When We Were Young

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Summary

Torn apart by the war, once long time friends are reunited in the most unlikely of ways. What will happen when Abigail Williams finally crosses the path of her best friend, Benjamin Tallmadge, after having not seen the man she has loved her whole life for several years? Things get pretty complicated after that, not even including the fact she's married to someone else.

(The fic is better than the summary, I swear!)

Notes

This is the current obsession in my life. I hope you all enjoy it! Also, this is the first fic I've ever written for this fandom, and I'm very excited to post it here!

The first few chapters are mostly world establishing/character introducing/building, etc., but things pick up rather quickly after that.
Chapter 1

The morning Abigail rose from her bed would be the morning that would definitively change the course of her life, yet she did not know it.

Ever since the day her husband had been recruited into the Continental Army, their house had been particularly quiet, with the exception of the few servants who also resided in their residence.

That had been a certain argument that she had to concede to, seeing as how Tobias’s parents had all but insisted on having servants while she had been insistent they could handle the household themselves. “Don’t be silly, Abigail dear. Servants are what keep a household functional and happy,” Mrs. Hawkins had remarked in only a partially patronizing way. “Really?” interjected Mr. Hawkins while chortling heartily, “I thought that was a wife’s duty.”

Abigail never cared too much for her in-laws, and, to be perfectly honest, neither did Tobias. His relationship with his parents had become strained over time when it had become apparent that their son’s growing patriot tendencies would not fade in spite of his very Tory upbringing.

Partially as a jab to his parents but mostly as a way to do what was right, her husband paid the few servants they employed very well, almost ridiculously well, and provided them with room and board so they did not have too many expenses.

If Mrs. Hawkins had known just how much her son paid their servants, she would have fainted, and Abigail would have pushed the fainting couch back a few feet as soon as her mother-in-law began to swoon.

But that was unbecoming behavior for a young lady!

Yes it was, but that never stopped her from sharing those thoughts with Tobias, who always laughed and added fuel to the fire by contributing his thoughts on how his father would react. It was safe to say that they were quite possibly society’s most unconventional couple, at least behind closed doors, and neither of them were bothered in the least.

It was now three years since she had seen her husband and her best friend after they had entered the war. A little over six years passed since their group had last been together – herself, Tobias, Abraham Woodhull, Anna Smith (now Strong), Caleb Brewster, and Benjamin Tallmadge. The six of them had once been inseparable, but ever since then, the war and personal affairs had more or less sent them on their separate ways.

The last she had heard from Anna and Abe had been their engagement, but after Tobias had returned home from a trip to Setauket, he had informed her that their engagement had been broken off, and that Abe was engaged to Mary, who had been arranged to marry his older brother whose soul now rested with God. A few years later, Abe and Mary had gotten married just months before herself and Tobias and then not long after Anna had married Selah Strong. How was possible for so much could change so quickly?

Those events convinced her to reconnect with her childhood friends by joining Tobias on his business trips to Setauket whenever she could and visiting Anna at her husband’s tavern or visiting Abe at his farm, the latter of which would have been more present with the presence of “the shrew”, the lovely nickname she had given Mary Woodhull but never too her face. Yet.

Speaking of the Woodhulls, Abigail had plans on visiting Setauket that very day. After letting Iris, a
fair haired girl of seventeen, select her dress, she went about dressing herself while she encouraged the younger girl to get some breakfast in her before the day began.

Once alone, she retrieved her riding cloak from the closet along with her travel bag packed with the appropriate necessities for the journey, including the carrots she planned on sneaking out to feed Cantor, her favorite horse she liked to travel with.

A beautiful, Narragansett Pacer, Cantor was a tall, gorgeous, dependable steed although the name of his was fairly appropriate considering cantering was his favorite speed. On some occasions, Abigail suspected the horse of being quite arrogant at times, given the many drawings they have of him his pose held such a dramatic flair.

Making her way down the narrow staircase, Abigail was greeted by the sight of her father, who was in the middle of organizing his medical kit, perhaps getting ready for a house call. When he took one look at her carrying the riding bag and cloak, he gave a feigned heavy sigh and walked over to her to relieve her. He passed along the saddle bag to one of their manservants after asking if he could get the horse ready and saddled for his daughter’s departure after breakfast.

“How many times must I tell you about walking up and down those narrow stairs with that thing in your arms?” Thomas Williams scolded lightly but playfully with a waggle of his finger.

“A hundred and one times a day as I can recall, papa,” Abigail remarked whimsically, “and I believe you have not yet met your quota for the day.”

Mr. Williams laughed whole-heartedly. “Such a quick mind and a sharp tongue! I wonder where you get them from.”

“From mama, I believe, based on all the stories you told me, but you only reinforce it.”

According to her father, Mrs. Alice Williams and her sisters were considered high society darlings, but her mother had never wanted to be a part of that life, which did not surprise Abigail to hear that her mother had fallen in love with a poor Irish first generation immigrant, her father, and the relationship had caused quite a scandal. However, in spite all of their trials and tribulations, Alice Williams had suffered no fools and had known exactly what she wanted.

Mrs. Williams died moments after giving birth to Abigail, their only child, two years into their marriage.

“Ah, yes. I believe you’re correct. Now let’s have some breakfast before you run out of here like the wild heathen that you are.”

Chuckling, Abigail followed him into the dining room where their breakfast was waiting for them. She couldn’t linger long but did attempt to sneak some biscuits and fruit into her dress pockets when her father caught her.

“I have already set aside a bag of fresh biscuits and fruit for your travels so don’t ruin that dress!”

She grinned and thanked him before setting her napkin across her lap and digging in. When news had reached her father about Tobias’s enlistment, he had insisted that she come stay with him at his home while Tobias was serving. With her inherited British mixed with Irish stubbornness, Abigail had insisted on staying exactly where she was, that she refused to be driven out of her home. Eventually, they had come to an agreement where her father would stay with her, which turned out to be a much better arrangement.

After breakfast, Mr. Williams walked Abigail out to where the stable hand and Cantor, tacked up
thoroughly including her riding bag, stood. The poor fellow was having a difficult time getting the horse to lower his head to a more suitable height. Like Abigail said, arrogant!

“If you happen to see Reverend Tallmadge, please give him my warmest regards,” Mr. Williams requested. She saw a little spark in his eyes and just knew he was implying something, but she refused to acknowledge what that little implication meant.

The Williams and Tallmadge families had always been close, both being families of the Irish decent more or less. Their families would dine together almost every night, each taking turns at playing host. For each and every dinner, Abigail and Ben would sneak out during their fathers’ night caps to have a nightcap of their own, stealing a bottle of brandy – with Abigail usually doing the swiping – and sneaking out to the fields to entertain themselves.

That was actually the last time she had seen Ben. The night before he had gone to Yale, their families had held a celebratory dinner in his honor. Afterwards, Abigail had made sure to take the most expensive liquor her father had. When Ben had gone to stop her, she had said, “It’s a celebration, Benjamin! Only the finest alcohol will do!” and had proceeded to lead him out to the fields where the pair had gotten spectacularly drunk.

But it wasn’t the drunken part that made the night stand out so clearly to Abigail to this day. It was the memory of extra physical displays of affection – accidental brushes and bumps of shoulders and grazes of fingers that lasted too long, looks of hidden meaning exchanged between them throughout, and the heavy flirting, good Lord was there flirting! She could not remember exactly what was said, but what she did remember never failed to make her blush.

She busied herself with slipping on her clock to hide that very blush and promised her father she would give Reverend Tallmadge his regards. Making sure the coin purse was firmly secure in her dress pockets, she let the two men assist her in mounting the horse, but not in that silly side saddle nonsense. With one leg on each side of the horse, she felt more secure.

After a few more good-natured exchanges, Abigail bids her father and the manservant farewell before sending Cantor into a gentle trot down the road away from the house. She allowed the horse to transition into a canter once they are a good distance away from the house.

The ride to Setauket wasn’t too far away, but it was just far enough away to not fall directly into the redcoat occupation of the town. Their homes were just outside of the British’s reach. By some miracle, redcoats were never stationed in their homes, and she thanked her lucky stars every day for the past three years and counting.

When they reached a fork in the road, she turned Cantor towards a brief detour, cutting through an open field that would bring them closer to Setauket without having to worry about presenting papers to a redcoat when entering town. That was something Ben had shown her one day years ago while out riding.

It wasn’t until she could see the all too familiar bell tower of Reverend Tallmadge’s church did she ease the horse into trot and then into a walk as she arrived closer to the church.

The town swarmed with activity with both Setauket residents and redcoats alive moving about in a curiously alert manner.

Taking this as her cue to blend in, she dismounted from Cantor behind a closed woodshop and led him towards the Strong Tavern, praying that she wouldn’t be stopped.

“Stay exactly where you are!”
Abigail halted immediately, grip tightening on Cantor’s reins to stop him as well. She squeezed her eyes shut and took a breath as she heard clinking of metal buckles and footsteps behind her. She opened her eyes and turned around to see a redcoat heading towards her.

“Good morning, officer,” she greeted with her most charming smile, which felt completely false given the flurry of nerves she was experiencing. She loosened her hold on the reins so that she could push back the hood of her cloak so she could see the red coat more properly.

The officer in question gave her a tight lipped smile in return with a short nod in greeting as he approached her. “Good morning, madam. Pardon my intrusion, but I was curious to who the newcomer was arriving on such a fine steed.”

Abigail gave a light laugh while simultaneously tightening her grip on Cantor’s reins. He didn’t take too kindly to strangers, particularly strange men for some reason. She didn’t trust that he wouldn’t turn around and kick him even though she secretly hoped he would. “My name is Abigail Hawkins. I’m visiting my friend at her husband’s tavern. They are expecting my arrival any moment now.”

“May I see proof of your purpose here, madam?”

Biting back a sigh, she dug in her skirt pockets, thankful her father had thought to remind her to bring her receipt from her previous stay at the Strong tavern, and she handed it to the red coat for him to inspect.

She waited with bated breath until he finally deemed it reputable. “Everything looks to be in order, Ms. Hawkins…”

“Mrs. Hawkins,” Abigail corrected politely, not wanting him to get any funny ideas. She had heard stories about some of those less than honorable redcoats who preyed on unmarried women. In some of those tales, a few were married women as well. The warm metal of her father’s small pistol soothed some of her anxiety, though not by much when the redcoat’s eyes zeroed in on her face.

“Then where is your husband, pray tell?” he asked, his voice shifting into a tone she wasn’t sure how to identify. Thinking of a story quickly, she remarked, “He’s at the tavern waiting for me. My friend’s husband and mine go way back. We decided that a get together was what everyone needed.”

The redcoat stared at her with a perturbing level of intensity, trying to sense any dishonesty in her words. She fought the urge to bite her lip with anxiety. After what felt like an eternity, he replied, “I shall escort you to the tavern personally.”

Eyes widening with surprise, Abigail shook her head. “Please, don’t feel obligated to assist me on my account. I – I don’t want to detract from your post.”

“Nonsense. It would be my honor. The tavern I believe you’re referring to is the Strong Tavern, correct?”

Too stunned to speak, she nodded in response and fell into step with him as he began to walk in that direction.

“A young woman such as yourself, especially a married woman,” the redcoat continued as they walked, “should take extra precautions. We’ve had some trouble recently in the tavern, just the other day actually. It would be against my moral principles to not escort you there myself.”

“What kind of trouble?” she asked with concern.

The redcoat shook his head. “It’s nothing to concern yourself with. The incident in question is still
under investigation, though it may be of interest to you that one of the parties involved was the very owner of the fine Strong Tavern establishment.”

Her heart clenched inside her chest at his words. What had Selah gotten himself into? She knew very well that Selah, as well as her husband, held the British in contempt and supported the Continental Army. What could he have possibly done to land himself into such trouble?

Whatever expression he saw on her face prompted him to stop just outside the tavern door. Taking pity on her, he gently took the reins from her limp hands and tied Cantor up to the hitching post. “I suggest you start keeping mind of who your true friends are, Mrs. Hawkins,” he recommended, “and choose wisely.”

He guided her inside the tavern. There were several redcoats as far as the eye could see. This was not the same Strong Tavern Abigail had visited a week ago. This was a salon for the British.

“Now,” the redcoat said, interrupting her thoughts, “direct me in the way of your husband.”

Right before she could open her mouth to formulate a response, Anna Strong emerged from the backroom, wiping her hands in front of her apron. As soon as she looked up and saw Abigail standing there, she took in her company, blinking for a moment before surging into action.

“Oh, Abigail! It’s so good to see you!” Anna gushed, rushing forward and sweeping the blonde into a tight hug. “I see that you’ve made the journey back to our humble establishment safely.”

“… yes,” Abigail managed, still recovering from the redcoat’s words. “The ride was quite speedy. You know Cantor and his exuberant stride.”

Anna laughed lightly. “That sounds like that good ol’ boy.” She pulled back and looked over at the redcoat who was still standing by, observing the exchange with keen interest. “Why, Lieutenant Simcoe, twice in one day. That has to be a record for yourself, sir.”

This Lieutenant Simcoe smiled at Anna in such a way it made her own skin crawl. “Yes, it is, isn’t it? I’m absolutely parched, but I must see to my duty of making sure Mrs. Hawkins makes it to her husband safely.”

Anna gave a quick glance at Abigail, sensing this had been a ruse, and sought to distract the captain. “I’m sure she can find her own way. She’s among friends here. And I do believe I owe you an ale from yesterday.” She laid a hand on his forearm and held his gaze steadily with a pleasant smile. “Please, I insist.”

It took a moment or two before Anna’s charm convinced him. “Well, if you insist, I suppose there won’t be any harm in that.” When he turned his back to have a seat, Anna quickly seized Abigail by the arm and led her towards the backroom.

“Won’t all of those redcoats be suspicious of you hauling me back here?” Abigail whispered as soon as she shut the door.

Anna shook her head as she fiddled with a cloth in her hand, smoothing the edges and turning it into a perfect square. “Never mind them. They’re all too drunk to notice much of anything.”

Abigail frowned. “In the middle of the day? Also, this Lieutenant Simcoe character doesn’t appear to be intoxicated. In fact, he seems rather keen.”

The barmaid sighed grimly. “Unfortunately, that he is. Too keen, in more than one respect, in fact.” “So what’s happened? He wasn’t very forthcoming with details, but he said it involved Selah.”
Anna informed Abigail of the events that had taken place in the tavern yesterday, about how John Robeson, a Tory oyster farmer, happily read an account in the Royal Gazette of a retreat by Washington to a room full of redcoats and how Selah ordered Robeson to leave. There was a struggle, and beer was spilled on Captain Joyce, who angrily tackled Selah. Abe had attempted to intervene but was stopped by Lieutenant Simcoe, who placed a pistol to the back of Abe's head. Joyce then proceeded to attack Abe while he was down, kicking him in the head and doing more damage. Then some more redcoats came in and arrested Abe and Selah when Joyce had the audacity to claim they had attacked them. As far as Anna was aware, they were still being held for questioning.

With each description of the events, Abigail felt herself becoming sick with dread, covering her mouth in horror as every passing word from her friend’s mouth became worse than the last.

“We must do something,” Abigail murmured after a few moments of silence passed after Anna finished her recount.

“How?” Anna demanded. “There’s little that we can do, unless we try appealing to Abe’s father, but I highly doubt Richard Woodhull would help a rumored patriot and his wife along with his son.”

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Abigail began to pace back and forth in the tiny room. Anna was right, of course. Richard Woodhull, the town magistrate, had no love lost for the rebel cause and those who championed or sympathized with it. She would have offered to speak with the man himself if not for the fact she had no idea how the man felt about her, considering it was no real secret that her husband was more than a sympathizer. How would she hold up in the magistrate’s eyes by extension?

“We can discuss our plans later this evening,” Anna decided, breaking Abigail’s train of thoughts, “if you would like to spend the night, of course.”

“Absolutely,” the blonde agreed, nodding vigorously which made Anna smile tiredly. “How much longer is your shift?”

“It ends right about now. I’ll give Simcoe his ale and then we can go. If above all else, we need to get Cantor untacked and fed or he will not be happy.”

“Of course. He starts biting when he’s unhappy.”

“Sounds just like his owner.”

With a roll of her eyes, Abigail gave a light shove to Anna’s shoulder and watched as her friend walked out of the backroom towards the front. She didn’t want to give this Simcoe any reminder to be introduced to her husband so remaining in the backroom until the end of Anna’s shift was her best option.

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Managing to escape Simcoe and the rest of the redcoats, Abigail and Anna made it to Strong Manor with measured relief. Abigail released Cantor into the hands of the Strong’s stable hands and warned them that he liked to test his boundaries. It was a warning she had given numerous times to them but always felt the need to remind them should they forget to be on their guard.

Anna had helped her get situated in the room Abigail usually occupied on her visits. Since she hadn’t been able to stuff another dress inside her riding bag due to the amount of carrots she had smuggled out of the kitchen for Cantor, Anna agreed to loan her one of her dresses for the day while the one
Abigail currently wore could be washed. Abigail agreed but only on the terms that she would wash her own dress and that she could assist Anna in doing the soldiers’ laundry who were quartered there. It took some convincing, but Anna eventually agreed.

Doing the laundry was a necessary evil, at least she always considered it to be. Sometimes she even wondered what would ever happen in the world of men if women altogether stopped doing their laundry. The thought was an entertaining one, which more often than not provided her some form of entertainment while scrubbing clothes clean.

Between the two of them and a handful of Anna’s servants, they managed to carry out the long, tedious process of the washing unscathed. With their own laundry in hand, they headed down to the river so where they could hang their dresses to dry. The redcoats’ laundry could wait a few minutes for drying or so was Abigail’s logic.

“You really do have a beautiful home, Anna,” she remarked, gazing out along the land touched by the edge of the river as they stepped past the gate of the Strong Manor. “Sights like this really make me miss Setauket.”

When she received no response, the blonde glanced over at her and asked, “Anna?” She frowned a little at the distracted look on her friend’s face. “Is everything all right?” She realized her error and would have pinched herself if she didn’t have a basket of laundry in her arms. “Of course it isn’t, given everything. Are you –”

“I’m all right. I…” Anna looked around distractedly, lowering her basket to the ground to smooth her hands down her dress. “I think I left something important in the barn. Would you mind hanging mine up as well?”

“Of course, I will. I – Anna!”

Before she could even finish her sentence, Anna set off to the barn without a moment’s notice. Curious. Abigail let out a quiet sigh before picking up Anna’s basket by the handle and heading towards the river to pin up their laundry for drying.

By the time Anna returned from the barn, Abigail had already finished pinning up the clothes onto the line. With the gentle autumn breeze billowing through the cloth, she was almost certain their laundry would be dried in no time.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” Abigail asked, adjusting one of Anna’s dresses on the line without a glance in her direction. If she had looked, she would’ve seen a rather distressed looking Anna who had been signaled by Abe to meet her in the barn to discuss his kidnapping by the Continental Army and his interrogation by Ben.

Seeing as Abigail was momentarily distracted, Anna took advantage of the opportunity to school her features before replying, “Not entirely sure if I founded what I needed, but I hope I’m on the right track.”

Abigail snorted lightly. “That’s quite cryptic, but I take your word for it.” She lifted her empty basket and turned towards Abigail with a grand flourish. “Shall we return to our laundry wench duties, madam?”

Grinning, Anna grabbed her own basket, and together, they returned to the house but separately were thinking entirely different thoughts.
Dear Ben,

Hopefully, one of these days I’ll pluck up the courage to actually send you these letters I have written. It has only been three years now. I –

“Ugh, no!” Abigail murmured harshly, aggressively crossing out those words with her quill before crumpling the paper and shoving it into her bag. She had decided to stay in rather than join Anna for her night shift at the Strong Tavern, once again thinking of Simcoe and how she never wanted to meet the man again. There was something about him she just didn’t trust. At least she wasn’t alone in the sentiment. Apparently, Anna felt the same way.

Having changed into her nightdress, she was in for the night so she thought composing a letter would help take her mind off the events she had learned about throughout the day. The letter to Tobias had already been written and sent off via a trusted courier days ago as were all of his letters for the past few years. For some reason, she could never manage to send Ben his. It wasn’t for a lack of knowledge for his station because she had no idea where her husband was apart from the latest information she had received from his responses, which had grown less and less frequent as the years went by.

She still held each and every one of Ben’s letters she had written for him for the first year he had enlisted. Three hundred and sixty-five letters remained in her drawer tucked away from any prying eyes of servants. After that one year, her Benjamin letters became less frequent, yet she continued to write them all the same. It didn’t feel right not to.

Tapping her foot lightly on the wooden floorboards, Abigail chewed on her lower lip thoughtfully, trying to think of exactly what to say and how to say it. Many of the words she had written in his letters in the past were quite honest, so honest in fact she worried for their discovery into the wrong hands, yet she did not regret writing them. Perhaps, that honesty would serve her well again tonight.

With a new sheet of parchment, she dipped the quill into the ink pot, tapping off the excess ink and began to write, honestly.

Benjamin,

So much time has passed since the last time I have written you. I’m afraid that fault falls heavily on me. It’s not the lack of desire to write to you what stops me, but it’s what I wish to express that often prevents me from doing so. Have you ever had a moment where you wish you could’ve been braver, to speak honestly without fear of the consequences? Of course not, how foolish of me. You are doing that by being where you are, fighting for what you believe in. One day, I hope to demonstrate that sort of bravery but in a different manner than how you’re experiencing it of course.

I cannot recall if I ever told you how very proud I am of you. Whether before you left or in letter, the memory escapes me so if I have already told you, then forgive me for repeating myself. What you are doing for the rest of us matters. What you do matters. I just hope I can tell you all of this in person one day, and when that day comes (when, not if mind you), I hope I can find the bravery to say it.

Yours truly,

Abigail

Satisfied, she set the quill back in its bottle and allowed the ink to dry on the parchment. She rose from her seat at the writing desk and began dimming the candles save for one so she could have enough light to fold the letter and slip the parchment inside an envelope.

Once done, she tucked the envelope carefully inside her riding bag and padded her way towards the bed. Slipping underneath the covers, the blonde turned to the candle left on the bedside table and leaned forward, cupping her hand around the flame before blowing it out. Darkness descended upon the room. The only light came from the moon outside, which was barely concealed by the curtains.
Sleep no longer came easy for Abigail these past three years, but when it did come, it came so slowly. She missed the presence of a strong, warm body by her side. The last thought that entered her mind before succumbing to sleep was that of Benjamin Tallmadge.

But she would never admit to that.

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The next morning Abigail awoke to a sound of insistent knocking at her door. Slipping from beneath the sheets, she grabbed a borrowed robe from where it had been left across the back of a chair and put it on just before she opened the door.

“Anna,” she breathed out a sigh of relief. For a moment, she worried that one of the redcoats quartered in Strong Manor had stumbled across her room for some purpose or another. She took in the other woman’s urgent demeanor and immediately held back any sort of quip that would have naturally tumbled out of her mouth. “What is it?”

She stepped aside to let Anna glide in and shut the door behind her. As soon as she did so, Anna remarked, “Abe’s out. He’s been released.”

Abigail stared in amazement. “But how –”

“His father got him out,” Anna replied. “Mr. Woodhull has a very good relationship with Major Hewlett.” She paused, wringing her hands together nervously. “No word about Selah yet, however.”

Walking the short distance between them, the blonde cupped her friend’s arms gently in her hands and gave them a comforting squeeze. “I’m so sorry. With Abe out, though, perhaps there is a way we can get Selah released as well.”

“I…” Anna paused, momentarily unsure. Unsure about what, Abigail was uncertain herself. Her expression turned oddly decisive as she took another breath before adding, “I believe there’s something in the works, but I cannot say for sure.”

Abigail titled her head, brows furrowing. “What can you say?”

But Anna shook her head insistently. “I haven’t been told everything myself, but Abe told me he would find a way to –”

“Abe? When did he find a way to contact you between the incident at the tavern and being released from British custody?” Abigail asked, confounded.

With another shake of her head, Anna carried on as if that particular detail wasn’t important, “He’s been instructed to make an oath to the king, in public, in the town square just before noon, as punishment for his supposed recourse.”

Silence settled into the room for the briefest of moments, allowing Abigail to take in the news. It was quite a lot to digest, considering how she was only offered half the pieces to Anna’s puzzle. Still, she couldn’t just let the other woman continue to dodge her questions.

“Did he come to you at the tavern last night?” Abigail questioned. That was the only time she could imagine he could afford to slip away to find Anna.

“Yes,” Anna remarked immediately with a nod, and Abigail knew she was telling the truth then. That was enough, for now.
“All right. I suppose I might get to see Abe for a moment on my way out of town today after a quick stop first. As soon as I arrive home, I’ll speak with my father about this. Perhaps he’ll know someone that can help Selah out of his predicament if Abe’s father will not.”

Thomas Williams might have only been a traveling doctor, but he had made many interesting contacts and connections among many of his visits. Hopefully, it would not be too much of a shot in the dark, but these were desperate times.

After a grateful hug from Anna, Abigail began to ready herself for the day’s travel once she was alone. Dressed in her freshly laundered dress, she made her way downstairs to have breakfast with Anna when one of the redcoats decided to join them. He was polite and kind enough, but the very presence of his red coat was enough to set them both on edge.

When she was ready to go, the two women walked outside together towards their horses so they could make the journey to town together.

Upon their arrival into town, Anna and Abigail went their separate ways, with the former heading straight to Strong Tavern while the latter found herself on the steps of the Setauket Presbyterian church.

With Cantor tied at the hitching post and grazing casually at the small patch of grass that was afforded to him, Abigail waited a moment before opening the large wooden door and let herself inside.

It was as if she had stepped back in time as soon as she set one foot inside the church. Nothing in the past six years had changed, not the strong, steady high rafters nor even the wooden floorboards underneath her feet. The integrity of the architecture remained simple and pure in its design. With few renovations, it was the church Abigail remembered well from childhood.

She was not alone in the church as it would appear. Standing at the dais before the pews stood Reverend Tallmadge, scouring over his Bible and taking notes on parchment. Every now and then he would lift his hand to adjust his spectacles, which would always slip down the bridge of his nose, an all too familiar sight indeed.

“A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace,” the reverend spoke, reading aloud from his sermon notes. He gave a quiet sigh with an ironic smile twitching across his lips. “I suppose this verse will do.”

“A very well chosen verse, I must agree,” Abigail remarked, holding back a smile when Reverend Tallmadge looked up from his notes, startled. “Ecclesiastes 3:8 if I am correct?”

The reverend removed his spectacles and pocketed them for safe keeping. “Correct. I am very relieved you’ve kept up with your Bible studies.”

“There isn’t much for a young person to do when all but two of her friends have gone off to fight for the ca… in the war,” she amended quickly, glancing around the church and wondering if she had been overheard by an unseen party.

“Don’t worry,” the reverend assured her. “There are no eavesdroppers here. It’s just you and I. For the moment at least.” He stepped away from the dais, rolling up his parchment and tucking it underneath his arm with his Bible cradled against his chest. “It won’t be for much longer, I afraid. Major Hewlett has set his sights on the church for being his new headquarters.” His expression soured at that. “A place of Tory business in a house of God! The nerve of that –”
He managed to catch himself before he said something he might regret, especially in the sanctity of his church. She watched sympathetically as the man regained his composure. “Pay no mind, I am merely a frustrated soul among a sea of—”

“Redcoats?” she interjected helpfully and grinned as the worn lines along his face eased as he let out a laugh.

“I would have chosen a different metaphor, but let’s go with your analogy instead. It’s quite an appropriate one.”

“Indeed.”

“So what brings you to Setauket, Ms. Williams?” he asked and then realized his error. “Mrs. Hawkins, my apologies. Forgive me, it has been quite some time since we last saw each other. I can recall my son Benjamin chasing you around the fields one afternoon after you threatened to take something special from him if he didn’t stop tugging at your curls.”

Abigail couldn’t help but ask, “Wasn’t that the summer before he went off to Yale?”

An amused grin spread across the reverend’s face. “I was thinking a few years prior to that, but you might just have a point there. Your playful squabbles never did quite fade as you both grew up.”

Ducking her head a little at his teasing, she knew as well as Reverend Tallmadge that her and Ben’s squabbles as he so phrased it had always been interesting events when they were children. However, as they transitioned into adolescence and then early adulthood, they were certainly more than inappropriate behavior between members of the opposite sex. But she knew from the fond expression on the reverend’s face that he was not being reproachful. In fact, he held that similar spark in his eye that her father always had whenever discussing that particular Tallmadge boy.

Nor did it help years ago she had overheard the reverend, in conversation with her father, saying how much of a daughter he considered her to be, suggesting he believed Ben would propose to her on his next visit over the Christmas break.

Ben never did.

Tucking a stray curl behind her ear, Abigail changed the subject back to his original inquiry. “I was visiting Anna at her tavern and spent the night at the Strong estate. I wanted to pay a visit to you before I traveled back home. My father always wanted me to give you his warmest regards. He misses our weekly dinners with your family dearly.”

Reverend Tallmadge smiled sadly. “Times have changed drastically these past few years, but we all must make our sacrifices.” He paused for a moment, thoughtful, before walking towards her and offered his Bible to her. “Give this to your father for me, and tell him he is always welcome in my church even though Setauket does not welcome his ideals.”

Understanding the meaning in his words, Abigail accepted the Bible reverently, running a hand across the well-worn spine of the holy book before clutching it to her chest. She promised him she would before he led her out of the church.

Just as they were stepping out onto the church steps, they caught onto what sounded to be a speech of some sort. The closer Abigail approached the source of the voice did she find Richard Woodhull and his son standing in the middle of town, with Abe resting his hand along the Bible and making the solemn oath to the crown. Just as Anna said he would.

Abigail gazed at the sight of father and son engaged in such a display in front of the townspeople and
British officials alike and felt the twisting sensation in her gut from yesterday worsening. The oath held so much more than a simple public reprimand for the son of the town magistrate who had gotten out of hand. Judging from the tension radiating from Reverend Tallmadge beside her, Abigail feared whatever the future held for Abraham Woodhull and what the future held for them all.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I’m so happy that many of you seem to be enjoying the fic so far! Here’s the second chapter! You can expect new chapters posted every week. Hope you enjoy! <3

“Abigail, may I speak with you for a moment?”

Moving her gaze from the book in her lap, Abigail looked up to see her father standing in the doorway of the parlor room. His expression made her close the book and set it on the table beside her. The expression was a mixture of determination and decisiveness, a rare look for her to be on the receiving end. Her curiosity transitioned to concern quickly.

“How could things be better, but that is not what I wanted to talk to you about. What you told me the other day, about your visit to Setauket… it concerns me greatly.”

Abigail nodded gently, understanding his feelings completely. She, too, was concerned for the small town and their friends within it. She had told her father everything that had occurred and had even implored him to have one of his contacts help release Selah. However, her father had admitted there was no one he knew that could save Selah Strong apart from Judge Woodhull himself, and they both had known that would never happen.

“As am I. The British presence in Setauket has increased significantly in the years we have left,” she commented. Her father’s house was just out of reach of Setauket, and she and Tobias were even less so. If the British felt inclined to expand their territory, in their mind they had every right to do so. How they had managed to slip by the Quartering Act she had no idea.

She observed as her father become more conflicted as he thought over his next words carefully.

“This is why I would prefer for you not to travel to Setauket anymore, at least not for the foreseeable future.”

Silent, the blonde blinked slowly, processing what he had just said. “I… I don’t understand. My friends are in trouble. They need our help. How can you ask this of me?”

“I’m not asking,” Mr. Williams stated flatly. The steely look in his grey eyes solidified he had already made up his mind. “It is dangerous for any man to ride alone to a British territory, let alone a woman. How you have made it there and back on so many occasions is astounding.”

“It’s called being careful.”

“It’s called sheer dumb luck. Honestly, Abigail, have you learned nothing from me your entire life? You need to protect yourself, first and foremost.”

“Which is precisely why you taught me to shoot at the age of twelve,” Abigail fired back, rising to her feet to meet her father’s gaze challengingly. “Which is why you’ve always told me to keep a pistol on my person whenever I travel, to carry some extra coins to pay someone off if I’m given any
trouble. You have taught me everything that I know.”

“Clearly, I haven’t taught you enough!” her father remarked bitterly, pinching the bridge of his nose. “I should have demanded you to move in with me the moment Tobias left for the war, instead of giving into your foolish stubbornness to remain here.”

Chest tightening with indignation, she retorted, “I refuse to apologize for abandoning my home just so that any person could just come along and seize it for their own purposes. I will not be driven out of my home.”

Her father’s face contorted with a mixture of irritation and fear. “There is much that I am willing to tolerate from you, but your insolence when it comes to your safety is not one of them.” He cut himself off from what was possibly a more expansive tirade by turning around abruptly and walking towards the bookcase across the room, giving him a moment or two to collect himself.

After a strained silence stretching out for several minutes, he spoke quietly, “You won’t be staying here for much longer. I’ve already made arrangements with your Aunt Claire in Dublin. You will be staying with her for the next few months, perhaps longer. For as long as the war persists.”

All of the air felt as if it had been sucked out of the room at his words. She could not comprehend anything else he was saying. The only phrases her mind could replay over and over “arrangements with Aunt Claire… Dublin…won’t be staying here…until the war ends.” It didn’t seem real. None of it seemed real to her.

What if one of her friends needed her, and she was gone? What if Tobias returned home to find his wife not in their home? What if she couldn’t get her letters to Ben?

“…Abigail?”

Abigail’s focus returned to the present at the sound of her father’s voice, much closer and more concerned than she was expecting. It appeared that he had been trying to regain her attention for some time, judging by the faint frustration laced in his voice.

“No,” she spoke softly.

Her father’s brows furrowed in confusion. “Pardon?”

“No,” Abigail said louder, refusing to meet his eyes. “I’m not going.”

“You don’t have a choice,” he remarked firmly, the decisiveness and irritation returning to his eyes. “The carriage will arrive by the end of the week. Iris and the other maids have already started packing your belongings for the trip per my request.”

Panic seized her as the realization struck her that her father’s words weren’t just words, they were a course of action, and he had already followed through. Clutching at his arm, she stared up at him and begged, “You cannot do this!”

“It’s already been done,” he spoke softly, though his eyes remained hard. “I’m doing this for your sake, Abigail. For yours and for mine.”

He stepped back, releasing himself from her grip, speaking about how he was late for a house visit to some sort of family name she was not familiar with, but she was only half listening. The only thing she felt as her father left the room was the hard pressure inside her chest, knowing that her world was on the verge of falling apart.
The moment Mr. Williams travel cart headed down the cobblestone road and out of sight Abigail eagerly encouraged Ichabod, the manservant, to have Cantor tacked up and travel ready as soon as possible. When he seemed reluctant to do so given her father’s strict instructions, she placed a small handful of coins into his slender hand for his trouble, and he immediately set off to do the task.

She had to speak with Anna about this, in person. It was too much to write in a letter, and she doubted the letter would reach the Strong estate in time before the carriage to whisk her off to Dublin arrived.

Her father’s house call was in a town in the opposite direction of Setauket, and he wouldn’t be expected to return until later that evening or perhaps the next morning. She suspected it would be the latter, given his cautious nature. There was plenty of time she could make it to Setauket and back without her father ever having to know, as long as the servants kept her in their confidence.

By the time she reached Setauket, the sky was painted in the warm hues of impending dusk. Instead of dismounting behind the woodshop as she had done days prior, she opted for the field just outside the town perimeter. She tied Cantor securely to a wooden post, giving him enough slack to graze until his heart was content, and walked into town, blending in with the crowd as much as she could.

When she reached Strong Tavern, she dared not to step inside, fearing she would run into Lieutenant Simcoe once again. Instead, she simply waited until she finally managed to catch Anna’s eye. She gave a small nod and proceeded to head out towards the fields where she had left Cantor, hoping her friend would follow.

Abigail was not by Cantor’s side five minutes when she heard the voice of Anna Strong say, “Two visits within three days. This is certainly a treat indeed.”

The blonde let out a mirthless laugh and noticed the playful smile fade from Anna’s face.

“Oh, I wish this visit was a pleasant one,” she said with sigh. She lowered herself onto what was once wooden steps for an entrance of some business that had once stood there. “I just really needed someone to talk to. And a letter would not have sufficed. I don’t have enough time.”

“What is it?” Anna asked urgently as she took a seat beside her, eying her with concern.

So Abigail told her everything, how she had told her father about the day’s events from her previous visit, how she had implored to him about Selah’s case and that he was unable to find someone to get him out, leading to the argument they had just engaged in earlier that noon.

“So much for your word of not returning to Setauket,” Anna remarked wryly. She nudged Abigail’s shoulder in an attempt to get a laugh from her and grinned a little as she succeeded.

“You cannot break a vow if you’ve never made one,” Abigail countered back with a small smile.

A light dusk breeze rustled the autumn leaves along the ground, swirling them around in a colorful cyclone, then falling gracefully to the ground as the wind gradually died down.

“He’s made arrangements for me to stay with my aunt in Dublin,” she confessed, sighing heavily. At Anna’s startled look, she continued, “I’ve already tried reasoning with him, but he refuses to budge on this topic. He’s concerned more for my safety than anything else, which I understand completely, but I find it highly ironic that for a man with such patri-”

She stopped herself short and corrected herself, dropping her voice so that only Anna could hear.
“For a man with such radical beliefs, that every man, woman, and child ought to protect our country, he is so quick to cast me off to the mother land!”

Carefully, as if not to spook her, Anna flipped the blonde’s hand over in her lap and laced their fingers together so that she could press her hand comfortingly. “I know this may not be what you want to hear right now – believe me, I understand your feelings and concerns about this – but perhaps your father is right about this.” At the blonde’s look of utter betrayal, she was quick to add, “If I had the opportunity to return to the land where my ancestors were from, at least for a time, while the war still rages on, I would like to think that I would take advantage of it.”

After a moment or two, Abigail looked back at her friend with a knowing smile. “You and I both know that you would not leave this place while our country needed our support.” Her smile saddened as Anna did not disagree with her. “So what am I to do while our men need us, while our country needs us?”

Neither woman could come up with a sufficient solution to her words or the dilemma at hand. With the time that remained, they instead discussed the latest developments in Setauket regarding the redcoats and the changes in the town. The discussion then eventually led to the Woodhulls, namely Thomas and how big he was growing. At the mention of Mary Woodhull, Abigail instinctively wrinkled her nose and muttered, “Mother Shrew,” causing Anna to toss her head back and laugh loudly. The sight alone had Abigail bursting into giggles as well. It was almost enough to make them forget that she would be leaving within less than three days’ time.

It was nearly nightfall by the time the two women parted. Their goodbyes were more tearful than usual, seeing as how neither of them were sure if Abigail could make it back to Setauket before her departure.

The journey home was miraculously a safe one, even with the amount of shortcuts she took to keep off the roads as nightfall descended. She could easily picture the outrage of all of the important men in her life at her alleged reckless behavior. As she could see it, she was only being practical.

Thankfully, Iris had delayed snuffing the flame of the front porch lantern, and seeing as how her father’s cart wasn’t present either, she was even more grateful.

Dismounting Cantor, she patted her horse fondly while passing him along to Ichabod to take him to the stables. She removed her cloak as soon as she was inside and folded it over her arm to take with her back to the bedroom to avoid her father’s suspicion the following morning.

She declined Iris’s offer (though really an enticement) of dinner and joked she would have a rather sizeable breakfast in the morning, affectionately pinching the younger girl’s cheek on her way to her bedroom.

Once settled in, Abigail found herself making her way down to her husband’s study, which held the finest quality of liquor. It had been Tobias’s idea to keep it in the study for whenever his parents decided to pay a visit. If they ever commented something particularly underhanded and upsetting, he found an excuse to retire to his study. Abigail approved this strategy.

She grabbed crystal glass from the table besides the cabinet and perused the selection with great care before deciding on whiskey as her drink of choice for the evening. With her glass in hand, she walked around the study, taking in lack of messy clutter that often accompanied the room in the past in the absence of her husband.

Taking a long sip from her glass, Abigail walked towards the desk and sat in the armchair, something she rarely did these days. She leaned back into the leather seat, shut her eyes, and just let herself
think. How was she going to get herself out of this situation?

When nothing came to mind, she opened her eyes and took another sip, pausing midway when she noticed a parchment half poking out from underneath a closed leather bound book.

She set her drink aside and carefully pulled the sheet from underneath the book. Her blue eyes widened. It was a recruitment flyer for the Continental Army. They were difficult to come by these days, especially in Rhode Island, and this close to Setauket!

Initially, she would have thought it was the old flyer from when Ben and Tobias had enlisted if it had not been for the date of 1776 in the corner.

That was when everything began to fall into place.

Her father’s insistence on sending her to Dublin to stay with his sister, the strange behavior he had been displaying for the past few days… it all made sense now in this light. Her father was enlisting into the Continental Army while his daughter was away in Dublin.

Numbly, Abigail downed the rest of the contents of her drink and rose to pour another, with the flyer still gripped in her hand.

She read over the flyer again and even the words aloud. “To all brave, healthy, able bodied, and well-disposed young men, in this neighborhood, who have any inclination to join the troops, now raising under General Washington for the defense of the liberties, and independence of the United States against the hostile designs of our brethren. Thomas Williams has many fine qualities of his character, but ‘healthy’, ‘able-bodied’, and ‘young’ are not among them!”

She tossed the flyer back onto the desk and took another hard swallow of whiskey, cringing and coughing as the liquor burned her throat.

Dizzily, she reached for the desk to balance herself after placing the empty glass to the side. The room was spinning and not just from the drinks. It all made perfect sense. Any other way she attempted to picture it, it all led back to this.

Tears prickled at the corners of her eyes. The longer she stared at the flyer, the blurrier it became. Blinking rapidly, she slid the parchment back underneath the book to its original location and proceeded to snuff out the candles in the study. It kept her mind vaguely preoccupied until she shut the door of the study behind her.

There was no way she would allow her father to do this. Mr. Williams was not well enough to serve, despite his physical appearance and youthful personality. His immune system had never been the strongest, and the cold affected him more easily than it did other men, especially younger. How would he last out in the battlefields? How would he survive the brutal winters?

Sleep did not come for Abigail that night as she lay awake in her bed. Her thoughts were plagued by different horrific circumstances of her father fighting with the rebels, each and every one of them more gruesome than the last.

Pushing back the sweat covered blankets from her body, she willed herself to think, to breathe. What use would she be to anyone if she could not think?

Somewhere between this thought and several other attempts to calm herself an idea began to emerge, one that made her sit a bit straighter. Maybe her father did not have to enlist in the army at all. He would not be able to if he happened to lose the flyer, which were a rarity these days due to the fear of it falling into the wrong hands.
By losing the flyer, she did not refer to burning it or tucking it away for safe keeping. No, what she intended to do was a much more compelling option.

Instead of going to Dublin, Abigail Hawkins would enlist in the Continental Army in her father’s stead.

