back just in time for a Fourth of July update! Have a great day if you're in the US, and have a great day, too if you aren't. ...In any case, what better date to pick for an update on a TURN fix-it about a rebel and a redcoat? ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[...]

Ye monarchs, take the East and West
   Frae Indus to Savannah;
   Gie me, within my straining grasp,
   The melting form of Anna:

   There I'll despise Imperial charms,
      An Empress or Sultana,
   While dying raptures in her arms
      I give and take wi' Anna!

   Awa, thou flaunting God of Day!
      Awa, thou pale Diana!
   Ilk Star, gae hide thy twinkling ray,
      When I'm to meet my Anna!
Come, in thy raven plumage, Night,
(Sun, Moon, and Stars, withdrawn a';)
And bring an angel-pen to write
My transports with my Anna!

Postscript

The Kirk an' State may join an' tell,
To do sic things I maunna:
The Kirk an' State may gae to hell,
And I'll gae to my Anna.

She is the sunshine o' my e'e,
To live but her I canna;
Had I on earth but wishes three,
The first should be my Anna.

(Robert Burns, The Gowden Locks of Anna, c. 1790)

Mount Vernon, Virginia.

The morning light pleased him as it fell through the windows, but even more pleasant was the silence.

How much he had missed it, to be solitary, to savour the sound of nothing- he had done his bit, and now it was time to retire. He had longed for it, the war had made him weary.

-Still, come the later hours of the day, he would receive visitors, well-wishers of all sorts and other such people who for some reason thought they ought accost him, perhaps because they had a serious concern, perhaps they only wanted to share in the Fame of the late war by being able to claim that they had beheld the great Washington with their own eyes.

It fatigued him, he, who had now set his life on a private existence.
Perhaps, despite everything, this was all he had ever wanted, however much he had made himself believe that he had been made to lead men, to rise up in rebellion against the British oppressors.

He had done what was right, now, with his duty done, he hoped to find some quietness at Mount Vernon with Martha, and perhaps the more extended family of his adoptive children.

“George”, a voice admonished the thoughtful look on his brow, as the view and sunshine were blocked by Martha’s figure. “So thoughtful?”

She smiled rather girlishly, and he knew perfectly why- now, with some more time on his hands and more comfortable and above all private accommodation than what he had sometimes endured during the campaign, there were more opportunities to attend to his marital duties, though what they had only done last night was no longer meant to produce an heir; Martha was too old, he knew that; it had just never meant to be, and they had had the Custis-children anyway. What they did was for their mutual enjoyment only.

Still very visibly pleased with the memories of the past night (he ought not forget to set up a new order of Spanish fly), she joined him and stood shoulder to shoulder with him, overlooking their home.

“I am happy, George. It is over now. They are negotiating a peace, and we can finally be together again- have some peace of our own.”

Almost mechanically, he reached for her hand and stroked it, as a good husband should.

“They are negotiating. It is not peace yet.”

“But it soon will be. And they’ll leave you alone then- hopefully.”

Hopefully. He doubted that, but wished for it.

“You have achieved a great feat, George. We are independent now in all but on paper, aren’t we? And you achieved that. Soon, we will send an ambassador to Britain as a sovereign state recognised among nations”, she continued proudly, “and our independence was secured by my old man.”

George could not help but smile when he heard her speak so, use her affectionate moniker for him, even if it had him slightly concerned that he was growing old indeed, considering the usage of aforementioned term had increased over the years.

“An ambassador to Britain indeed.” Immediately, his thoughts wandered to one of the more curious reports he had received concerning Culper and his Ring: the year before, he had received a document from the hands of Major Tallmadge in which he had described an incident he had been made aware of by Culper Junior.

A woman whose position had been described as “vital, an intrepid character whose actions in previous missions were nought but courageous and bore testament to her conviction being that of a True Patriot” had left the harbour of York City in a quite unusual, and if he had understood correctly, rather hasty manner; she had jumped into the water and swum towards a boat transporting passengers about to board a British merchant ship leaving the harbour shortly before such had been impossible when the war on land had reached the seas with French reinforcements controlling the waters.

She had done so to follow a man, Tallmadge had written, a man by the name of Hewlett, a major in the British Army.

But, he had further elaborated, she was not an enemy agent or a traitor: Love had driven her to do so,
when in a rather unusual turn of events and against her own beliefs and convictions, the woman, a
native of Setauket as he understood and thus well-known to both Tallmadge and Culper, had
developed a Fondness for the man she had been tasked to keep an eye on.

She was a traitor by definition, contrary to whatever alternate wording Tallmadge’s missive had tried
to convince him of, but none of his concern, for she was beyond his reach on the other side of the
ocean. It was to be lamented however that she had chosen to change sides; she had been a valuable
member of the Culper Ring, after all.

Love. Curious, what Love of all things could make people do- he loved his country, and had
defended it from the greed of the British foe, and he loved Martha, like one loves a good friend and
companion, and in the past, had loved Sally, Sally who now was where his former lady-intelligencer
dwelt.

As a young man, would he have done the same for Sally that the ominous spy-dame had done for
her British soldier?

Deep in his heart, he understood. Mr Washington of Mount Vernon even approved, as one approves
of romantic love, but The General did not. People, he resolved, had to know when it was time for
love, and when it was time for war. War called for restraint and personal sacrifices and did not leave
room for sentimentalities. One had to decide if one was a soldier and a statesman, or just a fool.

He had made his choice long ago, and did not regret it.

His marriage to Martha had been one of reason, nor romantic attachment, and the very same had
grown of it over the years.

Still, he could not shake off the thought- what was it like to love so much, so unconditionally one
would leave everything behind- a life, one’s possessions, one’s service to one’s country even? How
much needed two people tasked with if not destroying, at least undermining the other’s efforts to love
to overcome their differences and resolve not to suffer separation from the other?

He did not know. And he never would.

Perhaps he and Sally could have had that, had they not been too level-headed for any greater follies
than the few times they had competed in the horizontal joust. Her lovely body underneath him,
young and supple, he had not supposed there could be any greater joy on this earth than the moment
he was in.

But it hadn’t been meant to be. Other things had happened. They had both accepted that, and
continued to be friends- no harm or hard feelings between them.

And even now, their starkly differing political views aside, they still wrote letters; not of the same
quality as they had many years ago, but they did. They were friends.

What would life have been like had he chosen Sally?

He would never know. And he was happy with Martha, whom he had courted not so much for the
woman she was as for the vast Fortune she had brought into their marriage, at least initially.

He, it seemed, had succeeded in both love and war.

That man, Hewlett (why did his name sound so familiar?), he had lost the war- but had evidently
won in matters of love.
And the woman of Setauket? His former spy? She had won, too, he supposed. There was no evidence to suggest, according to Tallmadge, that she had had any sensible information on her person or had since divulged her knowledge to British authorities.

With the war as good as over and the news as old as the fabricated, pro-Loyalist headlines of Rivington’s newspaper, he did not worry too much about that.

What he worried about was the United States’ future relationship with Britain, whatever contract was being negotiated.

-An ambassador, indeed. Martha was right. But diplomacy had to go beyond London drawing rooms and political speeches. It had to arrive in the hearts and minds of the British people that the United States were a sovereign country, a respectable force among the nations of this earth- and perhaps, love was just the answer. Contrary to the other members of the Culper Ring, he did not consider the lady in question dismissed yet- her task had only just begun by making friends and represent her country as a quasi-personification- and perhaps, he added as a blushing afterthought, to make love, too.

Carlisle, northern England.

When he came to, the first thing he saw was Anna hovering over him- there were two others, too, two men if he remembered correctly, but he didn’t pay them much attention. He could not remember how he had come to find himself waking up on the ground and lying there without saying a thing and just trying to ascertain what had happened seemed to him like the most sensible thing to do.

“Edmund? Edmund, you’re awake!”

Anna’s hands reached for his face and cupped it. Having forgotten all decorum that one would expect of a woman attired as finely as she, she had let herself fall onto her knees in the wet sand beside him and bowed down to kiss his forehead.

This would have been a much welcome gesture on other days, but presently, his head hurt and the sound of her lips disconnecting with his skin and the sheer weight of her head pressing against his were too much to bear.

“Ah”, he groaned, not quite able to form any coherent words yet, and Anna let go of him.

“My head”, he managed to explain, “it hurts”.

“Don’t worry”, Anna replied in a voice that most definitely achieved the opposite and ordered the two men to be of assistance.

“Hold him for me”, the younger of the two said and Anna stayed behind, holding whoever “he” was while one of them picked him up under the arms while the other took his legs. It was not pleasant at all, but seemed the inevitable consequence of his present incapacitation, wherefore he tried to keep his effectuations of discomfort down as best as he could.

He must have been out for a while again, for the next time he remembered being awake, he was laid out on a bed, not unlike a corpse, fully dressed save for his coat, wig and boots.
He needed a while to adjust to the daylight falling in through the window by way of merciless sunrays before he was able to realise he was in the lodgings he and Anna had rented for the time. They had opted to take a room together, and had for this purpose travelled under the alias of Mr and Mrs Smith, a common enough surname that happened to have been Anna’s maiden name, which made it easy for her to keep up the ruse.

With a gradual slowness, his senses started to deliver their impressions to him again and he had to realise, quite shocked, that his head was bandaged. Reaching for the crown of his head he realised with horror that his hair had been cut short and promptly gazed at Anna, who had been sitting by his side most reassuringly throughout the ordeal, who understood and answered: “We had to, the doctor and I. You see, the horse, he hit you in the back of your head rearing up- we think it was with the full force of his own head- it is a miracle you are still alive and have only had a wound to the head. It split your skin, and we had a doctor apply stitches to it to close it, wherefore we had to shave around the wound to make the doctor’s work easier. I thought it would be better if it all came off in that case, so it’ll look fairly even when it grows again. Besides, I think your hair is your smallest worry- I almost lost you-“

She could not hold back her tears of angry fear at so much as imagining what it would be like if he had perished. “You are too brave for your own good, Edmund Hewlett”, she added accusatorily, a scolding he liked much better than being called a “reckless fool” or whatever else was commonly said in situations of this kind.

“-And the horse?”, he suddenly remembered, possibly at her words, “is he-“

“He lives”, Anna was quick to clarify, “they wanted to shoot him, but the pistol went off in that man’s hand by accident, and the bullet went into the ground- it’s a miracle no one was hurt. The horse was spooked by the shot and then, throwing his head in the air, hit you with it. You went down and we brought you here-“

“But Pot-8-Os”, he impatiently interrupted her narration with an imploring gaze in his eyes to release him from the tension of not-knowing, “what about him?”

“They put him to the stable- for now. He lives, until the scandal, as they term it, is over. By now, the whole city is talking about you.”

“Excellent”, he replied, likely having completely drowned out the part of the sentence where she had informed him of his sudden local fame, and immediately struggled to sit up in bed even when Anna tried to prevent him from doing so.

“You see, he did nothing wrong- and he isn’t hurt either- not badly, at least. Painful it is, no doubt, but he will turn out fine, if given the time and a proper examination. He is a beautiful animal- majestic, fast, but also a bit of a daisy cutter, as they say. He was not trained sufficiently to lift his hooves from the ground, making him susceptible to stumbling. That is one part. The other, you see, is that it is a clear day with the sun shining- which must have reflected off a pocket-watch held at an unfortunate angle or some such, which had happened a number of times while we stood and watched, which then spooked Pot-8-Os into stumbling, during which he lost his footing and kicked himself- a silly chain of events. He limped a bit, but his leg was not broken- I could see that even from afar. The two gentlemen, the owner, I presume and the other man, did not notice. With his leg swelling and his agitated display brought on by the frightening distractions of some audience members, they thought he was in so much pain it had to be broken- a wrong assumption. I, ah, only tried to save him. After what happened to Bucephalus- I could not just stand by and watch-“

Within the fraction of a second, the sheer impetus of outrage and protectiveness of the equine was gone, as if removed by magic and forced him to slump back into the cushions.
“It’s alright”, Anna breathed and put a damp cloth on his forehead when she sensed he was in much pain he had only realised he was in when he had ended his tale.

“But what about the horse?”, he tried to ask again, “what are they going to do-“

“That’s not our thing to decide”, Anna tried to tell him, but he could not accept that.

“No.”

“Don’t be stubborn, Edmund. We cannot do anything for him and you tried to save him already.”

Sniffing a little, he took Anna’s hand.

“You cannot know what it feels like. Horses are companions, friends even if you let them be. Loyal, kind. They are never evil- perhaps they are the purest creatures in this world. And yet, we do them ill- look into their eyes and you know what pure innocence means.”

Anna sighed- she had known Edmund could be stubborn to the point his stubbornness could easily be confused with stupidity, but his present bull-headedness in the matter of the horse angered her. He could easily have been more seriously injured, or worse, perhaps even killed, and all he was caring about was that blasted horse.

Not that she did not have compassion for the animal, but first and foremost, Edmund’s health needed to be preserved. She would not lose him again.

To think she had twice before thought him lost forever- the first time when she had to fear for his life and needed him to go without returning, wherefore she had done the cruelest, yet most effective thing at the wedding they had been supposed to have.

The second time, when she had lived with the knowledge and dully throbbing smart of her loss for a while, she had, against better knowledge, ran to the pier see him leave forever. He had called out to her, and she to him.

There had been love still, after everything, after all the tears, the pain, the separation.

To have him back, to be able to hold him, to even share his bed, feel his kiss and hold his hand- she would have called the person insane had someone sooth-said the same to her during her time in the Camp.

Nothing would ever come between them- she would make certain of that. Not even death.

“Rest”, she thus commanded him in a stern voice she recalled her mother using when she had been a child and unwilling to comply, “you will feel better afterwards.”

“I won’t” Edmund, ever the intolerable patient, replied bluntly. “Not until I know what happened to him.”

Although Edmund claimed the profession of the soldier had not been a choice, but a combination of nepotism and the hopes to make an scholarly-inclined young man somehow useful to the family by making him contribute to the estate with what little his meagre army pay would allow him to part
with, he fought more fiercely than anyone would have expected of him in this situation at least.

Perhaps a parley was in order, a negotiation of terms.

“If I would promise to you I will find out what happened to the horse, will you rest?”

Seeing there was no point in further arguing and indeed being more fatigued than he would have admitted, Edmund agreed, though grudgingly.

In return, Anna promised him she would go in the afternoon and see what she could learn about the fate of the famous race horse.

A sighing Edmund sunk back into his cushion (Anna had paid extra to have one brought for him that was soft and filled with downs in order to allow him rest his head as comfortably as was possible) and closed his eyes. As he did so, his hand went searching for hers, hovering above the blanket close by her and finding it with astonishing precision. Without saying more, she held it, stroked it with her thumb until Edmund’s regular breath and calm face told her he was fast asleep, an opportunity Anna seized to gently untangle their fingers, much as she disliked doing so, to find some rest of her own on the old, somewhat musty well-worn old daybed by the window.

She had barely made herself as comfortable as these more decorative than actually practical pieces allowed and closed her eyes when the door to the room was opened and the landlady’s daughter, a shy girl of about thirteen in worn, but very clean clothes and a starched cap entered. In an attempt not to make a sound when she saw Edmund was asleep, she unceremoniously slipped out of her shoes at the doorstep and tiptoed to Anna in her stockings.

“There is a man downstairs wishing to speak to Mr Smith”, she whispered into Anna’s ear, “a gentleman”, she added, confusing Anna more than anything- had perhaps Eliza and her Barnett come to see the races and wanted to surprise them? Or had the mystery visitor something to do with the recent series of unfortunate events?

“I’ll answer for him”, Anna, acting in her role as “Mrs Smith”, assured the daughter and rose, brushing a few times over her skirt to smoothen it as she walked, conscious not to wake Edmund up.

In the parlour of what was in the evening a somewhat better though by no means particularly distinguished or fashionable drinking-establishment, a young man waited.

He looked younger than he likely was; his face was boyish, young in a timeless manner that caused Anna to supposed its features had not ripened past the age of sixteen, but not unpleasantly so; his mouth, though nervously pulled into a thin line at present, spoke of a friendly disposition and a man who laughed freely.

She recognised him from the track- he had been there, now it came to her- he had been the man who reluctantly decided to shoot the horse.

“Mrs Smith, I presume”, he greeted her and bowed. “I am inconsolable- the distress we must have caused you- how fares your husband?”

“He is better”, Anna nodded briefly, reminding herself that at their present abode, they had presented themselves as Mr and Mrs Smith in order not to be able to rent a room together.

“And I am, too.”

Both spun around on their heels in surprise- in the door stood Edmund, dressed in his banyan and cap that hid the fact Anna and the doctor she had called to examine him had cut off his hair rather
clumsily in order to be able to attend to the wound at the back of his head better, tried his best not to look worryingly ill and like one who belonged in bed.

Farnon, Anna thought, was not fooled either, judging by the somewhat surprised and equally worried expression on his face.

“My dear Mr Smith, I am glad to be able to apologise to you in person—“ Their visitor chose not to let Edmund know how appalled he was at the sight of him see-sawing into the room in undress and pretending to be fine, and did well doing so. After an exchange of long and firm handshakes, as men do to prove to each other who is manlier, the topic of their conversation shifted from very general pleasantries to the more concrete topic of what exactly had happened at the track.

Luckily, Anna could persuade them to sit down; the taproom was empty anyway, with the evening’s business not yet having descended upon it.

“…but why did you feel it necessary to ‘protect’ Pot-8-Os, as you say, when my intention was to end his suffering? Is it not unkind to keep a creature, be it an animal or human, in a state of prolonged pain?”

Anna observed how one hand, retreating ever more deeply into the wide sleeves of his banyan, was balled into a firm fist.

It was not a gesture of rage, Anna realised— it was meant to suppress something, namely a pain on Edmund’s part that could not be explained by any physical wound.

She knew he was thinking of Bucephalus, about his horrible death. He couldn’t have saved him, but he had thought he might stand a chance saving Pot-8-Os. Perhaps in his mind being able to save the racehorse was some sort of absolution, making right where he had thought he had done wrong in not even thinking any of it when Simcoe had fed the horse an apple, not knowing the latter had poisoned it.

In her mind, he was free of any sin he might see in himself— it was not his fault, could never be, but the human mind had its wondrous ways, and it would do more harm than good to try and convince Edmund of his innocence regarding the death of his beloved Bucephalus.

“I think, milord, you shall find that the loss of Pot-8-Os should be a great waste and it would be a horrible mistake to commit him to Heaven. He is not injured, you see— at least not as badly as you thought.”

Now every word mattered, and Edmund knew it. He had to convince the man on the other side of the table that the horse’s life was worth saving, and he would, he knew he could.

“Allow me to look him over, I shall go and dress immediately— in the Army, I was, ah, known for— for being quite a connoisseur on the topic of horses. My mount was an, ah, majestic white Andalusian that was much envied by my fellow officers.”

Despite having mentioned Bucephalus, he tried to make his lips curl into a confident smile, but didn’t quite succeed.

However, he had succeeded in piquing the man’s interest, who leaned forward in his chair and
“then what do you think is wrong with him?”

“I shall demonstrate it to you- with gladness.”

This time, he managed to smile. Like a magician, he would not give up his trick in order to keep his audience intrigued.

Farnon, too intrigued to say no (and hopefully just as interested in the health of his horse) sighed and told him that he should dress, they would go right away.

His head hurt still and Anna shot him glances that communicated to him she did not like his decision to forego any further rest one bit, but nobody could take from him the feeling of early victory. In the lord’s chaise, they drove to the stables, where they found the poor, limping yet still so majestic creature attended by a stable-lad.

“There, now.”

Thinking it polite to introduce himself first, he appealed to Pot-8-Os’ attention, who turned clumsily on the three legs he was using and promptly shifted his attention to the hastily-dressed man in a poorly-curled wig before him.

When he thought the horse was comfortable with him near, having sniffed his scent and deemed him friendly enough, he ventured inside the box, petting the majestic stallion a little as he went, and then touched his hind leg.

Immediately, Pot-8-Os tensed.

“It’s all right”, he cooed, trying to keep him from panicking in earnest for a second time- and this time, he would be in real danger would Pot-8-Os go mad, confined with him in a small space.

“Anna”, Edmund called out to her in a soft tone so as to not startle either her or the horse, “could you rub his forehead a little? Pet him, he will be diverted somewhat from what I am doing.”

His dear obliged, reluctantly and not without a facial expression that expressed how tense she was, wishing this to be over and him safely by her side again rather than in a confined space with an injured animal.

Like a unicorn, Pot-8-Os seemed to have a distinct liking for gentle dames and was quite pleased to say the least to be given such expert attention from Anna’s gentle hands- something Edmund could second without batting an eyelid.

Seizing the moment, he gripped the horse’s leg in two distinct places, then pulled in a single hard motion- Pot-8-Os threw his head up, forcing Anna to recoil a few steps and neighed- before setting down all four hooves onto the ground.

Lord Farnon, anxious to see what had been done to his prized horse, reached for the bridle and led the stallion out into the alleyway between the horses’ boxes to view him walk- which he did, stiffly though and not quite out of pain entirely, but using all four legs equally.

“What did you do?”

“It was not broken, one could see that right away. A simple misstep, that is all.”

“But what did you do?”, Farnon asked a second time.

“I, ah, cannot tell you. A secret. I have learned that trick from an old highlander coming by one night
when I was a youth- prided himself on being one of the last true Culloden Jacobites, *that sort*, if you know what I mean. This unsavoury character however won his place by our kitchen fireside for the night by curing one of my father’s limping horses in this manner- the alignment of the bones has shifted in a bad way, but the leg isn’t broken. Still, the pain causes the horse to limp, and the leg to swell- it looks terribly the same.”

Feeling triumphant, he scratched Pot-8-Os behind the ears in order to make up for the momentary discomfort he had doubtlessly caused him fade into the goodly sensation of human attention.

Farnon, kneading his hat in his hands, evidently knew not what to do or say. He was positively speechless, Edmund noted, and could not help but smirk a little in Anna’s direction, who looked on to the scene with a look in his eyes that spoke of a scolding he was to receive later for having used himself so ill and refused to rest, and admiration for having saved the life of one of Britain’s most well-known racehorses.

“Now, I bid you adieu. Mrs Smith, my wife, she will, ah, be anxious to see me return to rest”, he announced to Lord Farnon, and wanted to leave, but was held back by the same:

“What do you want for it? Recompense, and curing my horse?”

“Nothing”, he shrugged.

Why would he want anything? Not for being kind to a horse, he couldn’t take money for that. And it was he who had made the decision to race to the track, to protect an innocent animal from people who didn’t know what they were doing. He had just done what had to be done.

“I make you an offer: take him”. Farnon gestured towards the stallion. “My reputation and his are tarnished in this combination, and I do not think him running under my name would do much good- *the incident* would remain remembered, and much be to our disadvantage. That aside, I would have mistakenly shot him, had you not interfered, thus would have lost him completely. We shall make an agreement that is gentlemanly and honourable: you shall have him, if you want, at the price of fifteen guineas.”

Fifteen guineas was a lot of money, money he barely had, but there was hope in the expense: in a few weeks, Pot-8-Os would be as well as before and would be able to race again- or, if he wanted to spare him the exertion and an early, painful retirement due to injuries, he could be used for a stud career; a foal of the son of the great, unforgotten Eclipse had to be something the gentlemen investing vast sums of money into their own race horses had to lust after.

“Agreed”, he said, and they shook hands.

Anna looked horrified, and asked him what that was about, when they had returned to their lodgings. He had explained, and she had listened, then nodded slowly.

“Sometimes, you need to be brave”, she said, and he knew what she meant. She had jumped into the cold water of the harbour, now it was his turn- it was a risk, but one he was willing to take.

If he had proven anything in the Colonies it was his sense of not letting an opportunity to do business pass by- and if any of his senses exceeded his business-sense, it surely was his intuitive knowledge of horses- and he had an inkling the purchase of Pot-8-Os would rather sooner than later bring greater fortune to the House of Hewlett than the fifteen guineas he had cost them.
They had both known it would come to this. They had known it when they had overseen the workmen renovating parts of the house they had decided to modernise in looks and in commodities (no one should have to sleep in a guest room with draughty windows so horrible one had to be lucky if the bedcovers didn’t freeze over during a cold winter night). They had known it when with pride, they had walked through Ashcombe for the first time together. They had known when Alexander had written her a letter to come and see the house and visit him.

Perhaps, they had always known.

They had gone for a walk to a part of the garden that had been much neglected under the late Captain Barnett, and had found a somewhat rickety wooden bench there with a picturesque view of Ashcombe House, where they had sat down.

“I still cannot believe I have begun to call it home”, Alexander said, looking at his house.

“It’s yours by right, you have every right to regard it as your home”, Eliza replied bluntly.

“Perhaps. But- it is rather large for one man and a slew of servants to inhabit alone.”

He looked at her, expectantly.

When she did not say a word to the clumsy overture of what she knew to expect after having been proposed to two times prior, he elaborated: “It wasn’t my home- not before you came.”

“That is a kind thing to say”, she smiled mildly at him and took his hand.

“Eliza, can I ask you if-“

“No”, she shrugged. “Don’t. I have been asked twice before and it never brought me much luck.”

For a moment, silence reigned, not even the birds overhead sang; all was perfectly quiet, except for the wind rustling in the leaves of the trees. In this perfect tableau, Eliza rested her head against Alexander’s shoulder and closed her eyes, while he wrapped an arm around her.

After a while, whether it had been an hour or just a few minutes neither of them could tell, Eliza motioned Alexander to rise: “Come now, we have to get back. I take it we have a lot of letters and invitations to write.”

This causes Alex to laugh and tilt his head back laughing, so joyful was he- “you-“

“I just told you not to ask. I have been asked by two men, neither who lived long. Maybe it is just a superstition, but it is best to be safe than to rue afterwards. And besides, you needn’t persuade me to take you by means of a love-struck proposal. I have deemed you worthy of my hand all by myself a long while ago- and before you had become a wealthy uncle’s heir, might I add.”

Chuckling, he kissed her.

“You said we ought to go- then let us. I believe a date must be fixed.”
Hand in hand, they strolled back to Ashcombe through the dusky scene, a solitary nightingale their only companion.

Duncleade, Scotland, a week later.

“Edmund! Anna!”

Sighing, Anna’s arm retreated from around his back as she needed it to sit up on the bed. Instinctively, she touched her hair, hoping it did not look dishevelled in any way that might look suggestive of what they had been about to do.

Sometimes he wondered how the old woman could still shout so loudly, and wondered even more why she would not simply send someone- but perhaps it was for the best. That someone would have had the embarrassing task to tell his mother that he and Anna had been together in his bedroom, alone- something that best was avoided at all costs.

In order to avoid suspicions being raised, he waited until Anna was a few paces ahead of him and already half-downstairs before he pretended to hasten after her as if word of his presence being required had only just reached him.

“What is it, mother”, came thus his rather impatient and peevish reply. After all, she had been rudely disruptive of a past-time that had not even yet begun.

“I thought you might like to read this”, she answered, her voice sounding oddly content and mightily pleased as she handed him a piece of paper from her armchair.

Dear Mother,

We are writing to you to announce that we have decided to be wed-

Immediately, he led the paper sink, feeling odd. He wanted to be happy for his sister, and even that Barnett, but somehow, he wasn’t, not as he ought to be.

“They are to be congratulated”, he managed to jumble a few words together into a sentence of appropriate recognition of the letter, “I hope she finds happiness and joy with him.

“My congratulations”, Anna, the only one who had not been given the letter yet, added quickly.

The old woman looked at them like a cat does at two little cornered mice and asked if they would not wish to go and celebrate the happy couple’s engagement, a fête the letter announced was to be held in a fortnight.

“I suppose one can think on it. Now if you’d excuse us. Anna and I were just about to take a walk.”
Edmund quickly offered her his arm and she took it. They did not go to the garden; they went back
to his room, but something was different from before.

Seated on the edge of his bed, Anna felt oddly affected by the letter, even though it was of no greater
significance to her personally as that there would be one less person living under this roof
permanently from now on- which was not a sudden surprise, not at all, given Eliza Greenwood had,
though under the guise of pretending to lend a helping hand to a bachelor friend, moved into
Ashcombe House a good while ago.

“And, will you go?”, Anna asked in order to end the uncomfortable silence hanging in the room like
thick, impenetrable fog.

“I suppose I will. They, in the south, I might, ah, offer them Pot-8-Os services as a stud. He will not
arrive here until he is fully recovered, but it cannot hurt to make it known that we are now, in fact,
his owners, and willing to do business. Think on it- all the better persons of Devonshire and beyond
will attend- affluent people. Good neighbourhood, as I, ah, understand.”

He raised an eyebrow saying this, knowing full well that one pair of neighbours was the most
unsavoury man he had met in the old world and the new and his wife. But indeed, perhaps, so close
to Bath and London, who knew if he might not meet one interested in having a foal of the son of the
mighty Eclipse?

Their travelling expenses would be well-spent if he could charge a small fortune for a foal of his
stud.

Eliza, born with the same horse-sense that ran in the veins of Hewletts only, would understand.

“I’m just coming so I can keep an eye on you”, Anna stated, hands crossed over her chest, “the last
time-”

“I promise not to do foolish things again, my love.”

Kissing her ringed hand most reverently, he made the additional promise that she would not be in
any danger to meet Certain persons she had good reason never to see again, and that he would
protect her. If needs be, he would stab the man again, though likely any knife his sister might have
laid out for carving meat or cutting cake would likely be disappointingly sharp and un-rusty.