Scrambling out of her bed, she fumbled about her quarters until she found a match and lit the closest candle. She brought it over to the writing desk and sat down to write down her thoughts as they came to her all at once. Writing them all down would help her organize her thoughts, but logically she knew she would have to make sure the documents were destroyed.

No longer would she be Abigail Hawkins. She would be Thomas Williams of Setauket, Rhode Island.

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Groggily, she stumbled out of bed the following morning. There had not been much time for sleep after she had spent the majority of the night organizing her plans. The little sleep she did receive was a still a blessing.

Knowing her father would arrive at any minute, she got herself ready for the day, changing from her nightdress into a simple plain green dress and had Iris assist her with the other essential dress workings. She had to bite her lip when Iris made the comment about the smell of smoke in her room, to which she had given a not so cleverly crafted explanation for the smell when in fact the true cause of the order was from the burnt parchment, whose ashes she had swept into the desk drawer.

Four primary measures of her plan needed to be accomplished before the week’s end in two days. First, she had to convince her father she came around to the idea of traveling to Dublin. The second component of her plan was twofold: convincing her father to allow Iris to accompany her to Dublin and convincing Iris to come with her. The purpose for Iris’s company would be for the younger girl to act as her double. Many people commented how eerily similar the two women resembled one another, which made the fact of Iris traveling to Ireland in her stead all the more perfect. Abigail believed the younger girl had relatives living somewhere relatively close to Dublin so she should not be too difficult to convince.

Third, Abigail required some items of her husband’s clothing to take with her – one to change into before arriving at the training base and another as an alternative for any unforeseen occurrence. She would also have to take in the items she would be borrowing by quite a bit of inches so that the clothes would not hang off her much smaller frame while at the same time not reveal too much of her womanly figure. She was also familiar with her measurements from her wedding dress fitting. All she had to do was be extremely generous and double those measurements for when she was assigned a uniform – if she even made it into the army.

Fourth, her long locks needed tending to. Ideally, she would not have to lose too much from the length, but her hair needed to resemble the average soldier’s hair length if she wanted to be successful with integration. Iris would have to take the honor of cutting her hair so she would not butcher the cut herself. However, this would only be after she confided in Iris about her true intentions.

Finally, the invisible fifth measure, required her father to be away on a house visit while the plan was executed. This would be where Abigail would draw in Ichabod as an accomplice. Ichabod would travel with Mr. Williams for an urgent letter requesting his presence in Philadelphia, a letter which would be forged by Abigail herself. This provided more than enough time to make sure Iris was dressed in one of Abigail’s dresses with her hair styled in the long, loose fashion Abigail often wore her hair. This was as much of a façade for anyone else who might spot the carriage on the way to the
boarding docks.

Abigail had two days to accomplish all of this. With this impending deadline in mind, the blonde headed downstairs while preparing herself for the many tasks at hand.

Mr. Williams arrived back at the estate at 7:00 o’clock sharp. The dining room table was already set for breakfast, and as soon as he walked through the door, the tantalizing smells of eggs, bacon, sausage, and bread greeted him like old friends.

Before they sat down for breakfast, Abigail pulled him aside and confessed she had not been able to sleep a wink last night, having felt overwhelming guilt for how she had spoken out of turn. She told him she realized the wisdom of his words and his decision and apologized tearfully for her part in the harsh exchange. Her father immediately wrapped her in a warm embrace and told her there was nothing for him to forgive, that he rightfully understood her concerns. She was his patriotic little girl and was so very much like her mother that it made his heart ache.

On her part, the emotions she had conveyed to him were not an act. They were very close to the surface of everything she was feeling, which made it easier for her cry. The guilt overwhelmingly made her feel worse when he brought up the memory of her mother.

During breakfast, they began discussing the plans for Dublin. As soon as she spotted Iris entering from the kitchen to pour their tea, Abigail suggested that she would like some company on her travels and suggested Iris to be that very person. The younger girl looked at her with a great deal of surprise and asked if she really wished for her company. Abigail assured her she did and mentioned that perhaps they could take a trip to visit Iris’s family in the country, informing her father of the servant’s Irish heritage. He agreed wholeheartedly, and Iris returned to the kitchen with a lighthearted bounce in her step.

Informing Iris her true intentions later that evening surprisingly proved to be one of the least trying tasks she had to accomplish. Initially, Abigail believed this take the most effort and time to convince her, which encouraged her to confide in the younger girl as early as possible. However, she was blissfully proven wrong when Irish had all but agreed to do it immediately. “I’m just excited I can see my relatives again, miss. I don’t mind practicing some deceit to get there,” were the girl’s exact words before Abigail enveloped her into a hug.

Late into the morning the following day, she began to work on taking in the inseams of her husband’s clothes, which proved more difficult than she had anticipated. It took nearly half the day to accomplish, but luckily, she managed. Once those were taking care of, she folded them carefully and tucked them into the satchel she would bring on her journey. The boots she required also came from her husband’s wardrobe.

Just before lunch, Abigail met with Iris and requested for her to cut a few inches off her hair while in the bathroom so that the mess would be more manageable. She didn’t realize she started crying until Iris set down the scissors after finishing with her hair. It was silly. She felt absolutely silly crying over something as trivial as hair. But the realization did not occur to her until the moment she saw long, thick, golden curls filling half the sink. Abigail’s once beautiful, flowing hair now rested just below her shoulder blades.

Wordlessly, she tied her hair back into a low seated bun.

After dinner, Abigail and Mr. Williams went their separate ways. He wished to observe the stars in the night sky as he so often did and walked out onto the front porch once Abigail made sure he had put on his heaviest coat.
Seizing this opportunity, she approached Ichabod when he was alone and told him of her plans. He was the one person she had trouble to convince, and if she had foreseen this occurring, she would have approached him first. But now they were running out of time with the carriage arriving early tomorrow morning. After approximately two hours, he begrudgingly agreed to her terms and agreed to give him the letter she had already forged the day before.

Hours later, Abigail was getting ready for bed when she heard a knock on her door. She got up to open the door and saw that it was her father standing there looking haggard and conflicted. He improved her of the impromptu call he must take in the morning and blamed Ichabod’s uncomely tardiness for not having providing him more notice. Knowing that he would be unable to see her off, he regretfully added he would have to leave first thing in the morning to leave for Philadelphia. Father and daughter exchanged their heartfelt goodbyes in a fleeting moment that felt too cruel for them both. Abigail felt extremely wicked since she had orchestrated this.

Before she knew it, the morning had arrived. Awaking with a strange sensation in the pit of her stomach, Abigail rose from her bed and looked out the window. Her father and Ichabod had left at first light and had been gone for some time. The carriage would arrive at any time now so she slipped into her robe and went to retrieve Iris.

Abigail’s belongings were already downstairs in trunks and boxes, which they both moved onto the porch for the driver to collect. She let Iris pick out the dress she wanted to wear and told her she could keep it after lacing up the finally stays on the dress.

When the carriage arrived, Abigail walked Iris downstairs but stayed behind when they made it to the front door. They embraced warmly before Iris nervously opened the front door and took her first steps into a brand new life. Abigail, meanwhile, walked heavily upstairs to begin for her own new journey.

After binding her chest to the point of nearly fainting, the blonde dressed herself in her husband’s clothes, which neither clung nor fell off her feminine frame. The boots were still too big, but with an extra padding of socks, they fit just fine.

Donning her father’s cap she had taken from his room, she finally faced the mirror. The stranger staring back at her looked vaguely like herself but not as well. She wasn’t entirely sure what to make of that, but time was no longer on her side to allow her to consider that.

Tucking the flyer into her front pocket of her coat, she reached for the satchel and slung the strap over her head so it rested along her back. Before he had left, Ichabod had already saddled and tacked Cantor for her so she could ride off as soon as she was ready.

She went to leave when she paused and walked over to her desk. Opening the door, she found the thick stack of Ben’s letters she had tied together inside. She bit her lower lip contemplatively before grabbing them and stuffing them into the very bottom of her satchel. She couldn’t leave them there in good consciousness.

Once they were tucked safely away, she shut the door to her bedroom, the door to her house, the door to her old life as she mounted Cantor. Feeling the every present warmth of her father’s pistol on her hip and the coin purse against the other, Abigail took a deep, steadying breath before inducing Cantor into a gallop.

And if she kept her most recent Ben letter tucked inside her breast pocket, no one would ever know it but her.
Chapter Notes

I'm so happy many of you are enjoying this fic! Things definitely pick up in chapter four, for those of you who may be wondering...

“Name, town and state of residence, age, and previous military experience.”

“Harrison Smith. Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Age fifty-five. I fought towards in the French and Indian War towards the end in the year 1761.”

“Name, town and state of residence, age, and previous military experience.”


“Name, town and state of residence, age, and previous military experience.”

“Henry Isaacs. Staten Island, New York. Age fifty-three. No prior military experience, but I have dedicated much of my crops to support our troops over the years.”

“Name, town and state of residence, age, and previous military experience.”

“Clarence Jones. Boston, Massachusetts. Age twenty-eight. No prior military experience.”

With each passing hour, Abigail lost track of how many men enlisted possessed no military experience. What she had been able to have a rough estimate were the startling age differences. Ever since she had arrived at the enlistment station, she had seen a man of every size, age, and color present. While the majority were white men, she did observe an increase in black men being recruited, though in a designated area separated from the rest of the men causing her to frown. If every man was here for the same purpose, why were there any separate enlistment lines at all?

She saw men from their early sixties to boys in their late teens step forward to provide their name, residence, age, and prior military experience. As noted previously, the vast majority of the men enlisting held no military experience, which was both alarming and unsurprising. These men’s current occupations – farmers, artisans, merchants, and other professional pursuits – hardly gave them the time to serve, seeing as how their livelihood greatly depended on their presence.

Standing in line, she heard a handful of men identifying as veterans state their previous military experience from the French and Indian war, ranging in years of experience between them, but those were men with greying hair and aging form. The men who had military experience lacked the advantages and benefits that came with being young, and the young, able-bodied and agile, lacked the advantages and wisdom of their elder counterparts, namely experience.

When she had arrived, the station was not as crowded with potential recruitments as she had anticipated. In fact, the numbers appeared to be at an alarming low. However, given the small turnout for recruitment, this gave the recruitment officers more time to interview each enlistee more thoroughly, leading them into a private space to discuss matters of what Abigail assumed to be compensation.
So far, blessedly, she managed to escape any suspicion in her current physical state. Having taken one of her father’s caps to better obscure her feminine features, she took a small comfort in the notion she had a piece of him with her along with his pistol.

Steadily, the line moved forward with Abigail falling into step with every slow trudge forward. She looked around and spotted her horse tied up to a hitching post, grazing languidly at the pile of way a few of the men had placed for their horses to eat. Both surprise and pride filled her chest when she noted Cantor had not kicked anyone yet.

Practically in the blink of an eye, she found herself second behind a rather large fellow in both height and girth. She could not see his face or anything else beyond his back, but with a quick upward glance at the back of his head, she determined he must have been at least in his early thirties, possibly later, and was pleased with herself to be proven correct when he gave his information to the officer. She felt herself breaking into a cold, nervous sweat as she realized she would be next. With bated breath and rising heart palpitations, she heard the scratching of a quill against parchment as the officer took down the man’s information. Her palms began to sweat at the sound of chair legs scratching along the wooden floor as the officer rose and asked for the man to follow him into a private room.

When there was no longer anyone in front of her to conceal her view, she did her best to remain stiff and alert in the hopes she did not appear as a nervous wreck as she felt inside. A long string of colorful epithets filled her mind, and she repeated them over and over as a mantra despite her previous nature of intolerance for the use of such language in her own vocabulary. But she had a sneaking suspicion that intolerance would disappear very soon.

There was only one officer remaining at the table, the others currently interviewing their prospective soldiers. He had yet to look up from his notes quite yet. It wasn’t until another officer and enlistee stepped out of one of the private rooms did he finally glance up and gestured her over. She walked towards the table with the heavy feeling of lead in her feet and a jittery sensation throughout her entire being.

“Name, town and state of residence, age, and previous military experience.”

Swallowing inaudibly, Abigail took a quiet breath before stating, “Thomas Williams. Setauket, Rhode Island. Age twenty-three. No prior military experience.” She paused for a moment before adding, “But I do have experience shooting.”

The officer was already writing down her information when she mentioned her shooting ability, pausing to look up and assess her for the first time. She fought back the urge to squirm underneath the scrutiny. “Livestock or people?”

The urge to narrow her eyes at the almost patronizing tone in his voice was a strong one, but she understood it. She had heard previous men admit to their lack of military experience and even less experience with handling guns. The officer’s skepticism, while irritating, was justified.

“A little of both, mostly the latter,” she remarked and was pleased at the slight surprised raise of his eyebrows. That was the truth, for the most part. She had shot livestock before but only when it was clear they were suffering and would never make a full recovery.

As for people, she had fired her pistol as a warning shot on some occasions on her lone travels home whenever she heard a suspicious rustling in the trees. One time, she had shot a man trying to steal Cantor after she had just tied him up to get a drink of water by a nearby stream. She had intended to shoot him in the thigh, but he had been in mid-turn towards her when she fired her shot. To this day,
she still wasn’t certain if she had shot the man in the groin. She would never know for sure since she hadn’t thought it wise to stick around and find out at the time.

Clearing his throat, the officer rose from his seat and asked for her to follow him into the available room for an interview. Adjusting her cap atop her head, she followed him inside and continued to stand as he shut the door behind them.

As he rounded the desk, the officer introduced himself as Lieutenant Wilson, one of the recruiting officers in the state of Rhode Island, and extended his hand to shake hers. Thankful for the weather permitting the use of gloves to hide the smoothness of her hands, she accepted the man’s hand and shook it firmly, mimicking how her father shook hands with other men.

“Before you have a seat, would you disclose any items on your person and set them on the desk,” Lieutenant Wilson requested. “It serves the interest of the Continental Army for you to do so.”

With a nod, Abigail removed the coin purse from one pocket and set it on the desk. At the officer’s curious look, she explained, “It’s always good to be prepared to pay someone off who may give you trouble.” She then pulled out her pistol and set it securely on the desk in front of him, adding, “And it is also wise to be prepared in case said wayward person is not interested in money.”

He reached over to inspect the pistol but not before asking, “Is it loaded then?”

“Yes, sir,” Abigail remarked, choosing honesty in the moment when she knew that would be hard to do from this moment forward.

Carefully, he took the pistol in his hand, turning it over as he inspected it. “It’s a rather small pistol. Light as well.”

“It’s much more readily concealed while traveling, which is especially useful if it isn’t your first course of action.”

Wilson made an affirming noise as he continued to inspect the gun in his hands. “Very logical, practical, too.” He then placed the pistol back where Abigail had laid it and opened a notebook to a fresh sheet of parchment with his quill at the ready. “So let us discuss enlistment and compensation negotiations. Understandably, most men prefer the shortest enlistment terms as possible with renewal periods, but Congress has recently made some revisions to the process and requires each enlistee to serve at least one year. But you are not limited to serve only one year. You may choose to serve for more than one year or even for the duration of the way, but that option is less popular—”

“The duration of the war,” Abigail insisted, not even taking the time to consider she had just interrupted a lieutenant of all people. The longer she could keep her father out of the war, but the better off he would be. “I would like to serve for the duration of the war.”

Lieutenant Wilson, clearly unaccustomed to hearing this request, instead of inquiring if she was certain about her decision, decided to move forward. “All right. Now onto the issue of compensation. Congress has also made revisions to this as well but nothing too substantial. You will be provided with a yearly stipend and land, the latter of which will be received you have carried out your enlistment, which in this case would mean not until the end of the war.”

“I don’t need any compensation,” Abigail remarked. She did her best not to fidget as he began to eye her with suspicion.

“Nonsense. Every man needs to learn a living and should be compensated for their efforts.”

“I don’t want any compensation. Serving my country and performing my duties is more than
compensation enough."

Sitting back in his chair, Wilson laced his fingers together and observed her with interest, trying to figure her out. “While that is quite noble of you to say so, Williams, you are still entitled to at least a stipend. We can negotiate something reasonable for you. Do you have a family to support?”

Abigail paused and then remarked, “No, sir.”

“No dependent relatives, siblings, parents or otherwise?”

The face of her father entered her mind, but she answered, “No, sir.”

As the officer wrote this down, Abigail took this time to compose herself and then finally remarked, “I’ll accept whatever compensation you believe is best. This is not about money or land for me. I want to do what is right and serve my country. That… that is all I desire.”

She couldn’t quite read his expression, but judging from the upward curve of his lips, she must have said something right to impress him. “I’ll take that under advisement,” he replied, making another note in his journal.

They settled into a discussion of what the next few days would hold. She and the rest of the enlistees would remain there for some rudimentary training, but they would be assigned regiments before the week’s end. It was clear from his tone that the army was in desperate need of men no matter if they were experienced or not.

Part of their training including three manuals which he handed her – Humphrey Bland’s A Treatise of Military Discipline, Timothy Pickering’s An Easy Plan of Discipline for a Militia, and “Sixty-fourth”, the 1764 regular British Army manual. In the morning, the group would then begin drill training, which essentially consisted of target practice and properly holding a musket.

Essentially, what Abigail took away from her interview with Lieutenant Wilson was she must teach herself as much as she can before she was throw out onto the battlefield.

As soon as she was dismissed, she rose to her feet to retrieve her coin purse and pistol so she could return them to their proper place and made a conscious effort to hold the manuals against her hip instead of cradling them to her chest as she was accustomed to as she was escorted to her temporary lodging.

The enlistee lodging consisted of a relatively moderate size log cabin, but its outward appearance was deceiving. When she stepped inside, the cabin was crowded with men in various stages of undress. She quickly averted her eyes and hid her flush underneath her cap as she followed through on the officer’s advice to find a bed before they were all taken.

Abigail finds the furthest bed away from the others as far as she could find, which truly was not saying much given the close proximity of the bunk beds. Fortunately, her bunk partner didn’t appear very threatening. Tall, slender, and lean with raven hair and pale skin, he looked rather young compared to the other men. She hazarded a guess he was younger than herself.

“Do you mind some company?” she asked lowly as soon as she approached the boy. She noted one of the manuals opened in his lap and smiled. None of the other enlistees seemed to be particularly bothered with them, especially the younger and middle aged groups.

Jumping slightly, the boy peered up startled only to smile in relief. “No, not at all. You can have the top if you’d like. I’m nervous about rolling off and falling onto my face.”
Abigail grinned and set her satchel on the bed to stake her claim. “Well, if I do roll off, feel obliged to use me as a rug when you rise in the morning.”

His laugh was muffled by the roaring laughter from the other side of the cabin. She couldn’t help but jump a little at just how loud the others were and hoped no one would notice. “You seem like the quiet sort. I’d prefer your company over those lot,” he remarked lowly for her ears only. “My name’s Christopher. Christopher Morgan.” He extended his hand out to her.

Setting her manuals on her bed, Abigail accepted his hand and replied in kind, “Thomas. Thomas Williams. And I second that sentiment.” She grabbed the title that Christopher was reading and tapped the cover lightly as she faced him. “Care for a study partner?”

The boy smiled gratefully and suggested that she grab her bunk before one of the scrawnier men tried to push their way over to it. Without thinking twice about that, she pulled herself up easily into the bunk. Years of mounting and dismounting Cantor’s impressively tall form had led her up to this very moment.

The next few days passed by in a blur of confusion and struggle of adjustment. The biggest lesson she learned thus far was perhaps the most important.

Men were horrible, boorish creatures.

Their mouths were just as foul as the rest of their behavior, namely flatulence, belching, and every other action society deemed unsuitable to be done in front of women. Oh, and their discussions about women were perhaps even more vile than their bodily functions. She once walked in on a conversation a man discussing a woman giving oral pleasure and immediately walked right out of the room as discreetly as she could.

When they were not busy with drill practice, if one could even call it that, Abigail and Christopher read their manuals together, taking turns quizzing each other. Sometimes, a group of the particularly disgusting men would mock them for reading when they should be out shooting. According to one of member of the group, “reading was for pussies and pansies.” It had taken everything inside her not to react in the manner she would have preferred and instead settled for rolling her eyes after they left. They did manage to draw in a few more men into their alleged study group. Harrison Smith, the French and Indian war veteran, Henry Isaacs, the Staten Island farmer, and Stephen James, the sixteen year old enlistee integrated into their group one by one. Harrison deeply appreciated their dedication and offered to provide any assistance he could for them, which Abigail and Christopher gladly accepted. Henry Isaacs had approached them one day, stuck on a particular passage in one of the manuals and asked for some clarification, and the four of them held a discussion about it.

Stephen James, the poor boy, was completely lost. The youngest enlistee of the entire station, he seemed so out of place and unknowing just where he belonged. Taking one look at him, Abigail immediately took him under her wing and encouraged him to join their group, hoping that he and Christopher would form a friendship over their common problem of being the youngest present. Call it womanly intuition or pre-motherly protectiveness, but she absolutely refused to let those disgusting men corrupt his soul.

To be fair, not all of the men were completely abhorrent. There were different levels that explained these men’s behavior: tolerable, somewhat intolerable, and absolutely unacceptable. Reference to the disgusting men fell into the final category, which referred to three men in particular (ashole soldiers as she would latter mentally refer to them). She considered Bartholomew, Jasper, and Decory to be the worst of the worst and did her best to avoid them whenever possible.

During times the men were allowed to rest, Harrison took their group to an empty field to offer some
extra shooting practice and other useful lessons from his experience in war. Being part of the oldest age bracket of enlistees, he was often subjected to ridicule of his age by the younger, immature enlistees, which was why he felt no qualms about not inviting them to these extra sessions.

Unaccustomed to shooting with a musket, Abigail particularly struggled with this during official practice, but she could hardly say she was the worst. When it came to lighter weaponry – namely pistols and other hand guns – she could hold her own against most of the men with the exception of the war veterans naturally.

Each and every lesson Harrison shared his experiences of the war, the battles in which he fought and the weapons they used. Abigail found herself growing more interested in edged weaponry and asked one evening if he would teach her about the most commonly used and how they were used. Sensing her desire to learn more, he agreed to teach her, starting with the bayonet, the commonest edged weapon utilized on both sides as it turned out. This made it easier for her instruction on to use them since they were most often attached to the musket. A blessing in disguise.

Before the sun had risen over the horizon that Friday morning, there was an urgent knock on the cabin door followed by the booming voice of one of the lieutenants ordering them to rise for the day and gather their belongings. For once, everyone in the cabin moved in synchronized fashion, dressing quickly and gathering their belongings in a timely manner before filing out of the cabin.

“Do you think we’re being assigned our regiments this morning?” Chris leaned and asked her quietly, voice cracking mid-question.

All Abigail could afford him was a shrug, unable to formulate a coherent thought, let alone a response for him and focused all of her energy on putting one foot in front of the other.

Soon enough they were all gathered along the edge of the open field. Abigail took in all of their saddled horses, Cantor included, and knew this would be more than regiment assignments.

“They mean to send us off this morning,” she murmured to no one in particular but was aware Christopher heard her as he gripped the strap of his bag nervously.

Lieutenant Wilson stepped forward and informed them this was their graduation day. After they received their assignments, each man would change into their own Continental Army uniform and rejoin their group to set out for their destinations. If they did not return, they would be hunted down and shot as a deserter.

“This is war, gentlemen,” Wilson proclaimed. “It is time to join our brothers and defend this land that is rightfully ours.”

Many of the sixty-five recruited soldiers cheered and hollered in solidarity, but Abigail remained silent, too stunned to even make an attempt. Glancing over at Christopher’s pale face, she knew she was not the only one. She give him a tight-lipped smile just as they were lined up by surname.

By the time the lieutenants made it to the letter M, Abigail never felt more alone. Stephen, Harrison, and Henry’s names were already called and assigned to separate regiments. She watched them each file back one by one in their new uniforms and accept their weapons before mounting on their horses.

When Chris’s name was called, she dug her nails into her palms to stop herself from reaching out to comfort him, seeing as how he was barely holding himself together as he received his uniform and headed towards the cabin to change. He had been assigned to the flying camp, which held no disclosed location. Only the soldiers assigned to the flying camp would know of its location.

Abigail couldn’t bring herself to make eye contact with him when he returned fully uniformed and
instead found Cantor’s head poking out from the herd of horses instead, ever the curious creature. She held back an amused snort. The thought she would always have Cantor provided her with a significant amount of comfort she hadn’t realized she needed until that very moment.

“Thomas Williams.”

Abigail nearly jumped out of her skin at the sound of her father’s name and quickly remembered that was her alias. There weren’t many of the recruitments left to assign, which meant there would be less of them she had to worry about changing in front of when she received her uniform.

Stepping forward, she held herself tall and straight, just as she and the rest have learned from their many study sessions. She could practically feel Harrison’s proud gaze at the back of her head.

“You have been assigned to the flying camp,” Wilson remarked. He passed the uniform to her with such reverence she was absolutely petrified of his reaction if she were to drop it.

“Make your country proud.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, repeating the words of those who had gone before her. Holding the uniform securely in her hands, she turned from the lieutenants and made the short trek towards the cabin. As soon as she was out of sight, she rushed inside, taking advantage of the temporary solitude to at least change out of her husband’s shirt and into the white undershirt that inevitably cover just above the knee, but that would also conceal the fact she lacked a certain appendage all of these men possessed while hiding two particular assets that many of them often coveted in their particularly foul discussions.

Shuddering at the thought, Abigail proceeded to layer herself in each of the pieces afforded to them, starting with the waist coat and ending with the breeches, which she heard was rather uncomfortable for men given the unfortunate design towards the nether regions. Luckily, she had given measures doubled her size and did not have a penis so she anticipated her comfort would be more than tolerable. Perhaps it was God’s way of offering her some reprieve from the week’s social adjustments.

By the time the next few recruitments entered the cabin to change, Abigail was mostly dressed in her uniform. After slipping into the new pair of boots, she rose from Christopher’s cot and reached for the coat. It was a remarkable shade of blue, a color that had always been her favorite. The rough fabric of wool greeted her fingertips as she lightly traced the material, observing the intricate pattern of the lapels, cuffs, collar, and the coat skirts.

Realizing she was dawdling the time away, she slipped her arms into the coat, shifting a little underneath the extra weight, which she would be appreciative of come winter. She hesitated for a moment before replacing her father’s cap with the cocked hat. That didn’t stop her from placing her cap into her satchel anyway.

Once she was presentable, she turned and headed towards the door when she recalled the letters stowed away in her satchel. She had been fortunate thus for as to not have any of the men rifle through her bag and discover them. Quickly and discreetly, she slipped them into her breast pocket of the coat, comforted in the knowledge the larger coat held larger pockets.

Abigail returned to the field where she received her musket and other weapons. She then walked towards Cantor and mounted him, trying not to be too eager to reach a part of her that was still familiar.

She met Christopher’s gaze and shared a brief smile of relief. At least they would be continuing their journey together. The unfortunate side was that Bartholomew, Decory, and Jasper were also
assigned to the flying camp. There were quite a few more men assigned to their group as well so she believed avoiding them would not be difficult.

Each group was led by one of the three lieutenants, and their group conveniently were led by Wilson. He did not exactly disclose the location of where they were headed but impressed upon them the importance to make sure to follow his lead.

Knowing being a follower wasn’t one of her horse’s favorite activities, Abigail forced Cantor towards the back of the group and prayed multiple times for God to give them both the strength to make it through the journey without an incident.

Her earlier sense of dread was slowly being replaced by a strange sense of purpose. She couldn’t explain the feeling or how she came to feel it, but this feeling calmed and soothed her anxiety, at least for the moment. Sensing her owner’s calm, Cantor latched onto it and did not put up a fuss, choosing to trot behind the rest of the horses easily.

For the first these past few days, Abigail felt hope, hope for herself that she could survive this and hope for the future of their country as they rode off to defend her.
By the time the group arrived at the flying camp site, it was nearly high noon. With only taking short breaks to rest their horses and themselves, they made the journey in nearly two days’ time.

Exhausted and famished, Abigail considered breaking off a piece of a carrot she had nearly forgotten about in her riding bag but refused to risk facing Cantor’s wrath, at least not in the horse’s line of sight.

For the most part, Abigail rode alongside Christopher, conversing with him whenever the opportunity presented itself. During one of their stops, Christopher had informed her the wonderfully boorish trio of men had given her a nickname.

She had been nearly afraid to ask, but the boy had told her anyway despite her inward hesitant reservations. “Pretty boy,” he revealed lowly for her ears only with a barely suppressed grin. Abigail frowned. “It’s supposed to refer to your small build and not quite feminine stature.” At her hard stare, he had lifted his hands in self-defense. “Their words, not mine!”

Instinctively, she wanted to be insulted, but the more she considered it, the less indignant she became, choosing to receive the moniker more as a backhanded compliment than the words clearly did not intend to be.

Men and their fragile pride never ceased to amaze her.

Throughout their journey, Abigail had wondered why their numbers had been so significantly smaller than the other assigned regiments at the recruitment base. However, upon their arrival at the site, she learned very quickly why.

The flying camp was just that: a temporary dwelling for soldiers to rest between missions before picking up and traveling back to their authentic camp.

Neither Abigail nor the other men were aware of the current mission these soldiers were on. All they were aware of was what Lt. Wilson had told them previously, that they would be informed by a General Charles Scott, whoever that was.

The group dismounted a few yards away from the site and walked the rest of the way by foot after being greeted by a handful of soldiers ready to herd their horses with the others. Before Cantor could attempt to snort his discontent, Abigail snuck him the last carrot from her riding saddle to appease him. She wished she could say the same thing for her own stomach. Lucky beast.

They were then led to a small area intended as a dining area, which mainly consisted of men sitting on logs with plates balanced on laps and cups resting precariously close to the edge of their log. Each of them were offered a plate, though rations were running low since they had arrived just at the end of lunching hour.
None of them complained, not even the trio, who all but wolfed down their food the second they had their hands on it. Abigail just stared at them in shock until she felt Christopher elbow her in the side to keep moving.

She sat next to Chris, carefully balancing her plate in her lap while instinctively fighting the urge to pounce on the food like her other male companions. Years of societal etiquette ingrained in her a certain decorum, which included eating. She knew giving in and scarfing her food down would only enhance her alias, but that would have to be something to work on. For now, she took a bite of her biscuit in measured bites, forcing herself to chew slowly and savor the taste instead.

After a brief survey of the camp, she spotted Lt. Wilson stepping into what she could only assume was the general’s tent, judging from two soldiers stationed directly outside. She tried her best to recall all of the things she had learned from the manuals and lessons from the recruiting base, knowing that understanding the chain of command would serve her well, no matter how ridiculous she secretly thought of the bureaucratic nonsense of it.

“…can you believe it? The demotion hasta’ve gotten to ‘im.”

“It’s not an official demotion, you bollock. Where do you get your information from?”

“Ya know Charlie? He’s the one who told me –”

“The wash boy? Fucking idiot wouldn’t know his head from his arse. No, I get my information from one of those fellas over there.”
Picking up on the conversation, Abigail threw a cursory glance behind her, noting the two gentlemen, if they could even be called that given their current disheveled state, speaking to each other in hushed tones not too far from her. She happened to look back just in time to see what the man pointed in the direction of his informant and looked in the direction of his hand. It had to be directed towards one of the two soldiers guarding General Scott’s tent.

Needless to say, their conversation captured her interest.

The one who pointed dropped his voice lower, causing Abigail to strain to eavesdrop without bringing attention to herself. She kept her gaze on her plate, poking at the leftovers with her spoon. As she was listening, she was vaguely aware of Christopher “discreetly” sneaking food from her plate, but she couldn’t be bothered to acknowledge it, too engrossed in this intriguing camp gossip. And on her first day nonetheless!

“…There’s talk of court-martiauling him, but he doubts they’re gonna do anything of the sort. The boy’s too valuable an asset, and they’re in desperate need of men. Why do you think we’ve got this new lot?”

She held back an indignant sound at that but knew the soldier had a point. There had been rumors that the Continental Army were running low on supplies and men, and it appeared that it was certainly true in the case of the latter.

The one with the thick Scottish accent remarked, “But dontcha think if he fucked up that badly there would be somethin’ done to him? It’d serve the little bastard right, him and the General as a matter o’ fact.”

“Would you shut your stupid trap, man?”

“I’m not gonna apologize for sayin’ it, seeing as how he rose through the ranks so bloomin’ quickly while the rest o’ us have been servin’ for years before he even enlisted.”
She wasn’t sure if the other man had slapped a hand over his companion’s mouth or had shot him a dirty look. Either way, she was engrossed and tore off a piece of her bread to eat, the one thing on her plate she absolutely refused to let the boy swindle from her.

“James, if you don’t shut the fuck up –”

“- why should some Yale educated little prick outrank us?”

Abigail looked around the dining area and wondered how the other men did not appear to hear any of this. The trio were too busy discussing topics among themselves while the rest of the men continued to scarf down their food. Even Christopher, who was sitting right beside her, was too busy enjoying his meal to pay even the slightest bit attention.

There was a slight tussle behind her, prompting her to give another cursive look behind her. The man dragged who she presumed to be James passed the group towards the edge of the woods so they could continue their conversation. If she wanted to hear the rest, she needed to find an excuse to pursue them.

Downing the contents in her drinking cup, she told Christopher she was off to find some water to refill her canteen. Before he could say anything else, she slid him her plate to finish off and headed off in the direction towards the stream she had spotted on their way to camp, which so happened to be in the direction of where the two men had traveled.

Fortunately, the stream was just in earshot of the men’s conversation. It was clear to Abigail’s ears James was on the receiving end of a verbal lashing.

Squatting down near the edge of the stream, she took her time filling the canteen with water while she resumed her place in listening to their conversation.

“… talk like that could land you into a whole out of trouble,” remarked the second man, who sounded very irritated indeed, “and the last thing we need right now is more trouble. The army’s barely holding on by a thread as it is.”

James hissed harshly, “How much longer do we have to be o’erlooked by newcomers, Matthew? Does it not bother you at all?”

“I didn’t say it didn’t bother me. What I’m telling ya is to keep your head, mate, otherwise you might not have a neck. Ears are listening in this camp. Anything heard by the wrong person could land you in massive shite.”

“… but that Tallmadge boy –”

Abigail froze, nearly dropping her canteen into the stream. No, that wasn’t possible. They couldn’t be referring to…

“Captain Benjamin Tallmadge is the least of our troubles right now. Let’s concentrate on getting through this war in one piece. Focus on taking your aggression out on some bloody redcoats. It’ll do ya some good.”

Hearing the rustle of leaves behind her pulled Abigail out of her shocked trance. She quickly screwed the top back onto her canteen and practically dived into the nearest bush just as she spotted the two men stepping beyond the cluster of trees, having narrowly missed being caught listening to them.

She sat there for a moment, perhaps longer than a moment to let the weight of their words sink in, to
let the reality of her situation fully hit her. Of course she had been assigned to Benjamin’s regiment. Of bloody course she had. Why wouldn’t God find form of amusement during this war for Himself? For the first time in her life, she allowed herself to murmur the words “fucking fuck” underneath her breath and ran a hand over her face anxiously. She had never sworn a curse in her life, but the occasion was more than appropriate for it.

There wasn’t much to be done to remove herself from the situation now so she began to contemplate her options. First, she could find Ben and reveal herself to him, hoping against all hope he wouldn’t expose her. While risky, that appeared to be her most reasonable option. Or.

Or.

She could avoid him like the plague as much as she was physically capable without having any confrontation. Unrealistic and untimely but certainly more appealing than the first option.

Decision made, Abigail carried the plan out for the rest of the day and well into dusk. She was extremely surprised and a little bit pleased with herself to being as successful as she was, but she had a feeling the success was due to Ben’s unknowing role in the avoidance than her own determination and paranoia. Whatever trouble he had found himself in must have influenced his presence or lack thereof in the camp. Worry filled her thoughts along with her surprise and hoped, despite the intentions of her avoidance tactics, she would catch a glimpse of him so that she could see for herself that he was fine.

But she really should have remembered the phrase be careful what you wished for.

No sooner did the sun begin to set, all of the soldiers were ordered to gather in the middle of the camp site, both the old and the newly recruited. Lt. Wilson stood in line with his fellow officers, including the man she assumed to be General Charles Scott. Ben stood towards the end of the line furthest from her, but that didn’t prevent her from trying to hide behind the taller soldiers, which wasn’t a difficult task to accomplish considering she was most likely the shortest soldier there. The only exceptions to the rule were some extremely young looking soldiers who she nearly suspected were secretly twelve years of age.

The man whom she assumed was the camp’s general stepped forward and introduced himself as General Charles Scott. He gave a rousing speech of patriotism and thanked them for serving their country with such passion a soldier somewhere towards the back led a rallying, if not somewhat boisterous cheer. Abigail couldn’t help smiling as the rest of the men followed suit with their own.

After a few moments of the tolerated hoopla, Ben stepped forward after being introduced by General Scott, and it was like the air was completely sucked out of the camp. Not for the other men, no, they were still murmuring among themselves as they came down from the excited cheer. The only one that felt breathless was Abigail, who was all too aware of the young captain’s every step now that he was in front of them.

She hadn’t seen or spoken with him much since the Christmas of ’70. The last moment she had seen him properly had been at her and Tobias’s wedding the following year. Tobias had asked him to serve as his best man. That one very painful dance they had shared at the reception had been the last time she had ever been in close proximity to him, before life had chosen to take them in separate directions.

Standing before her, Benjamin Tallmadge appeared the embodiment of a young lion, strong, confident, and accomplished in both his stance and appearance. Taking in his uniform, she noticed he was not just any other soldier. He was a man of importance, and sensing from the way he held himself, he had earned his place, no matter what she had overheard from those two bitter fools. Time
might have placed an ocean of distance between them, but even she could see he was still the same boy she had always cared for. He was still her Ben.

Although in many respects, he truly wasn’t.

Ben had had a look of mild displeasure at the general’s introduction – “Captain Benjamin Tallmadge, one of our youngest and most promising officers, has led some missions into the field but will now be assisting with the integration of the new recruits for the time being” – and Abigail couldn’t blame him. She had barely concealed her own frown at the man but then the words he had just spoken and settled in – “will now be assisting with the integration of new recruits…”

Fuck.

After introducing himself, Ben accepted a roll of parchment from one of the camp servants and announced, “When I read the name from the list, step forward and identify your presence. Recruits’ names shall be read off first.”

Cursing inwardly, Abigail dug her nails into the palms of her hand to keep from repeating the words aloud. Not only would she have to step forward and draw attention to herself to all of the camp and then to Ben, but she would also have to do it sooner rather than later. Holding back any nervous sounds threatening to tumble out of her – though she was nearly certain it would have been a scream – she maneuvered herself so that she was with the group of her fellow recruits, which ironically only brought her closer to Ben. Brilliant.

There were only ten recruited soldiers in total with the inclusion of herself. After Ben read the first name from his list, she realized the names being read off were in alphabetical order, but not only were their names being called, where they were coming from were also being read off as well.

“Christopher Morgan of Boston, Massachusetts.”

Christopher stepped forward when Ben reached his name and announced himself, “Present, sir!” And God bless him, he was the only one so far that gave a salute. She was nearly embarrassed for him but was comforted by the small smile Ben offered the boy before calling out the next name.

There were only a three more men in front of her, and she tried her best to shake off her nerves. Resolve was her only friend to her, and she chose to embrace it wholeheartedly. What other choice did she have?

Her heart leapt inside her chest as the last male recruit in front of her stepped aside. Now she was face to face with Ben or rather soon to be face to face. He had glanced down at the parchment to read off the next name but paused, brows furrowing in some unidentified emotion.

“Thomas Williams… of Setauket.”

To the outside observer, the words seemed calm and controlled, if only oddly enunciated. However, Abigail knew far better. To her ears, the words sounded choked and restrained, and a wave of guilt nearly knocked her over. He must be thinking my father enlisted, she thought to herself with no small amount of grief. He must think with my father gone that I would be all on my own.

Her father never would have survived the war if she had allowed him to enlist, which was what gave her the courage to mimic the actions of the recruits before her and step forward, arms held straight at her sides. Consequences be damned.

“Present, sir,” she spoke once she could find her voice.

Almost as soon as the words came out of her mouth, Ben’s head snapped up from the list, his eyes
locking with hers. She held onto his gaze steadily while inwardly fighting to maintain her composure. Those blue eyes of his pierced her own, breaking briefly to assess her face and taking her in before returning to meet her gaze.

It felt like an eternity held them in that moment. She waited with bated breath, not knowing what course of action he would take, because in that moment she knew that he knew. Once their eyes locked, she should have known it was all over. A long time ago, she had attempted to scare him on All Hallows’ Eve, but he had caught her in the act, ruining her fun. When she had asked how he had known, he had confessed he could “recognize those eyes of yours anywhere.”

Why were his eyes so damned blue?

After drawn out pause, Ben gave her a short nod and turned to the servant behind him for the list of enlisted soldiers’ named.

A strange whooshing sensation flooded her ears as relief flooded through her body. He kept her identity concealed.

Ben protected her.

With shaky limbs, she forced herself to move over to the recruited soldiers’ group to stand beside Christopher, barely aware of him patting her on the shoulder in solidarity. She glanced over at him with a tight lipped smile, but a part of her felt what had transpired was nowhere near over.

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With the acquirement of the new recruits, the General required for some of them to bunk with another soldier for the time being, at least until they could make it back to the official camp base. Abigail all but latched onto Christopher in declaration as his bunkmate, and funnily enough, he had been just about to do the same. The camp was already running low on supplies so sharing tents temporarily would help alleviate some of the pressure.

She and Chris set up their tent together with the boy more or less telling her what to do since she could not recall the last time she had ever pitched a tent before – which was never, in more ways than one. Clearly.

Throughout the entire process, Abigail sensed she was being watched. It was like a pressure along the back of her neck without the presence of anything against her, not necessarily unpleasant but distracting nonetheless. It was so distracting near the end Christopher ended up taking over and only letting her help move their things inside once the tent erected.

No sooner had they finished setting up their cots were they summoned back to the center of the camp. The recruits were paired off with experienced soldiers to patrol the perimeters at different shifts. Christopher was part of the first group for the first shift and returned to his tent to retrieve his musket. Abigail was assigned to the second group and held the morning shift.

Right when they were dismissed, Abigail caught Ben’s eye. For the first time since roll call, he did not look away. Instead, he gave a slight tilt of his head and walked inside his tent. Realizing that she was expected to follow, Abigail waited a beat before walking in the direction of his tent, pausing right outside to collect herself before pushing back the thick material and stepping inside.

Ben’s back was facing her when she let the tent flap close behind her, but she didn’t need to see his face to observe how he was feeling. His shoulders were tense and rigid from some repressed emotion. He was pinching the bridge of his nose and somewhat hunched over, indicating the severity of his frustration.
She knew better than to say anything to fill in the moment so instead removed her cocked hat and placed it lightly on his desk to alert him of her presence.

It took another prolonged moment of silence before she heard him murmur, voice strangled, “What were you thinking?”

Abigail opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out, though she doubted the question wasn’t rhetorical as he finally turned around to face her. He wore an expression of such anger she was not accustomed to seeing. To say it startled her was more than an understatement. “How did you even get through recruitment? Hell, how did you even find out where the recruitment station was?”

She had a feeling he would have thrown his hands in the air in frustration if that was a characteristic of his nature, but he refrained from doing so. He then gave a short, ironic huff of laughter. “I would ask if you were even thinking at all, but it’s clear to me there was plenty of forethought going into this plan of yours.”

“Of course there was a plan,” Abigail found herself retorting, though she was vaguely aware there had possibly been a compliment in there somewhere. “Would you think I would do something like this without one? How stupid do you think I am?”

“In previous experiences, the thought would have never crossed my mind, but today, I would say extremely,” Ben remarked, tone equally clipped and sharp yet quiet.

Her eyes narrowed. “You don’t know the lengths I went to in order to come here so excuse me for not tolerating what you just said to me. And before you can accuse me of any other false accusations.”

She paused at his second huff and walked over to him so that they were practically nose to nose – or they would have been if he wasn’t nearly four inches taller than her. “I did this for my father. He… he intended to enlist, and I couldn’t let him. I found the flyer in the study and figured it out. I couldn’t let him do this. He’s not as well as he claims to be.” She looked away when she felt tears threatening to brim but forced them down. This was no place for tears.

There was a soft touch underneath her chin and a gentle nudge so that she was now looking up at him again. Ben’s fingers had brushed along her chin to coax her to look up at him, his thumb unconsciously brushing against the soft skin there. Though his face still expressed his anger, his eyes were much softer, less of a stormy grey has they had been moments prior.

Being so close to him and seeing that look in his eyes compelled her to tell him everything, about how her father had intended to send her to Dublin to stay with his sister and how she had manipulated the situation to her advantage to disguise her absence. With each passing detail of everything she had done, she could see the conflicting emotions across his face, but in the end, she knew she could trust him. If there was one person in her entire life she could confide in and trust completely, it was Benjamin Tallmadge. He had always been her person.

“And no one knows you’re here,” he remarked quietly, though the statement was phrased more like a question in his tone.

“Apart from Ichabod and Iris, the latter who traveled to Dublin in my stead, no one else knows I’m here,” Abigail confirmed. She paused before amending quietly, “No one else but you.”

Squeezing his eyes shut, Ben clenched his jaw, taking a breath to process everything she had just confessed to him. Despite everything, she pitied him. It was quite a lot to take in, especially for someone in Ben’s position, an officer in the Continental Army to deal with something as precarious
“I won’t reveal your identity to anyone,” he promised finally after several minutes of silence. It sounded as if it greatly pained him to speak the words. “It’s too late for anything to be done about it now. The consequences would be too severe even if I were to say anything. I won’t risk your safety.

“But, you must know, there is very little I can do to protect you. General Scott has essentially made me his personal secretary after I recently disobeyed an order from his command.”

Abigail’s eyes widened. So her information from the other soldiers had not been too far from the truth then. “How much trouble are you in?” she asked urgently.

“I’m not entirely sure, but I can’t disclose much more beyond the situation until it gets rectified,” he said, dropping his hand from her face in favor of reaching down to touch her hand in an attempt to provide her some comfort. “It’s not myself I’m concerned for at the moment. I’ll do for you what I can, but I can’t protect you as long as I’m –”

She shook her head. “I don’t need your protection, Ben. I just need your word.”

“You already have it.”

“I know.” She smiled softly, reaching up to touch his face but rethinking the action and letting her hand fall back to her side and took a few slow steps back. “I suppose if we’re done here I should probably go. Don’t want to start any more rumors about you.”

Puzzled, Ben raised an eyebrow. “Any more rumors about me?”

She recounted the conversation she had overheard between the two soldiers when they had arrived at the site, informing him of more or less of what they said minus the profanity and exact phrasing of the insults. “I don’t think they intend any harm, but I think you should still keep an eye out for them,” she concluded, observing how the tightness in his shoulders returned with a small frown.

“Did you happen to catch their names?” he asked tiredly after running a hand through his hair.

Squinting thoughtfully, she mentioned hearing them address each other as James and Matthew but not hearing anything pertaining to surnames. She grabbed her hat from where she had placed it on his desk and turned to leave his tent when he commented after a moment, “You cut your hair.”

Abigail stepped right at the closed flap of the tent, remembering all too well the playful affinity he had always held for her hair, having always tugged on her curls to annoy her as children or to tuck a stray curl behind her ear simply out of affection. The once long golden locks were now gone and replaced by a short braid that barely passed her shoulders.

With a small, sad smile over her shoulder, she replied in a half-hearted attempt at jest, “We all must make our sacrifices, don’t we?” before placing the hat back onto her head and stepping into the crisp autumn night.
Autumn gave way to winter’s bitter cold, orange and red leaves lying frozen underneath blankets of snow. This wasn’t the only transition Abigail had difficulty adjusting to. In fact, it was perhaps one of the easiest of them all.

The knowledge of having to learn as one would go rather than receiving any semblance of the training the British gave their troops didn’t make the transition to Continental Army any easier. In fact, it felt more of a hindrance than anything else, at least initially. However, as the days had worn on, she had found a way to turn this into a strength, seeking out advice from more experienced soldiers and observing their routines to better herself but only from the ones that were mostly agreeable and tolerating of her questions.

The only change she had not been able to adjust to completely was her relationship with Ben, or the lack thereof one. Logically, she knew no one could know of their friendship, which would only lead to more questions than were needed.

There had been a few stolen moments periodically, but those moments were filled with information Ben had felt it was vital for her to know, such as who to approach and not to approach within officer ranks and the importance of the military hierarchy. Apart from that, they had little to discuss with the other. He was often busy doing General Scott’s bidding while she was either often on patrol with her assigned group or with Christopher, though a part of her wondered if the fact their group remained so close to camp on their patrols had anything to do with Ben’s interference but never had the chance to pose her inquiry to him.

By the time December arrived, the regiment had returned to the Continental camp base. Integrating into the larger base was much more overwhelming than the flying camp had been, but as with everything else she had faced, adjustment was necessary, the sooner the better. It was very similar to the flying camp but only more. More men, more officers, more rules and information.

She did her best to avoid Caleb Brewster whenever she could as well. As close as they were growing up, it would be unwise to have anyone else know about her in the camp, at least that was what she and Ben had agreed upon. Well, perhaps not verbally. It wasn’t something that they explicitly stated. If Caleb did know of her identity, he would have found her straight away, and if Ben had shared her identity with Caleb, Abigail trusted he would confide to her that he did so or at least discuss it with her before telling him.

To be perfectly honest, avoiding Caleb was a complete and utter nuisance. The man was always everywhere! If she spotted him in the distance or approaching the area she was in, she had to find a way to get herself out of there before he could catch a glimpse of her. All it would take would be one look at her face, disguised or not, and he would know. He wasn’t a stupid man. Wait, correction. He wasn’t a blind man.

Caleb Brewster had always been stupid in the most impossible ways. It was one of his more endearing qualities, oddly enough.
Christmas Eve in the Continental camp was hardly the Christmas Eves she had been accustomed to. The wind was cold and biting, nipping at any exposed necks or any patches of skin not covered by the heavy wool fabric of the army coat. Snow, once always so magical and pure, seeped into the soles of well-worn boots, threatening to expose one’s socks to their same fate. The once merry carolers singing Christmas songs were replaced with drunken and belligerent men who sang off key, only pausing when an officer arrived to reprimand them and picking up right where they had left off as soon the officer was out of sight.

Abigail fought back a frown as she bypassed the boisterous group, not wanting to draw any attention to herself as she trudged her way through the snow. She could feel the frigid slosh seeping into her soaks and bit her lip to keep herself from swearing. Ordinarily, she would have promptly stopped right then and returned to her tent to quickly remove her boots and socks to revive her rapidly numbing feet, but there was a task she needed to see through so she persevered despite her toes’ throbbing protests.

Tucked away inside her inner coat pockets was a thick stack of letters, tied together with coarse string of twine. The three hundred sixty-six letters rested firmly against her chest as she subtly tightened the coat around herself to shield herself from the cold. Their presence both comforted and unnerved her, a complicated but appropriate combination of emotions given the decision she had impulsively made on what to do with them.

She didn’t even give herself time to gather herself when she reached his tent. If she had, the opportunity to not do what she had intended would have been too appealing.

With only a gentle tap to announce herself, Abigail waited until she heard Ben’s permission to come in before stepping inside, letting the tent flap close behind her.

She turned around just as Ben rose to his feet. Neither of them spoke a word, unsure of where to start off first. The last time they had gotten a chance to speak privately had been sometime the previous week, and even then, it had only been brief. She missed his company terribly.

“I… wanted to congratulate you on your reinstatement as captain,” Abigail found herself saying when it was apparent neither of them knew what to say to each other in that moment, a rarity given how often they used to bicker and banter about the smallest of things growing up.

The small smile offered to her in response was nearly enough to lead to her undoing, but somehow, she managed to maintain her composure, an admirable quality she rarely thought herself capable of possessing. “Thank you, though it only provides a small comfort at the moment.”

Abigail frowned softly. “But I thought you said…”

“Without the official title and approval from General Scott, there was little I could do in the camp, at least on an official basis,” he paused for a moment, as if unsure of if he should confide in her the words that appeared to be on the tip of his tongue. However, it appeared that a part of him already had his mind made up from just one look at her. “Just because he gave my position back doesn’t mean I’m necessarily out of the woods just yet. So to speak.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, doing her very best not to wring her hands in worry for him. “If there’s anything you ever need me to do –”

“I won’t have you risking yourself for me –”

Abigail carried on as if he had not interrupted her, which had happened all too often in their youth, a tale nearly as old as time itself, “– I’m here for you. Always.”
Those words were too much and too simple all at the same time, a complicated mess of things she always managed to find herself in, especially lately. They didn’t feel as if they expressed enough of what she was feeling, while at the same time she never felt more exposed.

“I know,” he remarked after a brief silence, expression torn between veiled and soft.

Before she could let herself feel overwhelmed, she glanced down to run her fingers over the material of her coat, restless. “I have to admit though that my intentions of coming to your tent weren’t completely congratulatory. It’s Christmas Eve, and I didn’t feel right not giving you something, especially because it’s been years since the last time we spent Christmas together at all and –”

“Abigail, you’re rambling.”

“I…” She looked up sharply to see him still looking at her all fond and narrowed her eyes at him. “Shut up.”

Ben lifted his hands in surrender, though the appearance of his grin ruined the gesture. Damn him.

“Well, anyway,” she continued after an amused shake of her head despite herself, “I figured I should give you something, so I thought I would give you these.” Without pause, she reached inside her breast pocket and withdrew the thick stack of letters. She wasn’t aware of just how warm they had been keeping her until she removed them from her coat, leaving her with a vaguely empty, vulnerable sensation.

She watched him take a step forward, eying the stack of letters in her hand with no measured ounce of curiosity and focused her gaze on the letters, turning somewhat sheepish. “These are letters that I’ve written to you but never sent. I never knew precisely where you were, so there was no way of me knowing where to send them. There should be three hundred sixty-five of them. Well, more like three hundred sixty-six. There’s a more recent one at the top but…”

She stopped herself mid-rant, knowing she risked another teasing remark from the captain before her, and thought it best to stop herself there, at least momentarily. “I know these aren’t much of a Christmas present, but I thought you should have them,” she added softly, instinctively reaching up to tuck a curl behind her ear, only to recall the lack of them flowing past her shoulders and immediately lowered her hand back to her side.

When she received no reply, she hesitated a glance up and noted with some surprise his gaze remained transfixed on the letters held in her hand. A part of her wondered if he had even heard her.

“…Ben?” Another pause. She frowned. “Benjamin.”

“… a whole year’s worth of letters?” he asked weakly, staring at the letters with such an unreadable expression Abigail nearly wanted to take them back and bolt.

Instead, she answered, “Yes, plus one of course, but that was a few days before I left Setauket for recruitment.” She nearly admitted to having written more over the years, perhaps not another three hundred sixty-five of course but still a significant amount, but sensing how he appeared to be overwhelmed by the ones she was presenting to him, she decided to keep that information to herself.

Deciding to take the initiative, she took a step forward and then another until she was standing directly in front of him. She was just about to reach out to take his hand so she could pass him the letters when he accepted them from her, her proximity possibly triggering the action, of that she wasn’t certain.

His fingers brushed hers, and it was like a spark ignited underneath her skin, warming her in ways the wool coat hardly ever did. Breath hitching quietly, Abigail cautiously retracted her hand after
passing along the letters to him.

“Merry Christmas, Benjamin,” she wished him with a smile. Or as merry as one could be during times such as these, but those words weren’t necessary to speak, especially now.

“I… Merry Christmas, Abigail,” he returned softly, struck with the generosity of her gift. By the time he managed to lift his gaze from the letters in his hands, she was already gone.

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A few nights had passed since Abigail’s gift, and Ben had yet to read the letters.

It wasn’t that he held no desire to read them. That was the furthest from the truth. Truth be told, his desire for the knowledge of each letter’s contents nearly drove him mad with each passing day he was unable, either from his official duties or from his fear of anticipation of what the letters contained. The latter of which was completely ludicrous, and he was completely conscious of this fact, but that still didn’t mean it was untrue.

Fed up with his uncharacteristic indecision, he slipped the top letter from underneath the twine holding the stack together and sat on his cot, holding the letter in his hands. Finally, progress at last.

Running his fingers over the crinkled edges of the envelope, he turned it over in his hands and broke the wax seal before he could talk himself out of it and then pulled out the folded sheet of parchment from its sheath. The familiarity of Abigail’s neat, concise handwriting nearly knocked the wind out of him.

Benjamin,

So much time has passed since the last time I have written you. I’m–

“Tallmadge,” the voice of the urgent soldier quickly pulled Ben away from the letter and back into the world of the camp. Folding the letter quickly, he sat up in his cot, noting the urgency from the younger man. “On your feet. Muster up your men and supplies. Every man gets three cooked meal rations, forty rounds of ammunition, fresh flints, and a blanket.”

Rising to his feet, Ben inquired, “For what, sir?”

“Secret mission, they say,” was all the soldier remarked before he turning to step out of the tent, “The password challenge is ‘victory’.”

“And the answer, sir?”

The soldier paused and then answered, “Or death”, and exited the tent without another word, leaving Ben to his own confused thoughts.

He did not dare linger too much on them, instead taking the opportunity to gather his things and dress himself accordingly. Most importantly, he took the stack of letters from where they sat on the small wooden stool beside his cot and buried them deeply into his knapsack, slipping the letter he had just retrieved back into its original place. Then he readied himself for the secret mission, one of which was a secret to him as well.

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To be perfectly honest, being interrupted in the middle of the night by a soldier for some mission was an occurrence Abigail was finding herself becoming used to. Whether or not that was a good thing she wasn’t quite certain.
Dozens, if not hundreds of men were busy loading supplies and weapons into boats, and Abigail was one of those men. The horses had apparently been secured and taken to wherever place they were headed. She only hoped that Cantor had cooperated well. Or decently rather.

She was in the middle of helping pass along a rather heavy supply of ammunition when she heard Ben call out Caleb’s name. She nearly dropped the crate of said ammunition but thankfully managed to tighten her grip before it could fall. Also, fortunately for her, she and her loading partner had already been half way loading it into the boat prior to her hearing his voice.

“What?” Caleb shouted back at him, and it took everything inside her not to snort. Typical Brewster. She would not have been surprised if he had shouted back “oi!” instead. There wasn’t much she would past him.

“Do you have any idea of what this is about?” she heard Ben asked as he drew nearer.

“Me? No,” was the other man’s remark as he helped load some muskets into a boat. “Thought you would.”

“All they told me was that we were crossing the Delaware.”

Keeping her head down, she continued to help load weaponry into the boats, only stopping by Christopher to help him with another heavy crate of ammunition.

Caleb gave a short huffing laugh. “Oh great! They just told us to follow you.”

So, neither of the men assigned to lead them knew what was happening. What a comforting thought. Too busy gritting her teeth from attempting to lift the crate with Christopher by her side, she supposed she was lucky to have a distraction to keep her from voicing this very thought.

“Here, let me help you gentlemen with that.”

This time Abigail did drop the crate, though it was hardly very far from the ground to begin with. Glancing up, she saw that Ben was standing above them, only crouching down to take a side of the crate while Abigail and Christopher held the others.

“Thank you, captain,” Christopher said for the both of them, more than a bit sheepish but his breathlessness overwhelming his embarrassment.

“It’s no problem,” Ben remarked with a kind smile, helping them load the crate into the boat. Abigail felt the warm brush of his fingers against her the entire way along the rough wood of the crate.

Seeing as how the boats were filling up quickly with men, Abigail bent down to retrieve her own bag and turned in the direction to follow Christopher when she felt a firm but brief tug on the corner of her coat. She looked up just in time to see Ben turning towards the boat where Caleb was stationing, giving a subtle tilt of his head in the same direction before continuing his walk over to Caleb. She waited a moment or two, adjusting the strap of her bag on her shoulder before following him.

“Well, you’re the whaler,” Ben began, placing his bag into the boat and then himself. He raised his voice so that his regiment could hear, “As long as we’re crossing, he’s captain.”

“Oh, dear Lord above,” Abigail murmured to herself, too low for anyone to hear as she mimicked Ben’s actions of putting her bag into the boat before pulling herself in. Out of the corner of her eye, she could have sworn she spotted Ben instinctively reach out to steady her but stopped himself short of doing so as soon as she made it into the boat. Perhaps she was just imagining things.
Standing in the boat, Caleb pointing to a soldier in each of the boats, ordering them to push off the shore.

As soon as the boat was fully in the water, Abigail looked around them and barely concealed her frown of concern. Of course, given her rank or lack thereof, she wasn’t entitled to know everything the army planned, but that didn’t stop her from not liking being uninformed. And judging from the frequent glances she threw in Ben’s direction, he appeared to share that sentiment, so they were in the same boat.

Oh, Christ. They were literally in the same boat. Had she somehow caught Caleb’s knack of cracking puns?

The further they made it beyond shore and into the mist laden waters, the colder it became. Abigail’s arms ached from the rowing. Practically frozen from the cold, her fingers cramped from their tight grip on the oars as they moved forward in the water.

Every man in the boat, except for one look-out and Ben and Caleb, shared an oar. It would have been easy for her to slack up lightly and allow her partner to take much of the rowing duty, but she refused to even consider that as an option.

Dubious circumstances aside, she enlisted into the army just as they all had, and she would be damned if she didn’t give it her best shot, even if that meant her fingers falling off from rowing.

She did find a way to distract herself, mostly by eavesdropping on others’ conversations. It was something she found herself becoming increasingly skilled. It wasn’t that difficult to listen in on Ben and Caleb’s conversation either, especially as how the other men in the boat were concentrating on their rowing and holding off the bitter cold.

“… if you ask me, this is just a glorified scout.” Caleb, clearly. “Secret password, ‘victory or death’? Washington’s just making us feel like we’re still in the fight.”

There was a light swaying in the boat as if someone were standing up. She hazarded a glance behind her to see Ben had risen to his feet. “Caleb, look.”

At his words, Abigail’s gaze returned forward and took in the scene before her. Her eyes widened. There were numerous boats sailing with them, not just the few half dozen or so back near the shoreline of the camp. There had to be a dozen or so more, if not doubled that.

What on earth?

“Jesus,” Caleb commented, voicing Abigail’s sentiments precisely.

“This is no scout.”

Whatever they were heading into, Abigail realized as she tightened her grip on the oar, must have been incredibly vital, to invoke this many soldiers. For the first time, it struck her the reality of seeing battle was imminent, if not inevitable. Not just witnessing battle but participating as well.

Clenching her teeth, she moved the oar forward in the water, careful to avoid a large patch of ice floating along beside them.

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“What was it that you… you sailors say?” Ben asked, the cold causing him brief pause to collect his thoughts. “‘Fair weather brings cloudy weather’? Maybe this time it’ll be the reverse.”
“Or maybe the fog will lift, and there’ll just be more fog,” Caleb remarked helpfully, to which the captain gave him a look inquiring why he always had to be such a pain in the arse.

It had been hours since they had set sail away from the camp, and the temperature and weather had done little to be kind to them. The cold had long settled in his bones, which had prompted Caleb to fetching him a blanket to wrap himself in. Guilt settled in like an old friend as he sat beside Caleb with a blanket around his person while his men continued rowing, shivering and shifting to make themselves warm.

His gaze hardly moved from Abigail’s form, too stiff and still for his liking. If it weren’t for the motions of her rowing, he would have sworn she had frozen to her spot. Initially, he hadn’t wanted to accept Caleb’s offer of the blanket, instead wanting to give it to Abigail, but one hard brief glance from her had stopped him. Both of them were all too aware he couldn’t demonstrate any kind of preference to her among the rest – “don’t you even think about it, Tallmadge” her blue eyes had seemed to say, showing evidence of vivacity he hadn’t realized how desperately he had needed from her.

“We’re here,” the lookout announced, prompting both men into action.

“All right, on your feet, men,” Ben commanded, and a series of clinking of metal accompanied the soldiers stiffly rising to their feet after hours of rowing. “Everyone, check your flints.”

The men proceeded to remove their oars and check their flints as Ben ordered, but there were too many of them on one side trying to accomplish the same task.

“Move back, you’re tipping her!” Caleb ordered, eying the soldiers with increasing tension as Ben approached them.

The captain, having grown increasingly nervous with how the men were handling the equipment and nearly hitting each other with them, walked closer to intervene. Just one good hit could easily send Abigail, the lightest of the bunch, overboard.

“Watch those arms!” Ben shouted, fear sharpening his tone. No sooner had the words come out of his mouth did one of the swivel guns threaten to dip into the water. “Grab that swivel gun!” He bent down to retrieve it just as the boat gave another dramatic tip.

“Ben, no!” Caleb shouted after him, quickly echoed by Abigail before he submerged into the ice cold water.

Without a second thought, Abigail lunged forward and latched onto one of Ben’s hands that still clutched to the side of the boat, her scream stuck in her throat when he submerged completely. It felt like an eternity before he resurfaced.

“Pull him up!” she heard Caleb shout, and with the help of two other soldiers, they hauled him out of the water as fast as they could.

“Can you hear me? Be- Captain, can you hear me?” Abigail asked urgently, lightly tapping at his face. He coughed and spluttered out water. She rolled him onto his side to assist him.

“We’re going to have to strip him,” she spoke, raising her voice for everyone’s benefit. “He’ll freeze if we don’t.”

“You heard the fella, make some room,” Caleb’s voice got progressively closer. “The rest of ya, get us to shore.”
Everyone fell into their assigned tasks promptly. Abigail hardly paid any mind to where they were headed, too busy trying to remove Ben of his soaked uniform to think of anything else. When it became too difficult to remove an article of clothing, Caleb dropped by her side and aided her, not asking her any questions, only doing as what she told him to do.

They were only partially through removing his clothes by the time they managed to get to shore. Quickly and efficiently, Caleb and Abigail finally removed the last stubborn article of clothing, namely his trousers when she had Caleb fetch the blanket Ben had been wearing moments before and also asking for as many blankets at their disposal to warm him up.

They got him wrapped into one and had some of the others help carry him out of the boat, carefully lowering him to the ground only when they were as far from the water as possible. Abigail remained by his side the entire time.

Dropping to her knees, she cupped his face and asked if he could hear here. He gave a small jerk of his head, and she gave a quiet sigh of relief, which faded when she realized that probably would not be the case for very long. The trembling had started moments after pulling him out of the water and had already intensified in the past few minutes. With her hands cupping his face, she rubbed the sides of his neck to warm him when the thought struck her.

“Body heat,” she murmured.

“What?” Caleb asked, leaning forward.

She repeated herself louder, turning her head in his direction, “Body heat. The best way to increase his temperature is direct contact with another warm body. Do you have any more blankets?”

“That’s all the blankets we have wrapped around him,” he remarked, frown deepening as he took in the state of his friend, shivers wracking his frame. “What exactly do you intend to do?”

“Basically? Wrapping myself around him to give him as much body warmth as possible,” Abigail remarked bluntly. She looked up at him challengingly, eyebrow cocked. “Unless you want to do it?”

“… right. I’ll go make a fire.”

“Good call.” Without as much as another remark, she peeled back the top blanket layer covering him, wincing in apology as he groaned at the cold, so that she could slip inside with him. Once inside, she wrapped herself around as much of him as she could while trying to unsuccessfully close the blanket clothed cocoon at the same time. Somehow, she made it work but only partially.

“Listen to me, I’ve got you,” she murmured, dropping her voice only low enough for him to hear. She wasn’t sure if he had until he turned his head, and their noses brushed. Inhaling shakily, she shifted so that she could align herself at a taller height so that he was more comfortable and that she could avoid doing something foolish. In the back of her mind, she knew that an even quicker way to warm him would be direct skin to skin contact, but since there were multiple factors hindering her ability to do so – namely her current “male” status in the Continental Army among many, many other reasons – she settled for this.

Ben tried to speak, but she quickly shushed him, tightening her arms and legs around him and pressing herself more firmly into his side.

Rolling her shoulder slightly, she felt the material of her coat shift back slightly and encouraged him to move his face towards her neck, the one part of her that was actually not entirely frozen.

She nearly leapt out of her skin at the first press of his freezing skin against her neck but merely
sucked in a breath to remain calm, though when he made an unintelligible noise and nuzzled desperately into the warmth he discovered there, she sucked in another breath but for an entirely different reason.

In the distance, she could hear Caleb and the men gathering wood for the fire, but she was more concerned about the man in her arms than what the others were doing.

“You’re an idiot, by the way,” she informed him quietly, “trying to grab that swivel gun like that. I was closer. I could’ve gotten it.”

“No ya’couldn’tv,” he groaned against her neck, which surprised her. She hadn’t expected him to reply. “Didn’t wan’ta’y fallin’ ‘n.”

She did her best not to snort and make a sarcastic remark about making a fine mess of things and said instead, “Don’t talk. You should save your energy. I’m here. Nobody’s getting rid of me that easily.”

Making another noise she couldn’t quite decipher, Ben pressed his face further into her neck and shuddered violently, the edges of his vision darkening before he slipped into unconsciousness.

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Waking up did not happen fully at once. Drifting in and out of consciousness, Ben barely knew of his surroundings or his current state. He caught glimpses of faces and overheard pieces of conversations, most of which he most likely would not be able to recall later. The faces he most often saw were those of Caleb and Abigail, the latter of which he saw less often. He would have frowned at that if he had been in his proper state of mind.

One of the first times he drifted into consciousness, he caught a full view of Caleb’s face hovering over him, concern lined into his face.

“All right. Hey, wake up!”

Ben blinked, unable to process the darkness of the night had given way to a bright winter morning.

“How’s that fire coming on? We need… oi! Don’t you dare…”

He couldn’t catch onto his friend’s next words before slipping back into the darkness, though the soft, warm form against him didn’t make it completely unpleasant.

The next time he woke up was for an even shorter period. Nearly as soon as he had caught his eye, Caleb was on him in a flash, all strained grins and nervous laughter, “You’re not going on us like this, you dumb bastard. You hear me? You stay awake all right?”

Unfortunately, he was unable to follow through on that request and fell back into the darkness, this time burying his face into whatever soft warmth he was clutching to. This time he heard a different voice, murmuring against the top of his head, “Come on, stay with me.” A quiet, feminine voice, so familiar and yet…

The third time he managed to blink awake it was night again. There was a fire crackling beside them, but he couldn’t tell just how close he was. However, judging from the extra amount of warm, it was just close enough.

“Know why you can't die? You're still a virgin.” Caleb.

“Don’t you ever shut up?” The feminine voice again.
Groggily, Ben rolled his head to the side to get a better look only to be met by a face full of neck and golden locks. Instinctively, he wanted to bury his face against said neck, but what he wanted more was to see this person’s face, this woman’s face.

Suddenly, he felt himself shifting, along with the warm soft form he was pressed against, and soon enough he was able to see her face. Abigail’s face was angled towards Caleb, pretty features settling into a glare. Even in the dim firelight, he recognized her face, hell, could’ve recognized her face anywhere.

He wasn’t all that concerned with what they were talking about – though he would very much mind much later when he remembered of course – he was too busy scrutinizing her profile to decide if she was properly real or not.

“See, all you ever done is box the Jesuit. I'm surprised you're not blind.”

“Caleb!”

“Now, the man upstairs, He don’t take kindly to virgins over the age of twenty. Sees it as a waste of His good works.”

“I swear to God, I’m going to beat you with a tree branch as soon as I get up…”

Ben faded back into unconsciousness, so he never got to hear the end of Abigail’s threat towards Caleb.

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Blinking slowly, Ben flinched against the brightness against morning sun. It didn’t take him long to dissolve into an intense round of coughing, forcing him to curl in on himself, face pressing against a melting patch of snow.

“Ah, Happy New Year, Tall-boy!”

He lifted his head groggily and looked over to where Caleb was turning from the river and walking towards him, brushing himself off as some snow descended upon him from a tree branch.

“How are ya feeling?”

Ben groaned as he rolled onto his side, trying to find a proper position that didn’t leave him feeling like absolute shite. “Where are the... where are the men?”

“Right now? Gone.”

“Gone?”

“Yeah. You've been out for a few days, my friend.”

The captain stared at him, uncomprehending. “What?”

Caleb walked over towards him, squatting down to over him his canteen. The contents of the bottle Ben was not certain of, but at the moment, it was difficult for him to care. “The year’s over. Bounties are up. I doubt too many are keen to reenlist.”

Looking around, he took in the number of missing boats and even more so his men. The lack of presence of one particular soldier caused a tightening sensation in his chest. “What of Abigail?” he blurted out without a moment’s thought.
“She went to fetch some more firewood,” Caleb answered, grabbing a stick to poke at the fire. “Was worried about it getting too low so she went in retrieve some herself. Stubborn one.”

Taking a long swig from Caleb’s bottle, Ben groaned again, attempting to pull himself up into a sitting position until he felt his friend’s hands on him but instead of helping him up, he was pushing him back down.

“You need some rest still. Besides, if I let you up before you need to be, Abigail will tear me a new hide.”

Too weak to fight him, Ben fell back into his makeshift cot, cocooned in more blankets than he could count. It took a few minutes for him to process what Caleb had just said and a few more to realize what he had just done. Face growing pale, he stared at Caleb in horror and began worriedly, “Caleb, you must understand. Abigail… I mean, Williams. I-”

“Relax, Tall-boy. Abigail and I talked it all out last night,” Caleb reassured him. “It was long after the others left, I swear. To be honest, I’m rather annoyed I hadn’t figured it out sooner, though her nearly elbowing me in the face a few days ago was my first clue.”

“Well, she… wait, elbowed you in the face?”

“Yeah, wouldn’t let me get near ya. She never did leave your side since we got ya off that boat, too. Who do you think kept you warm?”

Flashes of images entered Ben’s mind in brief snippets – the soft form he had clung to, the curve of her pale neck, those dreadful golden locks… He swallowed an unwise amount of liquor from the canteen without a moment’s thought, coughing and spluttering a bit as he lowered it from his mouth.

Caleb gave him a hard, sympathetic pat on the back to help him out. “I won’t breathe a word of this to anyone though.” Ben looked up at him while wiping the corner of his mouth and noted the rare serious expression on his friend’s face. “You have my word.”

Trusting him, he nodded his appreciation. “It’s really not my secret to tell, but it’s one I’ll guard with my life.”

Caleb nodded in understanding, which of course he did. He had grown up with the both them, having become a witness to Ben’s growing affections for the blonde over the years. Caleb knew better than anyone, if not taking Abraham and Anna into account, how much he cared for Abigail. He knew he could trust Caleb to the very end with this.

“Aye, I understand. That’s why Abigail said -”

“What exactly did Abigail say now?”

Both men turned at the sound of her voice and saw Abigail approaching them, arms full of branches ranging from numerous sizes. Not seeing Ben was awake, her gaze focused on Caleb as she remarked, “I think I might have found a decent size branch to hit you with, so any more innuendos, and you’re in for a world of trouble.”

“Darlin’, that’s the title of my autobiography,” Caleb huffed out a laugh, though he made sure to keep his eyes on her as she came closer to deposit half the load into the fire. “Look who’s awake.”

Pausing in her actions, Abigail turned just as Caleb took a step back so she could see for herself. Her blue eyes locked with Ben’s, and for a moment, it felt like time stood still.
In the next moment, she was right in front of him, nearly nose to nose, with her hands sliding to touch the sides of his face, and he couldn’t breathe.

Her hands were running over him, searching, as her eyes focused on him intently. “How are you feeling?”

“I…” any words died on his lips as she brought the back of her hand against his forehead. It took every ounce of his willpower not to close his eyes.

“You feel good.”

Ben couldn’t stop himself from licking his chapped lips. “Abigail…”

“Much better than you have felt previously,” Abigail murmured to herself as if she hadn’t heard him. Perhaps she hadn’t, considering how calm and collected she appeared. He wanted to resent her for it. “You do look a bit flushed though.” She frowned, fingers trailing across his cheeks, which grew increasingly warmer under such attention.

A loud cough drew Ben’s attention over Abigail’s shoulder to where Caleb stood, clearly concealing with great amusement behind a feigned cough. Ben’s eyes narrowed pointedly, which only made the other man’s shoulders shake even more in barely suppressed laughter. The urge to lunge at him never was more appealing than in that moment.

Meanwhile, Abigail was completely unaware of the silent battle between the pair, too concerned with assessing Ben’s vitals to pay them any mind. Eventually, she rocked back on her heels to get a better look. Considering his flushed complexion, his temperature appeared to be increasing to a healthy state, though his dazed demeanor had her feeling more concerned. She hadn’t missed the way his gaze flickered from her eyes to her mouth and back again, unable to completely focus. While he was getting better, he wasn’t completely out of the woods yet.

“What’s the diagnosis?” Caleb inquired, scarcely managing to suppress his mirth by the time she turned around.

“Much better than yesterday,” Abigail confirmed, “though I think you could use some more rest before we move again.” She looked at Ben expectantly, knowing fully well he would try to find a way out of it. “Just give me a few hours, and I promise you, we can start moving again.”

She had removed the cocked hat, so he had a completely unobstructed view of her eyes, which bore into his in such a way he was finding it difficult to say no. That and his traitorous body appearing to agree with her demands all lead to letting out an incredibly reluctant “fine”. His lips faintly twitched upwards at the sight of her pleasantly surprised smile.

Returning his attention to the traitor, Ben asked, “‘Where were they headed?’

Caleb tilted his head. “Who?”

Ben held back a sigh and asked carefully, “The men. Where were they headed?”

Scratching the back of his head, the other man remarked after a short pause, “Uh, Trenton.”

Ben stared at him for a moment. “Trenton?”

Looking between the two men, Abigail asked curiously, “What’s in Trenton?”

Caleb looked at Ben, silently asking for his approval. When Ben gave it, he looked over at Abigail as
he answered, “Washington, I reckon. Probably a very good chunk of the Continental Army as well.”

Abigail’s stomach dropped at that information. They would be heading to where the major base of the Continental Army resided, to where Washington was most likely stationed.

They were going to meet the Gray Fox himself.
Chapter 6

Ben, Abigail, and Caleb had arrived in Trenton, New Jersey within a day’s time. After encountering a group of disguised Continental soldiers posing the password challenge of “victory”, Ben had responded with “or death”, the answer he had confided in Abigail and Caleb prior to their trek in search of Trenton. Upon the acceptance of his answer, the trio had been escorted to the Continental Army base.

Almost as soon as they had set foot into camp, one of the soldiers had been prepared to escort Abigail to where the other lower ranking soldiers resided until Ben had stopped them, saying, “Williams is with us.” Nothing more had been done about it, at least for the moment.

After their accommodations were readied, Abigail followed Ben to his tent, after having been informed she would have her assignment the previous morning. Just as soon as they were alone, she told him he needed to get more rest, but he made a counter offer of her getting her rest first, after having spent so much time taking care of him herself. Of course, he presented that argument.

“Besides, I must speak with General Scott to inform him of our arrival,” he added, slipping back into his coat. “Please humor me and take the cot while I’m gone. If it makes you happy, I’ll rest as soon as I return.”

Eyes narrowing thoughtfully, Abigail remarked, “It would, but only if you’re telling the truth.”

Ben only offered her a mildly cheeky grin in response before slipping out of the tent. No sooner than he had disappeared did she start lying down on the cot. Perhaps some rest would do her some good.

She fell asleep before her head had hit the pillow.

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Abigail found herself in a strange balanced state upon the hour before dawn, drifting between the realms of sleep and consciousness. This perhaps explained why she didn’t entirely jump out of her skin when the flap to Ben’s tent opened to reveal one of the disguised soldiers who had escorted them to camp. This was truly a blessing. At least she didn’t have to explain herself as to why, a low-ranking soldier was alone in an officer’s tent.

“Apologies for the sudden intrusion,” the soldier said and sounded surprisingly sincere. A rarity! “But every man must be officially dressed and armed as soon as possible.”

Tensing, she pushed herself into a sitting position and rose to her feet. “Are we preparing for battle?”

The soldier shook his head. “It’s just for protocol and a precaution.” He didn’t explain any further, which she found disconcerting but not completely unheard of for the military. Judging by his uniform, he more than likely out ranked her and was privy to information not intended for those below them.
She nearly asked if Ben had been informed of what was happening but stopped herself just in time, realizing he probably had already heard during his meeting with General Scott.

“We’re all to report to the house right before dawn.” Before she could even inquire as to what they were meeting for, the soldier slipped back out into the morning darkness.

The first thing she made sure to do was tighten her binds underneath her shirt, sucking in a sharp breath when she tugged nearly too tight. The brutality of the bindings rivaled that of corsets, which she loathed with every fiber of her being. Once suitably held in, she straightened up her appearance by adjusting her uniform before retrieving her musket and cocked hat, the latter of which she pressed firmly onto her head just as she followed the soldier’s previous path out of the tent.

By the time she joined the other men, the sun was just peering above the horizon, providing some much needed light away from the fiery torches and campfires. Judging from the confused expressions on many of their faces, they were just as much in the dark of what was happening as she was, which brought her little comfort in their solidarity.

Soon enough an officer arrived and had them line up in groups, which initially lead Abigail to wonder if this was another roll call. However, when they began to move towards the house, the thought was cast aside to only be replaced by half a dozen other possible theories inside her mind.

It wasn’t until the last group of men arrived at the house did she gain some insight. Before them stood a wooden platform supported by a heavy crate foundation. It appeared to have been put together hastily but determinedly if noting the multiple sources of support of the platform.

Four soldiers were at the wooden platform, three of which holding a rather large wooden post while the other remained on top of the platform, directing them as they pushed the post upward. Once the post was upright, Abigail noticed its inverted “L” shape with a single upright and horizontal beam as it was shoved firmly into the ground.

A heavy feeling of dread washed over her at the sight as drawings of similar structures in books appeared in her mind’s eye. This was no ordinary structure at all. In fact, she knew precisely what it was as the on soldier standing on the wooden platform began to attach the rope across the horizontal beam.

They were witnesses to the construction of a gallows.

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The hours leading up to the execution were perhaps that longest hours Abigail had ever experienced. Upon the arrival of the officers, her eyes immediately searched for Ben, knowing he had already confessed of his previous indiscretions to Washington practically upon arrival. She still didn’t know what exactly had landed Ben in such trouble with General Scott, but she feared the consequences.

Growing nervous when she didn’t see the captain’s arrival with the others, she walked over to Caleb to question him, knowing she must be brief considering her status in the army’s ranks. “Where is he?” she murmured anxiously.

With a cursory glance over his shoulder, Caleb leaned a bit forward, speaking lowly for her ears only, “He’ll be here. General Scott and he had some unfinished business left to discuss.”

“What kind of unfinished business exactly? What did he even do, Caleb?”

Sensing her growing anxiety, he reached out and placed a heavy hand on her shoulder, giving her a brief firm squeeze. “Can’t really talk about it here, Ab- Williams, but you should try to calm yourself.
No use worrying unless you have to.”

“Easier said than done,” she replied grimly. Not even the reassuring gesture of his brought her much comfort.

Giving her a forced, if not half-assed, smile, he gave her shoulder another firm squeeze, remarking, “Man up, soldier. It’s going to be a long day.” He didn’t get a chance to say anything else when another soldier drew his attention elsewhere, leaving Abigail to mull over those words. Man up indeed.

Soon enough, General Scott and Ben joined the officers standing in front of the house porch, talking quietly amongst themselves. Judging from their tense postures, the latter more so than the former, she couldn’t stop herself from relieving that gnawing feeling of anxious fear.

For the briefest of moments, she thought she caught Ben’s eye, but when she finally managed to turn her head in his direction, he was once again looking elsewhere.

The sound of horse and wheels rolling along gravel drew her attention in the opposite direction. The wagon came to a halt, the driver hopping down from his post and handing the reins to another soldier. Sitting in the back of the wagon was a soldier with his hands bound together who was now being escorted from the wagon towards the platform. The blue material of his coat contrasted starkly with the greyness of the world around them, the patches of snow and the brown, barren trees.

Both the condemned soldier and Abigail’s eyes locked onto the noose dangling from the makeshift beam.

In the crudest of terms, she knew this was very much an informal execution, given the construction of the site and the lack of presence of other soldiers. When it had become known who was being execution, namely a man of relative anonymity and perceived unimportance, many of the soldiers had left, either to carry out their duties or whatever excuse they had formulated. While many had left, quite a few had remained, herself included. She had a sneaking suspicion if this were an execution of a captured enemy soldier or perhaps a ranking officer, those men would not have left.

Moments later, a group of soldiers arrived on large great beasts of stallions. Upon a more focused inspection, she realized they were officers, if not generals. She watched them dismount but was more focused on the man leading the group, possessing such an air of authority many a man’s conversations dwindled to a halt at the sight of him.

Abigail’s breath caught in her throat when she realized she had just laid eyes on George Washington. Every officer standing nearby removed their hats in respect, Ben included. She wasn’t sure if she should do the same but thought it unwise of her to do so. Thankfully, the other soldiers around her had kept theirs on as well.

However, she did not get a chance to observe this legendary man any further as he stood next to the young captain when a soldier, upon the commander in chief’s approval, began to read from a roll of parchment aloud the following narrative while another soldier proceeded to strip him of his uniform coat:

“The accused, John Herring, having been convicted of breaking into the house of Mr. Prince Howland and robbing him of several spoons, silver dollars, and wearing apparel, has been sentenced to suffer death.”

The condemned soldier’s hands, which had been previously unbound, were then bound again behind his back. The noose was then tightened around his neck as the statesmen continued, “His
Excellency, the commander in chief, approves this sentence as an example made to deter the boldest and most hardened offenders.”