Not much ado was made, their bags were quickly packed and for the second time in a few weeks,
Anna found herself mounting a carriage to travel the British countryside, this time to the far south.
She wondered if it was normal for genteel ladies to travel about up and down the country so
frequently; in Setauket, she had most of the time remained at Strong Manor (when she had been what
came closest to a genteel lady in the once-loyalist Long Island society) and later spent her days
shackled to doing de Yong’s chores, mopping up after his less than savoury customers.
This life, still financed by the little Edmund received and some unknown founts of income only Charlotte Hewlett really knew, was foreign to her.

-And she would be perfectly content not to sleep in coaching inns, she mused, scratching a flea bite to her arm after a night spent in a particularly run-down establishment, her body leaning against Edmund’s.

The last miles to Ashcombe from Exeter, they were surprised to find out upon arrival, would not be spent in a hired coach; waiting for them by the coaching-inn where they had expected to change, was a coachman, asking their names, who then led them to a coach bearing upon the door in gules an eagle displayed or and armed. Edmund, upon being asked, did not know it, or the family connected to it, but was quickly assured that it had been lent to his soon-to-be brother-in-law by a friend, for his coach was otherwise employed collecting some guests coming from the east.

Looking out of the window, Anna enjoyed the beautiful countryside; the hilly landscape was beautiful to look at, and even though they were not quite by the coast, there was a faint smell of salt in the air. As the coach rattled along towards Ashcombe at a decent speed, Anna knew these were their last few moments of calm before the storm of Edmund’s sister’s rather loud personality, a number of guests and possibly unwanted old acquaintances would be meeting. She was not looking forward to it in particular. In that moment, Edmund, who had in the ways of a true gentleman seated himself opposite her, rose to sit down beside her and put an arm around her shoulder.

“Edmund.”

“Anna.”

Holding hands, they arrived at Ashcombe before the majority of other guests invited for the coming day did. Some stayed in the recently-renovated rooms of Ashcombe that had been deemed fit for inhabiting after having been repainted, others not living in the area had found a hospitable roof to sleep under in the houses of friends or relations while those least fortunate had found beds at local village inns. The brother of the bride and- well, as whatever she qualified, however were given “good rooms”- after all, they were representing House Hewlett, as Charlotte, who deemed herself too old and too frail for such a long journey, had told them and thus were important guests of honour.

Barnett himself gave them a tour of the house without giving them so much time as to rest a while or drink a cup of tea (which Eliza would scold him for later on) and showed them to their rooms.

“Connecting doors”, he pointed out slyly in the beautifully furnished, though somewhat too rose-coloured room she had been allotted, by opening a doorway that was barely discernible from the rest of the wall due to the perfectly applied wallpaper, rendering it almost invisible.

Quite happy, Alexander watched the eyes of Edmund Hewlett and Anna Strong grow as he showed them the hidden doorway that had originally been installed for the convenience of servants or some such- he had never asked his uncle, but had found a use for them.

“The stars shine very brightly here”, he announced with a gesture to the newly glazed window, I think, Edmund”, (he could now call him that, that he was to be his brother-in-law, couldn’t he?) but do not stay up to long- I must warn you, against better judgement your sister and I shall have a rather
With that, he left them to their own devices and bade them adieu until dinner, thinking on how it was possible that he and Eliza were the ones to marry, not them. Perhaps, he added with a sly grin on his face, they would develop a taste for wedding-cake very soon.

After their short tour of Ashcombe, his soon-to-be-wife, who had taken to the kitchen to give orders to the cook and ensure the particular quality of tonight’s food as it was to be a welcome-supper for her brother and his dear friend, emerged, a bunched-up apron in one hand.

“Edmund! Anna! How good to see you—was your journey pleasant?”

“Bess of Hardwick”, Edmund returned, smiling the awkward toothy smile he had never seen on any other person before, “it is good to see you.”

“And you! You must tell us everything—Mother wrote to me—she said she did not know what business you were up to in Carlisle, but you returned without your hair and a race-horse?”

“I ah, did not think it wise to inform her of the particulars of our excursion to Carlisle”, Edmund retreated somewhat defensively and shot a glance at Anna Strong by his side, who looked no less unwilling than he to divulge details of a tale that now sounded more mysterious than it had before.

“Horse sense. You are a Hewlett, sister, you know it.”

“Pshaw. Ever secretive, are we, Edmund? Now come and sit with us, you must be hungry!”

Leaving the siblings to talk and banter their way to the table as if they were not past their fortieth year but barely fourteen, Alexander offered his arm to Edmund Hewlett’s—bride?—lady-friend?—platonic companion?

In any case, Anna Strong appeared in need of someone to lean on to, for she looked quite greenish-white in the face.

Dinner was served and the dishes looked divine, but Anna ate no more than a few morsels. The smell somehow sickened her, even if she was not quite certain if she had ever seen such a delicious roast chicken before.

It had to be the motion-sickness from their travels, some of the country roads had been quite bad. Thus, she limited her intake of food to a few cut potatoes with a little gravy, and even this tiny amount of food even seemed too much.

She would have given everything to lay down, but decided not to go before the company did not retire to play cards or drink, and patiently answered every question thrown at her by the inquisitive couple whose name she had forgotten the second after they had introduced themselves to her.

Sleep. Sleeping would be good.

At last, the other couple and the almost-Barnetts and Edmund decided to sit a little by the fireside and talk. Seizing the moment, she announced she would retire and lay down. Goodnight was said rather
awkwardly- with strangers there and in the house of his almost-brother-in-law, Edmund would not kiss her and she did not know what to do either- an awkward handshake was what they ended up with, probably causing more curious glances than if they really had kissed.

When she arrived in her room, she found a nightshirt laid out, warm water provided for washing and was attended by a maid who helped her undress.

Standing up and doing nothing while somebody else unclothed her felt peculiar, given she was used to dressing and undressing by herself or with the minimal help of either Edmund or, when she was wearing one of the more formal gowns she had been given by the charitable friends of Charlotte Hewlett, a servant girl who was used to doing whatever odd task from scrubbing to undressing was thrown at her.

The last time she had had someone undress her, someone who was not a man doing it prior to bedding her, had been in Setauket, where she had had Abigail to do it- Abigail- perhaps the best spy the Ring had ever had. Where was she now?

It was another life, another world even.

Wrapping a knitted shawl (a present from Charlotte, who had made it for her) around her shoulders over her wrapper, Anna made herself comfortable on the strange bed, outstretched and on top of the covers.

Was this her new life? Britain was not a strange foreign land in that she did not know the customs and mentality of its inhabitants (in fact, she had until not very long ago been ‘British’ herself, if one believed in ‘King and Country’), and yet-

Maybe it was best to try and sleep. She should go to bed, and not think too much about the morning, the feast, the guests and the curious glances she would reap being “the American” among a crowd of well-to-do English landowners, perhaps even nobility and a handful of Hewlett friends and relations.

As long as she could keep away from someone she hoped had not been invited-

A low knock shook her awake from her thoughts. The noise came from the hidden door in the corner of the room.

With her heart beating faster at the realisation what the knock meant, she opened, and could make out Edmund’s form on the other side.

“Anna. I wanted to make certain you are well.”

“I am, Edmund.”

“I must be honest with you; I am more selfish than I pretend to be- I, ah, cannot sleep just yet. Would you care to join me? For a short while, if you like?”

To Anna’s shock and amusement, she found Edmund had brought a travelling-telescope and set it up in his room.

“The view is not as good as it is at home, but it will do”, he commented on her disbelieving facial expression when she took note of his the notably smaller and lighter contraption than the one he had shown her a long time ago.

“You haven’t-“
“I have”, he chuckled, and showed her how to work it to make out far away stars.

Adjusting the lens somewhat when he intended to show her a specific formation, he suddenly said: “you know, it’s stopped to matter for me.”

“What?”, Anna asked cautiously, not knowing what he could possibly mean.

“Time, Anna. Time has stopped to matter for me. I see the heavens above change, stars move throughout a night and know tomorrow will be a new day- and I am not afeard of it because I have no need to be. There is nobody waiting to do me ill, no war—”

Edmund inhaled deeply and, for lack of anything else to do, pulled her knitted shawl tighter around her shoulders to protect her from the evening cold.

“I think it still does”, she answered, “time progresses, just as life does. We get older, we change so much—”

People changed. Abe had. She had. Edmund Hewlett had. The war had caused them to, for better or for worse.

For a while, she stood silently next to Edmund, who adjusted his telescope with great exactitude and patience and watched his gracefully long-boned fingers nimbly turn screws and clean lenses with more zeal and attention to detail than all the inspections of his men she had witnessed.

There was no need to talk; sometimes, Silence could express much more than words ever could. The heart needed no words.

They shared a smile, indicating neither of them would enjoy a philosophical discussion much and let the topic slide without further discussion.

Edmund instead adjusted his telescope once more to show her a batch of stars up close and when he asked her to look through it and came to stand behind her, she was reminded of their very first encounter of the sort in Setauket, where he had asked her to call him by his Christian name in private.

Anna did not have the heart to break off his enthusiastic explanations, even if she was personally far less invested in what she thought of as professional stargazing. To some extent however, she enjoyed it, because they were together, everything was calm and quiet and above all, his unbridled enthusiasm only proved that he was the sort of man who would do everything to everything for his lady- even such a seemingly impossible task as putting the stars within her reach.

“You- you enjoyed it? Then, I mean, and now I suppose—” he would never fully stop stammering and be lost for words when he was agitated, even in such a positive sense as in the present moment, Anna realised.

“I did. Setauket was a small town. Everything was narrow and little. You put the heavens above into my reach.”

“My beautiful flatterer”, he teased her, but tears in the corners of his eyes he was unwilling to acknowledge indicated just how greatly his words had touched his soul.

For a while they simply stood there, their hands interlaced and more occupied with gazing at the other’s face than the stars- in her opinion at least, Edmund’s eyes were more beautiful, more wondrous to behold than any celestial body he could fix his lens upon.
For a time, there had been no sight more painful than he; now, it was all different. They would never share these days of tender first love again when it had first began to grow between them like a tender blossom on a rocky, wind-swept cliff, the novelty and excitement when one of them dared something new, a kiss on the cheek, a thumb stroking the back of a hand, but neither would there be pain and sorrow again.

Hearts could scar just as skin could- only nobody could ever see the welts, bruises and marks left by love as the heart was hidden from the eye.

Scars however needed not to be bad; their existence proved that a wound had healed, not festered, that Forgiveness had trumped Bitterness.

Suddenly, the ring she had taken to wear out of habit and so as to honour Edmund's present felt comfortably warm and oddly present on her hand. She twisted it absent-mindedly between her fingers.

Selah’s hand, where he had cut himself in Philadelphia, had festered; Edmund’s heart had healed. Anna wondered if this was a divine sign, but dared not to interpret it as one- despite everything, she was still Selah’s widow.

She didn’t miss him, not as one missed a loved one; she had never truly loved him, and their marriage had been decided for them by eager parents- her father, who had disliked her “close attachment” as he had called it to the Judge’s son as much as Richard Woodhull had liked seeing his younger son courting the daughter of a known patriot, had thought on marrying her to Selah well before her engagement to Abe had been broken off.

Their engagement had been secret, as secret as could be in Setauket, and everybody knew of it even if no one dared to speak about it.

Her father, Anna was as sure as the night was dark, had been almost sad Richard Woodhull had acted first and forced Abe into marrying Mary Smith, who had been handed over to Abe like a used item, a shirt or suit, just as it had been done with all of Thomas’ things all of their lives when Thomas had outgrown them; Abe had always walked in his brothers footsteps, mainly because he had been made to wear his shoes, and still followed them to the altar against his own wishes as a grown man.

Poor Mary had been just as much a casualty in the politics of their parents as she and Abe had been. Perhaps Mrs Mary Woodhull had become the only truly honourable person of the three of them. She had given Abe a son whereas she had never given Selah any children, was most correct and accurate in her duties as a wife and, in absence of Abe’s deceased mother, the premiere dame of Setauket and acted the part, ever humble, polite and pious, giving alms and hosting parties despite being angry and probably feeling abandoned on the inside.

Anna could not blame her; what she had done, what Abe had done, had not been fair in hindsight with Mary in mind, Mary, who had had as much as say in marrying Abe as she had had in marrying Selah; but the harm was already done.

In part she regretted her time with Abe, how it had continued on well into their married lives and she doubted she would, had she the power to travel back in time, to advise her sixteen-year-old self to hold on to Abe or the thought of marrying him.

Over time, he had shown his true face; he was jealous and rather selfish in the bed; he had never outgrown the teenage-awkwardness of their first union and had, in the days their romance had cooled off when suddenly a prim and proper redcoat had stepped into her life, a man she should have hated but who had, against all odds won her heart, reminded her of a rutting rabbit in heat.
Selah had been more skilled, but there being no romantic love or past attachment between them, she had not enjoyed it much either whenever he had come to lie with her and she had permitted it.

Edmund however, despite being very clumsy and not very versed in these matters, had given her all; he had wanted her to like it, had put all his heart into the physical act of love-making and made her feel loved, revered.

Edmund, the man she once had plotted to kill when he had still been Major Hewlett to her had treated her with the respect she found lacking from her husband and from Abe; to him, she had been more than Anna, the housewife, Anna, the tavern-wench or Anna, the quick fuck; to him, she had been Anna, just Anna.

She had wanted to keep hating, him, his uniform, the attainder that had left her close on destitute, but couldn’t.

How ironic that she had fallen for him, a British officer, her enemy.

Well, they might not be enemies much longer- they were negotiating a peace. There might even be a treaty soon, she realised and felt happy- not just for herself and the man she loved, but in general. She had seen so much bloodshed, so many lives extinguished by the war- a war that had almost claimed Edmund, too.

His dark eyes, the charming, wide-mouthed and rather too toothy smile he gave whenever he saw her, not at all as gentlemanly as his appearance with his silver sword and lobster-red uniform, had taken her heart, as had his kindness, which truly did not halt at differences of station.

Perhaps most importantly, he had taught her not to hate, but to love. She had hated the British with a passion, and said hatred had turned to love for the man she had found among the number of her sworn enemies.

For no other person would she have given up America, her friends, the country she had tried to help them shape.

-they had been apart for very long. They had tried first to forget, then to give the other up but found they couldn’t.

-Finally, all seemed to fall into place.

It could stay in this way, for a while. Just the two of them, attending family celebrations and rescuing race-horses. Or whatever adventure would come their way tomorrow.

From the early morning on, Eliza was busy and up on her feet greeting people, keeping an eye on the organisation of what was to be her engagement fête and was generally more worried about a social event than she had been in a long time.