Abigail’s eyes found Ben just as the condemned soldier was pushed off the platform. Her chest tightened at the sound of his choking. Instinctively, she found herself turning towards the sound, but Ben’s gaze refused to release her. Even from the distance between them, she understood the message he was silently conveying: don’t look, keep focused on me, do not turn around until...

Washington turned his head slightly in Ben’s direction, speaking quietly before turning around and heading into the house, following by several officers. She refused to look away from him, hoping against hope that her gaze alone could keep him from entering the house.

However, her attempts at mental manipulation were all in vain as Ben, after lingering for as long as he dared, gazed remaining on hers, turned to follow the last officer inside. The gravity of this decision did not fully land until the door closed behind him.

Swallowing hard, Abigail took a step forward in the direction of the house when she felt a hand grasp her elbow. She turned and saw Caleb giving her a subtle shake of his head.

“That wouldn’t be a good idea,” he advised. Instead of releasing her, he gave her a gentle tug in the opposite direction. “Come with me. You should learn a few tricks of the trade before your patrol tomorrow morning.”

The only reason she allowed herself to be led away from the house was for the fact she appeared to have lost any sensation in her limbs. She allowed herself to be led away but couldn’t prevent herself from taking a final look at the house, only to see the body of the condemned soldier being lowered from the gallows.

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“You want to try and make sure to find a water source of any sort,” Caleb instructed, pointing out towards the small creek not too far from them. “That’ll be your best bet for lasting in the woods if you’re left on your own.”

“Right,” Abigail replied distractedly. Her mind wasn’t entirely present with them in the woods, instead lingering right outside the Trenton house.

If he sensed her distraction, he didn’t acknowledge it, instead drawing her attention towards a large tree with rather large hollow. She caught some of his words describing how tree hollows were excellent places to take cover but was still too consumed in her thoughts to process what he was saying.

“…are you even listening?”

Starting lightly, Abigail turning around to find Caleb leaning back into said tree hollow, looking at her expectantly. She sighed heavily and tugged at the edges of her coat. “I’m sorry, Caleb. I know this is important for me to know.”

“Very important to know,” he emphasized. She nodded.

“I don’t mean to be so distracted,” she apologized, pausing for a moment. “I’m just worried is all.”

Nodding in understanding, he said, “I understand, but Benjamin’s a big boy. He can handle himself. You shouldn’t let yourself worry.”
Abigail gave him an irritated expression. “Right because why would I be concerned about him after a soldier was executed by hanging? How silly of me.”

With a grimace, Caleb said, “Okay, I’ll give you that. But listen,” he pushed himself away from the tree and began walking towards her, “if he’s in any serious trouble, I’ll be the first to know about it, and I’ll always have his back. All right?”

He kicked out a foot to lightly nudge at her foot, prompting a reluctant smile from her. “Fine. I suppose.”

“Not really the confidence I was hoping to inspire, but I’ll take it.” He clapped his hands together, grinning when she rolled her eyes. “Let’s get back to survival woods training, shall we? Ben would want you to know this.”

Abigail nodded in agreement, knowing fully how right Caleb was. Keeping this in mind, she made a stronger effort to focus on his teachings and to prevent her mind from straying, although the occasional worried thought did enter her mind, but she managed to control it.

They spent a good portion of the day in the woods, with Caleb showing her the best ways to conceal herself in the woods, what could and couldn’t be consumed, and even how to make the most unlikely of objects into potentially lethal weapons.

Surprisingly, he was a very good teacher. His patience proved infinite as she asked him to explain something again or even if she felt she had posed too many questions. He also used his humor whenever he could, a characteristic she was not at all surprised by. At the end of the day, she felt accomplished when she could recall everything he had taught her with almost perfect clarity.

By the time they returned to camp, Ben had still not returned, which only made her grow more concerned.

It wasn’t until two nights later did he rejoin them.

As much as Caleb tried his best to distract her during that time, Abigail had not been able to prevent herself from feeling increasing dread with every passing hour Ben wasn’t with them. The progression of her fear and worry from the first night to the second night increased to the point where she had forced herself to keep busy, to do anything to distract herself from doing something that she would regret later, such as breaking protocol and marching into that house to see him for herself.

After having been assigned a shared tent with another soldier, with whom she had not met previously, sleep had not come easily to her during those two nights either. On both occasions, she had found herself rising from her cot and leaving the tent to join the nightly patrol, in spite of the fact it was not her group’s shift.

She never heard any complaints from any of the officers she encountered nor any of the soldiers. In fact, she was certain they were grateful for an extra set of eager eyes. Truth be told, she was keenly aware of the selfishness of the motivation for the reason she was merely volunteering as a way to distract herself.

Better to be selfish and productive than not, right?

However, on the night Ben did return, her worry had transformed into annoyance once she had learned he was never in any danger. Upon Caleb’s brief report of his status, her intense relief had begun to turn into irritation, but at first, she had managed to rein herself in.

There were two sides of Abigail at war. One side acknowledged the gravity and delicacy of Ben’s
situation, realizing it would have been impossible for him to have reached her to inform her of what was going on underneath such scrutiny.

However, the other part of her claimed that while unrealistic, she could have tried to help him if he had just asked for it. If only he had found a way to tell her that he was okay.

One of these arguments was only slightly less rational than the other.

She hadn’t decided which side was the victor over the course of those few days.

It wasn’t until she saw him again, walking down the steps of the house porch and heading towards herself and Caleb with such a purposeful stride did she finally come to her decision on how to feel. She chose furious.

“I’m going on the night patrol,” she informed Caleb, barely giving Ben another glance as she picked up her musket from where she had lain it after reloading it.

“But your shift isn’t even until morning,” he said around a mouthful of biscuit, looking up at her with a confused look. Swallowing, he rose to his feet. “Do you even understand the definition of protocol – oh, well, off you go then.”

Abigail grabbed her belongings and quickly marched off to join the rest of the soldiers gathering up for the night patrol right before the young captain could even reach her vicinity. With the veil of night, he probably hadn’t realized it was her beside the whaler.

“Oh, Tall-boy!” Caleb exclaimed as soon as he spotted his friend and walked over to meet him halfway. “What’s the damage, captain?”

“Nothing that I can’t handle,” Ben answered, the relief from his meeting with Washington still in his system. “And it’s major now, actually.”

Eyebrows nearly disappearing into his hat, Caleb whistled lowly. “Let me get this straight. You get into trouble with General Scott, and you get promoted to major? What do I have to do to piss him off?”

Grinning, Ben gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder. “Nothing really. You fare just fine on your own. Actually…” he stopped himself short and after a quick tilt of his head towards a more remote location, he remarked as they began to walk, “Washington promoted me to major only after General Scott claimed only a major could serve as head of intelligence.”

“Head of intelligence… blimey, you managed to tell Washington about the ring then,” Caleb murmured, dumbstruck. “And he went for it?”

Ben nodded discreetly, although his excited expression was hardly anything but. “He’s willing to try anything and thinks it’s a good idea. We’ll have to get to work right away.” He paused, his excited expression fading slightly before asking, “You didn’t mention any of this to… Williams, did you?”

Caleb shook his head as he answered, voice low for his ears only, “Nah. Didn’t want to get her involved in anything more than she needs to be.”

“Good. That’s good,” he nodded in approval. “Have any idea where she is?”

“You just missed her, though I doubt you’d want to talk to her right now.”

Ben’s brows furrowed in confusion. “And why is that?”

“She’s pissed at ya, mate,” Caleb remarked. “You had her worried to her wits’ end with your meeting in there. I had to practically hog tie her down to keep her from going in after you.”
At Ben’s reproachful look, he lifted his hands and added, “I did no such thing.”

Sighing heavily, the newly promoted major knew he needed to speak with Abigail, but currently, he couldn’t make that a top priority, as much as he would have liked to. Instead, he and Caleb headed in the direction of his tent so they could make their plans for the ring, starting with the way to contact Abe again.

If a certain blue eyed, maddening blonde plagued his thoughts, Ben tried his best to ignore it.

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Volunteering for two nights’ worth of patrol along with performing her three assigned morning patrols was certainly not the most pleasant decision Abigail had ever made. In fact, she would willingly bet it was in fact one of the poorest decisions in her life.

Several hours of foot patrol around the camp’s parameters paired with the carrying of the heavy musket along her shoulder, pistol on her hip, and a small stash of ammo strapped to her side in freezing temperatures of the evening and early hours of the morning even on the strongest of men. The only way she managed surviving each patrol was the near immobilizing fear that her identity would be discovered, if she were not able to carry her own weight.

While there were unpleasant consequences of these multiple patrols, there were some advantages she found to be rather useful. With the increase in patrol duties, she discovered herself becoming more familiar with the parameters, making mental notes of the lay of the land in the morning and recognizing certain parts even at night. Caleb’s woods survival lessons really did assist her immensely on patrols as well, giving her more opportunities to put his guidance into practice.

Despite all of the progress she felt she was making, a part of her couldn’t help but wonder why they weren’t doing more. The location of the British camp was not far from where their own resided. Why was there no action being taken by Washington? Of course, being outnumbered by the enemy was an immense influence, but that didn’t have to rule out sabotage, perhaps tampering with their rations, stealing their ammunition…

There would be no way Washington would approve of any of it, of that she was most certain. From each of the manuals she had studied weeks ago, it was clear that, in spite of the causalities and hardships of war, there was an honor to it, a code that each army should abide by, which implied the discouragement of subterfuge. However, she highly doubted the British never engaged in some form of trickery, but that was not her place to say.

Upon reflection of hearing tales of doomed soldiers who had attempted to go rogue, Abigail didn’t find it at all difficult to understand those soldiers’ reasoning, now that she was essentially in their shoes. However, that line of thought was dangerous, especially in her current situation, so in the end she thought it best to keep these thoughts to herself.

She and the night group of soldiers returned to camp, nearly dead tired on their feet. She all but stumbled into line to get cup of water, her feet feeling heavy and leaden yet somehow still attached to her body. Blessedly, the line moved quickly, men parched enough to not dally about and moving on about their business.

Grabbing a cup, she took a deliberately slow sip, not wanting to risk choking in her haste to quench her thirst and turned to head back towards her tent to get some rest before the morning when a familiar voice captured her attention.

“Williams! I thought that was you!”
It took her a moment or two to react, which was a significant improvement over the near month she had adopted the alias, before she turned around to see a grinning Christopher Morgan waving her down from his perch by a crackling fire.

She walked over towards him, grinning tiredly in kind, and sat beside him while containing her groan of appreciation at finally having a reason to no longer stand. “It’s good to see you,” she greeted after taking another sip from her cup. “How long have you been here?”

“We made it a few days before you, Brewster, and the captain arrived,” he answered while reaching for a stick to poke at the fire. “Or rather major now. Apparently, Tallmadge got promoted.”

Abigail hummed in what she hoped sounded as affirmation, but no, she hadn’t heard the news, considering how very cross with Benjamin she was at the moment.

The reunited friends chatted amongst themselves for several minutes, each expressing how strange it was to be away from their respective homes for such a prolonged period of time but agreeing it was worth it in the same of their country’s freedom. She listened with a warm smile as Christopher described his rambunctious little brothers and how troublesome they were in his family. He was the middle child of seven siblings, of which there were five sons and two daughters. She couldn’t help but express her pity for their poor mother, which only made the raven-haired boy laugh in agreement.

“Bless her soul. She was never really fond of the idea of our father teaching us how to track in the forest,” he remarked, poking the fire gently with a stick. “We almost always traveled too far for her liking. Pushing our boundaries but never crossing them was how he looked at it.”

“That’s an interesting philosophy,” she mused as she set aside her cup, long ago drained of its contents, and gazed into the dying embers of the fire.

A brief silence settled between them, with only some faint chatter of soldiers and the sounds of nature cutting through. Then Christopher remarked, “Come to think of it, I think that’s exactly what we need.”

“Hmm?” she hummed, having been lost in thought for the moment.

“That philosophy. Pushing boundaries.” Glowing with increased eagerness, Christopher turned to her, lowering his voice to a pitch only she could hear, “Perhaps we should expand our boundaries when it is our group’s turn to patrol in the mornings. Think of it. We could cover more ground and see what those redcoats are up to.”

Curiosity sparked, she shifted in her seat on the log so that she could face him properly while scoping the area to make sure they were not being overheard. “I do like the sound of it, I do. But what if we get caught?”

“As long as we make a pact to keep it a secret, we shouldn’t get caught,” he answered quietly. “Maybe we could even follow them if we spot them, but only within reason of course.”

She couldn’t deny the thought wasn’t appealing. In fact, it was almost too appealing. It certainly appealed to her sense of restlessness. “And we would be doing something productive…” she trailed off hesitantly.

“Precisely!” he grinned eagerly. “What do you say?” He held out his hand between them, raising his eyebrows. “Are you in?”

For a moment, she hesitated, not so much in a manner of she was reluctant to participate due to a lack of interest. She had too much interest in pursuing this endeavor. The danger, however, did give her
pause.

Briefly.

“I’m in,” she responded with a growing smile, finding his excitement infectious. She took his hand and shook it, accepting the secrecy pact as a binding agreement.

They planned to meet sometime into their morning patrol before going their separate ways to get their rest. During her walk back to her shared tent, a keen sense of guilt began to gnaw at her as she realized this was yet another secret she had to conceal, and it wasn’t just a secret to protect her and Christopher’s intentions from the rest of the base.

Now Benjamin was no longer the only one keeping secrets.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

(update: ughhh i'm so sorry! I didn't mean to delete this chapter!)

previous notes: a lot of the dialogue comes directly from the episode, but it goes with the plot with this episode. Thank you guys for all of the comments, kudos, and bookmarks! You make my day!

White Hall Manor, Setauket, Long Island

“Conspiracy?” Major Hewlett asked, setting down his knife and fork across his breakfast plate.

The major had transitioned his place of business from the Setauket chapel to his current residence at White Hall manor, the home of Judge Richard Woodhull. Not only was the man a loyal subject of the crown, but he had grown to be a dear friend to the major along with being a valuable asset within this town. Hewlett knew Richard could be trusted when he had presented the idea to him. It was a challenging time to have trust in anyone these days, especially from the previous attempt on his life, which had been intercepted by his beloved horse, may God rest his soul.

“I’m afraid so,” responded Captain Simcoe, having received the promotion in rank upon Captain Charles Joyce’s tragic demise months prior. His opinion on the matter of official business conducted at White Hall was less favorable than the major’s, namely for the sake of the judge’s son, Abraham Woodhull. That son of his was not to be trusted, but the captain had no way of proving it, especially since the task would be difficult with Woodhull having appeared to have fallen into Hewlett’s good graces. All Simcoe could do was wait for the right opportunity to present itself.

“Whilst enduring torture at the hands of my rebel captors,” he continued, “I managed to wheedle out the fact they hailed from Setauket.”

Major Hewlett’s eyes hardened as he focused on the captain’s face with keen urgency. “Setauket?”

“By your leave,” Simcoe remarked, walking closer towards the dining table to where the major sat, “I would like to conduct an inquiry, beginning with the family names of Tallmadge and Brewster. I believe we will discover who these traitors are by beginning with them.”

He paused for a moment, watching the consideration shift into approval across Hewlett’s face. Knowing he would be granted approval, Simcoe decided this was his chance to inform him of his additional intentions. “I would also like to extend my inquiry to include another family as well, one in which has also very close ties with the Tallmadge and Brewster names.”

“Go on,” the major encouraged, folding his hands together thoughtfully.


Hewlett frowned. “There are nearly a dozen Williamses in Setauket alone and more up and down along the coast. Care to narrow it down?”

“The Williams family who live just outside of Setauket, to be more precise.”
“If they don’t fall into my jurisdiction, I’m not sure that would be wise -”

Simcoe, eager to assert his point, cut him off pointedly, “It is rumored that the Tallmadge boy fancies this Williams girl. It’s long been established as fact rather than rumor. According to some sources, she’s the first and only woman he’s ever loved.” He pressed his hand along the back of the wooden dining chair with his other holding his captain’s hat securely against his hip. “I believe if we inquire into the Williams family as well, it will provide the others with the incentive to come forward, at least for Tallmadge anyway.”

Major Hewlett reached for his glass of wine and took a long sip, tense as he weighed his options. Simcoe observed him with the keen, sharp attention of a hawk, looking for any signs of dissent and was more than prepared to defend his position.

“Very well,” the major remarked after some consideration, looking up at Simcoe, who barely suppressed his pleasure. “But.” He held up his finger just as the captain was about to smile. “Tread lightly.”

Somewhat confused, Simcoe inquired, “Lightly?”

“Tactics of which we employed on our first days here are no longer to be tolerated,” Hewlett remarked. “We must show these people that we are better than the rebels. We must win the battle for their hearts and minds.”

As the major looked far away as he took another drink from his wine glass, Simcoe didn’t bother to suppress the mixture of annoyance and disgust across his face as he fought back a sigh. He took a step back and began to round the table towards the foyer, replying as he made his exit, “I intend to. Believe me.”

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A few days had gone by since Abigail and Christopher had made their agreement regarding patrol. During those few days, they had even begun to put their plan into practice, making minor adjustments along the way whenever an issue occurred. So far, the pair had been rather lucky, considering they had yet to be caught breaking protocol.

Day patrols were trickier to maneuver than night patrols, though it was easier to track and find their paths during the days for the light. Nights were much easier to slip from under the supervision of other soldiers but also presented a challenge for them. However, as Christopher chose to see it, the nights were only putting their knowledge to the tests. Fortunately for Abigail, after having managed double patrol day and night shifts, she found the truth in his words and took them to heart.

During this time, they had made sure to keep track of the time, memorize the camp routine as it pertained to mandatory roll call and tent inspections, the latter occurring far less frequent than the former. They both knew that some officers, namely Officer Brandon, was particularly fond of unannounced checks and roll calls. However, roll calls could not be performed during patrol shifts, of that the pair was most certain. Abigail had voiced her concern of this previously, but Christopher had been quick to assure her they could make it back in time “before Pita can puff out his chest and bully the newer soldiers.”

Pita was an acronym that a few of the soldiers had created for Officer Brandon. He was an arrogant, annoying idiot, ordering non-ranking soldiers about just because he could. This was why he earned the name of Pita, otherwise known for as “pain in the arse” Brandon. Pita Brandon.

Abigail wasn’t sure who created the name, but she forever owed the creator of the nickname for
providing her with this amusement in these times of war.

With each passing day, they began pushing the boundaries to search more, even perhaps pushing their luck with each boundary crossed. Abigail did agree that these “side” patrols of theirs, in the end, would benefit them a great deal. It was better to know the full terrain of one’s territory than only a portion, especially considering how the enemy wasn’t too far off from where the Continental camp lied.

“I think if they would just let us go beyond these parameters, like what we’re doing now,” Christopher murmured lowly to her while walking up to a low lying branch of an old birch tree, “we could probably have an alternate path out of camp, to meet with other regiments for instance.”

Abigail nodded, squatting down near the tree to inspect a rather interesting shaped rock. It was rough and jagged but a near perfect shape of a spearhead. She passed it over to Christopher, who went to work on carving a mark into the tree, one that only they would know. “That’s really something they should consider. I think they would only listen to reason, however, if it came from of a soldier of higher rank, and only if this theory has been put into practice.” She was incredibly tempted to take Cantor out to experience this new path for herself…

“Maybe you could pass along this information to Tallmadge,” he remarked, after etching a small looping carving into the bottom portion of the birch tree. His strange tone prompted her to raise an eyebrow, sounding innocent, far too innocent to be innocent.

“Are you implying something or…”

“I’m not implying anything! All I’m saying is that he seems to take your words into consideration, is all,” he commented. He didn’t sound bitter or resentful as she was beginning to fear. Instead, he looked more curious than anything else, but she knew the boy well enough that he would not push her if she didn’t wish to speak of it. He might have been for pushing the rules of the military, but regarding their friendship, he did not appear to harbor the same sentiments.

For that, she was extremely appreciative.

“I’m not sure I agree with your assessment, but he is more inclined to lend an ear than the other officers,” Abigail remarked slowly, carefully treading the line between truth and needed secrecy. As much as she couldn’t tell him, Christopher deserved what she was able to tell him, despite how limited that capacity was.

“That’s good to know,” he mused, pocketing the spearheaded rock inside his coat pocket before resuming patrol. Abigail lingered behind for a moment, allowing herself a quiet breath of relief, and then followed him along the path. With all of the risks that came with her situation, she was incredibly fortunate for having found a friend in someone as loyal and patient as the young Christopher Morgan.

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“There’s something going on between those two,” Caleb remarked while he paced back and forth along the wooden floorboards. A small frown settled along his normally jovial face. “Just don’t know what.”

When Ben failed to comment, he continued, “You know, when I suggested that Abe take Anna to New York to get past the checkpoint, he got very upset.” He stopped to gage Ben’s reaction, only to find him continuing his work on the camp’s correspondence. “Anyway, I suppose none of this is our concern.”
Looking up from his work, the major frowned towards Caleb. “They’re my only two agents on Long Island. If there’s trouble between them, I want to know about it.”

Caleb gave him a wry grin. “Well, how’s about you jump on a whaleboat with me, major?” He gestured to the empty room around them, save for the wooden desk and stacks upon stacks of parchment and other forms of stationary. “Get your arse out of this woodpile?”

Ben sighed heavily. “I would like to, but Washington needs me here. Compiling.” He settled back into his chair, setting his quill back into its ink pot. “That and there’s Sackett’s homework… trade craft, as he calls it.” Groaning quietly, he reached back to rub the back of his neck, restless. “I feel like I’m back in school again.”

“No, see, this is exactly the reason why I’ve been careful to avoid success,” Caleb remarked, grinning as Ben gave a tired chuckle.

“As for Abraham and Anna,” Ben said, returning to their previous topic smoothly, “should I be concerned?”

Letting out a breath, the whaler just shook his head. “Not sure how to answer that. Once I find out more information, I’ll let you know.”

“Thank you,” Ben remarked gratefully and then eyed the papers in front of him dubiously. “I suppose I should be returning to… desk duty.”

Snorting lightly, Caleb resumed his pacing just as he replaced his grin with the most innocent expression. “It’s tricky business, this all agent stuff, isn’t it? Needing to find the proper balance between loyalty and trust.”

Ben hummed in affirmation, though the other man suspected he was only half listening at this point. Well then, he thought to himself, this should grab his attention.

“Especially,” Caleb continued, maintaining the same innocent air he was never known to possess, “when there’s history there, a long, complicated history with a lack of closure and unresolved… feelings and such.” From the corner of his eye, he noticed with no small pleasure of delight as Ben stiffened, clearly reading into the implication behind his words just as they were intended. Good.

“Even more especially,” the whaler on continued, tone verging on gleeful, “when it’s men and women. Tricky business indeed.”

“If you’re going to continue speaking in innuendos,” Ben remarked, tone clipped, “just come out with it.”

“All I’m trying to say is that perhaps Anna and Abraham are not the only ones that need to resolve whatever conflict has developed between them,” Caleb said, lifting his brows challengeingly, as if daring to be proved wrong.

But alas, in this instance, that was one thing Ben could not do. He had yet to speak with Abigail after his meeting with Washington, and that had been a week ago, a week and a half if those few days in between were considered.

He hadn’t been able to seek her out, having been assigned his tasks by. However, neither had she made the attempt to find him either, which only confirmed his belief she was still very much cross with him. His only method of knowing she was not in harm’s way was due to Caleb’s observations, whenever he wasn’t on his way to Setauket.
While he understood her feelings, he couldn’t help but feel frustrated, both with her and himself. It felt as of late whenever they took one step forward, they took two steps backwards.

“It’s a little more complicated than –”

“Sir,” a voice interrupted, prompting both men to turn their gaze towards the door. Entering the room was a soldier, a corporal in fact, who walked straight towards Ben as soon as he saw him. “I have an urgent report from the provost marshal.”

Ben accepted the parchment from his extended hand as the corporal continued, “He thought perhaps you’d like to see the latest prisoner exchange proposal.”

“Thank you, corporal,” he remarked with a short nod. The corporal nodded in kind and exited the room, dismissed. As soon as he was gone, the major opened the folded parchment and began to read the proposal’s contents, which consisted of a brief summary of the number of men and how long they had been held in British custody along with a list of names.

It wasn’t until he reached the final name did Ben push back his chair and rise to his feet abruptly, refusing to remove his gaze from that one name. He stared and stared until the words became blurry. It could not be…

“What is it?” Caleb asked, stepping close to get a look at the parchment.

“Samuel,” Ben croaked, voice tight with emotion. He attempted to clear his throat, but that did nothing to help. “It’s Samuel. He’s alive.” His voice still sounded choked to his own ears. It didn’t matter because

Samuel was alive. His brother was alive.

Ben finally managed to look away from the paper to meet Caleb’s stunned gaze, and he couldn’t help the light laugh in his voice as he added, “He’s being released.”

Snatching the paper from his hands, Caleb read over the proposal and let out a loud, whooping laugh. Ben covered a hand over his mouth, though he didn’t know why as he felt himself grinning relentlessly against his own palm.

“Sammy boy!” Caleb cried and immediately walked over to the major. They two men embraced warmly with Caleb slapping him heartily on the back.

“When do we go get him?” the whaler asked the moment the embrace ended.

“I…” Ben’s excitement deflated as reality returned, causing him to sigh. “I have to report to Washington tomorrow.”

Caleb huffed. “Oh, come on! He’ll release you for this.”

Ben shook his head, desperate to rein in his irritation. “No, he won’t. He’d consider it… special treatment.” Those last words came out more bitterly than he intended, but that couldn’t be helped. He hadn’t seen in his brothers in years. He had thought… he had thought the worst had happened, that he would never see his brother again. And now he held a paper in his hands detailing his release… “There are other men’s brothers on that list.”

Caleb nodded, understanding. “All right. Well, I’ll pick him up then. Yeah, I’ll go and get Samuel, and then I’ll bring him straight here.” He started off to the exit and then paused, shaking his head. “No, you know what, I’ll get him drunk first. I’ll get him drunk first and then I’ll get him a screw.”
He grabbed his hat from Ben’s desk and turned to head out in the direct of his boat, a bounce in his step when Ben called out to him, “Wait, Caleb.”

Pausing, Caleb turned in the door way, radiating with excitement, “Yeah?”

“Thank you,” he spoke sincerely. He wanted to thank him for more than that, for putting himself at unnecessary risk for a task he wasn’t required to do, but he knew if he did, Caleb would take offense to it, seeing as how it was something he was gladly volunteering to do, so he kept those sentiments to himself.

The whaler grinned warmly, “Hey, what are brothers for, right?”

Ben watched his best friend leave, wanting more than anything to go with him but knowing that he couldn’t go against Washington’s wishes.

So with a heavy heart, he returned to his post, thumbing through correspondence and writing lists although his mind was far away from the room he was in.

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Day became dusk by the time Ben stepped out of the house and onto the wooden porch. The crisp winter wind greeted him with bite, but it was a welcomed one to be out of that house, that room in particular.

If anything, the cold energized him, easing the surge of restlessness he felt but only marginally. The news of his brother’s release had not fully hit him yet, although his current state of shock would suggest otherwise. It was something he could hardly believe, but he had the papers in his possession to know it was happening. He and his brother would be reunited.

If only he had been able to go with Caleb to retrieve him.

Having completed his tasks for the day, the major had the evening free to continue to mull this over and more, to over think and to over analyze, and count the hours until they returned. He was stepping off the final porch step when he spotted a familiar form not even several yards away, carrying a musket and other supplies utilized during patrol.

It wasn’t until the soldier briefly removed their hat did he know it was Abigail, even more so when he observed the boy beside her. They always seemed to be together these days, on the days he was able to see her but not speak with her, which was too often for his liking.

His curiosity about the boy was quickly replaced with his eagerness to share his news with her. Their families had always shared a close kinship throughout the years. She had every right to know about Samuel’s release.

As soon as the younger soldier headed off in the opposite direction of her, Ben walked towards her with a briskness that was anything but discreet. Fortunately, there was hardly anyone present to interpret his behavior as odd, and to be perfectly honest, in that moment, he was unable to care any less.

Meanwhile, Abigail, tired from the extra miles she and Christopher had tacked onto their patrol, was preoccupied with the removal of her musket strap from her shoulder to see him coming.

She let out a quiet noise of victory when she finally disentangled herself from the horribly heavy piece of weaponry and was tempted to leave it there and return to her tent when she finally glanced up to see Benjamin heading toward her in a rather determined manner.
Freezing in her moments, Abigail couldn’t help but allow the thoughts enter her mind that she had been caught, going against official orders and patrolling beyond the parameters. However, the closer the young major came, she realized his expression didn’t support her thoughts. He didn’t look cross at all. In fact, he looked almost happy but was attempting to maintain a calm façade, which wasn’t fooling her. She could read him like a book.

“A-” Benjamin went to greet her but stop himself short, catching himself just in time to correct himself. “Williams. Can you spare a moment?”

“I…” she paused to look around the camp, noting the scarcity. “Of course.” Then, in a much lower voice, asked, “Is everything all right?”

Matching her quiet tone, he leaned in for a moment, discreet, to murmur, “I have news but… not here.”

She nodded in understanding and shifted her supplies in her hands, along with the musket, “We just came back from patrol so I’ll have to deposit these in my tent, but I’ll come to your tent soon after. Promise.”

He looked as if he was prepared to join her for the walk, even going so far as to help carry her belongings, but they both knew how suspicious that would look regardless of the number of soldiers currently in camp, or lack thereof for the moment.

They went their separate ways, each returning to their tents. She had half a mind to drop her things onto her cot and return to him immediately but was conscious of the random tent assessments performed by Officer Pita himself.

With an irritated sigh, Abigail carefully sorted the supplies and musket into their proper places, which took more time than she liked. Even though she was careful, she couldn’t stop her mind from wondering to Ben, mentally assessing his countenance when he had walked up to her and pondered what news he had to share. It had to be something good, something important. Her curiosity consumed her.

She set off in the direction of his tent as soon as she was done, uncaring of any looks she might have drawn to herself, if there were any at all. It wasn’t until she was standing directly outside his tent she had forgotten her hat in her haste, but the moment the tent flap opened to reveal Ben, everything else ceased to matter.

Once inside, Abigail looked around, a little taken aback at the disheveled state of his tent. Normally efficiently organized, his things were scattered about almost haphazardly, almost as if he had been in the process of reorganizing to keep himself busy but unable to determine what should go where. It was a startling sight to say the least, and her curiosity quickly gave way to concern.

She turned around, prepared to ask him what was going on when he blurted out, “Samuel’s alive.”

Abigail stared at him. “What?”

“He’s… he’s alive. He’s on the prisoner exchange proposal I just received this morning,” Ben added and looked down at his hand, in which he still clutched at the parchment in a vice-like grip.

Her lips parted with a gasp. She could hardly believe it. The last she had seen Ben’s older brother was well before the war had begun, far before he had enlisted. Years’ worth of memories bombarded her at just the mention of Samuel’s name – Samuel being the mediator between her and Ben’s numerous bickering matches, Samuel helping her take care of her father during one of his sick spells,
Samuel as her confidant about her feelings for his brother at the tender age of sixteen – “my brother’s an idiot but be patient with him. I have a strong sense about the two of you” - He was the older brother she had never had but had always wanted.

Samuel Tallmadge was the older brother Ben had always adored and worshipped. And after years of separation, he was returning to him.

Without another word, Abigail closed the distance between them to throw her arms around his neck and embrace him tightly. She felt his arms wrap around her waist without hesitation and tightened her arms around him, supporting him.

“Tallmadge said you and he were close,” she prompted softly as he pulled her to him. “What did he say?”

Samuel Tallmadge was the older brother Ben had always adored and worshipped. And after years of separation, he was returning to him.

Without another word, Abigail closed the distance between them to throw her arms around his neck and embrace him tightly. She felt his arms wrap around her waist without hesitation and tightened her arms around him, supporting him.

“I’m so happy you told me,” she spoke softly against his ear, just as he pressed his face against the curve of her neck with a quiet breath. “I know how much you’ve missed him.”

She smiled as she felt him nod against her neck. Then, because she couldn’t help herself, “Now Caleb has someone to share his shifts when dealing with the pair of us.”

Ben laughed at that, warmly and solidly. She experienced his laughter both in sound and in touch. There wasn’t anything better in the world. “I think Caleb mentioned he was getting him drunk first.”

“Ah, that’s probably for the best then,” she remarked. “I suspect we’ve had that tendency to nearly drive him to drink in the past.” The fond chuckle she received was all the confirmation she needed for that.

He told her that Caleb had set off to retrieve him as soon as he had heard and how Washington required his presence at the camp for specific tasks. Judging from the tone of his voice, she knew this upset him greatly but also understood he had an obligation to Washington to obey his orders. That didn’t stop her from sharing in his resentment, however. He deserved to be there to be reunited with his brother.

They fell into a silence not long after that, each incredibly reluctant to break away from the embrace.

It wasn’t until she felt him begin to tremble against her did she finally pull back, not entirely but enough so that she could see his face. As soon as she did, the tortured expression on Ben’s face was nearly enough to break her heart. She knew him well enough he was trying to remain composed but was struggling with doing so greatly.

Reaching up to lay her hands against the sides of his neck, she slid her hands up to cup his face gently. “Hey,” she murmured. “You don’t have to put on a brave face for me. There’s no use in pretending here. I’m here for you.”

“I…” Ben started but cut himself off, squeezing his eyes shut. “It’s been so long… It’s been years. And I thought…” His breath caught in his throat. “I thought he was dead.”

Her thumbs brushed tenderly along his cheeks as she waited for him to finish, patient and calm as his façade began to crack. “And I should be there. I should be the one to bring him back. And I can’t. And it kills me.”

“I know,” she murmured, throat tightening with emotion as she sadly watched the first tear fall.

He breathed out harshly, trying to compose himself but failing with every single attempt. Blinking rapidly, he tried to keep the tears at bay, but as soon as the first traitorous tear rolled down his cheek, he knew there was little he could do about it. Just like how he was helpless in retrieving his brother.

“It’s okay,” Abigail assured him. When he refused to look at her, ashamed, she stepped closer so that he had no choice but to look at her. “Hey, it is okay. Everything is going to be okay. Crying,” she
leaned in forward to press her lips lightly against a tear stained cheek, “is okay.” She pulled back slightly to see that his eyelids had fallen shut.

With a decision made, she guided him over to the cot before walking towards the tent’s entrance, making sure the flap was securely closed. She then returned to his side, sitting beside him on the cot where he had buried his face into his hands.

Gently, she guided his hands away from his face, giving them a comforting squeeze before shifting them so that they were know lying down on his cot. It was definitely not meant for two people, but with some rearranging, Abigail managed to make it work, with her arms wrapped around him securely and his face pressed against her shoulder, attempting to suppress his sobs, sobs of relief, reawakening grief, frustration…

She held him throughout it all, even as the dusk became night, even as his sobs subsided and his shuddering ceased long ago. He refused to release her, and she refused to be released.

Hours later, both emotionally fatigued, they fell asleep together but only after some shifting so that Abigail was curled against his chest and Ben’s arms around her.
Abigail was keenly aware of the odd looks she was receiving from the higher-ranking officers who were coming in and out of the Trenton house. This was something she should have been more concerned about, knowing any kind of attention did not benefit her while trying to keep her secret.

However, those thoughts were the furthest from her mind, as unwise as it was. Before she had left his tent the previous night, Ben had told her he would be returning to the tasks Washington had assigned him, meaning he would be consumed with compiling of information and correspondence. At that time, she hadn’t spoken a word apart from squeezing his hand in comfort, but she knew then and knew now that little progress would be made the following morning.

And when she had stepped into the small wooden room inside the house, she had been proven right, having found him pacing the floor, periodically glancing out of the window to search for any sights or sounds alerting him to Caleb’s return with the men that were listed in the prisoner exchange proposal, looking for one particular face.

Upon seeing her, Ben’s initial reaction had been trying to convince her to leave, that she shouldn’t be risking attention for his sake, growing increasingly frustrated with her stubborn refusal. Quickly, however, it had been clear to them both the growing half-heartedness in his attempts to get her to leave. She had taken this as a minor source of victory as he had closed the door to the room to decrease the number of curious eyes.

“They should be back by now,” Ben remarked, continuing to pace back and forth incessantly. Abigail observed him wringing his hands nervously behind his back.

“They’ve only been gone a day,” she reminded him gently. “And the exchange could be happening any moment now.”

“Exactly. And I should be with them.” He chuckled bitterly. “But I’m not.”

“You were obeying Washington’s orders,” she reminded him with a small frown. “You said so yourself it would have been interpreted as special treatment if he had granted you leave, although I highly disagree.”

With a burdened groan, the young major halted in his movements and pressed his hands to his face in agitation. “I just wish I could do more.”

She nodded, knowing that words could do nothing to ease his restlessness in that moment. All she could do was be there for him, with him, and that was all she could do.

“I understand,” she said, after several minutes of silence. She rose to her feet just as he made another trip to the window. “I wish there was more I could do for you now.”

With his hands gripping the bottom length of the window pane, Ben said nothing, but he didn’t have to. All of the tension in his shoulders spoke for him. After a moment, he looked down at her, with a
complex mixture of emotions even she was having a difficult time deciphering. “You’re doing more
than enough.” For the first time that morning, he smiled. “I think this is first time I’m admitting this,
but I appreciate you not listening to me.”

Abigail raised her eyebrows, a grin growing across her face, which gave him momentary pause.
“Just this once, of course.”

“You’re not going to get away with that last bit. You know that, don’t you?” she asked, grinning
fully now as he sighed heavily, though that smile of his hadn’t dimmed.

“And you’re never going to let me forget I said that, will you?” he challenged in kind, his smile
growing.

Abigail shook her head with her wicked grin. “Never.”

Ducking his head with a quiet huff of laughter, Ben’s gaze inevitably returned towards the camp
base once again. She looked down to see his grip tightening along the window pane once again,
knuckles turning increasingly white.

Without a second thought, she lifted a hand to rest over his, brushing her fingers along his knuckles
and gently coaxing him out of his white-knuckled grip. Only once she felt his grip underneath her
fingers did she begin to withdraw her hand.

However, nearly as soon she did, his hand dropped from the window and reached for hers, drawing
her back in. The pair’s gazes remained fixated on the camp outside, pointedly not on the feeling of
his fingers sliding down along her wrist to entwine with hers. She feared he felt her pulse jolt at the
brush of his fingers along her wrist, but if he had, he showed no indication of it.

Throughout the night and into the morning, Abigail’s joy and elation upon hearing the news of
Samuel’s impending return gradually changed to doubt and quiet suspicion. She hated herself for it,
but it wasn’t in her nature to accept things at face value, or in this case, words’ value. Out of the two,
Ben certainly possessed more optimistic ideals than herself. This wasn’t to say she was a pessimistic
purist, far from it actually. In her life, she learned it was wiser to withhold trust until someone earned
it. She was a woman after all, no matter her current situation and her alias.

A part of her had a feeling, somehow some way, this wouldn’t play out entirely how anyone
anticipated. In what fashion, she was uncertain, but she knew better than to go against her instincts.
She hadn’t the heart to share these thoughts with Ben then, nor did she have the heart to share them
with him now. It just wasn’t her place, and she didn’t want it to be.

It was difficult to measure how much time the two of them stood there, silent and still with only the
occasional comforting hand press providing any sort of movement. It wasn’t until soldiers began
gathering in small groups in the center of camp did they realize there was a world beyond these four
walls.

She fought back a frown, realizing it was more than likely Officer Pita’s tent inspection rearing his
ugly head, and shared her suspicions with Ben while omitting the officer’s moniker, obviously.

He encouraged her to go, saying he would be fine on his own. Unwilling to completely accept that,
she promised him she would return as soon as the inspection was over, giving his hand one final
comforting press before allowing her fingers to slip away from his. Her hand felt significantly empty
after she left the room and stepped out of the house.

The wait for the inspection was much longer than the inspection itself, which only fueled Abigail’s
irritation further. Upon experiencing her first inspection, her initial response was fear, fear for being reprimanded for not having her supplies in the proper order, fear for having her belongings being searched through, all cumulating into her fear of getting caught. Now having more experience with camp life and observing the behaviors of other soldiers and officers alike, especially Pita, she knew what to expect, although this did not decrease her level of caution.

After a little over an hour of waiting for her tent inspection and minutes after the inspection was completed, she barely gave herself enough time to let them leave the tent before she made her way back towards the house. It was the sight of Ben marching determinedly out of the house and through the camp when she decided to alter her course.

“Where are you going?” she asked him as soon as she caught up with him, although she already knew the answer.

“I’m going to join up with Caleb,” he responded after a moment of hesitation. It was clear from that pause alone he had never intended on telling her of his true purpose if she hadn’t caught up with him, which only solidified her judgement in believing this was a bad idea.

“Are you sure that’s wise?” she asked, purposefully ignoring the determined set in his jaw as she matched his brisk pace towards the horses. “And not just regarding Washington. Are you sure it’s wise that you should be going? A highly ranked officer of the Continental Army in charge of a prisoner exchange?” Even as she said the words aloud, she felt even more convinced there was something not quite right about this scenario.

“I’ve done all I can do from here for Washington. Now I have to do what I can for my brother,” Ben replied, “I thought you of all people would understand this.”

Abigail pressed her lips together firmly, doing her best to rein in her irritation at the mild accusation underlying those words. “Don’t read more into my words than what I’ve said, Benjamin,” she remarked. “All I’m suggesting is to think about this –”

He was already reaching for an already saddled horse, which quite possibly meant he had made arrangements for this very moment – just how many hours prior she couldn’t quite say. One quality Ben was known to possess was a particular terrible tenacity. Whenever he had his mind set to something, it was incredibly unlikely for him to be talked out of or down from whatever he desired to accomplish. She knew this to be fact, mostly because she was exactly the same.

Knowing better than to continue this route of the argument, she decided to change course. “Let me come with you, at least,” she reasoned.

“No.”

Abigail’s eyes narrowed. “Benjamin.”

“No,” Ben retorted before mounting his horse, as if holding the higher ground would win him the argument. He adjusted the reins in his hands before looking at her. “You’re to remain here, at the base, until you receive orders stating the contrary.”

“You need someone, Benjamin –”

“That,” he cut her off, “is an order.” Before she could even think of a sharp retort, he kicked his horse’s flanks and rode out of the camp at a trot.

She stood there for a moment, collecting herself through measured, calming breaths, counting silently before turning on her heel and rushing back to her tent. Slipping out of her uniform coat, she
shrugged back into her father’s coat and cap, to provide her some cover. She then grabbed her pistol and other weaponry she could carry on her person in what little time she had to spare and slipped out of the tent to retrieve Cantor, holding his reins firmly in her hands.

There was no time to tack him properly, not if she intended to follow Ben into his foolhardy mission of his. Thankfully, with years of riding bareback under her belt, she knew she wouldn’t have much trouble, unless Cantor was feeling particularly frisky that morning.

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The journey into woods wasn’t particularly eventful on Cantor’s part. As if sensing her urgency, he was perfectly well-behaved, doing just about everything she asked him to do, which was more than she could say under ordinary circumstances.