This was not the Scottish countryside, this was the English south, after all. Originally, their engagement should not have been a spectacle- but Alexander now being a prominent member of the local gentry, it was hard not to oblige the expectations affixed to the title of Master of Ashcombe House and thus, the proportions had changed from the intimacy of only a small number of guests to a
much grander dimension that included invitees from far and wide— in all fairness, she even started to enjoy it. The Strettons, so newly arrived from the former Colonies, had come, as had a number of her friends from London and Bath, as well as neighbours who jumped at the chance to meet the new additions to the county’s landowners and friends and even a few relations of Alexander’s.

They were civil, but cool; Eliza had no illusions that they had wished for their son to marry a younger woman, one who might give him a son and heir— and possibly a richer one, too.

-Zedland’s richest beauty, the still quite new Mrs Simcoe, came by herself, excusing her husband’s absence, who had fallen ill with "a fit of the ague”. Eliza knew it to be a very poor excuse drawn up on his part to avoid meeting people he would rather not see, but said nothing.

The young woman, having so very prettily excused her “poor, suffering” husband, added a few words of genuine congratulation and made a comment about the prettiness of the flowerbeds outside before she went to motion a servant to bring her a chair to rest on.

Letting the rudeness of commanding other people’s servants slide in the face of the very obviously protruding belly of a woman very visibly with child puffing her dress out, Eliza turned to speak with some gentlemen Alexander had introduced her to as distant cousins, wishing to be a good hostess by speaking to everyone in person.

From the corner of her eye, she could see Edmund, surrounded by five or six gentlemen and about the same number of ladies listening attentively as he spoke of his great and mighty stallion. Perhaps, one of them really would find some interest in his horse’s services— she wished it for him— and Anna.

Over time, the large crowd in the drawing-room settled somewhat; smaller groups retired, went for a walk or sat by the old harpsichord in the adjoining room, where a spontaneous concert was held; some ladies and gentlemen, some singers, some players, some both, had agreed to give a taste of their musical accomplishments to the public, singing mainly well-loved songs everybody could join singing, more or less anti-musically, but in good fun.

Thus proceeded the afternoon, flew by like a white sheep-like cloud in the summer sky. Of the refreshments provided, Eliza recalled not having had any afterwards, so immersed was she in her task of being a good hostess, and hoped to succeed in it.

“Mrs Greenwood— you are needed— please follow me”, an exculpatory voice said even before she had realised what was happening.

The lady, well beyond her fiftieth year by the look of her iron-grey hair, had taken her by the arm and led her, as inconspicuously as possible into an adjoining room (before disappearing without a trace— whoever it had been was more accomplished than any of the spies she had met in the now-United States) where she was startled by what she saw:

Anna, who had evidently been made to sit down in a chair, clutched what looked like one of the less valuable terrines, was ghostly pale in the face.

“We thought it was best to remove her from the company”, Amelia Stretton, who had come from Bath only this morning, had put an arm around the back of Anna’s chair in a maternal manner, while the frowning figure of Mrs Simcoe held a towel a servant must have brought and which bore evident stains on it that needed no further questions to be asked.

“She was sick”, Mrs Simcoe added nevertheless, “she grew pale in the face, tumbled as if afflicted by a sudden illness and—” instead of repeating such rude words, she made a face that was half exculpatory, half disgust.
“What is going on with you, Anna?”, Eliza asked, wondering if it might have been the food- if something had been bad, would other guests soon show similar symptoms?

“What did you eat? Did something taste peculiar? Can you-“

“I am fine”, Anna tried to brush the them all off, “Not much-“

Tutting, Amelia Stretton, a mother to two children, ordered Anna to remain seated: “We shall have none of that now. What if you rose and fell again? Mantelpieces and edges of tables are not as yielding as the poor elderly gentleman you fell upon.”

“My uncle is unhurt”, Mrs Simcoe , glaring at her with unsettlingly glittering hazel eyes that did almost rival those of her husband when he was angry as if somehow Eliza would be at fault and to be held responsible had harm come to Admiral Graves.

“Are you ill? Should we fetch a doctor?”

“I’m not ill. Just feeling unwell. When I smelled the cakes that were brought in- I don’t know- just don’t tell Edmund. He would worry.”

After all three of them promised her individually that they would not tell Major Hewlett, Anna looked a little better, regaining a soft shade of rosy health in her cheeks again.

“I am sorry-“ Anna said, “I didn’t want to disturb your fête-“

“It’s alright”, Eliza assured her, “if only we knew what was wrong with you.”

Eliza noticed how Amelia looked down to inspect her fingernails and how Mrs Simcoe raised an eyebrow in a theatrically doubting manner, as if she could not believe something she thought obvious was overlooked.

“Perhaps all you need is some rest, the weather is rather oppressive, a little too warm, isn’t it? Perhaps some water would be beneficial”, Eliza said more to herself than to anybody else in a vain attempt to explain her own worries away.

“You are right, the heat is rather oppressive”, Mrs Simcoe then chimed in, “I think I shall have some rest also.”

Resting one hand on her sizeable belly that appeared even bigger for the petitesse of the rest of her frame in the pseudo-motherly, attention-seeking pose of all mothers-to-be lusting to make their belly the centre of attention, she waddled (it couldn’t be called walking, really) into the adjoining grand drawing room, where most of the guests were gathered in search for a place to sit.

Eliza would have brushed her unwanted and unhelpful comment off as the entitlement and self-centredness of one who had all her life had had everyone do her bidding, but the tone of the young woman’s voice had sounded odd- there had been something in it, a hidden element, something else that reminded her quite uneasily of the lady’s husband- a quiet, affected sort of amusement at somebody else’s expense, half-hidden behind a genteel veneer and correct manners, but visible enough to consciously torment the person it was directed against.

Either his bad ways had rubbed off on her, or their marriage was a match of two who had been destined for another from birth.

Deciding it was no good to continue thinking about something that was ultimately of no consequence, Eliza instead focussed her attention on Anna, whom she quickly accommodated in the
library—perhaps the dusty books and displays of objects of historic value were not the ideal place for someone sick, but she would be closer to everybody else here than in her bedroom, and could be attended to more quickly if she called for someone. Seated in the worn, yet comfortable armchair of Alexander’s late uncle and with her feet propped up on a footstool, she looked as comfortable as one could be, given the circumstances.

“I’m better, thank you. You can leave me now, your guests must be waiting—”

“You’re my guest, too. Now rest.”

Turning one last time on her way out, Eliza could tell that while Anna’s body now rested, her mind without a doubt did not.

Alas there was no time for her to think on it—as soon as she re-joined the party, she was surrounded by a crowd of congratulants and well-wishers.

Chapter End Notes

Robert Burns’ ”Anna”, whose real name was Ann Park, was the niece of a Mrs Hyslop, who owned The Globe Tavern in Dumfries. The two met in said tavern and embarked on an affair together, which resulted in the birth of a daughter, Elizabeth, whom Burns’ wife Jean is said to have raised like one of her own.

Many of Burns' poems are inspired by a variety of very worldly muses, if you know what I mean.

Sally Fairfax (c. 1730-1811) is said to have been Washington’s first love. In the end, she was married and he had his eyes on the wealthy widow Mrs Martha Dandridge Custis. The Fairfax’ and the Washingtons would remain firm friends even after the Loyalist Mr and Mrs Fairfax moved to Britain in the 1770s. It is said that Sally regretted her life choices towards the end of her life and never forgot her romantic attachment to Washington.

Bonus round: as a widow, Sally moved to Bath, where she came to live in the vicinity of 15 Lansdown Crescent— the house of another prominent widow with connections to the Revolution, Mrs Margaret Graves, whom those of you reading “A Season at Bath” or “The Colonel’s Portrait” will know as John Graves Simcoe’s rather difficult aunt-in-law and wife of his godfather Admiral Samuel Graves. Sally and Margaret knew each other. Margaret’s verdict: “I like [her] very much.” If the widow of the man who ordered the burning of Falmouth and the former sweetheart of the first US president talked about her relationship with Washington we’ll never know.

Daisy cutter (from Grose’s Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 1788 edition): “a jockey term for a horse that does not lift up his legs sufficiently, or goes too near the ground, and is therefore apt to stumble.”

Pot-8-Os’ miracle recovery is in part based on the practice of bonesetting and partly fiction-magic. Sadly, even today a lot of horses competing in high stakes professional tournaments are injured or even worse, have to be euthanised because they won’t recover from their injuries anymore.

The coat of arms on the coach belongs to the Graves-family. This being a 4th of July update, I could not resist sneaking an eagle in when the opportunity arose— in addition to
this, if you recall the last chapter, here’s the lost eagle of the Ninth Legion for you! ;)

Zedland (from Grose’s Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 1788 edition): “Great part of the west country, where the letter Z is substituted for S; as zee for see, zun for sun , &c. &c. This prevails through the counties of Devonshire, Dorsetshire, and Somersetshire.”

Elizabeth "Bess" of Hardwick (1527-1608) was a powerful English noblewoman at the Tudor court. Through four marriages, she accrued great wealth and aristocratic titles and was a companion to Queens Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour. The Dukes of Devonshire are among her descendants. Edmund calls his sister "Bess of Hardwick" because of her string of engagements/marriages, teasing her she wants to be as wealthy and powerful as Bess.
Secrets and Whispers

Chapter Summary

Anna has a secret, Eliza tries her best to find out, but it is somebody else who is first to find out- and it's not Edmund...

Chapter Notes

Hello there! Uploading this chapter, I realised "Roses and Thistles" has received almost 6,000 hits- allow me to take a second to say thank you to everyone who has klicked, read, and above all, kudos'd and commented; I never expected this story to receive so much attention. I want to thank each and every one of my readers for sticking around and hope you will enjoy this latest chapter, too.

Just one note before I finally let you go, this chapter mentions, though very briefly, the topic of abortion. If this is a subject you are uncomfortable with (abortion being a topic that is still being controversially discussed today), you might want to skip said passages (two in total) towards the end of the story.

...After much ado, I now hope you enjoy the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

(Robert Frost, The Secret Sits, undated)

The Sun beamed at him, and it was not the celestial body he was referring to; his Sun had eyes of the finest hazel, and hair darker than the rarest woods shipped from the tropics, and the most adorably pointed chin imaginable.

John Graves Simcoe contently overlooked the scenery of his own parlour, in which he was sat for breakfast with his Little Wife, whose fingers, fattened from the effects the pregnancy was having on her joints, reached once more for the orange jam to coat the buttered toast (her third, perhaps the fourth, he had not counted) with a thick layer of sweetly-sour goodness.

She was eating for two, so much was certain, and devoured the thing in hearty bites while he tried to amuse her with tales and idle gossip he had overheard in the neighbourhood.
It was greatly appreciated, it seemed, for she looked at him with such glowing cheeks and eyes his adoration for her, already immeasurable, increased an additional thousand fold.

Even when she was long finished, they remained seated and conversed, just for the fun of it, and the mutual enjoyment in the other’s company.

“...You know, I quite enjoyed the gathering at Ashcombe. Mrs Greenwood shall prove a worthy mistress of it.”

Immediately, his face dropped to a frown. If he could forbid her to visit the sister of the man he still disliked very deeply, the woman who would almost have killed him and when she realised she was too weak a person to kill him had wanted to leave him to die in a fire, he would. But that was not how it worked.

He hadn’t told her of the entirety of the events surrounding Hewlett, his devil of a sister and his own person, partly because he could not bring himself to burden her with these things and partly because somewhere deep inside the fear she could come to hate him would she know about the things he claimed responsibility for, and she had accepted that knowing it was quite hard for him to speak of the war. Elizabeth knew he had not been well-liked and he had told her on the day he had proposed to her with his godfather’s blessing and the begrudging consent of her aunt that he was not a good man, and she needed to know this fact before giving him her answer. She had kissed him on the mouth and told him to stop talking, she loved him as he was.

Therefore it was not much to his liking that woman should have come to make her own little nest in the area. Who knew what this dangerous person could get up to next? She might have shown weakness when she had attempted to murder him, but who knew what she would do to another woman? She was much taller than Elizabeth, the sort of common wench of roughly-hewn proportions who looked like she could pull a sutler’s cart single-handedly. His tiny wife would, especially in her present condition, stand no chance, unless armed. Perhaps he should show her where he kept his old bayonet, and how to perform the Abyssinian Trick.

He had told her it would cause him to worry were she to visit this Barnett-fellow, whom he had never liked since boyhood, and his ungodly consort who looked a little like he imagined her brother would look like when dressed in women’s clothing, and he would be much displeased with her if she did, but in the end, he had no way of preventing her from going.

He had known that one day, the Lord or whatever other greater power above would hold him accountable for the things he had done, but certainly not on earth, and not here. That woman had no right to disturb his peace, especially not with the baby on its way.

His wife needed rest, and he, too, not the antics of that terrible person to worry about at night, there was enough to think on already from the hiring of additional staff to tend to the child once it was born to the birth itself, the latter which frightened him very much.

“Very well”, he tried in an indifferent tone, but failed.

“You like her not, but I think she is quite pleasant. A delightful new face of unconventional origins, with good enough taste. She redecorated Old Barnett’s home- I daresay it is quite pretty now, and tastefully furnished within their limited means.”

“You speak as if they are married already”, he said, now worrying even more than before.

“And they will soon be- they have celebrated their engagement, after all- though I think there will be another marriage in the same family much sooner.”
She smiled at him, a cryptic, seductive smile that made him want to take her right back to bed and disregard all advice the doctor has given them with regards to marital relations during pregnancy.

“What makes you think so, wife?” he asked, now intrigued in earnest.

“I am a lady who knows things when she sees them, husband,” the sweet siren’s smile broadened, “trust me. Edmund Hewlett and Anna Strong will be married before Barnett has even applied for a license.”

“Never. Hewlett is- he is- he is weak, and from all one heard in days gone by among his men, not versed in matters of love at all.”

He could feel how his face grew red, taking a particularly dark, easily visible shade he knew rivalled the hue of his hair.

“If you are in such disbelief, then I propose a wager: I shall bet that Mrs Strong shall be Mrs Hewlett before Mrs Greenwood has become Mrs Barnett, and you pledge your Fate to the reverse case.”

“Very good”, he nodded, “and what shall the forfeit be?”

Elizabeth sat up, leaned across the table to such an extent as was possible to her and whispered:

“After the little one is out and I am-“ (here she paused, looking for the first time somewhat uncertain or afeard even) “-quite recovered, you must be at my service for one whole night and do my bidding in every way I ask of you.”

Well, he had heard of worse forfeits. Seeing that he could not lose either way, he offered her his hand to shake in the manner of gentlemen betting on horses and asked: “and if I win-“

“Then I am at your service, of course.”

“All night?”

“All night,” she confirmed in a dark, alluring tone. “And nothing is off-limits.”

With a little effort and stretching (and a wicked grin on her features), she illustrated her pledge by reaching for his chest with her right forefinger and languidly drawing lines across it.

Immediately, he knew what she meant and was thankful the wide cut of his banyan allowed him to bunch some fabric in his lap in order to disguise a certain place that would otherwise cause him reason for embarrassment.

Dear Lord, how long until they could share a bed again? Whatever the outcome of this bet, he was winning.

He had seen Anna Strong long for Hewlett, had assisted her even in crossing the ocean by lending her Salem. What she saw in him, he knew not but then he didn’t know what Elizabeth saw in his own person, either.

One could at least hope for Mrs Strong that Hewlett had thrown off his bumbling, painfully awkward, ah, ways. How any woman would attach herself to a man like him was incomprehensible to him- not to speak of the fact that he probably didn’t even know where to stick his very likely rather unimpressive appendage and how to satisfy a woman. He had always held the belief that a Jesuit would make a more skilled bedfellow than Edmund Hewlett.

-And hopefully, he’d never learn- otherwise, and if Elizabeth was right and they would marry and
share the marital bed afterwards, one had to fear an overpopulation of Hewletts.

Trying not to think of his former superior trying to play the seducer for Mrs Strong, which at least helped to ease his previous little personal problem with the disgust such images caused to well up in him, he consoled himself with the fact that to keep the balance in the Kingdom, one would need a number of well-trained combatants to keep any Hewletts in check, and he would kindly assist in raising such a force- together with his wife. The house they were planning to build left plenty of rooms to be occupied by little girls as pretty as their Mama and little boys- well, hopefully not so much like himself as a child.

Ever the consummate soldier, he was beyond pleased and in a state of constant hopeful excitement at the thought that the first of what he imagined to grow into a little army of children was already on its way and due very soon.

Ashcombe House, Devon, a day prior.

She wasn’t ignorant of her body- how could she be, feeling so odd recently? That morning, Edmund had long risen to go and exercise Pot-8-Os, she used the time she could confidently expect not to be called upon or visited by him or anybody else by standing before the old full-length mirror (a relic most likely of the times of the mother of the late Captain Barnett) that was blinding from age in several spots, and examined herself closely.

Already as she let the somewhat faded manteaux-de-lit slip off her shoulders to reveal her body in a merciless state of undress that left her with her nightshirt only, a gloomy, foreboding feeling took hold of her lungs, choking her almost from within her own body.

Her hands brushed over her breasts, down her sides and ultimately over her belly. There was change, she admitted to herself, small things, not immediately obvious to the naked eye of an acquaintance, especially not when fully clothed, but obvious to her, who knew her own body best, particularly regarding her chest and belly. Perhaps it was just her vivid imagination, but (pulling her shift taut against her skin), did not her belly look fatter? She hadn’t eaten more than usual. Perhaps it was just the happiness of being with Edmund and the definitive end to malnutrition as she had experienced in Washington’s camp, though not as hard as those at the very bottom of the hierarchy, always having been able to rely on Ben’s patronage in that regard.

It could just as easily be just a trick of the light, too, she dismissed her observations and shook her head. Of course, that was it, had to be. The angle with which the morning light caused shadows to fall was very unflattering.

Shaking her head, she turned her back to the mirror before she could make any more discoveries about herself with her eyes her mind had suspected through quite simply inhabiting her body already.

One thing however she would be very glad about to see with her eyes was the blood of her monthly visitor. No woman ever enjoyed it, the uncomfortable wetness, the feeling of blood stickily clinging on to her most female parts and thighs, but however much Anna tried to explain certain things away, she could not fully quieten the suspicion she most dreaded to be true.
For the Visitor to be irregular was nothing new - it had been at camp, and when she had been young, too, with some odd spells of irregularity in between, but currently, the absence pointed into a distinctive direction, one that made her feel nervous and anxious, because quite realistically, she was on her own now. There was no one she could tell, not yet, not now.

If she was just imagining things, or if she lost it (if it was there at all) which was common in the early stages, she would humiliate herself seeking out the trust of someone (who would that be?) only to later go and say it had been nothing; and she surely couldn’t say a word to Edmund or his sister, or any other person she knew in Britain.

Waiting, Anna decided with a heavy heart and anxious mind, was the only thing she could do, the only option she had to be certain.

Perhaps she had just been a little ill recently and hadn’t noticed it. Maybe she should just excuse herself from all company for a day and rest; she was feeling very tired indeed - a warm blanket and some hot tea would surely do her a world of good.

In the evening, Edmund came to sit with her, kissing her and holding her hands as he read to her a story printed in some magazine to divert her mind from her indisposition to merrier thoughts. Of the story, Anna did not catch a single shred of plot; all she heard was Edmund’s voice, and how it soothed her, at last lulling her to sleep.

The next morning, she awoke feeling as nauseous as she had been on the first days of her journey to England aboard the ship and promptly sat up much more quickly than her tired body would have anticipated and lost the contents of her bowels to a chamber pot.

Immediately after having finished, the door connecting her room to Edmund’s was pushed open, and he was by her side dressed in a nightshirt only.

“My dear-“

Without thinking twice, he took from her hands the chamber pot, and put it away. The acidic smell of almost pure bile (she had not eaten anything since yesterday) and half-digested food did, to her surprise, not disgust him at all, he did not even frown at it.

“We’ll have that taken away”, he soothed her, and went to his room to bring her the glass of water he liked to keep by his bedside to combat nightly thirst. Anna took it gratefully, letting the cool liquid run down her throat and take the revolting taste away, at least somewhat.

“Must’ve eaten something my body didn’t tolerate well”, she said, more trying to soothe his evidently agitated mind than anything else.

“You must be cold, my beautiful-“ but Anna was not listening to Edmund’s professions of love, all she felt were the arms snaking around her middle to draw her closer to him to share the warmth of his body with her until his searching eyes found her manteau-de-lit, which he proceeded to drape over her shoulders before returning his hands to her body.

Feeling him holding her would only a week ago have made her more than happy, even full of lust and impatience to get her clothes off and go to bed with him (Edmund had been a quick study, and without a single doubt transformed into the most skilled and generous lover she had ever had). On this day however, her sinews tightened, her muscles hardened and her entails coiled like living snakes. It was not about him, but she just couldn’t bear being with him at this moment.

“No”, she said, trying to sound firm and definite, “I need to lie down again, I am tired.”
“Oh”, his eyes widened with gentle concern and immediately his fingers, like ghosts, disappeared from her, “you ah, you need to rest, then. Can- can I do something for you?”

Anna shook her head.

“No. I think I just need to rest. Sleep a while. –Alone”, she added as an afterthought she considered necessary.

Edmund nodded understandingly and despite her supposed potential contagiousness kissed her softly on the forehead.

“Rest well, my angel”, he whispered (as for some reason nobody ever speaks normally around the sick) and closed the door to her room softly.

As soon as she could be sure enough he had gone either to his room or far away into any other direction not to hear a thing, Anna let herself fall onto the bed and turned her head to weep in the cushions.

A terrible thought overcame her- she had never been more alone in the world than in this very moment. To be deprived of friends, of family, of benevolent connexions of any kind was not unknown to her, she had struggled through adversities most would never in their lives encounter, but at present, it was far worse: to be alone and to know it was not half as terrible as knowing one in theory was not, was loved and cared for by kind souls, but was forbidden to speak with them for one or another reason and forced to keep a secret one would rather not like to keep.

Weeping freely, Anna wondered if her guess was right, if she truly might be with child. The nausea she felt so frequently at least hinted at it.

-That would change everything, of course.

A part of their renewed love and relationship had been that by having previously broken all conventions of love, courtship, marriage and even politics; they had not thought any of these broken rules applicable to themselves anymore and thus lived freely and without obligations under the same roof in the spirit of perfect mutual harmony.

If she really was pregnant, everything would change, would have to- even if she would not mind any further disgrace of her person and even with Edmund standing by her side, and he would, they would be responsible for the life of their child, which would be marked with the stigma of bastardsly illegitimacy for his or her whole life.

Personal irresponsibility was all well and good until it affected others- and in this case, it would. It would ruin the life of an innocent child.

-And Edmund? Charlotte? Eliza? Even the few townspeople of Duncleade and friends she had made in Edinburgh, would they cast her away, forsake her? She had known hardships of all kinds, but was unprepared this time, now that she had thought it was over, her fight, the war, at least for her, having settled down in a strange country with the man she loved and having come to like it, even, Scotland, the wild, heathery hills surrounding the town.

She was just not prepared to give everything up a second time, to be a wanderer again, and this time without aim or destination-

Pressing her face into the cushion as hard as she could in order to prevent any sounds from being audible, she wished they hadn’t been so imprudent, wished rather helplessly she and Edmund had been wise enough to abstain from the carnal side of love, even though she would for no money in the
world trade the sweet memories of him finally holding her, of the look of utter abandon in his face when he reached completion or the sweet, good feeling of him giving her pleasure.

It was complex and full of contradictions, life, her life, and giving life to something, somebody new was equally so.

When asked in the evening why her eyes were so red, she managed to lie that it was the sickness she had feigned to Edmund making her nose drip and eyes tear, and Eliza, calling her a “poor thing”, sent her a tea made of herbs to her room to aid her recuperation.

For the moment, Anna decided when lying awake at night, nobody could know. This state of affairs however could not last forever; in a few weeks, her belly would start to show more prominently and her clothes stop to fit, and others might notice.

What she had was a short while to think about what to say, what to do, plan her next step. In the coming week however, she did nothing of the sort, and preferred to seek for divertissement in the papers, reading of the negotiations between Britain and America, trying to once again drown herself in the fight for America’s freedom.

It did not go unnoticed by Edmund and Eliza, the latter of the two calling her “our little rebel” with amusement, she who could not imagine what it meant to be a so-called rebel, the danger, the dedication to one’s country and the determination that one would rather give one’s life than betray the General- no, she could not imagine it.

For everyone else, Edmund and she were a romantic tale, akin to some extent to the stories of knights and dames in novels- not as real, hard and gruelling as their love had been at times. No, she did not understand.

Nobody could. Nobody would, ever.

Poor Anna- Eliza had thought of her throughout the evening of her engagement festivities, had gone back a few times even to ensure she had everything she could want, but had otherwise been quite engaged in being a good hostess and entertaining her guests.

Although time had been scarce, she had remembered to send the cook notice to prepare a strong bowl of chicken broth, a remedy for almost any and all ailments.

Anna had taken a satisfactory amount of it, and gone to bed early. While a slight cold or some such ought not to be a reason to worry about when occurring in a grown person, a tiny voice at the back of her head doubted that the explanation for Anna’s not feeling well was so straightforward.

A cold shouldn’t cause a person to vomit rather violently in public.

Whatever the cause, she was in no position to force Anna to tell her anything; perhaps she had received some news from her home country that distressed her, a death among her friends maybe, though Eliza was unaware of Anna ever having received letters at Ashcombe- most likely, if she received any, they were addressed to Duncleade as she would hardly have had time to inform anyone of her travels to the south.
In the following days, Anna’s condition seemed not to improve much; she read a lot, lay down on the sofa overlooking the garden with a woollen blanket and some tea, and looked overall too pale and too worried.

Of course, the thought had occurred to Eliza to investigate—after all, she was the woman who had brought Anna here, summarising events very broadly, and she was perhaps the only person in the world who almost killed Simcoe—a part of her, inhibited by those strange little inhibitors called morals, scolded her for the secret pride she took retrospectively in her actions, even the bayonet-bit, but another, decidedly less honour-bound division of her soul encouraged her to use her less than savoury talents and inclinations, especially since her cause would justify the means of discovering the truth about Anna’s malaise—what if she was very ill and tried to hide it out of curtesy, blinded by some such valiant (or, to use a less euphemistic synonym, recklessly stupid) notion of not wanting to spoil the engagement-festivities or be viewed as a burden on a household she was only a guest in? She surely was just as stubborn as Edmund, which only proved just how well-matched they were.

In that case, everyone would benefit from knowing what was wrong with her, and perhaps a doctor would be able to help her and remedy the ailment and all would be well.

When in the evening a little more than a week after the fête, Alexander and she bid adieu to the past day by sitting together and talking idly, she, unable to let go of her concerns even in the presence of the man she loved, voiced a vague desire, half-honest, half-jokingly, to have a look into Anna’s room while the latter would not be inside. Alexander, to her surprise, was not one bit amused:

“That is out of the question. You will not do that.”

Defiantly, Eliza glared back at him with a challenging look in her eyes. “And why not? What if I do?”

“You will not. This is my house after all, and I will not have one of my guests intruded upon. Eliza—you see, I love you quite badly, but sometimes, you overstep the mark by a mile, not just a few paces.”

“But what if she is ill and just doesn’t say anything?”, Eliza retorted, adding weight to her argument.

“If so, she will tell us, or your brother—“

“Well, what if she doesn’t?”

“-What will who not tell me?”

Alexander almost dropped his glass of port—they had been joined by the very person they had discussed.

Edmund swallowed hard, even though his mouth was so dry, there was nothing to swallow there.

With concern Edmund had noticed how Anna looked very pale, did not eat much and even shrunk back from his caresses, something that baffled him and caused him great concern. She had flowered, his Rose, his darling, in Scotland and now she was withering in the middle of summer.
Her sickness had to be really grave, he thought with great concern for her welfare and more than once had offered her to either take her to or call on the doctor, but she declined every time, saying it was not very bad.

“Don’t pretend with me, Anna, I know you are poorly”, he had told her right to the face when he had found her sitting by the old harpsichord without playing.

He had taught her a few simple tunes, perhaps it had been her intention to improve her skill, but his presence had obviously intruded upon whatever designs she had held.

With a look as if she felt cornered by his concern, she had risen and briskly brought the body of the instrument to stand between them by rounding it in two large steps. She had told him to leave her be, that her health was none of his concern and that peace and quiet would be beneficiary to restoring her former constitution whereas unannounced and unwanted, overbearing concern might worsen it.

“I thought, ah, I thought, Anna, we had no more secrets. The last time we kept secrets from another, we paid dearly for it. I thought we had formed a common understanding never to keep things from another again. It is hurtful to see you do so, deceive me almost.”

“I do not deceive you”, Anna had replied in an agitated voice, which she tried to control, but to some extent failed. “It in turn hurts me that you sense suspicion and intrigue behind every corner, and so mistrust me. I am unwell. And I told you so. No leave me be.”

He had done as she wished, leaving her be with the knowledge that whatever injustice he had accused her of, he had besmirched his own hands with the same crime by having spoken to her so-but love, especially when deep and passionate, transcending the being to the very Core of one’s existence, was an all-consuming, all-encompassing thing that regarded the other as part of one’s Self, and viewing Anna in obvious distress for which he could not provide any remedy since she was reluctant to part with any details pertaining to what ailed her, had its effect on his state of mind, robbing him of the ability to sleep soundly at night out of worry and fear for her.