She kept their distance from the young major, going only as close as she dared to without wanting to be caught by himself or anyone else. It was fortunate she had changed her coat and cap when she had, the neutral colors of the chestnut brown blending in well with the barren, dead bark of winter camouflaged them, or so she hoped.

It wasn’t long until they made it to the open trail, and not long after did she spot the Continental soldiers tasked with transporting those from the prisoner exchange back to camp. She reined Cantor back sharply, almost too sharply that she nearly slipped off his back. Knowing she couldn’t get too close, she observed from a great distance as Ben slowed his horse to a walk and an eventual halt to speak with the soldiers.

She tried to see if she could spot Caleb or Samuel within the group, but in the end her attempts were futile. Even though her skills at tracking had greatly improved from Christopher’s guidance, she lacked the keen eyesight of a hawk to observe from such a distance. Instead, she settled for remaining back, waiting in the shrubberies, or what was left of them, until it was safe enough to reveal herself if the time called for it.

The conversation between the major and soldier was brief, much briefer than she anticipated, and before she was aware of what was happening, Ben guided his horse down the road past the soldiers and took off into a gallop.

Cursing to herself, she realized she didn’t have many options left, which left many of her next decisions up to improvisation.

Knowing it would be difficult sticking to the path Ben had just taken while remaining out of the sight of the other Continental soldiers, she pressed the reins against Cantor’s neck, easing him to turn around and return from where the direction they had just come from. This was not an attempt to return to the camp but to travel back to the small break in the path that had lead in two directions, one of which she would be returning from.

She just prayed to God it would keep her in the right direction.

“Come on, boy,” she murmured encouragingly to the horse before nudging him into a light gallop when they were a good distance away from the soldiers. Cantor stretched out his legs smoothly into the run, breathing in time with every motion. At one point, she could have sworn she felt end of his tail brush along her back. She didn’t have to look back to know his tail was swishing about in pleasure. At least one of them was having fun.

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As soon as they returned to that break in the trail, Abigail didn’t hesitate to travel straight down the opposite path. She encouraged him to go faster, instinctively pressing her legs more securely at his sides and tightening her grip on his withers, cursing herself for not taking the time to saddle him all the while. How was it possible in all those months she had forgotten how fast this beast was?

It was next to impossible to know how much time had passed, with only the changing cast of sunlight as a guide. The bitter cold of the winter wind dug deep into her bones, beyond the material of her clothes and skin. Her teeth were gritted in pain but did her best to ignore it in favor for concentrating on remaining upright.

Eventually, she did slow him down into a trot, allowing Cantor a moment or two to catch his breath. She reached up to adjust her cap atop her head as the trot eased into an energized walk.

The only sounds in the woods were the crunch of leaves and snaps of twigs underneath Cantor’s hooves, which only made it more startling when a loud whinny pierced the veil of silence. Stopping him immediately, she reached inside her coat to pull out her pistol with one hand and clutching Cantor’s reins in the other.

She scanned the area cautiously, heart pounding. The thought of hopping off Cantor to take a closer look was entertained but was quickly eliminated by the need of a potential escape. Though she soon realized even if that was a possibility, she wasn’t certain how much longer she could ride without falling right off. Her limbs were already stiff and half frozen from the combination of the lengthy ride and cold. Even with all her hours of riding bareback, that would be difficult to manage.

The sound of thundering hooves prompted Abigail to immediately tug on Cantor’s reins, commanding him to back up into the woods and behind a thick patch of trees. She cocked her gun and readied herself as the thundering came closer and closer still. Would this be her first confrontation with a redcoat?

The sound of hooves trampling along the woodland floor finally found its embodiment of a white horse, fully saddled and adorned fit for an officer. The only problem appeared to be the horse’s lack of rider.

Lowering her pistol to her side, she leaned forward, preparing to jump down to the ground. She suppressed a deep groan at the ache in her bones as she shifted but ultimately couldn’t suppress it altogether when she tumbled to the ground in a graceless heap.

Pulling herself to her feet, she quickly tied Cantor’s reins to a low hanging branch and took a step closer towards the trail. Once she was certain there was no one in sight, she stepped from behind the trees and walked over towards the horse for further inspection.

It didn’t take her long to realize the horse belonged to Ben.

Holding back her fear, she coaxed the horse in allowing her to draw him into the trees to join Cantor. She loosened one of his reins and tied him up on another low hanging branch, making each certain each horse had enough leeway to graze at what little grass was offered to them. Meanwhile, she checked the weapons on her person, knowing she would have to retrace the horse’s path on her own. Whatever trouble Ben had found himself must have been enough to spook his horse and send him toppling off.

That was what she had to believe and what encouraged her to travel forward on foot. She kept close to the trees and bushes, just as Caleb had taught her, and made sure to mark each tree she passed with the spearhead she had found on patrol just as Christopher had shown her.
Focusing on the horse’s hoof prints, she followed the trail, doing her best to distinguish between Cantor’s and the other’s, which proved incredibly difficult. The longer she walked, the more frustrating the act became.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, the firing of a musket not too far in the distance appeared to have confirmed her instincts correct.

Grappling her pistol, she lowered herself to the ground, wincing as another shot was fired, only this time much louder and closer to where she was. Her only recent experiences with gunshots had been at the recruitment base several months’ ago. This was worlds apart from that.

After those two shots, however, everything fell into a deadly silence. She wondered if she had just missed the skirmish, and if this was the standoff, but didn’t allow herself the time to think about it. She needed to move and move fast before whichever side decided that this reprieve was no longer tolerable.

With her pistol at her side, Abigail kept herself low to the ground for cover, hiding behind anything that provided any form of cover that she could. Unfortunately, her luck appeared to have run out when the next expanse of the woods provided no form of shelter apart from the occasional tree.

Her safest gamble relied on getting behind an elevated level of terrain or into a ditch of some sort, but the only way she could access those areas was to cross this long stretch of forest floor.

“Shit, okay,” she murmured, releasing a quiet breath. She could do this. It wasn’t that far a distance from where she currently stood.

With another survey around the area, she gathered all the strength she had and propelled herself forward before she could lose her nerve.

Everything in her line of sight became blurred as she sprinted through the woods, though there was nothing wrong with her hearing when the loud shot of a bullet whizzed past her, striking a tree bark somewhere behind her.

As soon as she could, Abigail dove to the ground, using the elevated terrain as cover. She panted hard, rolling onto her side and squeezing her eyes shut.

From behind her, she heard a voice question, “Oi! Newbie. Friend or foe?”

Abigail’s eyelids snapped open at the all too familiar voice and found herself grinning foolishly in relief. It took a minute or two to catch her breath, but once she did, she remarked, “A friend, I would hope.”

She rolled over to see Caleb grinning at her with confused surprise just yards away from where she resided. Not too far away was a rather disheveled looking man, of whom she wasn’t entirely certain of what to make of him.

“Can you make it over?” the whaler whispered loudly. She began to nod until she looked over at the major lying next to him and the expression on his face stopped her short.

Ben looked utterly furious.

“I’m… not so certain that I should,” Abigail whispered back, mimicking Caleb’s volume. “I’m afraid I’ve already drawn more than enough attention already.”

“Just get your arse over here, Williams.” Caleb gestured to her insistently. “Now’s as good of a time
Breaking her gaze away from Ben’s face, the blonde waited for any sounds of friendly fire. When she heard none, she pushed herself up just enough to rush over towards them.

It wasn’t until she was jerked down by a sharp tug as soon as she reached them and loud whistling bullet right after the tug did she once again recognize how precarious her position had been.

Though that hardly compared to being nearly nose-to-nose with Benjamin Tallmadge as she was currently.

“What in the hell are you doing here?” Ben hissed. Abigail would’ve been more affected by the intensity of his glare if their intimately close proximity wasn’t already distracting her.

“Following you,” she responded, choosing to state the obvious, which nothing to help his glaring. “And it was a good thing I did, too.”

“Why? So that you can nearly get shot?” he countered.

She did her best not to roll her eyes to the high heavens. “No. Because I found your horse and kept him safe along with mine. Now you have two horses instead of none.” Shifting onto her stomach – because she couldn’t remain just shy of being pressed against his chest while arguing with him – she then turned and added almost as an afterthought, “You’re welcome, by the way.”

Ben made an infuriated noise and was about to respond when Caleb cut in, “And where are these horses? I see none in sight.”

Grateful for Caleb’s interception, Abigail answered him directly over Ben’s shoulder, “I left them tied up a little ways from here. I’ve marked the path, so I know the way back whenever we get out of… this.”

Nodding, the whaler looked as if he wished to say more, but judging from Ben’s tense posture, he decided against it. Abigail took this time to look over at the other man, and after a few minutes of scrutiny, she realized with startling clarity the man was Selah Strong, Anna’s husband. How on earth…

And where was Samuel?

Worn and pale, he appeared to be assessing her, too, eying her with a furrowed brow. “Have we met somewhere before?” he inquired, his voice cracked from assumedly months of disuse.

Abigail stared, lips parting to answer when Ben took care of that for her, “No, you haven’t.” He briefly made eye contact with her, and while he remained furious, he still remembered the importance of keeping her secret. The less people that knew, the better.

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“The high noon had given way to night, without as much as another bullet being fired. However, that still didn’t mean their enemy, namely Robert Rogers, wasn’t still present. During this time, Abigail had learned quietly about the intended ploy on this Rogers’ part to entrap Ben by luring him out with the false impression of releasing Samuel. As fate would have it, however, Rogers had chosen Selah Strong as his impersonator, the man who had grown up with Ben, Caleb, Abe, and her husband Tobias from boyhood.
She had still reeling from the news when Ben had made his request to Selah.

From beside her, she heard Caleb remark, “He has a right to know, Selah.” Having split the duty of keeping watch between the three of them, their previous positions had changed with Selah lying carefully on his side across from Ben, trying not to meet his eye and Abigail herself resting her back against a low-lying tree bark, having just taken over the position of watchman – or rather, watchwoman.

Finally, after what felt like years, Selah spoke quietly, “The Jersey… was hell. We had to fight for food, air to breathe. We became animals.” He pressed the heels of his palms to his eyes, hoping as if that simple act would take away several months’ worth of brutal torture from his memory. After a moment, he lowered his hands from his face and continued, “We curse God, all of us… except Samuel.

“Your brother prayed every night. Convinced me to pray, too. To fight. We protected each other, as much as we were able to.” He paused, bowing his head grimly. “But I couldn’t protect him from dysentery.”

Abigail’s heart clenched inside her chest with each passing word from Selah’s mouth and absolutely broke at the mention of dysentery. Having observed her father’s medical practices and read some of his research, she knew how terrible the disease was on the human body. And to think Samuel had suffered through it all, it was enough to make her sick.

“When… when it was done, I was the one who carried Samuel above deck. I prayed for his soul go to heaven and sent his body to the sea.”

She couldn’t see his face, but she knew from the subtle tremors in his shoulders, Ben was on the verge of tears. She wanted nothing more than to reach out to him, to comfort him, but with their current positions, she was unable to reach him, in more ways than one it seemed.

Blessedly, Caleb did what she was unable to do and pressed a comforting hand to his friend’s shoulder. “Hey, at least he’s at peace now, Ben.”

“Peace?” the young major sniffed harshly, and Abigail’s heart shattered. “What peace? My brother died like a dog… with everything stripped from him. And now, even in death, Rogers… he steals his name to set a trap for me?”

Ben’s face turned upwards toward the mound, expression fixed into a stony expression, an expression Abigail had never seen on him before. “He dies tonight.”

A deadly silence settled over the group. Not long after was Caleb the one to break it. “Do you even have a plan for this?”

Ben nodded grimly. “I do.”

“Yeah? Would you mind filling us in?”

There was another elongated pause before the major finally responded, “Victory or death.”

Caleb stared at him. “No.”

“It’s the only option, Caleb.”

The whaler remarked firmly, “You’re not going out as some decoy.”
“I won’t let you die because of me.” Ben’s eyes locked with Abigail’s briefly over Caleb’s shoulder before his gaze returned over the mound. He cocked his gun, preparing to hoist himself over when Caleb stopped him with a strong hand to his shoulder.

“I’m sorry about Sammy, Tall-boy, I am. And I can’t bring him back like I promised. But I can help you get out of these woods and back to camp.”

Abigail listened to their exchange in uncharacteristic silence, her dread growing with each rejoinder. There wasn’t any part of her that could imagine allowing Ben to act as decoy while the rest of them escaped, nor could she picture a scenario in which Caleb enacted the duty. Both men were vital to the Continental Army. She might not have all of the information to know to what extent, but from the past several months alone, she was able to discern this for herself. And she cared for them both dearly and absolutely refused to let them take on a task such as this.

Which was why, when she nudged Caleb lightly with her foot and got his attention, she mouthed the words “hold him” to him before she quickly rose to her feet, back pressed firmly against the tree.

It wasn’t until she cocked her pistol did she catch Ben’s attention. “What… what are you – no!” Caleb held him to the ground before he could leap to his feet to tackle her himself.

She took a breath, waited a beat, preparing to step out and start shooting when a horse’s whinny broke the silence.

“Shite,” she heard Caleb murmur somewhere behind her. She raised her pistol close to her chest but didn’t take aim, not until she was certain of who she would be aiming for. The closer the whinnies came, the better the view they received of the accompanying riders. Redcoats and lots of them.

Shite indeed.

“Hold the line!” called one of the redcoats as they slowed down to a trot. Abigail hesitated, glancing down for a moment to look at Ben and Caleb before returning her gaze to the redcoats who have yet to spot them.

“We know you’re there. We followed the report of your guns. This standoff must cease and desist by the order of Major John Andre.”

Abigail met Ben’s gaze, which was both a mixture of fury and frustration. More than likely the look wasn’t entirely meant for her, but considering she had been prepared to act as decoy on his behalf, the expression more than partially hers.

“Both parties must put aside their arms and come down at once!”

As was to be expected neither party moved a muscle, neither willing to give an inch until the other side gave in.

Eventually, she heard the mechanical clicking of a revolver not too far from where she stood, and she held her breath, unable to decipher if it had been a cocking of the gun or not. Then the heavy thud jolted her senses and drew her attention to the ground. Nearly right beside her was a pistol, a design of which she was entirely unfamiliar, which meant it belonged to someone on the other side.

The standoff was officially over.
Chapter 9

The brokered truce that dissolved the standoff turned out much differently than Abigail could have ever anticipated. Upon confronting Robert Rogers’ roguish actions, one of the soldiers sent by Major Andre turned to Ben and asked if Rogers had indeed intended to lure him out under false pretenses of releasing his brother. The young major had only confirmed part of the accusations but, knowing Selah would have been recaptured by the British depending on his answer, presented instead that the man they had rescued was in fact Samuel Tallmadge, leaving Rogers in the hands of the British for going against his original orders for his own self-interest.

As soon as the last redcoat had ridden off and after making sure there were no more of the queen’s rangers lurking about in the woods, Caleb had prompted her to lead the way towards the horses, of which she had nearly forgotten about.

It had taken longer than it would have ordinarily would have to find them if it had been daylight, but to have found them at all in the same spot as where she had left them had been a miracle of itself.

The only problem that had been left was the dilemma of two horses and four people. However, the need to get back to camp as soon as possible outweighed the desire for social niceties. This eventually resulted in each pair sharing a horse for the journey, with Selah and Caleb on Ben’s horse and Abigail and Ben on Cantor. She had suspected Caleb had some ulterior motive for this arrangement but had no way of proving it.

Only once they had made it back to the camp did Ben finally turn to her and speak, “Come with me” before dismounting Cantor. He waited for her to dismount as well and began to guide her by the elbow in the direction of the camp and, she assumed his tent but not before hearing Caleb murmur a response to whatever question Selah had posed, “That’s… a bit of a complicated matter. They’re sorting it out.”

As soon as they were alone in Ben’s tent, Abigail braced herself for the impending argument that had been building up for the past several hours. There was so much that needed to be said, but what needed to be said would more than likely get them nowhere, seeing as how incredibly stubborn each of them were. She knew in her heart she was not sorry for disobeying his direct order, and neither was he sorry for having made the order to stay behind. This argument would get them nowhere.

Instead of the barely barbed words she expected to be exchanged, the conversation was surprisingly civil, even as it went just as how she had anticipated. They both refused to apologize for their actions, believing they had been entirely in the right when all they desired was to keep the other one safe. In the end, after what nearly felt like years’ worth of conversation, they managed to reach an acceptance, a mutual understanding that felt as if the very foundation of what Abigail had ever known had transformed, into what she could not say.

Sitting across from him at his desk and he on his cot, Abigail fought the urge to rise and walk over to him as she watched him struggle over his next words, a sight she had never witnessed before tonight. “I’ve made my peace with losing my brother long ago, and tonight’s events don’t change that, although with the news of how he died… I…” Ben stopped himself from going any further, but she knew he would struggle with the revelations of this night for some time. “But the thought of losing you, the possibility I could have lost you tonight… that I cannot bear.”

The pained inflection in his tone, the imploring sincerity in her gaze rendered Abigail breathless. For the first time in many years, the open vulnerability in his face revealed itself, a moment she believed not many people were often privy to.
“I’m not going anywhere, Ben,” she remarked softly, hoping the words didn’t sound disingenuous because, in this world and war they were in, there was no guarantee of keeping that promise. Seeing as how he was ready to challenge those words, she was quick to interject, amending herself, “Not without a fight, anyway.”

Ben’s troubled gaze prompted her to raise from her seat and cross the small distance between them until she was standing directly in front of him, over him. She went to reach forward to cup the sides of his neck when what he did next put a halt to her plans.

Without a moment’s hesitation, he found her hand in his, holding it close between them, and, after a long beat, brought the back of her hand to his lips.

The moment his lips brushed her skin sent an intense jolt of warmth straight through her. Whatever she had intended to say died on her tongue as soon as he had taken her hand. Any trace of thought disappeared from her mind.

His lips lingered against the back of her hand, which did nothing to help that warm feeling. She couldn’t recall the last time she felt so helpless, so uncertain of herself, but it wasn’t a terrible feeling, quite the opposite in fact.

The kiss lasted far longer than what was considered socially acceptable, but neither of them appeared to be too concerned with anything else beyond the tent. She certainly never felt this electrifying sensation from another male friend, who would bestow a fond, friendly kiss to her hand in greeting or farewell. This was different. This kiss was fond but certainly not just friendly.

There was a spark there, a warmth, and she felt it. And as soon he lifted his head to meet her gaze, she knew he felt it, too.

She wanted to kiss him then. The urge was strong and distracting. It was an incredible temptation to give in to, to lean forward and press her mouth to his and savor it, if they only ever had that one time.

There wasn’t a moment she could remember, either in the past several months in camp or over the years of growing up together, where she never wanted to kiss him, either to silence him in an argument or just for the simple desire to be with him. Even in all the years’ worth of distance that had grown between them, the desire to kiss him had never waned. It was suppressed and concealed but never abandoned, even on her wedding day.

And just like that, the thought of her husband, whom she hadn’t seen in over three years, had her taking a slow step back, guilt clawing at her from every direction. She should have felt more wretched at the thought of kissing another man that wasn’t her husband, let alone the burning desire she felt to do so, and the fact that she didn’t make her feel all the worse for it.

The moment was shattered even further upon the opening of the tent flap, which made her quickly put more distance between them. Thankfully, though, it was only Caleb, who came to inform them that Ben was needed to provide an account of the standoff earlier that night, with the possibility that she might be required to give her own account as well.

She nodded, understanding, and slipped out of the tent before the flap could fall shut and kept on walking even after she caught the quiet call of her name behind her.

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Spring 1777

The weeks following their return from the skirmish with Robert Rogers and the queen’s rangers were
filled with development after development. The British still held a steady line of successes along the eastern coasts, still in control of much of the colonies they were so jealously trying to protect. In that time, she and several of the men she arrived first arrived with from the recruitment base in Rhode Island had yet to see battle, but upon observations of the tension weighing on many of the officers’ shoulders, Abigail had a suspicion that wouldn’t last for very long.

While the strategic and tactical fronts with the redcoats remained grim, developments on the personal front were somewhat more optimistic, if not complicated.

Ever since the night in his tent, things had been different between herself and the major. It was significantly apparent, at this point, that they were more than aware of the sudden shift in their relationship, but it was also apparent that neither were quite certain how to act about. Nothing went said or unsaid all at the same time, which hardly made any sense, yet it did.

During the last few days, they hardly had any time to be alone, which was both a blessing and a curse. With Ben being assigned increasingly more tasks by Washington and Abigail partaking in increasing numbers of patrol and other camp duties, it was difficult to find to speak privately.

It almost reminded her of those stolen, brief moments when she had first arrived at the flying camp, but there was a stark contrast from their interactions then compared to their interactions now, namely the fleeting, soft looks she almost always caught him with whenever he thought she wasn’t looking. Although, she hardly could place all the blame on his shoulders. If she held a mirror to her face, she doubted she was hardly any better.

None of this changed their circumstances, which were complicated enough already.

It had been hours since Ben and Caleb had set out with a rather sizeable regiment of men. When he had informed her Washington was sending them on a mission, she hadn’t been surprised, telling him all the men had already been assigned to groups in the early hours of the morning but none of them knowing what the assignments were for.

“I've been assigned to the group remaining at camp, so you don’t have to worry about me following you again,” she said, lips quirking into barely suppressed smile that only grew wider as he gave her a half-hearted attempt at a stern look.

They hadn’t had time to return to his tent or hers, so they had no choice but to enter the woods for a moment alone.

“I’m not sure when we’ll be back,” Ben remarked, shifting so that he was facing her. “But I felt that I owed it to you to tell you.”

“Thank you,” she smiled softly. “I know you can’t tell me everything but…” Her smile broke off slightly as she released nervous sigh. “Just promise me, you’ll be careful.”

Nodding, he made his promise but only when he asked for her to do the same. As soon as she did, he reached for her hand, and for a breathless moment, she thought he would kiss her hand again, foolishly anticipating for the moment only for him to offer a comforting press before they stepped from underneath the mound to return to the camp.

Rubbing the back of her hand unconsciously, Abigail rose to her feet to prepare for the evening patrol. She wished she could’ve gone with the rest of the men, if only to make sure Ben wouldn’t do anything rash, but she could only do so much. Instead, she decided to refocus her efforts with Christopher for their patrol, which was much more difficult to achieve when the number of soldiers for patrol had been reduced drastically. The challenge was provided her with large enough of a
distraction to rid her thoughts of Benjamin Tallmadge.

But only for the moment.

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“Hey, look at the boy!” Caleb remarked as he approached Selah on horseback as the soldiers marched on foot. “Army life suiting you, Mr. Strong?”

Selah’s lips twitched into a faint smile but a smile nonetheless. The weeks since the standoff with Rogers had treated him well. No longer quite so pale and drawn, he was able to hold himself upright and carry a musket with the best of them now. Perhaps all of the scars from Jersey would not fade, but he was progressing in the right direction. That was all anyone could ask or hope for in his place. “Better since you swiped me a decent pair of boots, I’d say.”

Caleb chuckled and prepared to push further ahead when his childhood friend’s next words stopped him. “How far is the coast?” he inquired, his gaze in the trees and then straight ahead but not quite at him.

The whaler tilted his head knowingly. “The coast? Five miles, give or take.” He observed the other man’s thoughtful expression and couldn’t help but ask, “You thinking of home, Selah? Setauket?”

“Well, with the men we have here, we outnumber Hewlett’s garrison,” Selah remarked, glancing upwards at Caleb to gauge his reaction. “I say we return there, take back what’s ours.”

Caleb remarked after a purposefully noncommittedly hum, “Right, and after we take it, we can stay there till, oh, at least suppertime before the Navy smokes us out.”

The tavern owner shrugged, even with the musket pressing into his shoulder. “It’d be a good meal, though.”

Grinning, Caleb said, “I’m with you there,” before clicking his tongue for his horse to ease into a trot so he could move in front of the line to where the officers led.

As soon as he reached Ben at the helm, he slowed down to a walk beside him.

Turning his head at the sound of his arrival, Ben asked, “Fraternizing with the enlisted men?”

After a moment of adjusting his horse’s reins, Caleb replied, “Not sure he’d be so full of spunk if he knew his wife thinks him dead.” The last word he received from Abe, amongst his updates, had been mention of them learning that Anna Strong’s husband died on board of the Jersey, but as the situation was complicated enough, he hadn’t been able to present evidence to the contrary.

“I coulda sorted this out if your pal Sackett let me and Culpepper meet up instead of his letters stashed in the hollow of an old tree.”

Sensing his tone, the major immediately responded, “Sackett’s procedures are intended to keep you both safe.”

Caleb shook his head, quietly disgruntled. “But these are our friends we’re lying to, Ben.”

After a moment’s pause, Ben remarked, expression conflicted, “They’re agents. They only know what they need to know. Any more could put them in danger.”

Caleb gave him a look. “Right, so Anna doesn’t need to know her husband’s still alive.”
Ben sighed heavily. “This isn’t personal, Caleb. It’s a discipline… a craft, as Mr. Sackett calls it. The more we stick by the rules, the better it will be for all of us.”

“Right and I suppose that a woman having the right to know the whereabouts of her husband isn’t classified as personal,” the whaler commented, after a significant amount of silence. And then, “And I wasn’t just talking about Anna Strong.”

The pointed look Ben received from his friend landed exactly where it intended, the sting harsh and bitter. Clenching his jaw, he replied quietly, “As I said, this isn’t personal,” and nudged his horse to ride further ahead.

“Ain’t personal my arse,” Caleb murmured with a shake of his head and continued to follow the major to wherever Washington was sending them.

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The subsequent morning, when the first stretches of sunlight barely touched the earth, Abigail and Christopher discovered themselves on patrol once again. They had long established their routine, pushing past their assigned parameters with each patrol. Although they hadn’t made much progress, they had managed to find small quirks of the land that just might give the Continental Army a minor advantage, namely the possible trail they had stumbled across a few patrols back. At this point, any discover, whether significant or insignificant, Abigail considered to be a victory.

This morning, however, felt different than all the previous mornings, a sense of unease she couldn’t quite figure out settling around them. By the looks of Christopher’s demeanor, he felt it as well.

“Are you sure we’re in the right place?” Abigail asked him quietly, adjusting the hold of her musket against her shoulder. Even with nearly spending a year with the Continental Army with a small wince, the burden of bearing the weight of a musket had never lessened.

“Of course,” Christopher assured her, but the slight pause prior to his response suggested otherwise. Extraordinarily self-assured in his tracking prowess, the boy was ordinarily more confident on their other patrols, and he had certainly every right to his confidence. He could identify nearly every leaf, patch of grass, and earthly terrain, which proved incredibly valuable when they had needed to retrace their steps back to camp. In essence, his brief moment of hesitation was telling.

Some mornings, the pair would travel towards the British camp border but would never cross, only observing from a safe distance. They would take note of whatever they could see from their distance, which wasn’t much, but at least they had been able to count the number of redcoats.

This morning, however, there were even less redcoats at the British camp than usual, which had brought them no small amount of concern.

“I don’t feel very good about this,” she murmured. “I think we should draw back, return to our regular parameters for the time being.”

After a moment, Christopher nodded and eased back from his post the small secluded edge of cold, hard earth to push himself upwards.

Abigail prepared to follow suit, hardly a few feet apart from him when the shot rang out, followed by a sharp cry directly from her side.

Jerk ing her head towards the cry, she watched with horror as Christopher collapsed, knees buckling underneath him. He clutched at his thigh, which was now stained with blood, a large blooming red contrasting starkly with the light color of the uniform trousers.
She instinctively went over to him but stopped herself short, realizing the shot had come from behind them. Rising quickly to her feet, she quickly lifted the musket to her shoulder, pointing it directly at the woods before them, searching for their assailant.

“You need to get out of here!” the younger boy pled, hissing as he attempted to drag himself towards the trees, only to fall flat back to the earth.

“I’m not leaving you here,” she insisted, still scanning the trees for any sign of whoever had shot him.

Groaning, Christopher shook his head. “Just go –”

Before he could finish, a bullet whizzed past her and struck the base of the tree just to her left, missing her head by only a fraction. Her breath caught in her throat.

“Go! Get out of here!”

As more bullets began soaring in their directions, Abigail immediately darted to her right, desperate to outrun the onslaught. She had no intentions of leaving the boy, instead hoping she could lure whoever was attacking them on a wild goose chase but also remaining close to where Christopher remained.

Breathing harshly, she ran as hard as she possibly could, her musket, knocking her breathless with every beating it gave her strapped against her back.

She stopped then, catching her breath for the briefest of moments before drawing her pistol and firing in the direction she had come from. It was a wasteful use of bullets, but if there was even the smallest of chances that she could spare Christopher’s life, she was going to take it.

With the sounds of gunfire vastly approaching, Abigail didn’t have time to dwell on the success of her diversion. Knowing she had to make a choice, she removed the musket from her back and dropped it to the ground, along with her cap. Let them think their second target wasn’t too far from their grasp when she would be, in fact, back at the site of the attack.

Sending a silent prayer to God, Abigail fell back into the trees, going as far back as she dared before racing back to where she had left him, praying that her half-cocked attempt at a diversion had worked, praying that her attempt had not been in vain.

It wasn’t much longer until the sight of his crumpled body returned to her view. She dove for over behind a dirt ledge not too far off, pains piercing her sides and stealing her breath. There were enough bushes to shield her and to assist her in keeping an eye on Christopher, but they hardly brought her much security.

Posing with her pistol pointing directly from the pushes, she was ready to shoot anyone that came his way. He was too young to lose his life this way, and she owed him for everything, for all of the knowledge he had bestowed upon her from their time together, for being the first to befriend her upon entering this war, for simply being a friend.

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The minutes turned into hours, and the hours felt like years as Abigail kept watch. She wanted nothing more than to go over to him, watching helplessly as he struggled to pull himself to shelter before giving into the overwhelming pain of his wound. He was barely conscious now, and she had to get to him if he had any chance of survival. However, she was also keenly aware of the precariousness of her own situation. If she risked herself and got shot while trying to save him, than it
would all be for naught.

So she waited, waited and watched as the early morning eased into noon and noon into dusk. It wasn’t until dusk grew closer did she begin to formulate a plan. Perhaps if she used her coat and attempted to wrap him in a form of sling, there was the possibility she could drag him across the open forest floor. It would take a great amount of effort and strength on her part, but it was better than doing nothing at all.

It was decided at the moment just before night fell she would carry out this plan.

Setting aside her pistol, she shifted from her position on the ground so she was able to slip out of her coat and coil the material so that it mirrored a thick rope. She intended to slip each end of the wrapped up coat underneath his arms, with the center of the coat tucked underneath his back, and drag him into the bushes with her. She had no idea of what her next course of action would be after that.

With the last remaining light dimming the earth, she took this as her sign and slowly crept out of the bushes to step into the clearing, vulnerable and weaponless. Heart hammering in her chest, she waited for a moment behind a tree, carefully scoping the area before crouching down and quickly rushing to his side.

She touched his face and felt the clamminess of his skin with a concerned frown. If they couldn’t make it back in time for camp, she would have to tend to his wound herself. She hadn’t had any experience tending to gunshot wounds, although she had assisted her father from time to time when he had been called to help tend to men who had suffered some rather unfortunate accidents. The only guide she could rely on would be the hazy memory of having “borrowed” one of her father’s medical journals upon which she had discovered an entry of tending to a gunshot wound from a man in the next town over. The details weren’t entirely clear in her recollection, but hopefully, that would have to do.

Almost as soon as she had touched him, Christopher’s eyes opened, and he let out a loud gasp. She immediately clamped a hand on his mouth and shook his head.

“Don’t worry, it’s just me,” she murmured. “You’ve got to be quiet. I’m going to get us out of here. Just…”

Abigail heard the pistol cocking almost at the same time she felt the warm press of metal press against the nape of her neck.

She didn’t dare move or make a sound, completely frozen. There was no sound from behind her other than the workings of the gun pressed against her. She couldn’t think or breathe, let alone attempt any movement.

There wasn’t a moment in her life when she ever contemplated what death was like, what it was like on the other side. Now she would be able to converse with the John Herring, the traitorous executed soldier, herself soon enough.

She flinched violently at the loud blast of the shot and squeezed her eyes shut, waiting for the impact. But nothing came.

Stunned and shaken, Abigail opened her eyes and spotted a form in the distance, lowering their musket. In an unwise action, she turned around to confront her would be executioner only to find him dropped to the ground a mere few inches from where she knelt, dead.
Without the bayonet edge of her musket to stab him to ascertain his death, she remained where she was, frozen and stunned, on the ground as the form in the distance drew closer to them. Even in the growing dimness from dusk to nightfall, the redcoat contrasted brightly amongst the mahogany brown barks of the trees and the dusty earth.

Christopher’s musket laid several feet out of her grasp, and there was no time for her to grab it, even if she were able to move at all. With growing dread, she watched as the redcoat drew closer and closer until he stood merely a foot away from her, raising his musket.

He raised his musket and shoved the blade into the other redcoat. The sound of his fellow soldier’s gurgling groans chilled Abigail to the bone.

“Get out of here,” Christopher pled with her weakly, desperate to catch her attention while she barely was able to process his words. She didn’t feel as if she were in her own body. Everything, every sense she possessed, was muted. She couldn’t form a response.

Instead of replying, she managed to extend a trembling hand towards Christopher’s coat to extract his pistol and stumbled to her feet despite his attempts of stopping her. She needed to at least try to defend themselves, if this was how it was going to end.

“Put that thing away before you hurt yourself,” the redcoat muttered, his back to her as he stared down at the man he had just slain.

The deep, quiet voice sounded so familiar, but she shook her head and began to raise the pistol to aim at the redcoat, cocking it right before he began to turn around, and she could catch a glimpse of his face.

Even though it was well into nightfall, there was just enough light for Abigail to make out the features of his face and immediately recognized the man before her. It had been nearly four years, but how could she not recognize her own husband?

Her husband standing before her in a British uniform.

Abigail breathed. “Tobias.”
“Lower the pistol,” Tobias entreated carefully, slowly as if speaking to a spooked horse. Of course, the analogy was appropriate, considering the man she had married and the man she hadn’t seen in nearly four years was standing before her in a British uniform. It wasn’t a look she could have predicted she would ever see on him in a millennium.

Abigail’s throat tightened with emotion, shock, hurt, angry, and everything else sending a violent shock to her system. Her hand was trembling as she kept the pistol aimed at him, but that didn’t mean she wouldn’t hit something. Back at the recruitment base, Harrison had told her she was a decent shot.

Seeing as how this wouldn’t work, he attempted a different approach. He slowly set his musket to the ground, his gaze remaining firmly on her all the while even as he rose to his feet. Slipping his hands inside his coat, he withdrew a pistol, a revolver, a blade of some sort, and a small satchel of what was assumed to be more ammunition.

He set these on the ground as well as Abigail watched him like a hawk, confused and overwhelmed.

“That’s everything that I have on me,” he said, raising his hands slowly. “You can even search me if you’d like.”

Abigail’s eyes narrowed at what she suspected to be a poor attempt at humor. “Are you trying to be funny?”

“Absolutely not, especially when you’re holding me at gunpoint.”

Her irritation grew, and judging from the slight upwards twitch of the corners of his mouth, he knew it, too. That provided her even more incentive to cock the pistol back, but she didn’t. Yet.

“I’m not here to hurt you, either of you,” Tobias assured her, but the fact he was dressed as a redcoat provided her anything but assurance. “I was fortunate to come along when I did, and you cannot deny that.” His eyebrows raised a little, as if challenging her to prove him wrong. Over his shoulder, she could see the body of the dead redcoat, unbreathing and unmoving, and she knew she was unable to do either.

Still, even with this knowledge, Abigail couldn’t bring herself to lower her pistol, not just yet. However, the sound of Christopher’s pained moan broke the moment.

Tearing her gaze away from Tobias, she peered down at her friend and observed worriedly as he struggled to remain conscious. “I have to get him out of here,” she heard herself saying aloud, though it didn’t feel as if she were speaking at all.

“There’s a small shack not too far from where we are,” Tobias offered, prompting her to return her attention to him. “It’s closer towards the British camp than is preferable, but it’s better than the alternative.”

“Don’t you mean your side?” she asked, tone clipped. She was a little surprised to see him flinch but blessedly held fast. “And why would you help me, help us?”
For a moment, Tobias looked so hurt she wanted to lower the pistol and reach out to him, but before she could even stop herself from carrying out either action, his expression shuttered into a veiled mask. “It’s the best place for cover until morning,” he remarked, noticeably evading the question.

She wanted to push him further, but another pained moan from the boy had her decision made for her. Slipping the pistol back into her pocket, Abigail abruptly turned from Tobias towards Christopher, bending down on the ground beside him. Not long after did she feel his presence beside them, bending down to wrap one of Christopher’s arms around his shoulders and nodded for Abigail to do the same.

With her previously discarded coat tied around her waist, she stumbled to her feet underneath Christopher’s weight, but with Tobias’s guidance, she was able to find her footing as they began the trek towards the shack.

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“We need to move him to the bed,” Abigail demanded the moment she spotted the small cot in the back room of the shack. It was a small dwelling, as was to be expected, but beggars could not be choosers, especially given their circumstances.

They laid him down as carefully as they could, but it was with great difficulty. The poor boy had long passed out halfway through their journey towards the shack, leaving them to all buy carry him with Tobias bearing most of his weight.

Calling out his name repeatedly, Abigail pressed her hands along his face and leaned in close to his mouth to monitor his breathing, sighing in relief when she heard a raspy exhale from Christopher. “The poor thing’s fainted.”

“That’s probably for the best,” Tobias murmured, stepping back to give her more space to work. “What do you need from me?”

*Plenty*, she nearly remarked but stopped herself short from doing so. After a half moment of gathering her composure, she responded, “First, I’ll need you to rip open a hole in his trousers but just along the thigh. I need to get a better look at his wound. And then I’ll need something closely resembling some forceps as close as possible to retrieve the bullet if it’s still lodged inside.”

She waited for him to ask if she knew what she was doing, but the question never came. Instead, he did as she requested, retrieving one of the blades he had on his person and swiftly went to cutting a patch more than large enough for her to work with.

Immediately, she pressed her fingers to the wound, probing along his thigh to see if she could feel the presence of the ball underneath his skin. She recalled a passage in her father’s medical journal pertaining to this method and knew it would make her job much easier if she could find it without the use of the forceps.

It was incredibly difficult relying on feel alone and not with sight, seeing as how the only source of light came from the moon pouring through the small window.

A moment or so later, the room filled with light. Initially, she began to think her eyes had grown accustomed to the moonlight already, but when she looked up, Tobias was entering the room with a small lantern lit, though it appeared to have experienced better days.

“I thought you could use the extra light,” he spoke softly, setting the lantern on the small wooden bedside table right next to the cot.
“Thank you,” she responded, tone just as soft. “Did you find –” Her words stopped sort as he produced a blade and what appeared to be a long needle of some sort.

“The best I could find when looking for forceps.”

“Perfect,” she murmured, accepting them with an outreached hand. “Hopefully, the ball isn’t deeply embedded enough to require more than cutting and retrieving it.”

Fortunately, the case was just that. Not long after her eyes adjusted to the light and only after did she clean away as much as of the blood as she could, she managed to find the ball by touch but only after nearly missing it when wiping the blood away.

After making sure Christopher remained unconscious, Abigail took the blade and cut into his thigh, slicing as deeply as she needed to extract the bullet. Removing the bullet took much, much longer, but despite the long hours and preparation, she finally was able to successfully extract it.

Before she could even ask, Tobias had already left the room in search of supplies to dress his wounds and came back with what he could find, which weren’t the most highly recommended items her father or any physician would use, but it would have to do.

Once his leg was securely wrapped in a makeshift tourniquet consisting of multiple layers of cloth, Abigail rose to her feet with the intentions of washing her hands but not before checking on Christopher’s breathing again. Only when she was satisfied did she follow Tobias out of the room, shutting the small door quietly behind them.

“Impressive work, doctor,” Tobias commented. She could hear the smile in his tone even with her back to him as she searched for a spare handcloth. “Is that what they have you doing back at the camp?”

Judging from how forced the words seemed to come from him, she could tell that the smile was gone. She doubted he was happy about her enlisting into the Continental Army, but he had vastly more to explain for himself than she did.

“Not exactly,” she remarked carefully, taking extra care on her hands for both sanitary purposes and the excuse not to look directly at him. “And what is it that you do in your camp? Help ‘rebels’ take care of their own before reporting back to your superiors?”

“Abigail –”

“But what I don’t understand,” she interrupted him before he could say something they both knew he would regret and turned to finally face him, “is how you recognized me, especially from that far a distance. I know I wasn’t wearing that hat or coat, but it’s been one of the burning questions I’ve had for the past few hours.”

Tobias went to open his mouth, but she shook her head. “You know what, don’t answer that until you take that bloody thing off.” She gestured to the redcoat monstrosity with barely concealed disdain and watched as he shrugged off the offensive garment aggressively before tossing it to the side.

“I wasn’t that far from where you stood, considering I was patrolling with the man who shot your friend,” he remarked. “And does it really matter? Do you think I wouldn’t recognize my own wife?”

“Well, I barely recognize my own husband,” Abigail retorted, noting how his jaw clenched but kept going anyway. “Why are you a redcoat? Why join them? It doesn’t make any sense.”
Tobias shook his head, eyelids squeezed shut for a moment before looking at her, pained. “I can’t answer that.”

Not buying it, she took a measured breath before continuing, “If you had really decided to betray everything you had ever believed in – your principles, your country, me – then why did you call the British soldier intent on killing me and my friend? Why wouldn’t you kill us when you had the chance –”

His sudden grip on her arm shocked her back into herself. In her growing fury, she hadn’t realized how their proximity shifted until her face was nearly at his collarbone. She tilted her head back and met his furious gaze steadily.

“No matter what side I may appear to be on,” Tobias spoke quietly, “my allegiance is always with you. My heart is with you.”

Swallowing hard, Abigail took a moment to find the courage to speak, but when she did, she feared her voice would crack. “If what you say is true, please tell me, explain to me, why you’re with them. At the very least, give me some peace of mind. I can’t keep thinking the worst.”

When he said nothing, she shut her eyes and exhaled shakily before slipping her arm out of his loosening grip and walked across the small room to put some distance in between them. She could barely stand to look at him any longer.

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It was uncertain to know how much time had passed, but for however long it truly had been since she had last spoken to her husband, for Abigail it felt like an eternity.

She tended to Christopher during that period, assessing his wounds and seeing if he had awoken. The boy had still been out cold when she had first returned to the room and had remained that way throughout her examination of his wound.

From what she could see in the dim light, there wasn’t much inflammation, but they needed to make it back to the camp base for a more proper dressing of his wounds. She recalled how scarce medical supplies were in the Continental Army, and the camp base was no exception, but there had to be more appropriate supplies than what she and Tobias had used on him.

“How’s the boy?” Tobias asked quietly as soon as she exited the room, shutting the door behind her.

“He’s still out cold, thankfully,” she murmured, briefly making eye contact with him before busying her hands by preparing more cloths for a tourniquet in the event Christopher’s needed changing.

After a moment’s pause, Tobias spoke, “We need to do something with the dead redcoat. I can take care of the body while you hide the weapons and –”

Abigail finally met his gaze, firm and determined. “I’m not going anywhere with you until you explain to me why you’re with the British in the first place.”

Jaw set, he responded, “Abigail, you can’t be this difficult. This is important.”

Eyes narrowing, the blonde lowered herself into a small rickety chair not too far behind her, crossing her arms across her chest with the strips of cloths laying across her lap, and waited.

So was this.
Sighing heavily, Tobias ran a hand through his hair in agitation, tugging at his shortened locks with frustration. He struggled a minute or two with an internal dilemma until his shoulders hunched over in tired defeat.

“When I told you I was leaving to enlist in the Continental Army,” he began tiredly, “it wasn’t a lie. I had enlisted around the time most of the men with patriotic leanings, including many of our friends, had gone off to enlist. But not long after I was assigned to a regiment did I find myself crossing enemy territory to enlist with the British troops, not as a traitor but as a spy for the Continental Army.”

Abigail’s brows furrowed in confusion. “A spy?” Tobias nodded, and she shook her head. “I don’t follow.”

Grabbing another small rickety wooden chair from across the room, he took a set and began to explain everything. “As far as I was aware at the time, there hadn’t been a ring in place prior to my agreement to enlist with the British, no true system in place for me to share the knowledge I gleaned from the British troops. Instead, I would simply document what I find, keeping the data as simple and ordinary as possible to avoid suspicion and hide them in my belongings or on my person for if ever I met someone from the base. But now…”

He paused for a moment, considering his next words but deciding to plunge forward regardless. “The intelligence initiative has advanced in the past several months alone, at least according to Caleb —”

“Wait,” Abigail interrupted, bringing up a hand to stop him. “Caleb? Why would he know anything about this?”

Tobias pressed his lips together for a moment before responding with, “He’s the courier among the agents, including myself and the head of intelligence.”

“And the head of intelligence is?” she asked, equally curious and nervous to know the answer.

This time her husband’s hesitation was much longer, which only had her curious nervousness burning even more. “Benjamin Tallmadge.” He observed her face closely, searching. “The intelligence collection was Ben’s idea.”

Abigail stared at him, unblinking and unable to fathom this new revelation, but instead of demanding to know why neither of them had mentioned this to her, she found herself asking instead, “Who else is involved?”

Thrown off by her question and her lack of outrage, Tobias asked, “What?”

“You said that Caleb acts as the courier among the agents, including yourself, which suggests there’s more people involved. Caleb’s one. Who are the rest?”

“Abraham Woodhull and Anna Strong.”

“Christ,” Abigail released a startled laugh. “Anna and Fievel (see end notes). Of course.” She was more surprised by the latter than the former, considering how Abe’s wife, Mother Shrew, and his father were proud Torreys. A part of her had wondered whether Abe’s patriotic rebel passions had faded when Caleb, Ben, and Tobias had entered the war, but from the sounds of it, she had been wrong in her thinking.

“What are you thinking in that head of yours?” Tobias asked after an extended silence. She met his imploring gaze and found it incredibly difficult to break away from it.
“I’m… not entirely certain what I think,” Abigail spoke quietly, “but I do know how I feel. I feel lied to and almost… betrayed? Lied to by nearly all of the people I care about and for what?”

She knew exactly why she hadn’t been told and understood it, at face value. She understood it far too well. The less people that knew about the ring, the better it would work, just as how the fewer people knew her true identity, the longer she would remain with the army. But still, she couldn’t help the irrational part of her from revealing itself, and for that, she felt ashamed enough that she could no longer meet his gaze.

There was a soft scraping across the wooden floor as a chair was pushed back, and soon she found her husband kneeling before her and taking both her hands in his. Prompting her to look at him again. The pained, imploring look on his face tugged at her heart. “Secrecy was the only way to ensure everyone’s safety. It’s the only way to ensure the future of the Continental Army in this war. There is no other reason for you not being told.

“But I’ll admit the only reason I’m telling you everything now is for purely selfish reasons,” Tobias continued, squeezing her hands in attempt to comfort both of them at once. “I couldn’t bear the look you have been giving me from the moment you saw in those woods any longer.”

“And what kind of look is that?” Abigail asked quietly.

Tobias smiled sadly. “The one where you think I’m a monster.”

Frowning, she reversed their hands so that now hers were now on top of his. She gave him a short, firm squeeze, momentarily stunned at the feeling of their hands together. She was unaccustomed to the feeling of his rough hands against hers when her hands had always been smooth in comparison to his. Now they were nearly the same texture, although his were still much coarser than hers.

“There are many things I was thinking in that moment and the moments following after,” Abigail remarked, “but thinking of you as a monster had never once crossed my mind.”

Tobias’s smile turned warmer, but from the way the smile didn’t reach his eyes, it was clear he did not entirely believe her but appreciated her words all the same. He rose to her feet and encouraged her to get some rest before returning to the camp base in the morning.

Abigail was unable to sleep, despite his persistence throughout the night and into the hours of the next morning. She divided her time between checking on Christopher to discussing how they would explain their absence from camp with Tobias, knowing that she and Christopher’s absence were more than likely discovered by now. Thus, they began developing a plan, an alibi that would explain her and Christopher’s absence without destroying Tobias’s cover and one the officers would believe.

It was ultimately decided remaining as close to the truth as possible would be in their best interest. The story would go that Christopher and Abigail had been attacked while on patrol, and they had to wait until the following morning before they could make their return. Their lengthy absence would unquestionably be plausible given the boy’s injury. The only problem remaining would be how she was able to carry him to the shack on her own and tend to his wounds.

“Just tell them you carried a blade on you and used strips of your shirt as a tourniquet,” Tobias remarked but paused to inspect the untorn shirt with a small frown. “Though I would suggest cutting your shirt to parallel with your story.”

Nodding in agreement, Abigail untucked her shirt from her trousers, which was comically long on her person and made ripping the material not only useful for their alibi but for her own personal comfort as well. She planned on using the torn material from her shirt to redress his wound before
they left.

Still, with the story in place paired with physical evidence, Abigail felt as if she didn’t look as if she had just barely survived an attack, namely there were signs of injury on her person.

A glimmer across the main room caught her eye. Sitting right along the windowsill in the growing morning light sat a small flint knife. Without a second thought, she crossed the small distance to reach for it.

“What on earth are you doing?” Tobias asked sharply, grabbing her arm just as she was bringing the knife to her forehead.

“You know as well as I they aren’t going to believe anything I have to say unless I have physical proof,” Abigail replied. She could hear the nerves in her voice, but this needed to be done. “And that includes an injury for myself. Unless you want to do it.”

“Absolutely not,” he rejected the offer with a vehement shake of his head. Nodding, she returned to pressing the blade against her forehead until he once again stopped her, offering her a balled-up cloth for her to bite into.

She accepted it by opening her mouth and bite into the thick material just as she pressed the knife further into her skin. The first slice stung incredibly, but the deeper she pressed, a painful scream tore its way out of her throat, barely muffled by the cloth she was desperately biting into.

A warm, stickiness trickled down her forehead and dripped down the side of her face. The throbbing pain from the wound, however, paid no mind.

As soon as the first drop of blood fell, Tobias yanked the knife away from her with a barely muffled curse, dropping it to on the wooden table with a loud, metallic clatter before drawing her into his arms. “I think that’s quite enough,” he hissed, face pale as he took in the red droplets down the side of her face.

“I think that’s enough, too,” she agreed, wincing in pain.

Knowing they didn’t have much time left, they quickly prepared for the journey back to their respective camps, all the while unknowing when the next time they would ever see each other again.

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The journey to the camp base from Setauket was a somber one. Neither side claimed a strong victory, but Ben and his regiment had been able to save the lives of those patriotic men that had been sentenced to death at the eleventh hour. Almost all of them. God rest poor Lewis Brewster’s soul.

Ben had to tackle Caleb to the ground as soon as Captain Simcoe had marched out of the church with the gun to the Caleb’s elderly uncle’s head just moments before he had executed him on the spot.

Ben kept an eye on his friend, normally attempting to rouse the spirits of the men, remained silent on horseback, his face drawn and pale. He would continue to keep an eye on the whaler for the next few days, understanding all too well the grief of a familial loss of the cruelest manner.

They arrived back at the base and dismounted their horses when a few of the soldiers who had remained behind came to gather their horses. Ben went to walk over to Caleb, but the other man had already wandered off, possibly for a bottle of something hard hitting despite the fact it was only midday.
With a heavy sigh, the major decided it was best to leave him to it for now and prepared to head towards his tent to prepare a document of his account when he heard someone call out to him.

He turned to spot a familiar face striding towards him with purpose. The soldier was a young man by the name of James Sanford, although the descriptive of young man was rather redundant when compared with his own age. He had collaborated with Sanford on numerous occasions, and while he might not have the charisma to inspire men, his loyalty and bravery were commendable.

Judging from the determined stride of his, however, Ben knew he wasn’t walking over to welcome him back to camp.

“Good afternoon, Sanford,” he greeted him as he approached him.

“To you as well, major,” the soldier replied in kind, “though I wish it were under better circumstances. I have a report to make with you regarding the camp. Perhaps we can speak privately?”

Nodding, Ben guided him in the direction of his tent, knowing that any information pertaining to the camp could easily get around as misconstrued gossip, which was something he wanted to avoid.

As soon as they were in the confines of his tent, Sanford continued, “Morning and evening patrols were carried out according to protocol in your absence. However, when the morning patrol group returned from their posts, two soldiers were missing. I suspect they may be deserters, sir.”

“Christ,” the major sighed heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose. Just what he needed, just what the Continental Army and Washington needed. “Give me their names, and I’ll investigate the matter.”

Sanford removed a piece of parchment from his pocket and unfolded it carefully, smoothing out the edges. “The soldiers that failed to return from the morning patrol are a Christopher Morgan and Thomas Williams.”

Ben stared at him, uncomprehending. “Can you… repeat that, please.”

“Christopher Morgan and Thomas Williams, sir.”

It felt as if the wind had been knocked out of him, and he struggled to maintain his composure. “And how long have they been missing?”

“They were present for the morning patrol, but they never returned with the group. This was yesterday morning, sir.”

A full day. The two had been missing for a full day. Abigail had been missing for an entire day.

He dug his nails into his palm to keep himself grounded. “All right. May I have the parchment?” Sanford passed it to him without a fuss. Staring hard at the script, he added, “Do you have any other record of their names anywhere?”

Sanford shook his head. “No, sir, I do not. I only wrote them down to make sure I remembered their names precisely to inform you.”

Swallowing hard, Ben folded the parchment and tucked it inside his coat pocket. “Don’t breathe a word of this to anyone. I will handle this. We… we can’t have news of this getting around camp. Morale is low enough as it is.”
“I understand, sir, and I won’t tell a soul.”

“Good, man.” He clapped him on the shoulder and walked him out of the tent.

As soon as Sanford was out of sight, the major made a direct beeline towards center of camp, knowing fully well that’s where Caleb would be. It was where the liquor was usually exchanged, unless under the direct supervision of an officer.

Discerning the whaler’s figure amongst the small group of men having gathered for drinks, he walked briskly towards him and placed a hand on his shoulder, catching his attention immediately, a sure sign he hadn’t consumed any alcohol yet. Praise the Lord.

“I need to speak with you,” Ben murmured to him, gripping his shoulder urgently before heading towards the side of the house for a chance of privacy.

Caleb followed him without question, an uncharacteristic feat.

“I just received word of two possible deserters the moment we returned to camp.” Ben removed the parchment from his coat pocket and held it for Caleb to take with a slight tremor to his hand. “Go ahead and read it.”

He watched Caleb unfold it hurriedly and curse rather carefully as soon as he read the names on the paper, echoing his thoughts precisely.

“Jesus,” the whaler breathed out, peering up from the parchment with wide eyes. “Where do you think they went off to?”

“All I know is that they went on the morning patrol and haven’t been seen since yesterday morning,” Ben answered, each word tumbling out of his mouth increasing his dread and fear. He suddenly possessed a strong urge to punch something but faintly acknowledged that would only make matters worse. “Neither of them are deserters. Abigail…” He stopped, took a measured breath. “She wouldn’t do that.”

“Aye,” Caleb agreed softly and looked down at the page as if he had read the names incorrectly, but the moment he read them again, it only made the situation even more real.

“If they went on patrol and didn’t come back, something must’ve happened,” Ben continued, giving voice to his thoughts in a nervous stream of narrative. “Something’s wrong, terribly wrong.”

The heavy, supporting weight of Caleb’s hand suddenly on his shoulder helped ease him down from his growing panic but only for the moment.

“We’ll find her, the both of them,” the whaler promised. “Come on. I happen to know the patrol routes. It shouldn’t be too difficult to find them if they’re still around.”

Nodding, Ben followed Caleb from the house and through the center of camp to head towards the woods just on the edge of the outlier of the camp.

They were just approaching the edge when a bright flash in the distance stopped the major short. Stopping Caleb, Ben pulled out his spyglass and peered into the distance, adjusting the device just in time to spot two stumbling forms heading in their direction. He couldn’t make out their faces, but it appeared that one of them was holding something in the air, something that was shiny enough to catch the light of the mid-day sun, and it was then he knew, he just knew it was them.
“It’s them,” Ben breathed, lowering the spyglass. He passed it to Caleb without removing his gaze from the pair. “And it looks like one of them is injured, or perhaps both. Gather some men.”

Before Caleb could get a word in edgewise, Ben took off across the field towards the stumbling pair, not heeding to Caleb’s calls. He didn’t look back to see if anyone else would follow, having only two emotions that was propelling him forward. Relief and fear.

He ran and ran until he was only yards away from them and watched in horror as Abigail collapsed with the younger soldier he deemed to be Christopher Morgan to the ground.

Kneeling to the ground in front of them, Ben seized her frantically by the arms and pulled her up she was no longer lying on the ground. She fell forward into him, exhausted, and he caught her, instinctively wrapping his arms around her protectively until he remembered where they were.

“Are you all right?” he asked urgently, easing back so that he could try to catch her gaze. He exhaled sharply at the long streaks of blood down the side of her face, unable to look anywhere else for the longest time. When she didn’t respond, he forced himself to look away to return to trying to catch her gaze. “Abigail – Williams, look at me. Please. Just look at me.”

“He was shot,” she murmured sluggishly. He cupped her face to obtain her attention, but her current befuddled, lethargic state prevented her from focusing. His concern only grew. “Christopher, he was shot. I… we need to help him.”

Ben opened his mouth to respond when Caleb cut him off, having arrived just in time to hear her spoken words. “It’s all right. We’re going to take care of him. Come on, men, let’s get the boy some medical attention.”

The major could see a few of soldiers surrounding Christopher to prepare to carry him to the camp’s makeshift infirmary, but his main priority remained on the woman in his arms. “See? He’s being tended to. The Morgan boy will be all right. I… look at me, Williams. I… dammit!”

Abigail finally did manage to look at him directly, but the moment was fleeting as her eyelids fluttered shut before she fell forward into his arms, exhaustion pulling her under.

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Abigail awoke the latter the next morning, rested but famished. As soon as she opened her eyes, she discovered she wasn’t in her tent but was lying on a cot in the base’s medical tent. Pushing herself into a sitting position, she eased her legs over the side and stumbled to her feet, making her way towards the tent flap and pushed it the side, cringing at the brightness of morning that greeted her and carefully allowed the material to fall back to give her eyes some time to adjust.

Apart from herself, there was only one other soldier currently residing in the makeshift infirmary who remained soundly asleep. She didn’t spot Christopher, and initially she feared the worst before realizing that perhaps he had been brought in for questioning as soon as he was treated and fed.

Selfishly, her mouth practically watered at the mere thought of food, prompting her to lift the flap to the tent again. She felt guilty for having taken up a space where she felt she hadn’t deserved. Let some other unfortunate soul have the cot she had taken temporary residence in.

It was nearing the end of breakfast by the time she arrived. She received her rations happily and did her best not to devour them on the spot, the memory of Bartholomew, Jasper, and Decory massacring their lunches back at the flying camp still fresh in her mind.

A little while later Caleb found her and offered her a protective but thankfully brief hug, which was
made even briefer when she released a small hiss of pain. The soreness of her muscles was only announcing its presence with time.

When she asked about Christopher, he assured her that he was fine and would be on the mend thanks to her. She asked him to clarify, and he told her that during his questioning with the officers, the boy had told them she had saved his life by removing the bullet and bandaging his leg with the tourniquet. She nearly asked what else did he say but realized she had to trust that Christopher would remember the story she and Tobias had come up with but of course not reminding him of her husband’s presence. He had acted as if he had no recollection of Tobias. Why disturb a good thing?

Caleb then told her he would escort her to the house to provide her account whenever she was ready, which she provided the confirmation that she was before he led her in the direction of the house.

The questioning lasted not nearly as long as what she had anticipated. Their questions were basic and simple, and she answered every one despite her nerves’ best attempts of getting the best of her. Ben’s presence there was a much-needed comfort although he uttered not one word during the entire questioning, but his protective gaze spoke volumes on its own.

At the half hour mark, she was dismissed, and she hardly dared to breathe until she was out of the house back into the warm, noon air.

Abigail wanted to return to the infirmary tent to check on Christopher, whom she assumed would have been returned there after his questioning, but her bindings were constricting and pressing into her rib cage, so she took the quickest detour to the tent she shared with him.

Once inside, she lifted her shirt to adjust her bindings underneath, loosening them just enough to give her some relief. Inhaling generously, she released the breath, relishing in the painless action, and smoothed down the ripped edges of her shirt.

She wasn’t alone in the tent longer than five minutes when she heard the tent flap open behind her. Turning around, she discovered Ben stepping inside and realized he must have followed her back.

Puzzled, Abigail began to ask if they needed her again for further questioning when her words were cut off by the sudden presence of his mouth on hers.

Over the years, she had often wondered what it would be like to kiss Benjamin Tallmadge. Many imagined scenarios had been conjured in her youth, progressing from wanting to silence him in an argument to simply expressing her desire for him. Never had she imagined their first kiss would happen like this.

Nor had she imagined that Ben would initiate it.

The kiss was firm and demanding and just shy of desperate. Her body thrummed with a warm, excited-nervous energy, causing her to tremble ever so slightly, but she didn’t care.

Almost as soon as he kissed her, she melted into him instinctively, relishing in the strong, solidness of him. She nearly fainted when his arms wrapped around her, pulling her closer, holding her securely against him, protectively. It was everything she had ever wanted.

It was everything.

They kissed for what felt like an eternity and not all at the same time when they finally part for air.

Abigail licked her lips subconsciously, her mouth still tingling from the press of his mouth.
She wanted to ask him a question – what question, she was unable to formulate – but noticed his gaze fixated on her forehead, where she realized her self-induced incision dwelt.

She hadn’t had the chance to inspect the damage but knew it would turn into a rather unpleasant looking scar with time.

Ben brought his hands to gently cup her face, with one hand brushing back some stray strands of hair to lightly inspect her scar. His touch was so light, so careful that she didn’t even wince in pain.

“I… I had to see for myself that you were okay,” he admitted softly, his thumb caressing her cheek tenderly.

Sucking in an emotional breath, Abigail leaned into him, and he held her close. She didn’t want him to let her go, and, after today, she highly doubted he would.

There was so much they needed to talk about – what really happened, why it happened, and what she had learned after it happened – but in that moment, Ben was all she could think about.

“Stay with me, please,” she requested quietly, so quietly she half wondered if he had even heard her.

By some miracle he had because he gently nudged her in the direction of the cot, easing her down onto it with a gently kiss to her forehead. She reached out towards him and drew him closer so that he was lying on the cot beside her, holding her close and shielding her from the dangers of their world, if only for the moment.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so, I've always pegged Abraham as looking like Fievel from the *An American Tail* movie. I've decided to include it in the fic as well but obviously making it so that the character Fievel is a children's story type of character in colonial appropriate times. And so this will be the nickname Abigail has bestowed upon Abe since childhood. If you don't believe me, I've provided photographic evidence.

Exhibit A:
I rest my case. Cheers!
Chapter 11

Morristown, New Jersey

In the several days following Abigail and Christopher’s incident in the woods, Washington had ordered for the camp base to be relocated to Morristown, New Jersey. Every last item had been gathered and stored away in the preparation of the move, not wanting to allow their next location to fall into enemy ends.

Nearly a week had passed since the new Continental camp base was established, and many rules had altered regarding to camp duties and protocol, namely patrol protocol. It would be next to impossible for Abigail and Christopher to continue with their extended patrol boundaries now, considering how each pair would be accompanied with an off-duty officer. However, given the extent of Christopher’s injury and Abigail’s uncertain patrol status, she suspected they would be performing very little patrol duties for the foreseeable future.

After having assisted some soldiers with unloading a few crates filled with camp necessities, Abigail found herself walking through the center of camp when she spotted Caleb – or heard his mouth, rather – straddling atop what appeared to be a barrel of imported wine, and by “imported”, she meant smuggled.

She observed him quietly with a small, concerned frown, recalling everything she had heard about the standoff in Setauket. Her heart broke for Caleb and his uncle. She had known the man well and had often considered him the grandfather she had always wanted. The man had always had a kind, gentle soul, and for it to be snuffed out so cruelly was enough to make anyone’s blood boil.

Unfortunately, she never had the opportunity to speak with him about it due to multiple extenuating circumstances that prevented her from doing so.

Still, Abigail observed him as he encouraged the Native American soldier to throw his tomahawk at the barrel, using so many provoking, lewd comments she couldn’t help but roll her eyes. That was the Caleb Brewster way, after all. However, the desired result was achieved, with the blade embedded into the barrel between his legs, prompting a loud whoop from the whaler.

She just shook her head and was prepared to head off in the opposite direction when Ben approached the pair, placing a hand on Caleb’s shoulder. The blonde felt her hear leap inside her chest and knew her cheeks must have been a rather dangerous shade of pink just at the bloody sight of him. Fortunately, he hadn’t appeared to have spotted her because she suddenly felt like a foolish, lovesick girl.

However, come to think of it, when had she been anything but for him?

“I assume you put in the proper request for all these supplies?” she heard Ben ask and decided to make herself scarce, at least physically. She had no problem with eavesdropping. It had never served her wrong in the past, although it had provided some startling revelations.

“Oh? Request? No,” was Caleb’s somewhat distracted reply, though she couldn’t see the interaction, having ducked behind a rather towering stack of crates, pretending to sort through them on the off chance she would be questioned. “No, these are my gifts to the cause.”

Abigail smirked to herself. So she had been right about the smuggling after all.

“Oh, I see. The black market, then,” the major remarked, unsurprised yet amused. She could picture
the exact expression on his face and silently admonished herself for the fond, fanciful thought.

“Yeah, you do see!” Caleb remarked, voice sounding as if he were traveling forward, in her direction.

*Dammit!* She immediately crouched behind the boxes for good measure, knowing it was wise to be overly cautious than not. Yes, both men were her friends, but she still didn’t want to be in a position where she was caught.

“Well, perhaps you might be getting the itch to make another trade tonight,” Ben said, voice also sounding significantly closer. “Maybe visit our old hometown, visit an old friend.”

Abraham, she realized. Ben wanted him to visit Abraham, for information, for the intelligence ring. In the past week, the information Tobias had shared with her had never once left her mind. Her emotions were less unorganized as they had been upon the spy ring’s reveal, betrayal and hurt having replaced by a surging curiosity and intrigue. She had intended to ask Ben about it himself but that would lead to more questions on how exactly she had discovered the ring’s existence, opening doors to more answers she wasn’t willing to divulge just yet.

And the moment in the tent hadn’t helped her decision either.

“Nah, not tonight,” Caleb responded. Abigail blinked in surprise at the unexpected response and the light tone accompanied with it.

Apparently, surprised was Ben also as he said, “I… I’m afraid this is not a request, Caleb. It is an order.”

“An order?” Caleb asked.

“That’s right.”

“I think I’m done with those.”

There was a pause before Ben spoke again. “Done?”

“Yeah.”

“What, done with orders?”

“Orders, Culper, army. I mean, it’s all a bit of a tail chaser, yeah?”

“Oh, no,” Abigail mouthed to herself, pressing a hand to her face. This was not good, not good at all.

The whaler continued, “But with this here, whale oil, plucked from a fat Tory skiff off of New Haven and resold for a 12 on Devil’s Belt… that’s the kind of profit that can make a man think about quitting the army and applying to Congress for a license to privateer. Loyal subjects harass at my pleasure and make a bit of coin on the side. And the best part, the best part is the only one I’m risking is me.”

Throughout his entire speech, Abigail knew that Ben was doing his best to rein himself in, to hold his tongue until his friend finished speaking, but inwardly, he must have been struggling, conflicted between his duty as an officer and his duty as a friend. But she knew as well as he did that, as she had come to learn within the past year, this war was bigger than any one person, and that everyone must do their part. However, she also understood how difficult and trying these times could be on the soul. So, the only thing she could really do was sit and listen to their arguments and wait it out,
feeling as unhelpful as ever.

“Look, Caleb, this is not my order. It’s Washington’s.”

“Oh, Washington,” she heard Caleb murmur bitterly, a tone she had never once associated with the man before. “Well, you’ll just have to tell him that you’re following protocol. See Culper doesn’t signal unless it’s safe, and he ain’t signaled in two months. So, it ain’t safe.”

“Caleb, listen to me —”

The piercing sound of something piercing the tree startled her, nearly jolting her to fall back against the stack of boxes. She looked over to her right and noticed the tomahawk embedded into a nearby tree. “I am listening, Ben. I’m listening now like I should have listened before. Like when you ordered to let Simcoe live. I should have listened to reason and put my hatchet in his head. But I didn’t. And he survived long enough to kill my uncle. Now that’s on me.”

Caleb paused just long enough for his impassioned breath to even out. “You want to get Abe killed? That’s on you.”

After a moment, Ben called out his name quietly, almost too quietly for her to catch, but she knew in that moment Caleb had walked away.

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“I want to go in Caleb’s place.”

Ben started with surprise at the sound of Abigail’s voice and watched with a puzzled expression as she let the tent flap fall closed behind her. It had been nearly an hour since his unsuccessful discussion with Caleb, and he had been deliberating on approaching him again when she had made her unannounced entrance into his tent, breaking his line of thought.

After barely a moment’s pause, he processed her words and then remarked, “It’s a special mission and specifically requires Caleb. I’m afraid there’s nothing you can do here.”

Abigail pressed her lips tightly together and fidgeted uneasily with the cuffs of her coat, as if internally battling with something inside her before she blurted out, “I know about the spy ring. I overheard your conversation with Caleb, and I… I want to help.”

For the longest time, Ben stared at her in disbelief until he finally asked, “How much did you hear?”

“Enough to know that you need someone to return home, to Setauket,” Abigail admitted. “To meet with this Culper, or Abe rather.”

Before he could even open his mouth to ask, she added, “Caleb mentioned Culper and Abe in the same breath. It wasn’t difficult to figure out.”

“You and your eavesdropping,” Ben murmured, already feeling the beginnings of a headache blossoming at the back of his head.

She was so close to making a smart remark but wisely chose to refrain. Instead, she continued, “You said so yourself the order came from Washington, which means this has to be very important to him, which means this is very important to you. If Caleb can’t act as courier, then let me go in his place. Who else is familiar with Setauket —”
“Wait,” Ben stopped her right then and there. “How did you know Caleb was the courier? I don’t recall either of us using that specific word.”

Taking a breath, she berated herself for revealing herself far too easily but knew, in the end, this unintentional slip was perhaps for the best earlier rather than later and composed herself so that she could articulate a response. “I haven’t been completely honest with you about what had happened in the woods that day.”

She paused, waiting for an outburst that never came. When all he did was stare at her sharply, she continued, a bit unnerved under his scrutinizing gaze, “Everything I reported to the committee was true, but I had left something out. It’s clear just from the size of me alone, neglecting the fact that I am a woman alone, that it would have been incredibly difficult of me to carry Christopher all on my own. There… there was someone else who helped us.

“Tobias found us and helped us,” she said, watching him closely as a range of emotions flashed across his face – shock, anger, confusion, and… jealousy? – but forced herself to continue, “He saved me from a bullet to the head by another redcoat. And after helping us relocate, he did tell me about the ring but nothing much. He had only told me enough to explain to me why he was wearing a British uniform and with the British army. Which you should have informed me of, by the way.”

Ben’s jaw clenched, and he looked away, but she refused to back down. “I need to do this. And you need me to do this, seeing as how Caleb can’t.” Or won’t, rather, but it didn’t seem far to suggest any form of implication on their friend’s part. The man had been through enough.

“You have no idea what you’re volunteering for,” he insisted, shaking his head with deep disapproval.

“Then teach me everything I need to know,” Abigail pushed back. Arguing with Ben was second nature to her, practically a craft she had been honing over the years. As frustrating and infuriating as the practice was, she was able to read his face like a book, every shift in his expression that gave her insight into where the argument was leading and knowing when to back off or riding straight ahead, mostly the latter than the former.

“This is dangerous,” Ben remarked evenly. Abigail couldn’t prevent herself from rolling her eyes, which only irritated him even further. “You don’t – don’t you roll your eyes at me! The very nature of this is dangerous and is no place for a wo-”

He cut himself off before he could complete his statement, whether it was in the off chance someone was listening in or the unimpressed look she was giving him, as if daring him to finish what he was about to say. Wisely, or perhaps foolishly, the major continued his argument from another route, “There’s hardly any time to learn what you need to know. And this is a very delicate situation.”

“I understand that, and I’m willing to learn as I go,” she persisted. “And didn’t you say these orders came from Washington himself? This means you need someone to get to Abe, gather any and all information from him, and return. You’re desperate for this. I can see it in your face.”

Judging from the way he gritted his teeth, she knew she had just struck a nerve. “I’ve known Abe and Anna as long as you and Caleb have. And yes, I know she’s part of it, too. There’s already relationships of trust there.” At least, she could speak for Anna. With Abe, she wasn’t entirely certain, as she had hardly seen him in recent years, apart from that moment his father had him swear an oath of loyalty to the British crown in the middle of Setauket. “Please. Just let me do this for you, for the cause. You can count on me.”

“Abigail, it’s not that I don’t trust you,” Ben began, his expression earnest, “it’s the gravity of the
situation, not to even mention the danger. I couldn’t bear it if something were to happen to you while you’re on a mission because I sent you.”

She walked over to him carefully and took his hand, lacing their fingers together easily and naturally. “I can’t promise that nothing will happen, but I can assure you I will do everything that I can to come back, to you.”

Ben looked into her eyes, deep and searching, looking for any sign that she might waver in her decision. After discovering nothing, he sighed heavily and incredibly reluctantly agreed, knowing that someone had to carry on the mission, someone who could be trusted and knew the agents well. Abigail was more than capable in both areas.

However, as soon as he agreed, he also informed her they needed to go over spy protocol before she set out for Setauket. The rest she could learn after she returned. They agreed that she should return to his tent later that evening and begin her studies then.

As unhappy he was with her risking herself, there was a small glimmer of hope that he could perhaps return to Washington’s good graces with gathered intelligence to get them one step closer to ending this war.

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Abigail did manage to return to Ben’s tent later that evening, when many of the other soldiers who weren’t on duty retired for the evening, and considering Christopher was still healing from his injury in the infirmary tent, sneaking away wasn’t at all that difficult.

As soon as she arrived, they got to work on what she needed to know before her journey. They sat close at his writing desk, hunched over a shared journal filled with codes addressing specific persons, locations, and the like. Instead of returning to Setauket, she would be traveling to New York, which was both a blessing in and a curse regarding the secrecy of her identity.

Given such close proximity, the accidental grazes of fingers and shoulders were inevitable and were ever so distracting enough to give them both pause before they spoke. Every now and then, she would glance over in his direction with looks that weren’t circumspect, at all, but on more than one occasion, she would notice her receiving such looks in return from the major and took comfort in the realization she was not alone in her distraction.

“Explain to me again about the boiled egg trick,” Abigail requested, peering over his shoulder to observe his actions with the quill and invisible ink.

Ben turned over the egg in his hand, poising the quill on the shell in preparation to write, only pausing to consider his choice. “It’s one of Mr. Sackett’s cleverer inventions. The purpose of it is to get a simple message to the agent in question but in plain sight. If the agent is aware of how to properly inspect the egg to retrieve the message, then the egg has served its purpose. It’s rather ingenious, actually.”

“Very impressive,” she murmured, indeed impressed as he allowed the ink to dry. “What did you write on the egg anyway?”

“You’ll see soon enough,” Ben remarked, setting the egg down to allow the ink a moment or two to dry. “Impatience is not a good trait in a spy.”

“A great tragic flaw in my character, I am well aware,” she bemoaned dramatically, grinning as an amused smirk threatened to break his disapproving expression. She nudged him gently with her
shoulder and grinned more fully as the reluctant smile of his became more pronounced. A victory indeed!

After a few minutes had passed, Ben reached for the egg and held it over the candle, allowing the flame to brush along the egg but only for a moment. He then proceeded to peel off the shell, an act that was a bit messier than anyone would like, but finally managed to remove enough to read the message he had written. He handed her the egg, so she could get a better look.

“Trouble,” she read aloud, raising a brow slightly with a soft laugh. “Am I meant to read between the lines here?”

“No, but you are meant to read beyond the shell, however.”

“Very amusing. You’ve missed your calling as a writer with that wit.”

Ben grinned and turned his head to speak, but the simple act alone made Abigail realize just how close they were, their faces barely a few inches apart. His lips parted for a moment as if to speak, but whatever he had been prepared to say appeared to have died on his tongue. However, she couldn’t fault him for that since she was having a challenging time articulating anything herself.

For the longest time, they didn’t move, frozen in that moment. Neither had the strength or courage to speak. They had not once in the last week discussed their kiss back in Trenton nor had there been any more kisses since. Even with this in mind, being this close to him, she could practically feel his lips against hers, the warmth of his breath against her skin…

Before either of them could do something they might regret, Abigail was the one who finally broke their gaze, clearing her throat awkwardly before settling back into her seat beside him. “Perhaps we should resume my lessons in the morning. I’m sure I’ve taken enough of your –”

Her attempt at returning to normalcy were interrupted by Ben, who spoke suddenly, “I’m sorry.”

Brows furrowing slightly, Abigail asked, “For what?” She didn’t understand what he would be apologizing for in that moment.

Sighing heavily, he shifted in his seat so that he was now properly facing her. His knee unintentionally knocked into hers and remained there, his pressed against the inside of hers. It was nearly enough to drive her mad. “For what happened last week, the… I know things have been difficult for you since Trenton, and I wanted to apologize to you for a while now. It was a moment of weakness.” His expression was an unhappy one, with the corners of his mouth turning downwards into a frown. “It won’t happen again, I assure you.”

Abigail sat very still and did not speak for the longest time until she managed, “Was it?” To her own ears, her voice sounded strangled, but she couldn’t bring herself to think too much about what she wanted to ask next. The desire to know far outweighed her pride. So, against her better judgement, she added, “Did you read the letters I had given you for Christmas?”

Thrown off by sudden shift in topic, the major began after confused stammer, “I’m… I’m not sure what that has to do with –”

Abigail rose to her feet, not needing to hear the rest of his answer. What he had just said was enough. “That’s all I needed to hear. Because if you had, I believe you would already know how I feel about the kiss. But since you’ve made it abundantly clear it was a mistake, perhaps I was mistaken.”

“Abigail…”
“Good night, major.”

She turned on her heel and exited the tent, face burning as she cursed herself for her foolishness.

Inside his tent, Ben did the same, taking the book of parchment he had been holding on his desk and pitching it across the tent in a fit of frustration.

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By the time dusk settled upon the camp the following evening, Abigail transferred her humiliation and hurt into matters of productivity. She assisted with the most menial tasks, cleaning up after camp meals and organizing camp equipment but only after she had made sure she was prepared to travel to New York. Anything to keep herself distracted from the awful turn of the previous night’s events.

She even insisted on redressing Christopher’s wounds himself when she had visited him at the infirmary. Seeing as how the camp doctor was effectively busy tending to another soldier, she managed to convince Christopher to accept her offer.

“You must be incredibly stressed,” the young soldier commented, wincing periodically as she cleaned his wound.

“Why would you say that?” she asked, looking up at him with a puzzled expression.

Christopher smiled with amusement. “When you’re stressed, you’re unbelievably productive. Not that you aren’t normally, but you just seem a bit more determined than usual.”

She had wished she could have told him her reasoning for it but instead had turned the conversation back to his recovery and when he believed he would return to service.

Camp meals were not the traditional fare that she had grown up with, but over the several months after enlisting in the Continental Army, she had grown accustomed to them, knowing that rations were scarce during these times.

She had just finished off the last piece of bread from her plate when two soldiers sat down with theirs. They were talking quietly amongst themselves, and she was hardly paying attention to them until their conversation took a turn at the mention of Officer Pita himself.

“He should’ve known better than to read that aloud,” the scruffier looking soldier remarked, shaking his head. “To have a soldier drunkenly reciting incendiary letters of the commander in chief and an officer no less! The fucking fool.”

“Blimey, I thought Major Tallmadge would’ve beaten him unconsciousness if Brewster hadn’t stepped in,” replied the other and took a sip from his mug.

Abigail hadn’t lingered around to hear anything more.

Uncaring if she appeared a fool, she walked briskly through the center of camp, heading directly towards Caleb as soon as she spotted him. She immediately asked him what had happened and if Ben was all right, and perhaps her line of inquiry was a little too loud, considering how he guided her by the arm to pull her off to the side to have their conversation privately.

He assured her that he was all right, saying that he was “a little worse for the wear, but for the most part, he’s still walking upright.” That didn’t make her feel any better, which only made her more resolved in seeing him for herself.
Grabbing a mug filled with water and swiping a washcloth from a nearby table, Abigail marched directly to his tent, only after Caleb confirmed that was the last place he had seen him, and opened the flap to let herself in just in time to see him wince while attempting to manage his split lip.

Her heavy sigh garnered his attention when she remarked, “I leave you alone for half a day, and you get yourself into a brawl.” Her smile was gentle and teasing and only grew when the tension in his shoulders appeared to ease.

“How is he?” Ben remarked with a scowl, recalling the incident with perfect clarity. “I suppose it’s around the camp by now that you’ve heard?”

Abigail nodded grimly. “Unfortunately, yes. But if it makes you feel anymore, the talk is mostly positive about Officer Pita being put in his place.” Her eyes widened as she realized her verbal slip.

“My concern still – wait. Officer Pita?” he stopped and looked at her with confusion.

“Um… yes?”

Ben raised a curious eyebrow, waiting until she finally caved. “It’s Brandon’s… Officer Brandon’s nickname around camp. It stands for ‘pain in the arse’.”

He snorted but did his best to veil his amusement. Ultimately, he failed and began to laugh only to groan as the ache in his jaw reprimanded him for it.

“Let me help you with that,” Abigail remarked and walked over to him with the mug of water and cloth in hand before he could attempt to protest. Dipping the cloth inside the mug, she began to clean the cuts on his lip and side of his head, doing her best not to hold back any lectures of his lack of self-preservation only to realize that she wasn’t one to speak of such things.

Instead, she found herself saying, “I’d hate to see the trouble you get yourself into when I’m gone for a few days and not only a handful of hours.”

Ben made a quiet noise, which she wasn’t meant to be thoughtful or displeased but continued to carry on with tending to him. He didn’t appear that harmed apart from the few cuts to his face, although she highly suspected there would be spectacular bruising along his jaw in the morning, after gently assessing the tenderness with a press of her fingers along his jaw.

“I’m concerned with news of Brandon’s drunken indiscretion getting around the camp,” he expressed but then scoffed, “although I suppose it already has. Morale has decreased among the soldiers enough already, and to have an officer make these claims… Everything could fall apart.”

Nodding with understanding, Abigail commented, “I believe the men’s faith will be restored in time. You’re doing the best that you can do.” She lowered the cloth from his lip and looked down with a tiny frown. “I know my words aren’t providing you any solace but…”

“No, they do,” Ben insisted, reaching down to take her hand in his. When she finally looked at him again, she noted the earnest expression across his face, the sincerity in his eyes. “You asked me last night if I had read any of your letters, and the answer is yes, every single one of them. Sometimes even two or three times in one sitting. Your words inspire me and give me hope. Never, ever, doubt that.”

His fingers laced with hers, his thumb caressing the back of her hand in gentle circles, each brush igniting a spark inside her. There was no doubting his words, not when he was looking at her with such raw feeling and tenderness. So, it was hardly surprising that she had little choice but to lean forward and kiss him, mindful of his split lip.
The kiss was soft and tender, unlike their previous kiss which had been passionate and raw. This kiss didn’t lack any of the previous kiss’s passion by any means, but there was something lying underneath, a familiarity and intimacy that warmed and comforted but excited her all at once.

Their interlocked fingers parted so that their hands could settle on the other’s form, his hands resting against her hips and hers slipping up his shoulders towards the back of his neck.

The moment their lips parted, Ben pulled her closer, holding her securely when she nearly tumbled onto him. Both smiled sheepishly.

“I suppose we should inform Caleb of the new development,” Abigail said as soon as she regained the ability to speak. “For the intelligence gathering, I mean.”

Nodding, the major murmured, “He already knows. I mentioned to him after the incident with Brandon.”

“Me traveling to New York in his stead?” she inquired, already knowing his response but unable to keep herself from teasing him.

“Yes. Unless you had something else you had in mind to share with him?”

Abigail pulled a thoughtful face, glancing upwards briefly and shook her head lightly after some consideration. “I don’t believe there’s anything else I need to inform him of.”

Ben smiled up at her fondly, which invited another temptation to kiss him. However, the need for the spy ring eventually drew their attention back into reality, prompting them both to leave the tent in search for the whaler to discuss the trip to New York.

And find Caleb they did.

After moving to a more discreet location, the three worked out a system in which Abigail and Caleb would share the courier duties. As displeased as Ben appeared to be about this new development, she was still pleasantly surprised he was even agreeing to it.

When Caleb asked how she was going to get Abe to recognize her, she replied, “I don’t think I’ll have a problem getting Fievel to recognize me,” prompting a huff of laughter from Caleb and an amused grin from the major.

Instead of leaving in the morning, Caleb suggested that she left that night. It would make it more difficult for anyone to spot her, redcoats and possible Torrey citizens alike. Seeing the wisdom in his words, Abigail agreed and returned to her tent to change into civilian’s clothes, the very ones she had taken from her father’s home. She was gripped by an intense wave of pained longing and quickly changed inside the tent.

Once dressed, she slipped out into the night. She expected to see Caleb waiting nearby as she went to retrieve Cantor when she discovered it wasn’t the whaler who was waiting for her.