She should tell him, for what could she probably suffer from she wished to hide from him? Sickness, he thought, was never a state to be ashamed of, no; except perhaps for the sort of things one could catch at the bawdy-houses or Covent Garden, but there was no indication his Anna had taken a lover of any kind who might have disordered her, and he had found her as attached to him as he was to her- no, that could not be the reason.

Perhaps he ought to consult a doctor without her knowledge, describe her symptoms to him to obtain a diagnosis and most importantly, a possible path of treatment- but then, what would he say? ‘Feeling unwell’ and ‘vomiting often, mostly before meals and occasionally in the morning’ was scarcely a symptom indicative of any one affliction.

If only she would tell him what depressed her spirits and body so, he would do everything to help. Recently, his Study had found acclaim with the Royal Society, and he had been invited to London to speak before them. The letter was still in his pocket a few days after his run-in with Anna’s secretiveness and their hot-tempered exchange, read and neatly folded, but not replied to.

It was his wish to discuss this with her, yet at present, he was uncertain if she had a mind to travel, or even was in the right constitution to do so. Therefore, he had decided to wait a little, to see if she would be better, before replying.
Two days later.

“The air will do you good”, Eliza encouraged Anna and linked their arms in a jovial way which she hoped would convey her cordial attachment to the American.

Anna made Edmund very happy, but not only that; she had brought a new spring to the old house up in Scotland and was a lovely companion for their mother, amicable, kind, and skilled in a vast array of fields from needlework to book-keeping.

Months and months what she had known of the woman who had taken her brother’s heart away was what little information could be gathered from him, and considering this fact alone, she hadn’t liked Anna much- how could she have liked her, the woman who had hurt her brother so deeply she had barely recognised the man who had returned from the war in his stead, all because of her?

Having come to know her and the real reasons for her on the surface at least very cruel treatment of Edmund however, she truly admired Anna. She was a woman of fortitude and personal bravery- and very likely had been of more use to her army than Edmund had been to his.

But admiration wasn’t everything she felt- Anna had become a good friend, a friend whom she worried about because she looked ill and miserable.

“Yes”, Anna replied absent-mindedly and with a stubborn monosyllabism that prompted Eliza to continue: “it’s almost sea-air. From the Fort, where the Admiral lives, you can just make it out on clear days. Perhaps Edmund would accompany us to go to the seaside for a day or two?”

“Maybe”, her stubborn companion replied and kept her eyes firmly on the path ahead. Mildly annoyed, Eliza stopped abruptly.

Due to her left arm linked with Anna’s right (admittedly she hadn’t left Anna any choice in that), Anna had no other choice but to stop also, effectively trapped and barred from evading questions yet again.

“Anna, do you have any idea how much it burdens us all not to know what it is that ails you? If you know, would you please tell me what’s going on?”

A feeble attempt, but at least it had allowed her to let some of her pent-up anger out.

“I just don’t feel very well since some time”, Anna said defensively.

“A light summer sickness, that’s all-“

“A light summer sickness that causes you to decide to keep to your bed for days, makes it look like you’re seasick on dry land and has everyone worried for you? In the interest of us all, see a doctor. Nobody wishes you any ill, it is only that we care for you- you are not alone, or on your own, and thus, keeping not only yourself but those closest to you, too, in ignorance about the true nature of whatever ails you is made worse seven times over by the selfish fear that you might discover your sickness to be something dire. –Don’t look at me like that, somebody had to say it! But I tell you what: it’s better to know whatever it is and have it treated to the best of modern medical opinion than to suffer in uncertain secrecy. Whether it is only a trifle or indeed a terrible illness, your chances at recovery are greater when being treated and in either case, you can also be certain of those around you wishing you well and caring for you - you have grown dear to us, Anna, which makes your
silence even more hurtful.”

All Anna did was stare at her, mouth slightly agape and lips trembling. Eliza would never have thought the former secret agent would be so easily moved to tears, especially because she had not said anything hurtful and only expressed directly in a few short sentences what everyone at Ashcombe was thinking privately.

“I am sorry, Eliza”, Anna half-stuttered at last, her voice brittle, and embraced her without saying anything else. Somewhat taken aback, Eliza reciprocated the embrace and stroked Anna’s back a little awkwardly as she released a quick succession of stifled sobs into Eliza’s shoulder.

“Perhaps you know, or have a suspicion already what it is?”, Eliza suggested. “Please, Anna. Don’t be a fool. Allow me to help you. Allow us to help you.”

“I can’t.”

And with that Anna freed herself from Eliza’s arms and took a few paces down the path.

“Anna—“

Sighing audibly, Eliza followed her. Who knew what she would do in her state of mind? Even if she herself was perfectly fine with returning home and had no more patience to invest in Anna’s cryptic defiance to part with any information on whatever ailed her, she knew it was best to not leave her to herself.

Thus they walked silently, Anna a few strides ahead, going nowhere in particular.

“Perhaps we should return”, Eliza suggested an hour later, hoping she would still remember every fork or bend in the roads and pathways they had taken. Her memory was quite good, but usually better with memorising texts and information than visual clues.

Anna turned around quite biddably and in total silence began to walk back to where they came from when Eliza was struck with an idea: “perhaps, if we join the main road at the earliest opportunity, we might find a wagon or carriage to take us partway”, she suggested. It would be dark soon and she was, though not afraid of any vagrants or miscreants as the county militia was well-numbered and the justices firm on punishing criminal characters, not fond of the thought of having to find the way back in the dark.

To her own surprise, they were less than ten a quarter of an hour away from the road by her count, which they promptly followed, but except for a boy herding some sheep, luck did not appear to be on their side.

For a while, as dusk began to settle, they walked without seeing another soul and in total silence; Eliza, despite the adversity she had met in life not one to bow her head or quieten her voice, disliked that sort of thing to no end. She was not one to pass up the opportunity for a conversation and liked to joke and jest. This dead silence, more suited to the convent of a contemplative order than the bucolic beauty of the English countryside, vexed and concerned her in equal measure. A short while later at last, success: the sounds of two sets of horseshoed hooves pulling a carriage sparked Eliza’s hope of being taken partway to Ashcombe anew.

And as if some higher authority had answered her secret prayer, the coachman stopped the horses a short distance ahead of them on the path, motioning them to draw near.
She had seen the two women by the roadside and recognised them immediately. She was a little curious why they had journeyed on foot such a long distance, and without male company at that, but then added as an afterthought that her dear friend Mary Anne and she had done the same before her marriage- and not only with Mary Anne had she been alone in the hills, ‘sketching’ or ‘taking a walk’- but that was a wholly different matter that had been solemnised in retrospect by the blessing of the curate and the gold band on her left hand.

It was boring being confined to the house all day, and with John gone to follow an invitation from an exclusively male company that had no use for wives that night, she had risked a little, secretive outing.

Nobody, not her husband, nor her aunt and uncle, could know of it, for they would fret for her life. So close to the birth, it was generally found to be more prudent to rest and move little. Her active mind and body had however always resented sloth and stagnation, wherefore lying about like a beached whale all day while being fretted over and attended to like a dying person was the greatest punishment imaginable to her- perhaps in parts because some of the family truly worried they might be attending to a dying person, but that thought was best brushed aside.

She had made her bed, and now had to lie in it- she had even made it twice- first the marriage bed, in which she had found great delight with her sweet and positively depraved husband, whose imagination was not limited to his poetic inventions, and now, soon to come and resulting of the former, childbed.

Contrary to what was said about the risks of driving about to pregnant women, the Little Stranger seemed not to mind it at all; having kicked all morning and afternoon, for some reason the child had been placated by the not at all always gentle rocking motions of the carriage.

Perhaps her little son or daughter might enjoy some company other than a fretful husband and a handful of maids, too.

The two shapes walking by the roadside had looked familiar in passing, and her guess as to who it could be was confirmed when the coachman opened the door for her surprise-companions to enter.

“Good evening”, she greeted Mrs Strong and Mrs Greenwood, the Merry Wives of Ashcombe, as she secretly had dubbed them, and motioned them to sit.

“Whereto?”, she asked bluntly, not seeing it necessary to engage in false pleasantries in so intimately-sized a company.

“To Ashcombe”, the Scottish woman said, adding a polite “if you are headed our way to some degree, would you-”

“No, no. I shall take you there. Mrs Strong seems quite exhausted and deadly pale.”

For some reason, passing on the gloom and doom she had been dealing with for more than eight months now felt oddly satisfying.

“It is nothing”, the American muttered and lowered her gaze demurely, possibly a reaction instilled into by her previous occupation in a tavern- one does not stare at one’s betters.

-But did she not hear a hint of guilt in her voice? Perhaps the secret observation she had made at the
fête was to be proven right.

Prodding a little deeper, she decided to comment saccharinely: “I must say, your cook at Ashcombe must be the envy of all Devonshire now, the food you served us was quite exquisite. Am I much mistaken or does it not shew a little in Mrs Strong, that she is now so well looked after and fed in comparison to the horrible depravation among the ordinary Americans during the late unfortunate war, of which I read a great deal?”

If possible, Anna Strong grew even whiter in the face, so white, a plaster death-mask would have looked like an image of blooming health in comparison to her.

To speak as she had done was an affront, she had called Anna Strong fat, but her cutting rudeness was necessary to extract from the mute American the confirmation of her suspicions.

Perhaps it was not as obvious to others as it was to her, most notably men in general and women who had not experienced a pregnancy, but to her, it was clear as day. The Scottish woman, the Hewlett-sister, she did not have children of her own, did she? Why had she then spotted her pregnancy when she and her brother had come to bring that horse, Salem, but was now blind to her almost-sister-in-law’s condition?

Caught up in her own affairs, Elizabeth concluded, with her own wedding to think of and a house to organise and arrange to her liking, she had other things to do than to worry about Anna Strong and seeing her so frequently, perhaps she had even become blind to the small alterations to Mrs Strong’s form that must have taken place.

*My suspicions are affirmed*, Elizabeth thought triumphantly. Anna Strong was pregnant, but unwilling to tell anyone, because *of course* the child had been conceived out of wedlock. Sooner or later, she would have to brave telling Major Hewlett. Honour-bound and stiff as she held him to be from her limited acquaintance with him and her husband’s tales, she would have bet a good part of her fortune on the fact that he would on the spot endeavour to apply for a license and marry her while still in England, far away from his remaining connexions, or take her up to the next more or less infamous Scottish village behind the border immediately, where marriage-laws were a lot more accommodating to such unforeseen changes as a babe, that would grow mercilessly until in a short while, the belly would be round and prominent enough for all to see.

With silent excitement to have uncovered so big a secret all by herself (and while *in theory* lying at home ‘resting’) she watched Mrs Strong inspect her fingernails and Mrs Greenwood looking at the same (and the fingernails) with concern.

“I am very sorry we are not good company today, I fear we have, in attempting to restore Mrs Strong’s health, been a little overzealous taking our walk so far. I am sure she is just tired.”

The older woman gave the younger one seated beside her a warm smile before she returned her gaze to Elizabeth.

“And you are well, I hope? Is it too forward to ask when it is expected the little stranger will enter this world?”

“A month, perhaps a little more or less, the doctor estimates”, she answered graciously, trying to look every inch the Glowing, Glad Mama, even though recently, she had had her doubts preparing herself mentally for the birth as trying to ward off the haunting memory of her aunt’s retelling of the death of her mother became harder and harder. She had never wanted a thing, had been loved by a grandmother, three aunts and an adoring uncle who treated her like his own blood, but sometimes she wondered what it would have been like to have a mother, or a father for that matter, his death in
battle however had been a fate unrelated to her birth.

The baby, perhaps woken by the conversation, started to stir somewhat discontentedly, but the kick or punch it delivered against her intestines was more acutely felt in her heart.

Having been thus reminded that the ‘secret’ she had uncovered was a very real, very living little thing, a small person like the one she carried around with her, defenceless and unable to control its own fate, she was somewhat disgusted with her feeling of triumph and overall investment in uncovering said ‘secret’. Her personal boredom did not excuse the fact she had for the past quarter of an hour tormented a woman whose state she could not approve of, but for which she felt compassion from experience. It had been a bit shocking to her to come to terms with the fact that she was indeed having a child, and she had had every commodity she could have wished for- her aunt’s general disapproval of marriage before the end of one’s fertile years aside, she had a family who were offering their help in any ways they could, had a husband who cared for her, tho’ often overzealously, a house, servants and the means to support a child. Anna Strong had nothing, not a penny to her name and lived off the goodliness and charity of near-strangers.

All things considered, she was a pauper living off the limited means of a family themselves not too comfortably placed (Barnett’s newfound wealth aside), without any prospects of her own in this country.

“Mrs Strong.”

The American looked up from her fingernails, fear in her eyes. Fear, Elizabeth realised, that was well-placed, for indeed, the former spy’s secret had been uncovered.

“I fear we will not speak again before I am to have the little one, so let me speak plain, as our time is limited: it is obvious, and soon will be showing even more plainly. Soon, everyone will see it and you, and the child’s father better prepare yourself for it. You must marry fast to prevent the stain of bastardy to besmirch your child’s prospects in life. You and he, you will not be free from your escapade ever, as people can count and will talk when a half-year after the wedding, a child has been born well-sized and healthy, but it will not be as bad as it might be if you decide to keep it your secret for much longer. I understand Major Hewlett to be a kind man who is truly devoted to your person, whose sense of personal honour and duty would prevent him from casting you out or leaving you without protection. My husband told me.”

Anna Strong unwittingly recoiled as far as she could, but Elizabeth had seen. In a way, she was indebted to the American: had the foolish woman not rejected John’s advances, she would be in her stead, live in her home with her husband and would not have a care in the world, save for her baby.

“It cannot be undone. You must live with it, and can only do so by acknowledging your present state. Whatever I have said in here remains between us. Nobody shall hear anything from me. I have no desire to cause an exhausting campaign of Intrigue and gossip in the neighbourhood, and think this matter is best left to you and your major.”

Mrs Strong almost looked as if she was about to faint or fit; but she did not, composed herself as good as she could, and looked at her with imploring eyes: “nobody must know.”

“Nobody will know. Do you take me for a chattering fishwife?”

Somewhat offended, she glanced, nay glared, first at Mrs Strong, and then at Mrs Greenwood, the latter of the two immediately seeking to mend the injury: “no, of course not. I did not know- nobody did until today- you must excuse her, her secret, her current condition-“
“No offense taken”, she smiled coldly, yet benevolently enough to calm the anxious minds she was conversing with.

“Take heed of my advice. Soon, everyone will see, and they will talk. You would do well to sort matters out until then- go away, to India, or Ireland, and return when all is forgotten. Otherwise, neither you, or your lover or your child can ever be seen in polite company again, or hope to improve your fortunes in these parts. Oh, and one more thing: once you tell them, do not let them treat you like an invalid. You will find it rather tiresome to have everything done for you at all times,” Elizabeth started to add in a more kindly tone, hoping to soften the harshness of the past conversation a little, and thought of John who considered it his duty to sit by her side with a most fretful mien and would do anything she wished without thinking twice, even carry her if she tried to get up to go somewhere else. For her, who had been a veritable hoyden in her childhood (though a well-dressed one) and had never lost her appetite for physical exercise, such idleness was most unsatisfactory, and Mrs Strong struck her as a woman who would sooner or later be able to empathise.