It was Ben who was waiting for her instead, holding the reins of an already saddled Cantor. At her look of surprise, he told her he had someone retrieve and tack the horse for her, knowing she needed to be ready as soon as possible.

“I can hardly believe he would behave for someone to saddle him,” Abigail commented, amazed as she stroked the muzzle of her beloved, dramatic horse.
Ben chuckled quietly. “I never said it was an easy task.”

Cantor snorted and pawed at the earth, effectively ending the moment.

During their walk towards the forest trail, Ben offered her many words of advice and warnings, reviewing as much of what they had discussed the previous night as he could. However, it didn’t take her long to realize he wasn’t just trying to be helpful. The man was stalling.

“At ease, major,” Abigail remarked with a reassuring smile as soon as they made it to the trail, or as reassuring as she could be while her body was full of anxious, nervous energy for what was to come.

Ben chuckled, sensing he had been caught. “I… I don’t know how to do this,” he admitted. “Letting you go.” He gazed into her eyes, looking terribly conflicted.

“I’ll be back before you know I’m even gone,” she assured him, smile softening. Before she could stop herself, she rose on her toes and pressed a chaste kiss to his lips soft and fleeting. “Enjoy your dinner with the commander in chief, and your fellow officers. And knock some sense into Brandon while you’re at it.”

He rolled his eyes half-heartedly at her poor attempt at a joke and then moved to the side of the horse so that he could help her mount the saddle. She was more than capable of accomplishing this on her own, but she didn’t object to Ben’s arms around her, for the briefest of moments.

After another a few more minutes of bittersweet exchanges, the major stepped back as she clicked Cantor into a walk, heading down the trail into a trot with another nudge of her thighs. She didn’t allow herself to look back and to only look forward, riding forward down the path that would lead herself and Cantor to New York.

Unbeknownst to her, with her departure from the camp brought on the arrival of another. At nearly a quarter past eight, Benedict Arnold arrived at the Continental base.
Chapter 12

York City

It took Abigail much longer than she had anticipated to find Abe in York City. For all her previous experiences with growing up with him, Abe had gotten rather good at covering his tracks, making it that more difficult for her to find him. A surprising talent he had seemed to hone over the years, especially since he had been the least subtle creature ever to grace Setauket. She could still recall with perfect clarity how the boy had literally tripped over himself and fallen into a mop bucket when he had first caught a glimpse of Anna walking through town.

Since there was much difficulty in tracking Abe, or Culper rather, the mission had to be extended a few more days than what was originally intended. There was no way she would be able to send word to Ben or Caleb to alert them of this development, at least no way that would reach them in time. She recalled Ben telling her if that she was unable to locate Abe within three days’ time to return to the camp, and Caleb would go in her stead. She had agreed, already knowing she would refuse the order.

A week already passed, and she had yet to find him. However, that didn’t mean no progress had been made during this time. She took notes in her journal, which was tucked away in the inseam of her rucksack away from suspicious eyes, noting the increasing naval wharf in the city. The number of canons rolled in by the British seemed to increase in number with each passing day, along with their appraised value, which she also carefully documented in her journal.

The amount of safeguards the British were taking to protect their stock was alarming. Guards heavily armed were stationed at the docks at all times, at least whenever she passed by on foot. She couldn’t risk riding Cantor while in York City. He tended to draw more attention than she could afford, whether it was intentional or unintentional on his part she was never quite certain. Instead, the proud stead currently resided in a small but comfortable stable adjoined with the boarding house where she currently resided, a particularly interesting development in this mission of hers.

Upon her arrival in York City, Abigail had quickly realized she wouldn’t be able to last very long within the city without shelter and money. The little money she’d had previously from her travels prior to enlisting with the Continental Army along with the small stash Ben had given her in case of an emergency had all been spent on bribing a British officer to grant her entry despite the fact she’d had a permit, although a forged one.

Thanks to Mr. Sackett and his remarkable techniques, the permit had been forged so well that, when compared to the real document, it was next to impossible to detect the forgery. However, she hadn’t wanted to risk the change of the forgery’s discovery and had given the British soldier what she had to gain access into the city. When he had suggested for more, she had reluctantly given him her father’s money as well, leaving her penniless when she was officially allowed to pass into the city.

With a plan in mind, she had tied Cantor to a hitching post outside the first boarding house she had come across and headed inside straight to the front desk as soon as she spotted the young man walking his way back to the desk. Sensing a new customer, the gentleman had lifted his gaze as she approached him and asked if he could help her.

“I should hope so,” she remarked, adjusting the strap of her rucksack on her shoulder. “I’m looking for a place to stay and a job to go with it. And I’m hoping you can help with both.”

Boldness was not very far from her nature, but this was by far the boldest request she had ever
made. Perhaps her disguise as a man was influencing her behavior. Judging from the man’s unsurprised face, she determined perhaps her demand wasn’t quite so farfetched. If she had been a woman, she suspected this request would have been handled differently.

After a moment or two of consideration, the gentleman remarked, “There may be an opportunity for you here.” He went on to discuss how the young man who cleaned tables for the boarding house had recently taken some time off to visit family in a neighboring colony and wouldn’t be returning for a few weeks at the least.

However, he did impress upon her that the job would be temporary, which she was more than happy with.

“I understand,” she replied. “I’m only passing through myself. Just in need of some money and a place to stay before I set out again.”

The gentleman smiled faintly, a sight she suspected was uncharacteristic of the man before they went about setting up the position for her.

They had exchanged introductions, with her introducing herself as Thomas Williams and himself as Robert Townsend. She would work cleaning tables and serving the boarding house’s patrons during whatever shifts she was needed while residing in one of the smaller rooms the boarding house had unless there was high demand for rooms.

The week passed by without much incident. Disguised, Abigail worked interchangeable day and nights shifts at the boarding house. Often, she would walk about the town to make other observations but mainly during her day trips. At night, she usually remained at the inn either for work or busy compiling her notes.

It wasn’t until mid-day Sunday did she finally gain an advance into her original mission.

While cleaning off a table and counting down the minutes until the end of her shift, the blonde caught a snippet of conversation between two British officers. At first, she didn’t pay them any mind until the talk took a turn in which she could not ignore.

“Amongst all the problems and rebels that little town has suffered from,” one of the officers remarked, “it’s a relief to know that not all of its youth are foolhardy and troublemakers.”

“So, it is true then?” inquired the other, tone coloring with interest. “That the son of Setauket’s magistrate has returned to further his legal studies?”

Abigail paused in her cleaning, stunned upon this revelation. Just when she had begun to lose a little of her faith, Abe had returned to York City after all.

“Of course, it’s true. He even has a personal escort from his lodgings here to the college.”

Abe was staying there, in this boarding house? How on earth had she not noticed? When had he arrived?

Biting her lip to keep from making a sound, she focused with renewed determination on her cleaning, reaching for one of the candlesticks to polish. She made a mental note to look over the patron entry books at some point during the day whenever no one was around. It was hard to imagine that she would have missed his arrival, given how long she had been there herself. The only reason she could think of was that perhaps he had arrived during the day while she had been on one of her day trips in the city.
As soon as her shift ended, Abigail returned to the desk to sign herself out. Behind the desk, she caught glimpse of the open book and, unable to help herself, turned the page over to see the previous day’s check-ins. And she was not disappointed.

Abe had indeed arrived during the day she had been in the city, noting the time and day as Saturday at ten thirty in the morning. Elation burst inside her but did her best not to show it, carefully returning the book to its original place before signing out on her time sheet and returning to her temporary living quarters.

However, before she made her ascent upstairs, Abigail made quick detour to the kitchen upon when she requested a dozen boiled eggs to be made for her, saying she would pick them up herself to save the cook a trip. When she raised a curious brow at the gentleman’s amused huff of laughter, the cook remarked he would soon be running out of eggs at this rate, considering how he had just boiled a dozen not too long ago.

Abigail said to just cut hers down to half a dozen then, doing her best to hold back her excitement. Success was soon within her grasp.

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Sighing heavily Abe returned to his room to collect his belongings before they could be taken care of for him. The meeting with Robert Townsend hadn’t gone well at all, considering he had just demanded he leave his inn at once upon his discovery of Abe’s true intentions of recruiting him. He had known trying to convince Townsend would prove difficult, but he hadn’t anticipated the degree of difficulty it would be.

He decided to leave it alone for now, to grab his things, and return to Setauket. Another attempt to try and change Townsend’s mind could be worked out during his next visit to York City.

Igniting some candles for some much-needed light, Abe grabbed his bags from underneath his bed to pack his things when he noticed something on the writing desk that had not been there previously.

With a puzzled frown, the former farmer walked over to the desk and peered into the basket, his frown becoming even more pronounced at the sight of six eggs inside. He retrieved one and examined it closely, realizing with a jolt of surprise that it was a boiled egg. Upon further examination, they were all boiled eggs.

Had Townsend already changed his mind?

Hurriedly, he ran his fingers over the egg and brought it towards a candle to warm it. After a few minutes passed, he went to work on cracking the shell and peeling back its flakes until the entire egg was deshelled. There was only one letter on the egg.

“F,” he read aloud. “What the blood hell is that supposed to mean?”

Grabbing another egg, he cracked and peeled off the shell only to reveal another letter, “I”. He repeated his actions until each egg was deshelled. Each egg bore a singular letter, none of which made any sense, no matter how many combinations he attempted.

Cursing quietly, he began to pace, folding his hands behind his back as his mind raced. What on earth could this mean? Was Townsend messing with him? Or was someone else? Was there someone else that was on to him and trying to set him up?
There were too many scenarios to consider, too many possibilities. A headache threatened to blossom at the base of his skull.

After another few rounds of pacing, he stopped to look at the lettered eggs, a thought occurring to him. He walked over to them and lined them up to form a word, out of sheer curiosity. Initially, he didn’t think it could work, but with each letter he lined up to form the word, he realized that was the only possible thing it could mean.

“Fievel,” Abe read aloud, incredulous. What could this mean? There was only one person in his life that ever called him that, and he hadn’t seen this person since…

“It’s about damned time,” came an irritated voice from behind him.

Abe nearly leaped into the air like a startled cat, a strangled yelp coming from the back of his throat that didn’t destroy the analogy either. There at his dressing cupboard stood a rather thin looking man, or what appeared to be a man, with a cap nearly concealing the entirety of their face.

“Do you know how long I’ve been hiding in your cupboard? It’s rather uncomfortable and awfully dusty,” they complained, dusting off their shoulders with a disgruntled tone.

Abe continued to stare in amazement, completely unaware of what to say or do. There were hardly any times in his life where he had been rendered speechless, but this moment certainly qualified as one of those times.

There was a stranger hiding in his room and was talking to him as if nothing were out of the ordinary.

Although that voice sounded awfully familiar… and not exactly masculine either…

“Oh, sorry. I thought you would have figured it out by now.” The stranger removed their hat and looked directly at him and…

“Abigail?” Abe demanded loudly, perhaps too loudly as she walked over to him to slap a hand over his mouth with an impressive looking glare.

“You can’t call me that here,” she hissed, briefly looking around. “These walls have ears. Enemy territory and all.”

“Why are you dressed as a man and why are you here?” he demanded, but with her hand pressed against his mouth, it all sounded like a stream of gibberish.

She retracted her hand and asked quietly, “What was that?”

“Why are you dressed as a man and why are you here?” he asked, keeping his voice at a more acceptable volume or at least that’s what he took from the fact she hadn’t slapped her hand over his mouth again.

“I’ll explain everything to you as soon as I can, but I need you your information for Ben first,” Abigail remarked, which only made him more confused.

“What are you talking about? My information for Ben?” he asked. He eyed her suspiciously.

“What’s going on here?”

“Abraham, your information…”
“I’m not giving you anything until you give me some answers.”

The blonde pinched the bridge of her nose, taking a measured breath before deflating. “All right. Just don’t interrupt me until I’m finished.”

He nodded in agreement, and then she launched into a summary of the events of the past year, how she had joined the Continental Army in her father’s stead, having disguised herself as a man and that’s how she had enlisted. She described to him how Ben and eventually Caleb had discovered her and how they were both protecting her secret. When she arrived at the spy ring, he could tell she wasn’t telling him everything, only that she found out about it only recently and how she and Caleb would now be sharing courier duties until further notice.

When she finally stopped talking, Abe just stood there, blinking for several minutes until he finally uttered, “I think I need to sit down,” and did so unceremoniously onto the bed.

But not for long, since Abigail reached over to pull him up by the arms. “Oh, no you don’t. You can sit down all you want after you give me what you’ve got.”

Recalling just how persistence the blonde could be, he decided it was best to do as she asked and went to retrieve his notes from his bag, which thankfully appeared to have not been disturbed during his stay at the boarding house.

She looked over his notes and remarked that his observations matched the ones she had also documented and pocketed them securely inside her coat. When she asked what he was doing there in the first place, Abe then told her that his returning to King’s College had been all a rouse to try to contact Robert Townsend and convince him to serve as the York City agent, seeing as how his time in York City was now limited due to his father’s growing suspicions.

Abigail accepted all of this with a grim and sympathetic expression and much more maturely than he would have given her credit for but kept that last part to himself. It seemed that everyone had changed over the past few years, including Abigail Williams.

Once they both shared everything that needed to be shared, they agreed that she should go before either of them get caught lingering about. She assured him she would be leaving in the morning to head back to the camp and that the information would go directly into Ben’s hands.

She was turning to go when he saw her pause out of the corner of his eye. “As long as we’ve known each other, I know it’s ridiculous of me to ask,” she began, tucking a loose blonde strand behind her ear, “but since my position in all of this is perhaps just as precarious as yours, I want your word will not breath a word of this to anyone.”

“Of course,” Abe remarked almost immediately, giving her a mildly incredulous look. As if he would endanger one of his closest friends, especially considering the amount of deceit she must have exchanged in on a near daily basis. He couldn’t imagine what the punishment would be if her identity were discovered. “No one will hear about it from me.”

Abigail smiled gratefully at him, her hand resting on the doorknob. “Thank you, Fievel.” She gave him an exaggerated tip of her hat, which had him rolling his eyes lightly.

“You make a terrible man,” he remarked, lips quirking upwards in jest.

“And you make a God-awful spy. Good evening to you,” she whispered before slipping out of his room in the blink of an eye.
Chapter 13

Morristown, New Jersey

While the journey to York City had been less than ideal, the journey back to the camp had gone much smoother, with no trouble delaying her any further. The moment she arrived she dismounted Cantor and led him towards the stables where the other horses were kept, greeting the boy who worked the stables with a warm smile. He offered to take Cantor off her hands, and she gave him a few schillings for his trouble, knowing just how difficult her horse could be.

“And there’s more waiting for you if he doesn’t knock you around too badly,” Abigail remarked with a wink.

“Thank you, sir,” the boy said gratefully as he stuffed the coin into his pocket. She smothered a laugh, still unaccustomed to the new forms of address, and left him to his tasks.

Her journal along with Abe’s were tucked away in her rucksack, no longer within the inseam for much easier access. She had removed them from their hiding place only after the camp had come in sight and allowing Cantor a short break of grazing and rest.

Now she adjusted the strap along her shoulder walked into the directions of the tents but not her own just quite yet. There was another destination she had in mind first.

Bypassing a few soldiers handling equipment, Abigail reached the major’s tent not long after. She wasn’t entirely certain if he would be there but decided to try her luck regardless.

“Ben…” she started but quickly corrected herself. “Major Tallmadge?” There were far too many soldiers present in the camp to speak in such familiar terms with him. Any unintended slip was dangerous.

For a moment, she feared he wasn’t there, that he was on some sort of mission for Washington himself or, worse yet, leading his squadron to the battlefield. So much could happen in a week, especially with no possible form of correspondence.

But no sooner had fear gripped her heart did the flap open and a hand reached out to grasp at her wrist, pulling her inside.

Abigail scarcely had the time to look at him properly before Ben’s arm wrapped around her waist, strong and steady, to draw her close before his lips found hers.

Inhaling sharply, she kissed him back and slipped her hands along the sides of his neck, assuring herself that this was real. Feeling his grip on her tighten, she suspected he was doing the very same thing.

Thank you so much for all of the subs, bookmarks, kudos, and comments! It means so much to me you all seem to enjoy reading this fic as much as I enjoy writing it <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
After a moment or two of indulgence, the kiss was broken, neither of them very happy to do so. Unfortunately, there was important business to discuss, other important business that didn’t involve kissing.

“I’m sorry for being away so long,” she apologized. “Navigation through the city took a lot longer than I thought.”

He shook his head, dismissing the apology. “I’m just happy you’re okay,” Ben replied. He reached up to tuck a stray curl behind her ear, making her heart race from such the tenderness of the act. “I… I was worried when you didn’t return after those first few days, but Caleb was quick to assure me that you could handle yourself.” He paused before giving her a mild look of exasperation. “And I suspected you wouldn’t listen to me if you couldn’t find Abe in three days to leave.”

Abigail smiled. “You suspected correctly.” She held back a laugh as he gave a quiet sigh, nodding knowingly.

“I take it you have something for me.”

She retrieved her journal and Abe’s from her rucksack and handed them to him. They sat down at Ben’s desk, after he pulled a seat for her right next to his. She said nothing of the chivalrous act, though the small smile of hers said enough for her.

Before going through Abe’s notes, she informed him how she had spent her days while waiting for Abe to appear, taking notes of British activity during her day trips and listening in to British soldiers who stayed at the boarding house.

“Much of my notes coincide with Abe’s as you’ll see,” she said, having opened her journal to gesture to where the numbers of canons had been documented on a particular day to cross reference with Abe’s notes, which Ben was currently studying.

“This is very good, very useful,” he commented, impressed by the details of both of their journals. “Having two accounts of British status in York City gives us more leverage to go with. Well, as soon as Washington approves of your involvement, of course.”

Abigail looked at him, raising an eyebrow. “You haven’t told him yet?”

“There hasn’t been enough time, but you don’t have to worry. He’s given me the discretion to do what I see fit with intelligence collection.” He cut himself off, muttering lowly at whatever he read in the notes. She couldn’t quite blame him for it. The British were advancing in their control of their city with each passing day. It was growing more and more difficult for anyone to enter, if her experience had anything to go by.

This was when she decided to bring up Robert Townsend, and Abe’s intentions of bringing him into the spy ring. She could verify the man would make a good addition to the ring, although he had rejected Abe’s initial outreach. It made sense, having someone else within the city while Abe remained stationed in Setauket, and who wouldn’t be suspected of consorting with the Continental army.

It didn’t take much convincing for Ben to agree this, knowing the logic behind the reasoning was sound. He said he would speak to Caleb when he got back from Setauket. Apparently, Anna had signaled him for a meeting, whatever the meeting was about was Abigail’s guess. In the meantime,
he prepared to pass along both her and Abe’s notes to Washington directly, rising to his feet to do just that.

Taking this as her cue, Abigail took her leave but not before pressing a soft kiss to his cheek, a rather daring risk, especially with the soft look she received in return. She felt warm and happy as she turned to leave, but upon stepping out of the tent, she was hit with a wave of guilt and shame.

Her husband deserved better than this.

Benjamin deserved so much better than this.

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It didn’t take Abigail too long to reunite with Christopher. Over the course of the week she had been gone, the young soldier had made considerable progress in his healing. No longer confined to his cot or the infirmary tent, he was able to get around unassisted. He even walked a few steps to appease her, which made them both laugh in delight.

The past month alone, without any strenuous physical activity, certainly helped the boy immensely. However, he commented he still wasn’t cleared to return to patrol duties quite yet, so more than likely she would be assigned to another soldier temporarily while he continued to heal. But that was a potential problem she would handle later.

“How was your journey?” Christopher then asked, after they had sat down with their dinner rations. They sat near the outskirts of the unofficial meal station of the camp, to give themselves a better attempt of more privacy. It was also partially influenced by their desire to remain as far from the more unpleasant soldiers neither of them could tolerate being around for prolonged periods of time.

Abigail paused in lifting her mug to her lips and thought of an acceptable response she could give him. There was only so much she could tell him, now that she had involved herself in Washington’s spy ring. She didn’t dare breathe a word of the ring’s existence to anyone, unless they were a part of it. However, she hated keeping secrets from Christopher and felt guilty for every untruth that fell from her lips. The boy was so kind, patient, and understanding, loyal perhaps to a fault. She wished she could confide in him more, but ultimately, the mission and her secrets had to come first.

But he spared her any trouble in coming up with a story, assuring her, “I understand you can’t tell me, of course. Secret mission and all. I’m only curious to how that horse of yours, Cantor, behaved himself. He’s not used to galloping about lately.”

Grinning, Abigail remarked, “Oh, he loved it. He usually doesn’t care for being saddled, but I think he was able to overlook the saddle when he realized he was going somewhere that wasn’t a pasture.”

They talked about her journey to where she had been sent and back with no other details going beyond that, which served them both well. He admitted to experiencing some envy and found himself growing a little stir crazy as of late, which made sense considering his injury and the limitations that came with it.

She wasn’t surprised by his restlessness, having experienced it more often than she would have liked to admit. There was a recurring theme among the rest of the men in camp, for those who never set foot onto the battlefield. It wasn’t at all difficult finding a soldier expressing these very views. Their discovery would be as easy as falling off a log, requiring no exertion or any form of skill to weed them out. The attitude was common, becoming increasingly more so with each passing day she feared.
Hopefully, with time, the mindset would fade.

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When Abigail had appeared to perform the morning patrol the following day, as what grown to be her routine, she had been told she would remain off patrol duties until further notice, taking her mission into consideration. She was then told if she had any questions, she should present them to Major Tallmadge.

The blonde accepted the order with a nod and did her best not to shake her head in mild exasperation. Of course. She should have expected this from him eventually, using his influence when the opportunity presented itself. It was more surprising that Ben hadn’t done this sooner.

She had every intention of asking him about it, but every time she saw him, he appeared either stressed or cross. The frustration lining his face caused her concern, but she believed that perhaps giving him space would be better assistance to him.

However, as day the carried on, Ben appeared to grow even more tense, the frustration extending itself in his interactions with officers and soldiers that appeared to be trying what little patience he appeared to have left.

As soon as she saw Officer Brandon approaching, Abigail took it upon herself to intercept this interaction, recalling just how well the two men’s previous encounter had gone.

“May I speak with you for a moment?” she asked once within earshot, forgetting any form of formality and military hierarchy. Fortunately, no one, apart from Ben, appeared to be paying her any attention.

Giving her a brief nod, he agreed to meet with her inside the barn in ten minutes.

When he did arrive to the barn, she had only been waiting five minutes.

“Are you okay?” Abigail asked as soon as he had slid the barn door shut, voice and expression full of concern. He exhaled sharply and didn’t respond right away, which she took as her answer. “If you say that you’re fine, I’ll know you’re lying.”

The major walked over to one of the tables, cluttered with devices she was not familiar with, and rested the palms of his hands along the tabletop. “I… There’s just so much I wish I could get Washington to…” he trailed off, struggling to find the right words. “This entire process is just frustrating.”

Abigail observed him carefully with a sympathetic gaze. “I’ve noticed, and I’m worried. It’s not good for you to bottle all your frustration and agitation. It’s going to blow up in your face if you don’t find an outlet for it.”

Ben laughed humorlessly. “If only I could. I would love to air out my grievances, but to do that and express them to the people who should hear them would cause more trouble than it’s worth.”

And that was the crux of it all, wasn’t it? Hierarchical structure created an atmosphere of impossibility when essential information needed to be passed along. Protocol and procedures, while valuable in theory, were impractical in practice, especially in times such as these. They served their purpose and were important, but when it came right down to it, it seemed they were more of a hindrance than a safeguard, at least in her own opinion.

She knew she couldn’t even come close to understanding the pressure that Ben was under. There
was no way for her to, but from what she observed of him within the past day, it wasn’t serving him any good in smothering it down. He did need an outlet.

… and she may have just thought of one.

Pushing herself away from a wooden beam she had been leaning on, she walked towards him, her steps slow but sure, until she there was only about a foot’s worth of distance between them. She took a quiet breath and spoke, “The moment you feel your frustration becoming too much for you to handle… come to me. Talk to me.” She paused for a moment, considering, and then added, “Take it out on me.”

The major’s gaze snapped to hers, horrified and affronted, “I’m not going to put my hands on you just to make myself feel better. How could you even suggest that I hurt you –”

“No,” she interrupted, chuckling a little as she fought the urge to pinch the bridge of her nose or to press a hand to her face. He had completely missed her meaning entirely. “No in that way of course. What I meant was…” she stepped into his space, running her hands over his coat lapels until they rested against his chest, one placed just above his heart. “What I meant was take your frustration out by kissing me. I’ll be your outlet, your distraction.”

Ben’s eyes darkened, whether at her proximity or her words or perhaps both, but he shook his head slowly. “Abigail…”

“It’s okay,” she murmured, her fingers running over the cotton material of his shirt. The undeniable warmth of him, the solidity of him, was enough to get her heart racing. “I know what I’m offering, and yes, it is wrong, but…” she licked her lips unconsciously and immediately noted how his darkened gaze tracked the movement.

Steady girl, she thought, though the rest of her seemed to ignore the request.

“Unless you believe Caleb to be a more suitable partner, although I find his beard would be too much –”

Ben cut her off her words with a searing kiss, so searing in fact it sent a jolt of warmth from her lips straight to her toes. She gasped sharply against his lips, unprepared for the soundness of the kiss, despite the fact she had initiated the invitation.

She stumbled backwards until one of her hips bumped into the sharp edge of a wooden tables, and she didn’t even wince or curse, too consumed from his lips and just the very presence of him as matched her step for step.

Ben’s arm encircled her waist, pulling closer to him, as the other ran up her back so that his hand could entangle in her hair, or of what little he could as it was tied in a loose bun. As for her own hands, they fought for purchase against him, alternating between tugging to pull him closer or to just run her hands over him greedily, wantonly. She couldn’t decide. And from the way he was clinging to her, it was something he was struggling with, too.

They continued to kiss even as they parted for her, their lips hardly a hairbreadth apart. An impulse struck her then, the urge so powerful and strong that she easily gave into it without a fight. During one of their brief moments of breath, the blonde leaned forward and captured his lower lip between hers and tugged.

The low, guttural moan that act drew from him was well worth the risk, and she almost felt compelled to repeat it, if not for the way his lips slipped away from her mouth to press firmly along
her cheek, her jaw, and… oh.

She had always known Ben possessed a talented mouth, but she had never imagined he would so skilled at this, given his lack of experience.

His lips attached to her neck, kissing along the little expanse of skin exposed by the collar of her shirt. She could feel him panting against her neck, and she was weak. Thankfully, there was a table behind her, otherwise her already trembling knees would have given out from underneath her.

The amount of frustration built up inside him, that she had been expected. What she hadn’t expected was just how much of it could be translated into passion. She was not prepared.

But that didn’t mean she wasn’t enjoying herself.

Chest heaving with labored breath, Abigail tried her best to rein herself in, before things got even further out of hand, but his kisses, opened mouth and insistent along her neck, were slowly driving her to the brink of insanity. How was she even supposed to think?

It wasn’t until something clattered to the ground right beside them did they both come to their senses, although somewhat languorous and delayed.

They remained entwined in their embrace, with her still leaning against the table and Ben having crowded into her space. The spark faded into a mild simmer, though the intimacy lingered. She pressed a soft kiss to the side of his neck, hiding a smile into the crook of his neck at the soft sound he made in response.

“Feeling better?” Abigail asked, giggling breathlessly. She felt him shift against her, preparing to step back, and all she wanted to do was pull him closer. Leaning back, she nearly jolted with surprise as her head made contact with the wall. That certainly explained why the table hadn’t moved an inch since their… talk.

“Yes. Much better, actually,” Ben remarked, sounding just as breathless as she did. She took no small amount of pleasure in that discovery.

Abigail didn’t realize she had closed her eyes until she felt a hand cup her face, prompting her to open her eyes and meet his warm gaze. The look in his eyes threatened to take her breath away, again.

Another giggle escaped her, despite her best efforts, including biting her lower lip to conceal them, which unintentionally drew his gaze once more to her mouth. The giggling faded but not altogether, not even when Ben leaned in to kiss away the laughter from her lips.

Fortunately, or unfortunately rather, this second kiss didn’t set off another round of passionate embracing. Instead, this kiss was soft and fleeting, just shy of teasing, but aware their time together in the barn was limited, brief.

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Having received Anna’s former servant’s message pertaining to General Lee’s true nature, Ben, partnered with Caleb and Mr. Sackett, devised a plan to expose the general’s treachery. He forged a letter from General Gates, keeping the letter as vague as possible while denigrating Washington. As much as writing the words sickened him, he knew it had to be done, otherwise the plan would not come to fruition. As it turned out, General Lee did write back, and upon the major’s interception of the letter, its contents were incendiary, horrendous, and in every way indicative that Lee was, in fact, a traitor.
However, upon his second meeting with the commander-in-chief himself, with evidence firmly in his grasp, presenting this news had gone less than well.

“Washington will not go. He must be pushed,” Ben read aloud, glancing up from the letter to ascertain Washington’s reaction. The man’s expression was carefully concealed, giving him no indication into his thoughts. He glanced back down and continued, “If the Congress will not rid us of this demigod, I pray a higher power will intervene.” He scoffed in disdain. The gall of this man, a supposed ally.

“I have heard enough,” Washington spoke quietly, still rooted to where he had stood when Ben had first arrived.

The major folded the letter, tucking it back inside its envelope. “I wanted you to see General Lee’s nature with your own eyes.” He paused for a moment. “That part about a higher power sounds like he’s calling for your death.

Washington admitted, “It is damning.”

Ben nodded. “I agree. And I think more than sufficient to relieve Lee of his command.”

“I wasn’t referring to the general.” Washington raised his eyes towards him, in a way that Ben felt he was being assessed. “How did you obtain this?”

After a moment of hesitation, Ben had confessed to forging the letter as Gates to provide Washington with evidence of Lee’s treachery, and the commander had not taken kindly to his initiative. He was reprimanded severely for his actions, which would only cause the army more harm than good, now that France’s eyes were on them now, considering an alliance. That, Ben hadn’t been expecting. He had tried to apologize, beseechingly, but his apology had fallen on deaf ears.

Washington was now more disappointed in him than ever, and the only person Ben had to blame was himself for it.

He intended to go to Caleb, to inform him of their failure, but remembered his mission to retrieve the busk. The next person should have been Mr. Sackett, but his feet were moving of their own accord, walking past the gentleman’s tent towards the center of the camp, hoping he would see another certain face.

As soon as their eyes locked, Ben signaled Abigail to follow him with a tilt of his head towards the barn. She followed him without question, an unusual action on her part, but he was grateful for it all the same.

Once inside with the door securely shut, he told her everything that had happened, starting with the news he had received from Anna’s former servant Abigail about General Lee to his plan of exposing the general through forged letters, concluding with Washington’s increased disappointment in him when he learned of how he had obtained Lee’s letter. He even revealed the reason of the commander’s anger, with France considering an alliance with them, knowing that she wouldn’t breathe a word of whatever was said to anyone.

She remained quiet throughout his confession, giving him the time to talk it out without interruption or interjection, not until he was finished.

Ben talked until he could talk no more, venting his guilt, humiliation, and frustration with himself on his foolishness, wondering how he just couldn’t have predicted this.

It wasn’t until he lowered himself into one of the rickety wooden chairs, gazing downwards with
despair, did Abigail finally make her move. He felt her hands slide up the sides of his face, gently coaxing him to meeting her gaze. When he did, he saw her standing right over him, with a gaze so open and kind he knew he didn’t deserve it, any of it, but it stop him from reaching out to her, his hands settling on her waist of their own volition.

“You were only doing what you thought was right,” she spoke softly. “Like you always do.” She brushed her fingers lightly against his cheek to tuck a loose strand behind his ear. He closed his eyes and angled his face into the movement, desiring the warmth of her touch. “You couldn’t have known this would happen. No one could have predicted this. Unless your name was Nostradamus.”

Ben released a huff of laughter despite himself, sounding more bitter than he would’ve liked. “I know, but now I fear I’ve made things even worse with Washington.” He hadn’t even thought that would have been possible before tonight.

“Hey, look at me.” Her request, soft yet firm, compelled him to open his eyes to stare up at her. The look she gave him was so full of belief, devotion, certainty. It wasn’t a look that suggested she believed he could do no wrong but instead showed she believed he would do the right thing no matter the odds. In the past, she had absolutely no qualms telling him when she thought he was wrong. He even suspected she had sometimes taken pleasure in proving him wrong. But this was different.

“I know you think you may have made of mess of things,” Abigail said, “and yes perhaps they are for now, but there was no way you could have predicted this. I know I wouldn’t have anticipated France considering coming to our aide. And I don’t have the answer to what you should do, but I know what you will do, however.”

Ben gazed up at her, enraptured. “And what is that?”

“You’ll make things right, in your own way,” she said simply, smiling sympathetically. “I know that doesn’t provide much comfort but…”

“No,” he shook his head. “Don’t do that. Your honesty is what I need.” He turned his head a little further to press a kiss along the inside of her wrist, lingering to cherish the softness of her skin against his lips. “You mean more to me than simply a warm body to take my frustration on as well, no matter how pleasurable it may be.”

The major felt his cheeks grow hot, and he could only imagine how red his face was. The sound of Abigail’s quiet laughter, however, was more than worth his pride.

“While I’m glad to hear you say that,” she said, her lips threatening to reveal a repressed grin, “I wasn’t offering myself to you with that intention, or, well, not only with that intention, I suppose. I was concerned. You needed some sort of release. I would do anything for you. That’s what you do for someone you… care for.”

And that, those last few words, was something he hadn’t realized he desperately needed to hear until they were said. There wasn’t anything he could say in response that would even compare (although there were three specific words sitting right on the tip of his tongue), so instead of speech, he chose action.

Rising slowly to his feet, Ben stretched out a hand to settle along the side of her neck, thumb caressing the soft skin found there. He leaned forward, pausing for a moment at the sound of her breath hitching at their proximity, and then kissed her, allowing his lips to express everything his mouth couldn’t.
Chapter End Notes

I rewatched the episode which this chapter is centered on, 2x03, and noticed the beginnings of a certain plot that I felt I should address here to avoid any potential confusion in the future, although it might be a mild spoiler.

In the episode, we witness the early stages of Hewlett's admiration for Anna Strong. For this fic, I intend to have Mary Woodhull have Anna's romance plot with Major Hewlett. It won't get addressed fully within the next few chapters but might get mentioned further down the line when we reach the season three set of chapters. I just wanted to give you guys a head's up!
“Stop fidgeting.”

“I’m not fidgeting.”

“Yes, you are, and it’s distracting.”

“I am not!”

“You are to!”

“Very mature, Major Tallmadge. Washington is incredibly fortunate to have an officer with the maturity of a two-year-old.”

Ben glared from his position beside her in the bushes. It was difficult to observe the severity of his glare in moonlight, but Abigail could only guess it was mild, at best. She smiled sweetly in response, which only managed to irritate him further, which was the point.

She had volunteered to go with Ben to deliver his message to Abe and Anna in person. With Caleb was currently on an assignment, Ben had felt obligated to meet them himself. Of course, when she had presented the idea of traveling with him, he had objected, to which she had simply responded, “Either I go with you or I’ll follow you. Care to choose the easier option here?” And there they were.

Unfortunately, what neither of them had considered just how long their wait would be. Ben had believed Abe would check the drop off point in the woods at week’s end, but the day had come and gone with Abraham Woodhull nowhere to be seen. And seemingly with each passing hour, the major was growing more and more agitated, with her in particular it seemed.

She huffed quietly, untucking her legs from beneath her to prevent any potential cramping. While the night didn’t provide much light, it was still close enough to dusk that she could make out his profile. During the week they had traveled together partnered with their wait near the drop off point, his appearance had grown a bit more disheveled, partially to disguise himself but mostly due to the lack of amenities for personal grooming. His hair was loose and more than a little wild at his shoulders. The stubble had grown considerably over the past few days, nearly making him unrecognizable.

Not once in her life had the blonde ever seen him in such an unkempt state, especially with an unshaved face. It was a little disconcerting, not the sight of him in such a state but her own reaction to it or her body’s reaction to it more specifically. It wasn’t a terrible look on him, not at all. Was there anything that could be done to make her less attracted to him?

Pulling her coat closer to ward against a cool breeze, she noted his impatient shifting and did her best to refrain from making a retort regarding which of them was actually fidgeting. It was odd to see him so unsettled, impatient, since he was one of the most infuriatingly patient men she knew.
“Are you okay?” she asked. “I know this hasn’t precisely gone to plan so far, but…”

Ben made a dismissive noise, choosing to instead keep an eye out on the road by pushing back some of the branches with his hand.

Unperturbed, Abigail continued, “Far be it from me to pry, but I think that maybe you –”

Abruptly, he turned towards her and hissed, “Stop distracting me.”

Before he could even return to his attempts of serving as lookout, she asked, completely confused, “How on earth am I distracting you? I haven’t spoken a word since we had arrived here. Also, there’s nothing else happening here, if you couldn’t tell.” Why was he acted this way? It hardly made any sense.

Then the realization dawned on her. “Oh.” Abigail slowly grinned, like the cat who caught the canary. He hesitated a glance in her direction to bear witness to the full sight of her grin. “How exactly am I distracting you? It is my mouth or our proximity that’s the problem?”

She didn’t need daylight to know Ben was blushing nor did she need for him to verbally confirm or deny her words. His silence spoke volumes.

Deciding to show him some mercy, she made to raise to her knees and move backwards, to put some distance between them, when she heard him murmur, “Who said you could move?”

Smiling to herself, Abigail paused, mentally composing her reply, when they heard footsteps approaching them, the crunching leaves and snapping twigs drawing their attention back to their surroundings.

Ben brought a finger to his lips before peering out from the bushes, careful not to rustle the leaves to observe the newcomer. After a few minutes of observation, he pushed himself to his feet and out of their hiding spot before she could even blink.

“Ben? Ben!” Abe. Thank God.

The major groaned. “Christ, what day is it?”

“It’s Monday.”

“Wait, how long have you been out here for?”

“I don’t know. Two, three days maybe.”

“I thought you checked the dead drop at week’s end.”

“No, no, I check it when I can. Do you want to tell me what the hell you’re doing here? Why is Caleb not here?”

“Sorry, he’s on assignment in New Jersey. And this can’t wait. I need you to go get Anna and bring her back here. I need to brief you both.”

“Both? No, no. You tell me what you have, and I pass that along. This place isn’t safe.”

“Well, if it were that simple, I’d have written a letter. This has to be in person. Besides, I come bearing gifts.”

Taking that as her own cue, Abigail decided to make her presence known, mimicking Ben’s earlier
actions by pushing herself off the ground and out of the bushes, only pausing to grab rucksacks of the so-called gifts that had just been mentioned.

“And I,” she announced, doing her best not to stumble as she dodged a particularly nasty thorny branch, “am one of those gifts.” Her grin widened at the look of utter disbelief on Abe’s face. “Good evening, Fievel.”

“Good evening, yeah, all right,” Abe remarked, startled into an incredulous laugh.

Seeing as she was struggling with one of the bags against a rather stubborn branch, Ben came to her aide, purposefully ignoring the quite colorful stream of murmured curses tumbling from her lips. With a hard pull, the bag came detangled from its capturer’s grasp, and as soon as they gathered everything they needed, the trio made set to relocate to Abe’s suggested meeting spot.

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“Look, I know, the codebook, the egg, they’re not safe. But this, this is.” Ben bent over the desk, after having dipped his quill in the ink bottle, and wrote across a sheet of parchment, the text invisible.

Abe peered over his shoulder, impressed. “That’s brilliant there, Ben.”

Ben smiled and continued with his demonstration, “Look, this clear fluid is called the agent. And the green is the reagent. Now you apply just a little bit with a very fine brush. It took us months to acquire this much. There. Just wait.”

Abigail observed the childhood friends with a fond smile from her seat across from them. Before their departure from the camp, Ben had shown her everything he was currently showing Abe. The ingeniousness of Mr. Sackett and his inventions would never cease to amaze her.

Their relocation to Abe’s partially concealed cellar hadn’t been a particularly trying journey, though the explanation behind it was difficult to process. Hearing of the terrible confrontation between Abe and his quartering British soldier Officer Brandon, she had forsaken any type of propriety and hugged her friend on the spot. She understood all too well the increasing danger he had landed into. However, the shock had only hit her when she had learned of Mary’s involvement, how it had been her idea to burn down their home and the story behind it for others’ ears. It had almost been enough to change Abigail’s opinion of the woman, and perhaps it had but only partially.

The door to the cellar creaked open, followed by an all too familiar voice, “Abe?” Anna Strong.

The three shared a look, with Ben suddenly grinning with a mischievous gleam. He held up a hand for Abe to keep his silence and moved quickly and quietly towards the door, hiding behind the wall at the base of the staircase. Abigail bit her lip to keep from laughing, enjoying the brief moment of childish hilarity, and proceeded to hide herself as well. Catching a glimpse of his approving grin, she knew she made the right choice.

Meanwhile, Abe had sat down at his desk, making himself look busy while clearing his throat. He called out, “Yeah?”

From her vantage point behind a cluttered bookcase, Abigail spotted the bottoms of Anna’s skirts as she descended the stairs and saw her fully when entered the room.

“I came as soon as we closed,” the barmaid announced, tone a bit breathless. She paused and frowned after a brief survey of the room. “What have you done to your root cellar?”
Seizing his opportunity, Ben pounced from his hiding place and wrapped his arms around her with a loud, playful growl, which was swiftly lost in the volume of Anna’s surprised squawk. Abigail snickered and chanced a glance at Abe, who was chuckling heartily as Anna smacked Ben’s shoulder before embracing him.

“Anna Strong,” Ben greeted with a fond chuckle, returning her hug.

“Oh, come on! He’s filthy!” Abe protested, his laughter clear in his voice.

Slipping from her place behind the bookshelf, Abigail joined Abe at his desk, leaning against the back of his chair as she remarked, “I tried convincing to bring some extra supplies with us, but no! He insisted on traveling light.”

At the sound of her voice, Anna parted from Ben and turned to face her, expression startled yet seemingly unsurprised. “Abigail!” she exclaimed, crossing the cellar to throw her arms around her, hugging her firmly.

The blonde hugged her back just as fiercely, an ache blossoming inside her chest she hadn’t known existed until that moment. She had missed her friend dearly.

“I’m assuming Abe told you everything, about me, I mean,” Abigail remarked, purposefully loud enough for all parties to hear. She gave Abe a pointed look and was rather pleased to see the sheepish expression cross his face. “He always does.”

“Yes, he did,” Anna replied, her hold tightening on her briefly. “I could just smack you for what you’ve done, but that wouldn’t help matters.”

Abigail knew Anna all too well that she was telling the truth and purposefully held back a chuckle at her words, suspecting that would only tempt her further.