Eliza felt like a deer encircled by hunters, wanted to get out of the carriage, wanted to shout at Mrs Simcoe for being so heartless and cold, and shout at Anna for being so secretive about the child, but all she was able to do before her thoughts that had started to cloud her brain like a heavy layer of dust on an old book being blown off started to settle into coherency again, was sit and stare.

All the while, she had had her suspicions that Anna and Edmund were not celibate, but it had not been her place to meddle.

–After all, Edmund had in his teenage years intruded on a scenery he should never have seen, either, and she therefore considered herself lacking the moral high ground one needed to hold a speech on the virtues of virginity, or, as was more likely at the age of two persons in question, the virtues of not sleeping with anyone one is not married to.

She was far from happy; after all, Anna’s and Edmund’s ex-marital indiscretions would reflect badly on her, and by extension on Alexander, too, and might quite possibly disturb their plan to live in respectability and peace at Ashcombe.

Notoriety was the last thing she needed, or wanted.

She should be angry, especially because a child of infamy born into the family would cast a shadow over her own wedding, but concern proved the prevailing emotion –for the moment.

Concern for Anna, for her health, and for Edmund, who was less than prepared for anything of this sort, and their future.

For her liking, they could not reach Ashcombe fast enough.

When finally, finally they did, she almost jumped out of the carriage- everything was better than remaining in there with a shocked Anna and that little Simcoe-vixen who had uncovered Anna’s secret so mercilessly. While she did not like the fact that Anna had kept her pregnancy secret from her, she found Mrs Simcoe’s demeanour morally most reprehensible.

Anna ignored her hand, which she had reached out to her in order to help her get out, and half-stumbled into the yard unassisted.
Before the door was closed, Mrs Simcoe leaned out from within: “I wish you nought but the best, Mrs Strong. And your child, too.”

There was no time to ponder on her words, on their genuineness, for Anna had sensed the opportunity to make a run for the door all by herself- but Eliza noticed, brushed aside the thoughts occupying her brain and managed to get a hold of Anna’s upper arm.

“No, don’t you see? You cannot run. Not from this, not now. Your time of hiding from the truth must come to an end.”

“But-“

“There is no ‘but’- what do you intend to do? Run away? Whereto? And, why? Do you think Edmund- he will assume responsibility, he is not a man to run from the consequences of his actions- and he loves you. And if you want to stay here for a while, I am sure Alexander can be convinced.”

Tears started to show in Anna’s eyes, prompting Eliza to guide her into a shadowy corner where they would not so easily be seen from the windows of one of the major rooms in the house.

“I- I-“

Anna tried to say something, but the words failed her; perhaps what she wanted to say was too complex to even express in words, as feelings always are.

“No, no, no”, Eliza admonished her gently, “no crying now. It doesn’t do any good- to you or the child. You need to be a pragmatist now, Anna; I will be honest and tell you that you—in the plural, my brother and yourself, that is— have brought the family into a compromising situation. It will be talked about. All you can do now is mend the pieces, to the advantage of everyone, including the baby.”

Somehow, standing there with no way to escape and feeling afraid, confused and alone, Anna’s heart stung painfully, yet jolted at the same time when Eliza said the words “the baby”.

Her child. Her and Edmund’s child.

“Edmund loves you. He will also love his child”, Eliza tried to console her, “never mind Mrs Simcoe. She won’t talk.”

“Won’t she?”, Anna replied with a cynical, bitter half-smile on her lips. The last person she wanted to know of her current condition was John Graves Simcoe, the man she had rebuked in Setauket, but out of necessity wooed when it had become strategically important to the cause, when Abe had to be rescued through rescuing Edmund- thinking of it, she still shuddered at the thought of his much too rough, greedy hands on her arms, or worse still, the feeling of the kiss she had consented to give him as an incentive to bring her back Edmund from his wrongful captivity. The mere thought of this man knowing of something so intimate as her being with child made her almost as sick as the smell of food did at the moment.

“I don’t think she will”, Eliza shook her head. “She is not like her husband.”

She did not quite believe that, but in the end, what did it matter? Everyone would know within a
matter of time.

“Anna- I will not force you to do anything, but you must promise me you will speak to Edmund.”

Seeing that Eliza was right, she gave a slow, somewhat reticent nod.

“Don’t let it wait until the last. Do it while it is still possible without anybody else figuring it out, if they haven’t already. Speak with him.”

Pressing her arm, this time not with the force of a gaoler trying to guide his charge, but with an almost motherly compassion, Eliza left her be and went to the door, entered, and announced how tired she was after their long walk, and that she would go to bed now, as would Anna, loudly (and theatrically) enough for the whole house to hear.

Anna knew why she did so, and was grateful. Eliza was buying both of them time to think- a night at least.

A tray of cold sandwiches was sent up to her room, which Anna barely touched despite being a little hungry.

When she undressed, she made it a point not to look into the mirror, to spare herself the vista of her own body, which she was afraid to find undeniably indicative of her condition, even if that notion was completely and utterly ridiculous. Draping the widely-cut manteau-de-lit over her form, she felt a little better.

The nightly darkness crept over the room more quickly than expected, which did not keep Anna from pacing up and down, up and down, from the door to the window and back, lost in thoughts. In the room next to her was Edmund- she could almost feel his presence, so close, yet so far away through the walls, and it pained her. She wanted to be with him, now, wanted to lie her head against his chest and have him hold her, but that would mean telling him- and even if she believed in every word Eliza had said about Edmund’s honour and his love for her, she couldn’t bring herself to tell him. Not yet.

It, everything, overcame her then with the force of a storm surge- tears flooded her eyes, and not even her knuckles, quickly shoved between her teeth to stop herself from crying, could prevent noises from being emitted- all she could do was try and cry as silently as possible.

“Anna-“, a muffled, yet distinguishably agitated voice on the other side that could belong to only one person stammered, and before anything else could be done or Anna form a coherent thought, the door was thrown open and Edmund was with her.

“Anna, what is it?”

The Old Edmund, the stuffy Major Hewlett would have stood waiting a little embarrassed in the doorway, but the new one did not. With two large strides, he was by her side and took her in his arms, holding her to her chest in the very manner she had so longed for.

“My Anna, my dearest, dearest Anna”, he tried to console her without even asking what was the cause of her distress. She would have liked to keep it this way, but eventually, even if for the moment he restricted himself to holding her close, he would ask, and she would have to answer.

To lie would be futile, she saw that now. Inexorably, over the coming months, if she did not get rid of it, as she had heard other women had done, her belly would grow and Edmund would eventually see what was going on very clearly. Besides, he was the father- he had a right, no, a duty, to know and care.
For a while, neither said a word- Edmund’s admirable quality to be patient and not ask questions outright, a distinguishing feature of his personality that very likely had developed through his astronomical studies which consisted for the most part of sitting patiently, waiting and observing helped her a great deal- he stood firm as an oak tree for her to lean on, and was as patient as Time itself.

At last (Anna could not tell how much time had passed) her tears faded, and her crying ebbed away to be replaced by occasional sobs. His embrace, this unique form of comfort she had only ever found in him, gave her strength to wipe her eyes and nose on her sleeve with the careless gesture of one lost in her thoughts and freed herself from the sheltering warmth of his arms to sit down on the bed, gesturing him to do the same. He would better be seated, given the news she had to tell him.

But still, she said nothing.

“You know what ails you, don’t you, Anna?” Edmund said softly, holding her hand, but not speaking to her; he was talking to the darkness in front of his eyes.

“Yes”, Anna replied tentatively and avoided his eyes too as she did so, inspecting very closely the pattern of flowers of her bedgown on her thighs, as good as the twilit room only illumined by her bedside candle would allow, “I do.”

“And will you tell me? You know I- I love you. I cannot bear to see you suffer.”

Edmund’s voice sounded pained, as if he were wounded, or afflicted by the same crippling illness he thought had befallen her.

“It cannot be changed”, she countered, shrugging.

“What do you mean ‘it cannot be changed’? There is a doctor here, in Honition, and if he proves no good, we could travel to London, to the best men of their profession.”

“A doctor won’t help me, Edmund.”

“But why?”

-Even without being able to make out his features clearly, Anna could see how his eyes had widened considerably with fear- fear for her.

“What I have-“ she would have to say it, tell him- now was perhaps the best point in time to tell him, the right one even, even if it did not feel so yet. “What I have- I am not sick. Edmund, I am with child.”

Looking up into his face, Anna waited for his response, not knowing what would come, what she should expect.

“Oh Anna”, he exclaimed, undecided whether to laugh or cry, and pressed her firmly against him in an embrace that lasted an eternity.

“Our child”, he said at last, very slowly and with ponderous consideration at each individual letter, “our child.”
Edmund didn’t know what to feel, and even more difficult still, what to do or say. His first, intuitive reaction had been to be elated, to laugh joyfully and hold Anna close— for had they not always wished to be together, to have a little family of their own?

He had, all the time in Setauket, when they had been engaged, thought of how happy they would be in the coming years, surrounded by little ones, perhaps two or three, with Anna’s uncommonly beautiful round, dark eyes.

However elated he was once disbelief had transformed into joy, Reality soon caught up with him: they were mere guests at Ashfield, and were mere guests also in Scotland; his father had in his will left everything to his mother, preventing him and Eliza to inherit anything before her death; what had been a well-intentioned thing to do in order to settle his wife at least moderately comfortably placed after his death, he came for the first time in his life to resent; if he had inherited, as he should have, as the only son, the house and lands would be his, and he could do as he pleased there, raise his horses and even bring his pregnant mistress to live there and while people might frown, nobody would be able to do or say a thing about it without him chasing them off the grounds with his pack of hunting-dogs giving chase and a horsewhip.

For that was what they were, lovers, and in society, were their mutual attachment to another to emerge, she would receive the ignominious title of his mistress- the American who had jumped at the chance of securing for herself an easy life by the side of a Royal officer- someone would surely spread such vile words around town and country.

No, no, no, they should never have given in to Temptation- but the sinful flesh had only been too willing, and who could blame them, after years of dancing around each other, always in sight, but just out of reach, an unobtainable fata morgana?

It had been so easy, so natural when they had undressed each other for the first time in their rented lodgings in Edinburgh, and only grown more so over time.

What he had learned then, sporting and playing in the sheets with her, was that they were both quite, ah, passionate persons, who gloried in the possibility of holding another, in the feeling of the other’s body so close and the pleasure thereafter that was a product of their mutual desire.

Of course, Anna having been married and and he being a man, had known the purpose of such heavenly pursuits with another had by the Creator been assigned the function of multiplying- yet they had accepted that risk in favour of celebrating their love.

The pregnancy Anna had been so reluctant to tell him about was only a logical consequence of their actions— but he hated the thought of a human being as a consequence of something— if anything, perhaps, the product of their labours of love.

A family. They will be a little family. Only Anna, the little one, and he—

Well, they could be, if—

Edmund, though a man who would never have called himself a clever tactician, especially not in the social field, was well aware of what the arrival of a new little human would necessitate; marriage.

Anna and he hadn’t spoken of such things for more than a year, when she had jilted him in Setauket, and they had both been content with their state of existence, which was by no means seemly in the eyes of most people, but could be justified to some extent by the extraordinary circumstances of their
reunion, and by the fact that both had found shelter at Hewlett House, living with his mother and until recently, sister, who could be perceived as chaperones.

A child however- no, he could not wish being shunned and talked about on Anna once again; her time having been branded a traitor’s wife and village tart were over, and never to be repeated.

There were no illusions to be had, they had to marry. A hasty marriage would raise eyebrows, but in any case legitimise the child conceived out of wedlock, and things between him and Anna needn’t change- they could continue on living as they presently did.

He had never thought he would marry someday, not since the days when his mother and father had, at the tender age of sixteen, started to eye the families of more or less Consequence in London and in Scotland for a suitable bride for him, before the family’s financial near-ruination had forced him to join the Army, to be at least of some use to the family by being away from them and no longer spending what was left of the family money on his studies. Instead, Extended relatives had helped him to purchase a commission and that had been that. It had during his service never occurred to him to marry, for he had no desire whatsoever to add to his financial strain another person who would then depend on him, not to speak of the fact that, ah, he wasn’t and had never been very good even making conversation with the fair sex.

“Don’t be afraid, Anna. We’ll marry. All will be well.”

At hearing him speak so, Anna freed herself of his arms in a not exactly gently manner. What was he thinking to say with such nonchalance that he would marry her, as if it was his obligation, his duty, like the military service he had only ever performed because it had been expected of him?

The truth was, Edmund would never have chosen to be a soldier, he had told her that much, but having not had any other choice, he had complied with demands and wishes, and had tried to do his duty to the best of his abilities and knowledge, had even tried to convince himself he believed in it all, the war, the righteousness of what he had done in Setauket- just as he now thought it was his duty to marry her.

There was a reason why they had avoided this topic, why they had chosen such a loose domestic arrangement for themselves- they had wanted to do it once, but it had ended in pain on both sides.

It hadn’t been meant to be. She had wanted it very badly then, had wished she could say “I do” and go away with him, even at the cost of her friends, her country, and her cause, she would have- but that day she had sat at the dressing-table in her best dress, knowing she would hurt him badly on the day they both ought to be happiest.

It wasn’t forgotten yet, and wounds took time to heal, for him as for her.

“Edmund, what if we shouldn’t- marry- remember the last time, we-”

He swallowed hard, shaking his head.

“I will honour your wishes, you know that. For the best of our child and you, above all, you, my darling.”

Uncertain of the future and overwhelmed by her situation, Anna leaned against Edmund for support,
digging her nails into his shoulders in a fashion that would surely leave marks, but in that moment, he was her rock, to which she, shipwrecked, held on in the midst of the tempestuous turmoil of her mind.

“Hush, Anna.” He couldn’t bear it any longer, he took her in his arms again and guided her to sit down on the bed while still keeping her in his embrace, and by God, he felt it then as intensely as ever, he loved her with all his heart.

Although he felt responsible (because, in fact, he was), he also saw that the present situation was going to affect Anna more profoundly than it would him- a dark thought, to him at least, though one that needed to be voiced, crossed his mind, prompting him to speak. It was not a nice, lovely thing one would say to comfort, because it was not meant to be comforting, it was a matter of choice.

Throughout the years, he had seen and had himself done many morally reprehensible things, which had impacted his view of the world and mankind; while he did not like it one bit, it was important to him that Anna knew he would not stand in her way, ever. If it, the child, whatever it was being so small, was burdening her, causing her a pain of the soul, he would not- did not allow himself to judge her should she choose to-

“If- if, ah, you want it gone- there is a woman in Dumfries called Agnes Dugall, commonly known as ‘Old Agnes’, who is knowledgeable in fields of- of medicine doctors dare not dabble in. She has herbs- for everything, they say. There have been rumours she knows what needs to be given to make a woman- to make her bleed again, so that it is gone afterwards.”

He could not bear to look at her as he spoke, and somehow, the words meant to reassure her caused her sobbing only to increase.

“No, no”, he tried and failed, “you must listen to me: I love you, no matter what. Do you hear me, Anna? I love you. With or without it.”

He had taken her face into his hands and made her look at him. In her eyes, he saw his own fears and worries reflected, saw the tears and helplessness he felt, too.

Even now, she was very beautiful, and to see the woman he desired with body and soul alike so desperate caused his heart to bleed more than it ever had before- more than when he had lost his father, more than the day he, with a heavy heart, had forced himself to end the suffering of Bucephalus, more even than when he had thought he would die in rebel captivity, when freezing to death had been not a turn of phrase, but a realistic possibility and he had forced himself to amputate his own toes, frozen to a blackish-blue due to frostbite.

Sometimes, on bad nights, he could still feel them as if they were there, tingling, painful. But that hadn’t been the worst thing they did to him, leaving him to freeze to death, they had covered the sky with a tarp, that had been the worst, because in the stars each night, he had found order, comfort- they had returned to him each night without fail, and with them, they brought the oddly consoling thought that wherever he was, and wherever Anna was, she would see the same stars above her head, and perhaps she was even looking at the sky in the same moment as he, and perhaps she was thinking of him- over time and with growing desperation, this tender thought of remembrance had grown into something else; the less likely his rescue had started to seem to him, the more fervently he
had tried to retreat from his emaciated body into his mind, to think of good things, of reasons not to fall asleep on this cold night to possibly never wake again. He had thought of home, of his sister when they had been young, Eliza welcoming him home with her apron and hands dusted in flour, embracing him tightly and completely disregarding the traces she was leaving on his clothing.

The smell of the stables at home, the memory of the warm and perspiring body of a horse after racing through the countryside, his mother’s voice- but most of all, he had thought of Anna. Anna, who had been forced to witness his abduction, who had cried and called out for him as those brutes had taken him.

The stars above had started to cease to exist in their assigned constellations; at one point, he had started to see in them the faint outline of Anna’s face, which had henceforth grown ever more detailed.

Anna meant everything to him, he had known it then, and he knew it now. Without her, he would not have lived- he would have fallen asleep one night and never woken again, but the prospect of seeing her face again, even though she could not talk to him, had kept him alive and awake each night. When he had grown tired, he had pretended to have conversations with her, imagined what Anna would say if only they were together in this very moment, and in a happier place.

By God, he had loved her then and he loved her still, and would forever love her, whatever Fate might bring, whatever they would do now- whatever she would decide to be the right course of action.

To do away with a child, an unborn one, it was not right in his opinion, but he realised that there were two lives to consider, and could not, by philosophical consideration of arguments in his head, discern why the mother should be worth less than the child.

If it would make Anna unhappy, he would take her to Old Agnes, and be with her when the herbs would do their terrible deed- from whispers among the townspeople of Duncleade, he had heard of talk of women who had visited Agnes for the same purpose and spoke of pains in the abdomen and terrifying amounts of blood afterwards- he could not possibly leave her then when he had had part in it all, when he was guilty of putting it into her in the first place.

It was his duty to protect her. Upon his honour, he would do everything he could for her.

Wide-eyed, Anna looked up to find in Edmund’s eyes true honesty. His body was shaking against all efforts to remain calm.

“You would-“

“Anna”, he interrupted her, “I will accept, do, suffer everything, as long as it is for your good.”

“But we shouldn’t suffer. Neither of us.”

Without noticing it at first, her back straightened, and her slumped shoulders rose, as did her head until her chin had lifted to the angle many who had known her, especially in her girlhood, had called ‘stubborn’ or ‘defiant’ - in particular people who had tried to exercise headship over her.
She had never liked to be told no, or being given an unsatisfying answer— not a good trait to have in all situations, but one that had given her strength in situations she could safely say others would not have met with the same stalwartness as she had.

As long as there was a way to do something, anything about a situation, she would not accept to submitting herself blindly to it— she had not much lamented the loss of Strong Manor, her pretty clothes and other amenities long; yes, she had felt it, had longed to exchange the scrubbing and cleaning in the tavern for sitting on a chaise and knitting or reading a book, but she had always taken pride and comfort in the fact that her personal sacrifice (and Selah’s, he had been the one to be arrested and sent to the Jersey) had served a greater cause, had meaning and purpose.

Slowly, very slowly, her breath slowed and steadied. It was as if rain-clouds cleared from her brain, and for the first time in perhaps weeks she felt like being able to think clearly again.

Her brain experienced the equivalent to that feeling of walking through the woods after a rain— the cool air stroking the brow, the spicy smell of leaves and earth filling the nose with a smell even better than that of a fine meal, the sound of bird wings flapping, a little body rising to soar high over the treetops, to be free and above all earthly things—

A part of herself had gone into hiding when she had striven to hide a secret nobody, except for the only woman in the vicinity who was also pregnant, had guessed or suspected she had had.

She was done hiding, done suffering, and done being looked at strangely by the oh-so correct, mannerly society of rural Devonshire that reminded her of the frowns and disapproving glances she had reaped on Long Island in the days after Selah’s deportation to the prison hulk had finalised her fall from grace, when there had no longer been a husband to half-cover up the fact she had still met Abe in secret.

The rolling, green hills with white sheep grazing on them were picturesque no doubt, but Anna knew she could not stay.

The way she saw it, it had become her fate to remain an itinerant soul since she had left Setauket for camp and then decided to follow Edmund to Britain, and she had to accept that. The life here was doubtlessly very good, and all the other women she had known prior to coming to Britain, from the lowliest camp follower to Mary, Abe’s wife, would have traded places with her without a second thought, but it was not for her, this life.

Although she had no idea how, where and what she should do next, Anna knew she would not stay at Ashcombe.

“We must leave this place”, she announced with a determination in her voice she knew would be unanswerable by any doubts Edmund might have.

To her surprise, he agreed: “You are right. I suppose, ah, the ah, local populace would treat us, you, in particular, very kindly- it is very quiet here, and a ‘scandal’, I fear, a welcome distraction.”

“Mrs Simcoe said so, too”, Anna added absent-mindedly.

“Mrs Simcoe?” Edmund added, his features now governed by worry. Quickly, Anna relayed to him the essentials of the very uncomfortable carriage ride.

“So the first one knows”, he closed. “The sooner we are away from here, the better.”

“But where will we go?”, Anna asked somewhat worriedly, “surely not back to Scotland—“
Scotland would provide them with an opportunity to marry as per the lax marriage-laws there as soon as they would cross the border, but Anna had no mind to return to Duncleade.

Returning there, to the people who had come to know her, and to expose herself in yet another place she had come to know as the talk of the town would be the same sort of purgatory as going through it in Devonshire or on Long Island.

Heaviest weighed however the name Charlotte Hewlett in her decision not to return to Scotland; she had come to grow very fond of the old woman, who had so graciously taken her in and helped her as good as she could, but also knew that despite the excess of love and Christian charity in her soul, the old woman was very much a traditionalist.

She had been willing to take her into the house as a guest, and perhaps had for some time even turned a blind eye on her and Edmund’s romance, yet to Anna there was no doubt she had let it go on in the hopes of seeing Edmund married at last. As hopes of an advantageous match had long been given up, she could see how the old woman would content herself with a lowly American daughter in law, in hopes there might be a little heir to the family name soon.

At least the latter part they had fulfilled now, but without going through with a marriage. Charlotte would not like to have the smudge of illegitimacy stain her name or her two best white linen tablecloths, and a vague feeling of having proven a disappointment to the very motherly mistress of Hewlett House and a certain fearfulness of her ire cemented Anna’s resolve not to go back.

“We needn’t”, Edmund shook his head, “I imagine it would not be well-advised to do so. Not yet. We must settle other things first.”

His eyes looked at her with sincere solemnity. What he wanted to say, but did not dare to after her initial refusal to discuss this topic, was evident.

“Edmund”, Anna began, careful as the memories were still painful to her, and would be immensely so to him as well, “you know that in Setauket, when we fell in love, what I was supposed to be doing was use your trust to aid Abraham, and Washington.”

As she spoke, Edmund’s hand wrapped around hers more tightly until it almost hurt, like the hand of a sick or dying person holding on to a loved one for what little shred of comfort this gesture could offer in a sea of indescribable pain. His lower lip trembled, but he bit it hard in an attempt to conceal the fact from her that he was on the verge of tears.

“I- I didn’t stay true to my task, though. I fell in love with Edmund Hewlett, the man whom I should as per his profession have despised. I loved you then as I do now, but- I knew that whatever my secret hopes and dreams for a life that would include you, they could never be while we stood on opposite sides. I could never bring myself to permit myself the thought of ever marrying you, of being happy together- I pretended to be whenever you spoke of it, but in truth, it just made me sad, as it reminded me of my deceit and made me long for a life in which your hopes and dreams could come true.”

“Anna, my dear Anna. I know all that. It is done, it is over, it is-”

“No, it is not”, Anna contradicted her lover and now it was her turn to press his hand as if her life depended on it.

“On our wedding-day, I walked out in front of the guests from far and wide knowing that I would lose you forever, that I would ruin your happiness and my own, and that it was necessary to do so for reasons I would never be able to explain to you- it all happened so quickly, and it feels as if it is
happening again now-“

An arm came to support her back, holding her in a reassuring manner.

“We didn’t think we would ever see each other again, let alone that we would be together like this. I
don’t want to break what we have built for us by rushing into yet another ceremony driven by
reasons other than our love, yet I cannot see any other way out-“

“But there is love between us, Anna, more than any of us has ever had for any other human being-“
he stated, but his eyes revealed it was more of a question.

“Yes, of course there is”, she quickly answered him, almost offended he had obviously questioned
that fact at least in some sort of fearful theoretical ‘what-if’-thinking, “but once again, the decision
has been taken from us to decide on the right time, and place-“

“Ah, not exactly”, Edmund intercepted her explanation and grew so red in the face Anna could tell
despite there being only a single nightlight to illumine the room. “We ah, we have been quite, ah,
active in making it, the child-“

He had an irrefutable point there. But after so long apart, both in a spatial sense and in their hearts,
neither had cared much about the possibility of there being any consequences to their lovemaking.
Edmund dutifully had managed to pull it out in time most times- what had become of the times he
hadn’t would soon become evident for all the world to see.

They had not been very careful, rather reckless in fact, and would now have to foot the bill.

“Yes”, Anna conceded and blushed just as much as Edmund had.

“If you need time to decide what we should do-“

“I told you I have never allowed myself to even think so far as marrying, let alone children and now-it has come upon me- us- so sudden.”
She paused, looked into the distance without fixing her gaze on anything in particular, then turned
her head to face Edmund. Her mind was made up.

“I think that we’ll soon be a little family”, Anna breathed, barely able to believe in a reality she had
long considered to be an unobtainable phantasy, and still in some doubt about it all, the suddenness,
the fears- it would take time to settle and grow accustomed to.

Edmund didn’t reply, just hugged her close and kissed her with tender, yet fiery, passion.

“We needn’t marry right away”, Edmund suggested after some time had passed just sitting by each
other’s side without saying much. “The purpose of the legal finalisation of our union will be clear
enough when our little one will arrive, anyway, regardless if the child is born five months or two
weeks after the wedding.”

“It is just that-“

Anna could not explain.

“May I show you something?”, Edmund asked, much to her surprise. A confused “yes, what is it?”
later, they were stood at a window in the corridor overlooking the north side of the house.

Only when she stood there did Anna realise how much time must have passed- dusk was slowly
starting to dilute the inky velvet colour of the night into a lighter hue, and the stars began to fade to
make room for the sliver of red-golden light that, hidden by the house and some trees, was surely waiting on the eastern horizon.

“Not ideal conditions, I must say, but suitable enough. You see the Stella Polaris over there, don’t you?”
She did. Finding the star indicating where north was at all times measured pretty much the entire length and breadth of her astronomical knowledge.

“As you surely know, it always tells you where north is, allowing one to orient one’s self even when lost. It helped me when escaping rebel captivity”, he added in order to provide a personal example of applying this knowledge in the field, so to speak, before continuing: “knowing where north is, you will always find south, and east, and west. Long before we would divide the world by latitude and longitude or astrolabes and compasses were invented, Man found guidance in the stars, Stella Polaris being the most useful of all, perhaps. To me, in a metaphorical sense, our love is the same: it is always there, perhaps not always visible (to the naked eye at least) but it is shining brightly, and offers constant guidance. We shall never lose our way wherever we go, following it. It will lead and guide us faithfully for—“ he paused, evidently searching for the right word or phrase, “forever.”

Profoundly touched by his words, Anna found strength and reassurance in Edmund’s positive outlook on life.

However hardened and determined Edmund pretended to be, what was to come would be hard, Anna knew it. It would not be nice, especially because some people would doubtlessly treat them with either contempt or scandalised silence, but somehow, they would soldier on, together, guided by Edmund’s stars and of course, love.

For whatever their uncertain future would hold, one thing was certain: they could always rely on their love as a constant to navigate by, and the other’s hand for guidance when sight of said star, as Edmund had described it, was momentarily lost.

Holding his hand, Anna fell asleep at last, finding at least a little rest before the coming day would present new challenges they would have to face.

Chapter End Notes

Orange jam was Elizabeth Simcoe’s favourite. She loved that stuff.

Stabby Simcoe: …For all ye who forgot about this memorable scene: the “Abyssinian Trick” goes “stab the bayonet, twist the blade, and the notches will pull the intestines right out.”

Without a will stating explicitly otherwise, the oldest son would automatically have inherited the family estate, which could leave the widow in an uncertain provision if not otherwise provided for, either by being willed another property or being bestowed with money/a generous annuity.

A way to keep the widow settled in her own home and in control of the estate was to make one's wife one's sole heiress, with any children only inheriting anything from the parental estates after their mother's death.

I nicked the idea from a certain couple that also plays a part in this chapter. The Simcoes had evidently discussed their mortality and made matching wills: John made Elizabeth his sole heiress and Elizabeth in turn had the task to distribute their estate to their
children with each getting a share of the money that depended in its size on their age with the younger ones receiving a little more (as some late relatives had willed money to the older children when the younger ones hadn't been born yet or had been very young, the idea being that everyone would have a near-equal amount). The house and moveables were distributed more traditionally with most of the moveables going to the eldest child (Eliza) and the house going to Henry as the only (living) son.

Abotions were illegal in the 18th century, which does not mean none were performed.

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