As soon as they parted, the group settled into the matters of business. Ben presented a gift for Anna to bring to her former servant Abigail, claiming it was carved to appear as if her son had crafted it. Upon telling her that they needed to create a code for her former servant, Anna was adamantly against it, claiming she had made arrangement with the other woman herself, not as to set her up as a spy for Washington. Ben insisted that she was vital to the spy ring, and that her intelligence would grant them access to York City, but Anna refused.

It wasn’t until they reached a stalemate that Abe brought up Townsend, claiming he would be their man in New York. Abigail looked over at Ben and remarked that was the man she had met and told him about when she had gone to track Abe in York City. He admitted that Townsend was not aware that he had volunteered for this position yet, a remark that Ben did not particularly care for, but assured Ben that he would get Townsend on their side and told him to report back to Washington that Culper found their man in New York.

Abigail remained mostly silent during this exchange, apart from her coming to Abe’s aide regarding Robert Townsend. She was still mulling over what had just transpired when Ben had called them out regarding whatever tension there was between Anna and Abe. The tension was palpable the moment Anna had first arrived in the cellar. Their glances towards each other when they thought the other wasn’t looking weren’t at all circumspect, and this only made Abigail’s curiosity grow.

Something was certainly going on there. Or had been going on, rather.

After they had settled on a tentative solution, the group broke off in pairs, with Ben and Abe returning to the writing desks for more demonstrations of Mr. Sackett’s techniques while Anna
guided Abigail towards the far side of the cellar, so that they might speak privately, or as privately as they could get. The cluttered bookshelf provided them with only partial privacy.

The moment they sat down Abigail found herself asking, “What’s going on between you and Abe?”

Blinking in surprise, Anna remarked, “That’s funny. I was just going to ask the very same question about yourself and Benjamin.”

The blonde’s face felt a few degrees warmer but admitted nothing. She didn’t have to. The knowing look on Anna’s face suggested her silence had spoken for her.

“Abe and I…” the barmaid trailed off, pausing for a moment before sighing heavily. “Abe and I have… rekindled our relationship, to put it delicately, or had rekindled it rather. We slept together on multiple occasions, more times than I care to admit.” The sudden rosiness of her cheeks suggested many things, too many for Abigail to pinpoint to a precise reasoning. “I… you know how I feel about him, how I’ve always felt about him, how I’ll probably always feel about him. But circumstances got in our way, complicating and making things even more painful.

“And I know you realize why I’m admitting this to you now,” Anna continued, her expression full of sympathy and understanding. She understood all too well. “I can see it in the way you interact with each other. You look at him when you think he’s not looking at you, and when you turn away, I catch him looking at you in the same way.”

“And what way is that?” Abigail asked quietly, her hands tucked gently between her thighs and the wooden stool she currently sat on.

Anna smiled with a twinge of sadness mixed with mild exasperation. “With longing, complete adoration. The way he’s always at you, and the same look you’ve given him. The one you’re wearing right now.”

Abigail’s gaze snapped back to Anna, having not realized she had let her eyes wander until her eyes rested on the major’s form, hunched over Abe’s writing desk. It was an instinctive action, one that she no longer consciously thought about, only acted on.

“We’ve only kissed a handful of times,” Abigail admitted, dropping her voice even lower as her gaze flitted up to meet her friend’s. “I can actually count them on one hand. It hasn’t gone any further than that.” Apart from that one time in the barn, where his lips and touch had nearly driven her wild with desire, but she decided to keep that to herself.

“It always starts out that way,” Anna mused, her expression appearing far away for a moment, as if recalling her own experiences with Abe before lightly shaking her head, dispelling the cloud. “I’m not in a position to judge you, and I never would, but I recommend slowing things down with Ben, at least until you decide what your next course of action.”

When you’re ready to divorce your husband. The words went unspoken, but Abigail could hear them nonetheless. Just the implication was nearly enough to make her stomach plummet, but really, she should have seen this coming. To be perfectly honest, the notion had always been in the back of her mind, but she had refused to acknowledge it, knowing just how much hurt would be caused by it.

But how much hurt was she willing to risk by allowing this to continue?

Sensing her internal struggle, Anna shifted closer and placed her hand on top of hers, giving it a comforting squeeze. “I understand what you’re going through, and I know the guilt you must be
feeling, how deeply it must be clawing at you. But consider this... Ben isn’t married to someone else, nor does he have a family depending on him. You’re not breaking up a family.”

Abigail’s chest ached empathetically. “Oh, Anna.”

The barmaid shook her head firmly. “That’s not why I’m telling you this, Abigail. I’m not looking for sympathy. I just… want you to consider your actions and the choices that you’re making before things get even more complicated. Don’t follow down the path Abe and I have found ourselves on. There’s still hope for the two of you.”

“And there’s hope for you and Abe as well,” Abigail replied, squeezing her hand back firmly. “I believe that, with all my heart.”

The two women embraced, allied through their impossible situation they had found themselves in. A few moments later, they reconvened with their men briefly before the group parted ways, with Anna taking her leave first followed by Ben and Abigail not long after.

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Their journey through the Setauket woods would be a long one. Normally, conversation would help pass the time, but for Abigail, speech was an impossibility. Distracted by her thoughts, she couldn’t bring herself to drum up a conversation. Anna’s words of advisement and warning still rang in her ears persistently.

Using her situation with Abe as a cautionary tale, Anna had given her the ultimate testament to their friendship, imparting such personal experience so that she could avoid the circumstances Anna now had to live with. While Abigail felt for her friend, she considered their conversation carefully, mulling every word exchanged. Whether she wanted to believe it or not – although she couldn’t deny that she did believe it – Anna was right. While she was still married, whatever had developed between them couldn’t go any further than it already had, at least not until she was willing to go through with the divorce of her husband.

But the crux of it was, Abigail knew that she was in fact willing, and that only made her feel even worse. How could she do that to Tobias? He had been nothing but loyal to her, and this was how she repaid him?

*But he had known of your feelings for Ben from the start,* a treacherous voice objected. *Hadn’t he convinced you of the impossibility of the return of your feelings so that he could court you himself?*

As quickly as the thought came, she cast it aside, pushing it as far back inside her mind as far as she could. No, that wasn’t true. She had fallen in love with Tobias of her own volition, with no coercion on anyone’s part.

But why were those words so unconvincing?

The sudden presence of a warm weight on the small of her back drew Abigail’s attention upwards to Ben’s concerned face.

“Are you all right?” he asked. “You’re usually never this quiet.”

“I’m fine,” she managed the lie, although it sounded false to her own ears. Judging from his unbelieving expression, she doubted he hadn’t heard the falseness behind the words either. She sighed quietly, considering her words carefully. “I’m not quite sure how to go about this.”

“What do you mean?”
Silent for the moment, she thought over what she would say, what she should say. It was incredibly difficult, knowing what she had to do, but ultimately, she knew she couldn’t let her selfishness continue to cloud her judgement any further than it already had. The warm, comforting pressure of his hand against the small of her back was nearly driving her to distraction.

Quietly, Abigail stepped out of his reach, doing her best not to frown at the loss of his hand along her back. She took a measured breath before stopping near an old, gnarled tree, both for an excuse of rest and to put some more distance between them.

She didn’t have to look to know that he had stopped too, waiting for her explanation.

“This is incredibly bad timing, and I do apologize for it,” Abigail began quietly, slowly leaning against the tree for support. “But I’ve been thinking, over the course of our walk and, perhaps even before tonight, that…” Frustrated at her sudden lack of ineloquence, she pinched the bridge of her nose with a small irritated huff of laughter. “Great, I can’t even be articulate for this.”

“Hey,” Ben murmured softly, stepping half a step towards her. His hand reached out for hers, hesitating for a moment, before allowing his fingers to brush against hers. “You can tell me anything, you know that.”

Nodding, Abigail granted herself a moment or two of comfort from his touch before finally speaking again, “I know what I said and what I offered to you at the barn a week ago.” She paused, a half grin instinctively tugging at her lips at the sight of brief duck of his head, indicating he was in fact attempting to hide a blush. Fortunately, the night did the work for him. Her smile faded as she continued, “But… I really think we need to take things slower. And by slower, I mean ending this… whatever it is, before it goes too far.

“And before you say anything else,” she interjected, already seeing he was preparing to speak and held up a hand to prevent him from doing so, “just know that this isn’t some act of nobility on my part. I know how selfish I’ve been, how selfish I am. No matter how and what I feel about you, I’m still married.”

She trailed off, feeling his finger graze along her ring finger, which was barren. Upon her enlistment, she had removed her wedding band, knowing it would only draw more questions than she would have been able to provide answers to. The silver band currently resided in her rucksack back at the camp, tucked away along the inseam of the bag, securely hidden. Out of sight but not out of mind.

“But you must know, I do know what I want. And who I want,” Abigail concluded, finally daring a chance to return her gaze to his. “But as long as I’m bound to another, we cannot continue as we have been.”

The look in Ben’s eyes was what she had anticipated – pained but resolved, upset but understanding – and it only made her feel worse. He stood close enough now that when she lowered her head for a moment, her forehead grazed his shoulder. “I’m so sorry. You must think I’m an absolute tease.”

“No, I don’t,” Ben replied firmly. He brought a hand to her face, coaxing her to meet his gaze with a gently brush of his fingers underneath her chin. “You shouldn’t harbor all of the blame for this. I’ve had just as much of an active part as you, a more than willing and eager role.” His lips quirked upwards self-deprecatingly, which Abigail mirrored faintly. “No matter how long it takes, I will wait for you.” He trailed off for a moment, his fingers grazing her cheek with no small amount of affection. “You’re worth the wait.”

She released a quiet, shaking breath at that, nodding to herself. Of course, he had to go and say something like that, making things unintentionally more difficult but wonderful at the same time. He
was so unbelievably patient and kind, even with their long history of bickering and driving each other crazy, and she wondered what on earth she had done to deserve such a man?

Sensing her inner turmoil, the major stepped forward, pressing firm, comforting kiss to her forehead. He lingered, perhaps longer than he should have, and she heard him release a quiet exhale before ultimately letting her go. They had a long journey ahead of them back to the Continental camp, which proved to be even longer given the conservation moments prior.

Abigail knew, on some level, that they were doing the right thing, ending things before anything could truly began. In her heart, she knew what she had to do from there. She just hoped that God provided her with enough strength and conviction to see it through.
Morristown, New Jersey

The camp bustled with activity in the grey morning. Preparations were being made for the journey towards their next destination, Valley Forge. It was expected they would have the new base set up by December.

Abigail had yet to return to patrol duty, even after Christopher was seen fit to return to duty. When she had tried to insist she was more than capable of performing her duties, the officer remarked that she would have to take up the issue with Major Tallmadge himself.

“Oh, I intend to,” she muttered under her breath, turning from the gathering soldiers to walk the familiar trek towards the major in question’s tent.

With a great deal of purpose, she brought herself up to the front of the flap and called out his name quietly, making sure to keep any sliver of agitation out of her voice, conscious of the amount of activity surrounding them.

After a moment or two, the flap was pushed back, and she stepped inside, the move becoming practically second nature given the number of times the act was performed.

Whatever Abigail had been prepared to say died on her lips when she took in his appearance, fully dressed as if he had just returned just moments before she had arrived. Curiosity overcame her irritation, prompting her to ask if she had arrived at an inconvenient time.

“No, of course not,” Ben assured her, though he appeared to be rather busy, thumbing carefully through a notebook of some sort while periodically glancing in her direction. “I’ve just returned from a meeting.” He paused, his face settled into a considering expression before setting the notebook back on his writing desk. “A few meetings, rather. There’s been a recent development, which may perhaps hold some potential.”

Abigail reined in her increasing curiosity, keeping her expression carefully veiled before asking, “Is it pertaining to the Culper ring?”

“No… yes, er… perhaps a little bit of both.” The major leaned forward and flattened his hands across the desk, staring at the cluttered mess with a look of contemplation. “I… I haven’t spoken of this to anyone, but I’ve been speaking with General Benedict Arnold.”

She instinctively cringed at the sound of the general’s name and would have scolded herself for it if he had been paying any attention to her. Grateful for that fact, she did her best to school her features on the off chance he did decide to look in her direction again.

The name Benedict Arnold was not a name she was particularly fond of hearing nor was she particularly fond of the individual who bore that name. Never having interacted with the man himself, she had heard of other soldiers’ accounts with him, both on and off the battlefield, and none of these accounts painted him in a positive light. And now to hear that Ben had been speaking with him, a feeling of impending dread settled over her.

“About the ring itself?” Abigail asked cautiously, though she doubted he would ever discuss Culper
to anyone other than those involved. Or so she hoped.

Ben shook his head firmly. “We never discussed Culper specifically, though he knows I’m head of intelligence gathering, which he finds rather… beneath me, as I suppose you could say.”

“Oh?”

Whether he ignored her pointedly interjection or not, she could only guess, but he continued as if she hadn’t spoken, saying how the injured general desired a camp aide, to be kept informed of the camp’s inner workings and any other information he felt compelled to know. The longer he described their interactions, the deeper the frown formed on her face. It was clear from what Ben was describing that Arnold didn’t want Washington’s involvement in their new arrangement, and that perhaps was the most unsettling feeling about this.

The moment his narration ended Abigail blurted out without a second thought, “Tell me you’re not actually considering this.”

Ben’s brows furrowed in a mixture of confusion and something else. “Why shouldn’t I? He’s right. I’m of little use to Washington while I’m on constant desk duty, and as of late, I haven’t exactly been in Washington’s good graces doing what I’ve been doing.”

“Oh?” she protested gently, taking half a step forward. “You’re doing what you believe is best, and you’ve said so yourself that you’ve been given discretion to do what you see is fit with Culper.”

“But at what cost?” Ben demanded with a gesture towards the camp outside the tent. “What good is it for me to continue to serve as head of intelligence when we are hardly making any progress?”

“There’s Abby, Anna’s former servant –”

The major interrupted her with a shake of his head. “It doesn’t go with the protocol, and that’s precisely my point.”

“No,” Abigail remarked, “that’s Arnold’s point. Why are you allowing him to get to you? I’ve heard things about him, Ben, and none of them are good.”

Wearing a frown matching hers, Ben said rather brusquely, “He’s a general in the Continental Army with an impressive tactical history. Saratoga –”

“I don’t give a flying fig about who he is or his skills on the battlefield!” Abigail exclaimed. Her increasing agitation at the hint of belittling tone in his voice influenced the increase in volume. It was more of the reminder of their surroundings by a nickering horse as opposed to his stern glare that prompted her to lower her voice. “And the fact that he doesn’t want you to inform Washington of this doesn’t strike you the slightest bit troubling?”

“Be careful there, lass,” Ben warned her lowly. His use of “lass” nearly threw her for a loop. Not once had he used that term of endearment since she had first set foot inside the Continental Army, which was perhaps a good thing. She hadn’t realized how much she missed it until the word fell from his lips, no matter the glare that accompanied it. “You’re coming dangerously close to crossing the line, which you have done multiple times if you may not have noticed.”

“I just want you to exercise some caution when you’re around him,” Abigail replied, choosing to ignore the jab in favor of providing him some much-needed perspective. He certainly could benefit from it. “I don’t know much about General Benedict Arnold, that much is true, but from what I’ve heard from the men around camp, he has a certain… way about him.”
Exasperated, the major turned to face her fully, his posture stiff and muscles tense. “I understand what you’re saying, and your intentions are pure, but I don’t appreciate you questioning my judgement at every turn.”

Abigail sighed heavily, torn between the urge of smacking him and walking right out of the tent. Wisely, she chose the latter but not before making a quiet retort, “I only question your judgement when I think you’re making a mistake. Perhaps, coming to see you was mine.”

It didn’t occur to her until hours later that she hadn’t gotten around to confronting him on her initial reason for visiting him.

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_Valley Forge, December 1777_

How Caleb had managed to make it back to camp was anyone’s guess. The man had an unnatural knack for achieving the impossible when the odds were stacked against him, which only demonstrated his skills and lack, though most would consider the latter more likely.

As soon as he arrived at the new camp base, the whaler approached Ben and Mr. Sackett, presenting the smuggled letter from the busk of King George III with barely concealed delight. Upon receiving the letter, Mr. Sackett made a mad dash towards Washington’s tent with Ben and Caleb hot on his heels.

The letter revealed damning information of their English enemies, namely their current financial upheaval. This war was costly for the redcoats. England was all but bankrupt due to the financial costs of the war. This information was what Washington had been waiting for, and the commander in chief said as much as soon as he read the letter, exuding enthusiasm for the first time in several months. He informed his servant to invite the French commissioner to dine with them, so they could begin the official negotiations of establishing an alliance.

After the meeting with Washington, the three men went in their separate directions, with Mr. Sackett returning to his tasks of reorganizing his materials after the switching camps while Ben and Caleb set off in the direction of the camp supplies, all the while discussing this exciting development all thanks to Caleb’s delivery.

However, there was an odd sort of energy his friend was giving off, Ben noted. While he appeared excited, there was a slight nervous edge to his mannerisms, which he could no longer ignore.

“Is everything all right, Caleb?” the major inquired, glancing over at his friend with a hint of concern. “You seem sort of… I don’t know, quiet.”

Caleb gave a little huff of laughter. “Oh, there’s nothing wrong with me, Tall-boy. Nothing at all. It’s only…” He trailed off, taking a quick observation of their surroundings before gesturing for him to follow with a tilt of his heads towards the edge of the woods.

Once they made the short trek there, Caleb continued, “Along the way back from retrieving the letter, I was signaled by someone from the ring.”

Alert, Ben took a step forward, asking quietly, “Culper?”

Caleb shook his head, gauging his reaction carefully, “John Smith.”

Ben blinked, his surprise clear on his face. Not once had they ever had a signal from John Smith in all the years he had been part of the ring and for very good reason. It had taken several months to a
year to establish his place inside the British army. Any form of signal would have compromised his cover. Why would Tobias signal Caleb now?

To make matters worse, Caleb continued, “He requested a meeting with you personally. Wouldn’t tell me why. But he was pretty insistent about it.”

“It would risk his cover to have a meeting with him,” Ben insisted. “It would potentially compromise the entire ring. How could he even think this would be smart?”

“Yes, it’s a risk,” Caleb agreed, “but if he’s willing to risk exposure, it must be important, right?”

Pressing his lips together for a moment, Ben said he would consider the appropriate time and place for establishing a meeting with Tobias. As much of a risk as it was, whatever information Tobias had, they needed to know, and if he had to meet him personally, he would. When Caleb asked if he should tell Abigail, he gave an immediate shake of his head, telling him he would tell her about it after the meeting. It was apparent Caleb didn’t appear happy with this decision but acquiesced to go along with it regardless.

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During the next few days of camp establishment of the new base, Abigail managed to keep herself busy. Despite the fact she was essentially grounded from patrol duties, that didn’t stop her from being productive when she could, assisting with even the most menial tasks such as equipment inventory and meal cleanup.

It wasn’t until she witnessed a few injured men being brought into the infirmary tent that she came to a rather enlightening realization. If she could prove her skills useful, perhaps she could assist the camp physician with his work and other duties. In exchange for the much-needed assistance, she could learn from him the techniques and medicines he possessed at his disposal. It was one thing to learn from books and the occasional observation; it was another thing entirely to learn by performing the tasks at hand. As good as she was with books, she had always been better at learning with her hands.

It was with this idea in mind that she approached the man in his tent early in the morning before breakfast, reintroducing herself to him by reminding him of the time he had treated herself and Christopher from their alleged attack on patrol.

Dr. James Anderson, who remained mostly silent during her what could be best described as a poorly concealed attempt at persuasive diatribe, accepted her offer immediately as she paused to take a breath. Before she even knew what was happening, he asked her if she was knew the botanical name for bee balm.

Fortunately, that was one of the herbs Abigail was familiar with. “Monarda didyma,” she responded after a brief pause, thrown by the abruptness of the question but not the question itself. “It’s also referred to as bergamot, Oswego tea, or Indian plume. It’s helped used to treat colic, fever, or colds.”

Pleased with her response, he asked her how she came to know this. She informed him that her father was a physician and sometimes dabbled in herbalism when the case called for it.

“You’ve passed your second test,” the physician remarked with a wry smile as he examined a set of vials on his desk.

A little bewildered, Abigail asked, “And what was my first test?”

“Surgically removing that young man’s bullet after your attack.” He paused briefly in his
ministrations to peer at her from over the rim of his glasses. “That was you, wasn’t it?”

She nodded mutely just before he grabbed her by the forearm and led her off to begin her work.

Apart from the occasional wounded soldier, Abigail’s tasks essentially focused on correctly identifying herbs and organizing them into their proper vials and drawstring bags. Often, she was also tasked with the creation of salves once she memorized the ingredients, though secretly she had tucked away a small notepad inside the pocket of her jacket to keep track of each medicinal recipe, a cheat sheet if you will. Better to be prepared on the off chance of avoiding a mistake than wasting ingredients by making it incorrectly.

This new development proved to be one of the better decisions she had made over course of her enlistment into the army. Not only did it provide her with something to do, it also provided her with a sense of purpose. For the first time in a long while, she felt useful in the camp. Having yet not set foot onto the battlefield (which she wasn’t entirely troubled over) nor having been allowed to return to patrol duties, the blonde had been close to climbing up the ways of her tent, which would have proven rather difficult considering the instability of the soldiers’ tents. Gratefully, her unofficial apprenticeship with Dr. Anderson had saved her from the destruction of her and Christopher’s shared provisional residence.

Between her work with the camp physician and Culper, perhaps Abigail had finally found a place for herself in the Continental Army.

It wasn’t until Abigail was nearly finished cataloguing the physician’s herbs did she finally pluck up the nerve to check in on her next assignment with Culper. Ordinarily, she would have gone to Caleb first, but knowing him, he would only point her in the direction of a particular major’s tent, a destination which she was doing her best to avoid.

Ever since their argument in Morristown, she and Benjamin had hardly spoken. What little information she learned of his latest deeds was gleaned from Caleb, who served as the reluctant messenger between herself and the major even though they never sent direct word to each other. If Ben continued to entertain the idea of serving as General Benedict Arnold’s camp aide, she had little to say to him, and Ben, she assumed, had little to say to her.

But it wasn’t fair to Caleb to keep him in the middle of… whatever form of standoff in which they were currently engaged. So, with her decision in mind, she pushed herself away from her desk to make the trek towards Ben’s tent. The path was different, considering the different base site and new terrain, but the destination was always the same.

However, Abigail didn’t make it far. She only managed half a dozen steps beyond the infirmary tent when she nearly collided with face full of blue and white uniform jacketed chest.

With a glance upwards, she met Benjamin’s startled gaze with her own, blinking in surprise. “Oh…”

“Oh…” he echoed before pulling himself out of his startled state. “I was just coming to look for you.”

“Funny,” Abigail remarked. “I was just going to say the same thing.”

He huffed out a short, amused laugh, prompting a small smile on her face until she took in his distracted, pensive expression. She frowned, their argument from Morristown and the unfolding events which led to their undisclosed silence entirely forgotten. “What’s wrong?”

Instead of answering directly, Ben lead her in the direction of the new location of Mr. Sacket’s
inventions, yet another barn. It was the only suitable and logical place to store them. At least this barn didn’t possess reminders of their last meeting, which had not gone precisely to plan. Or perhaps it had, considering the offer she had extended to him that day.

Casting the memories aside, Abigail allowed herself to be led inside the barn and once inside put a respectable amount of distance between them. At first, she thought he was going to inform her of any Culper updates, but when he began to provide details of the camp’s latest visitor, she couldn’t help but lean a little forward, both with increasing curiosity and intrigue.

He informed her of the redcoat’s arrival along with the arrival of a civilian and his dilemma. Apparently, the redcoat had arrived first, forewarning there would be a civilian who sought audience with Washington to inform him of a potential attempt on his life. However, the redcoat had warned them to not be deceived, that he was in league with the British. When she asked how the redcoat could be trusted, Ben answered the red coat was allegedly seeking refuge in their camp, wanting to denounce the British and enter the war on their side.

“And what are your thoughts?” Abigail asked, once he concluded recounting the past day’s events.

Ben sighed heavily. “I don’t know what to think. On the one hand, there may be a very real chance of an attempt on Washington’s life, while on the other, this could be the British’s attempt of subterfuge by sending in a civilian to distract us.” His gaze was drawn to one of Mr. Sackett’s new inventions and took a half step in approach of said invention but at the last second thought better of it, instead choosing to remain where he stood, his back once more pressed against the barn post.

“I thought perhaps an outsider’s perspective could shed some much-needed light on the matter at hand,” he went on to say, though he hesitated for such a length of time she cocked her head in askance, “so I’ve considered bringing this to General Arnold’s attention.”

Abigail pressed her lips together in barely suppressed frustration before saying, “Ben, no. The man cannot be trusted. He’s far too hot-headed, and his temper wouldn’t help matters, at all.” Before he can even interject, she shook her head in exasperation. “I don’t wish to start another argument. I just only wish you could think this over carefully and tread lightly. Arnold would only hinder your ability to do so.”

She paused for a moment and then remarked, half-teasing, half-serious, “And I’m more than a little insulted you would go to him for an outsider’s perspective than come to me, but I suppose that’s just the way things operate in this military hierarchy.”

“First of all,” Ben remarked, eyes narrowing slightly in jest only from the intended humor in her tone from her previous remark, “it was only a consideration of going to General Arnold, not that I would actually go to him. From the numerous interactions I’ve had with the man, I do find his temper rather… unsettling. I only wondered if presenting this to him would give us any information we may have overlooked. But I admit that you’re right. His temper and impatience would be a hindrance.” Abigail’s brows raised with no small amount of surprise, but he held up a firm hand. “I’m not finished.

“Secondly, you’re not an outsider. You’re as much a part of Culper as I, Caleb, Abe, and this Townsend are. Your perspective is just as valid as any of ours.” His hands shifted at his sides, as if instinctively reaching towards her but instead remained firmly at his sides.

“I always value your input,” he added softly, “even if I may not always like what you’re saying.” His lips quirked upwards into a faint smile.

Abigail smiled in return, this time more genuine than her previously strained smile. It wasn’t as if she
didn’t know his words to be true, but she didn’t realize until he had spoken those words just how badly she had needed to hear them.

“Thank you,” she replied, her smile still in place. “You didn’t have to say any of that but still… thank you.”

Ben smiled. “I’ll say it again if I have to, however many times it takes for you to believe it.”

This was the closest they would come to an apology but seeing as how they had returned to speaking terms, this resolution, after weeks of not talking, was long overdue and more than acceptable.

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In the evening, Ben gathered Caleb and Mr. Sackett to discuss the case of the red coat and the civilian, a premise that would make a compelling novella, though she wisely kept this comment to herself.

Initially, she had kept her distance from the three men, listening in on their conversation under the guise of cleaning her musket. Right in the middle of her attempt of making sure it wasn’t loaded, Ben abruptly halted in his discussion, walked over to where she sat, and plucked the musket from her hands, commenting how she should join them before she accidentally shot herself accompanied with a disapproving frown.

Barely concealing a roll of her eyes, the blonde obliged, rubbing the gun powder off her hands before making her way to take a seat at the fire. Mr. Sackett, knowing she was now a part of Culper, merely moved his belongings from a spare log to make room for her, and continued to speak candidly.

Caleb was in favor of warning Washington of the immediate danger while Ben remarked how the civilian, Shanks, had said everything that Sutherland, the redcoat, claimed he would and believed it was possible he was lying to gain their favor. While the idea of informing Washington did warrant some consideration, he couldn’t bring himself to do it, stating that he was already on thin ice with the commander-in-chief as it was. There was also the development of the alliance with France to consider as well, to which Caleb remarked, “An alliance won’t mean shit if we ain’t got a chief to lead the army.”

Abigail’s gaze was torn between Caleb and Ben’s exchange to the contraption Mr. Sackett was tinkering with, some sort of mechanical device that did not look entirely pleasant. Judging from how he held the device, with his fingers resting on the metal bar and how the screws tightened its hold downward towards his fingers, she drew her own conclusions as to what the device would be used for.

“Besides, what if it’s the bloody-back who’s lying?” Caleb added.

“What if they’re both lying?” Mr. Sackett asked, his attention fixated on the contraption in his hands without glancing in the direction of the whaler who huffed out a laugh of disbelief.

“Jesus, Sackett. Do you even trust yourself?”

Mr. Sackett paused, throwing him an amused, brief glance. “Not for years.”

“Unbelievable.”

Abigail held back a snort and just shook her head. Men and their idiocracy.
Not even a moment later did Caleb volunteer to lead the decoy to Baltimore. At her apparent look of confusion, they explained how Washington devised a plan to distract Robert Rogers, who was fervently tracking Caleb down to retrieve the letter he had stolen from the bush of King George. The plan was to send the cavalry out in force and split the detachment in two, with one heading to Portsmith and the other would go to Baltimore. From what she could gather, the decoy was the detachment to Baltimore.

After a brief exchange, the young major gave his approval for Caleb to lead the Baltimore group, but before the latter could start off in the direction of gathering the troops, he pulled the other man into solid hug, each clapping each other on the back before Caleb set off.

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The moment Abigail greeted Christopher at their tent were the summoned by one of the officers to meet at the center of the camp. Once there, the large gathering of soldiers was then divided into two groups, one lead by a nameless officer and the other by Caleb Brewster. They weren’t informed of where they were going or what the mission was for, but Abigail already knew, even before she was assigned to decoy group heading out to Baltimore. The Portsmith group would leave first thing in the morning. As for the Baltimore group, they were to leave within the hour.

Abigail caught Caleb’s gaze, and they shared a brief, silent exchange. He gave her a brief nod, already knowing her line of thought and watched as she turned on her heel in the direction of Ben’s tent, hoping to catch him before his and Sackett’s interrogations.

She deliberated whether she should inform Ben of what happened, not to get herself out of it but to give him some peace of mind. However, knowing that she would be part of the decoy would provide him anything but solace. In fact, she suspected he would attempt to get her out of it, if his absolute refusal to release her to on patrol was any indication.

Apparently, luck was on her side tonight, or rather it wasn’t, considering her recent conscription. Ben was still in his tent sitting at his desk, the tent flap drawn back to reveal his profile. With her decision still not made, she stepped inside as soon as he spotted her and closed the flap at his signal.

“I was hoping to catch you before you and Sackett started,” Abigail said, purposefully keeping her wording vague and knowing he would understand her meaning. “I wanted to check in with you and see how you were doing, considering…” She gave a vague, general gesture with her hand, which somehow made sense to him.

“Yes, well,” Ben said, turning in his seat so that he was now facing her fully, “I can’t say for certain just how I feel until the interrogations are carried out.”

“But you do have an idea of who the culprit may be, don’t you?” Abigail asked knowingly. She recalled both their meeting in the barn and the talk with Caleb and Mr. Sackett, suspecting that the major held a belief of the truth of this mystery.

Ben frowned a little, considering. “I think I may have an idea,” he admitted reluctantly, “but it would be unwise to jump to any conclusions before all the evidence is presented.”

Nodding, Abigail agreed with him. “Whatever you decide to do and whatever conclusions you draw from your interrogations, just trust your instincts. They rarely steer you wrong.”

The smile she was received was a tired one but one filled with gratitude for the confidence she had in him. It appeared as if he was going to say more but at the last minute decided to change the route of his next words. “I’m assuming you’ve been assigned to one of the groups being dispatched.”
His expression turned grim, frown growing when she gave him a rather reluctant nod. Warily, he scrubbed a hand down his face, his words somewhat muffled as he asked, “Which group is it?”

“Portsmith,” Abigail lied smoothly. The lie was an impulsive decision, one she knew that would come back to bite her later. As for now, she didn’t wish to worry him more than probably already did. “First thing in the morning,” she added, anticipating his inquiry of when she had to leave.

Nodding to himself, he released a breath he didn’t seem to realize he had been holding, and she immediately knew she had made the right choice. Better to have his mind clear during his interrogations than be distracted by her departure.

“You better go get your rest,” Ben advised with a nod towards the tent flap. “It’ll be a long journey, and you’ll certainly need it.”
“I will, but,” Abigail remarked, taking a step forward before pausing and then crossing the remaining distance between them so that she could stand directly in front of him, “I wanted to tell you something, just in case I didn’t get the chance to see you before I go.” She reached down and cupped the side of his face, a gesture she had done her best not to indulge in ever since their trip to Setauket. The contact filled her with longing, after having denied herself his touch for so long. From the way he leaned into her touch, it was apparent he shared a similar sentiment.

“You should know that what you do matters, no matter the outcome.” She let her thumb brush lightly along his cheek, taking comfort from him being underneath her touch.

Expression growing soft, Ben gazed up at her with a growing smile. “I believe I read that in a letter somewhere.”

Abigail’s lips twitched into a smile matching his. She knew precisely what letter he was referring to and did her best not to dwell on the rest of those letters’ contents. And the fact that he had read every single one of them. “I think you should take that letter writer’s advice. They sound wise beyond their years.”

Chuckling softly, he turned his face against her hand and pressed a fleeting kiss to her wrist. Her pulse jumped at the unexpected act, and she wondered if he felt it.

“My apologies,” he murmured. “Just following my instincts.”

It was hard to figure out if he was actually sorry for what he did, but she nearly suspected that he wasn’t. And to be honest, she wasn’t either.

She took her leave of him before things could escalate further, though she knew very well that Ben was a gentleman, that he would never push for anything more than she was willing to give. That was the crux of the matter. She was all too willing to give him things she ought not to give, which was why she had put a stop whatever they had before it could go any further, until she decided what to do next.

But as she stepped out of his tent and headed to where her group was assembling for the night’s journey, Abigail knew that her decision had long been made, perhaps even before Setauket. She knew where her heart belonged, where it had always belonged.

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Among a series of twists, the decoy trip to Baltimore proved unnecessary. Rogers had found the Frenchmen along with his escorts, murdering him on the spot upon the retrieval of the damning letter of the state of British finances.
Another twist occurred in the camp with the case of the redcoat and the civilian. As it turned out, Shanks had been telling the truth and Sutherland, or Gambles rather, had been a spy, sent to seek out information specifically pertaining to their intelligence. Mr. Sackett bore the brunt of this tragically fatal error in judgement, which rested on the shoulders of Washington, who had never been the intended target. While in the middle of an interview with Mr. Sackett, Gambles had managed to murder the man in cold blood while stealing vital information pertaining to Culper specifically. It was nearly impossible to determine just how much information he had been able to steal before making his escape.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you guys so much for all of the support!! Your feedback is always appreciated <3
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail paced back and forth, biting her thumb out of nervous habit. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Caleb tilting back his bottle of liquor and wished she had the gumption to take some for herself. Ultimately, she decided against it, figuring at least one of the two of them should remain sober.

The Baltimore group hadn’t made it far when they had been flagged down by one of the camp officers, calling for them to return to camp. It took more than half a day to make it back, and when they did, they learned of the death of Mr. Sackett and the treachery that had befallen the camp, more specifically the intelligence.

She had wanted to go out in search of Ben immediately but had been halted by Caleb’s hand on her shoulder, telling her that the major would find them in due time. Reluctantly, she had agreed, and together they waited along the edge of the camp, with herself unable to keep still and he unable to keep his mouth from his bottle.

There had barely been time to bury the unfortunate Mr. Sackett before Washington had called Ben into a meeting. Whatever meeting that needed to be arranged was anyone’s guess. She only hoped that considering recent events it wouldn’t create more harm. How could things get any worse?

The sound of footsteps approaching from behind drew Abigail’s attention towards the edge of the trees. Her chest filled with relief instantly at the sight of Ben approaching them, but upon seeing the incensed look on his face, her growing smile turned quickly into a concerned frown, which only grew as he reached for Caleb’s bottle and took a healthy swig from the neck.

“Right, so I guess it didn’t go well then,” Caleb remarked dryly while observing his friend carefully.

Ben wiped aggressively at his mouth with the back of his hand. He appeared to prepare to hand him the canton back but then thought better of it, as he began to walk. “I’m being transferred.”

Caleb and Abigail followed him immediately, hot on his heels as the former demanded incredulously, “He’s dismissing you from camp?”

“I’m no longer head of intelligence,” Ben remarked flatly.

Abigail’s eyes widened. “I… can he do that?”

“He’s the commander-in-chief. He can do what he likes, what he sees fit.” At this, the major took another swig of the canton’s cantons, a longer drag than his previous indulgence, and barely concealed his grimace at the strong aftertaste of the bitter liquor on his tongue.

“Just goes to show he ain’t got no head for intelligence himself,” Caleb remarked, pushing past a thorny patch of leaves. The blonde made a noise of assent and walked a bit faster so that he didn’t have to hold back the thorns longer than he had to for her sake.

“He blames me for Abe going rogue. If he can’t trust me to maintain control over the actions of my friends, he can he trust me with any other asset?”

Abigail wasn’t entirely certain of what actions they were referring to where Abraham was
concerned, but it was clear from Ben’s words, tone, and stance that it was serious.

Ben continued with a frustrated sound, “Come the new year, I’m being sent to Boston to appraise the status of their defenses. What horse shite!” With an act of aggression she rarely saw in him, the major threw the bottle across the field where it shattered on impact against a tree.

“It’s a good thing Abe’s in prison,” Benn seethed, “otherwise I’d strangle the bastard with own bare hands.” He turned to face them, throwing his arms up in exasperation. “How could he just lie to us like that?”

Sensing another outburst, Abigail quickly intervened, slipping between the two men to wrap a hand around his arm. “Come with me for a moment.”

At first, he refused, instead preparing himself for another rant when she gave a firm tug on his arm to draw his attention to her.

Abigail looked up at him, eyebrows raised. “I wasn’t asking.”

Seeing as how she wouldn’t release him, he allowed himself to be led off. She caught a glimpse of Caleb’s nod of approval before all but dragging the major back towards the camp in the direction of the barn.

Once they were alone inside, she turned to him, remarking softly, “Talk to me.”

They were standing close enough that he could easily draw her into a comforting embrace, which was exactly what he did, almost as if by instinct. He pressed his face into the side of her neck, releasing a shaky exhale along her skin, and she did her best not to shiver at the warmth brush of his breath as she wrapped her arms securely around him, allowing him all the time he needed.

After several minutes of silence, she heard him murmur, “It’s over, lass. It’s all over.”

Abigail frowned and pulled back so that she could properly see his face. His defeated expression disturbed her more than words could express. “It’s not over, not by a long shot,” she insisted. “I’m sure there’s something. Caleb is probably devising a plane right now as we speak. It can’t be nothing short of creative.”

Ben’s mouth curved upwards into a reluctant smile, though his expression remained weary. “It’s not that simple.”

“Yes, it is,” Abigail replied. “You and Caleb will figure out a way to fix this, and we can go from there. It’s as simple as that.”

He gave her a look of mild exasperation mingled with a hint of amusement. “Do you always have to play the contrarian?”

She delivered him a confident grin. “But of course. Though in this case, there’s nothing contrarian about it. I know you, and I know Caleb, and with the unfortunate knowledge from growing up with the both of you, I’d say the odds are in our favor.”

Most of the time, she was never certain if whatever she said brought him much comfort, but seeing the shift of expression in his face, the increasing ebb of defeat from his face, she knew she must have said something right.

“While my position of head of intelligence has been revoked,” Ben remarked after a pause, “there’s still one matter I must attend to, though Washington doesn’t know about it. Perhaps whatever
information gathered from this source will be enough to change his mind.”

Interested, Abigail cocked her head to the side slightly. “Am I allowed to know what this matter pertains to?”

Ben smiled an enigmatic smile, a sight she wasn’t used to witnessing. She did manage to decipher a few possibilities – amusement, bitterness, resignation? – but it was nearly impossible to determine the rest. “I’m afraid it’s classified, but…” He reached up to tuck a stray curl behind her ear gently. “I promise to tell you about it when I return. You have my word.”

She nodded with understanding, lips upturned with barely suppressed curiosity. If there was one thing she knew about Benjamin Tallmadge – and she knew a hell of a lot about the man – she knew that whenever he gave his word to someone or something, he did not give it lightly.

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Returning to camp, Ben found Caleb, and the two men spoke privately. Caleb suggested they should take a detour towards Boston on the new year and free Major Hewlett if he was still alive, neither believing the man capable of the war atrocities he was accused of – namely killing a high-ranking Continental Army officer, writing a note in his blood signed with the redcoat’s signature and pinning the slain officer’s tongue to the sheet. It hardly seemed befitting of the man who had released Ben’s father, arrested Simcoe, and upheld their truce during the British-rebel standoff in Setauket.

The major agrees with Caleb’s plan but reminds him of their meeting with Tobias that had already been arranged prior to the new camp setup. Ben was to meet him himself on the outskirts of Kent, part of the Lower Counties which had gained their own governing assembly prior to the war with Great Britain. They were very much inclined to patriot sentiments, though neither of them would dare to arrive in their uniforms, choosing to instead meet in civilian attire. This arrangement suited them both for obvious reasons, especially for the other man, who would suffer more trouble for wearing his British uniform than was needed.

Caleb volunteered to accompany him, which Ben initially declined. However, the whaler’s next remark provided sound argument.

“Yeah, you need me to go with ya,” Caleb said. His face lit up with a mischievous gleam. “We can’t have you challenging your rival to a duel over the affections of a certain fair-haired maiden.”

Ben glared at him, unimpressed but ultimately saw the value in his presence during their meeting. “Fine. But keep the running commentary to a minimum.”

“All right, but I make no guarantees!”

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The journey to Kent went relatively smooth. The weather was in their favor, no signs of snow or sleet impending their travels. Nor were there any major obstacles, namely any encounters with redcoats or loyalists, impeding their progress. All conditions appeared to be in their favor.

Even though the day’s ride had been sunny and clear, a dark foreboding cloud perpetually hovered over Ben’s head. Thoughts of meeting with his childhood friend, after years – and more – dividing them, he wasn’t particularly eager to see him. Once, he had Tobias Hawkins had been the closest of friends, with the man considered just as much of a brother as he considered Abe and Caleb to be. They had schooled together, practically partners in crime to their early adolescence.

But that had been before he had met her.
Almost the moment he had lain eyes on her, there had been a shift in Tobias, one that he had not recognized right away. It was that moment, in hindsight, where his friend became his rival.

The changes had been subtle at the time, but looking back at those days with a wizened gaze, he realized the subtlety was hardly that. Tobias had played a clever game, choosing to become Abigail’s sympathetic ear whenever she and Ben had an argument, no matter the intensity. Whether it was a minor bickering exchange or a full out argument, Hawkins was always there, ready to serve as a shoulder to cry on or, what was more common, to serve as someone to which she could vent her frustrations to. Every time this happened, Caleb and Abe went to Ben, saying how he better pull his head from his arse to realize what was happening, but he had been too full of injured pride to pay it any attention or any mind. Tobias had long since known his feelings for Abigail. He wouldn’t do anything to jeopardize that.

Oh, how the major wanted to shake his younger self.

They arrived in Kent without much trouble, thankfully a reflection of their travels thus far. Caleb remained optimistic throughout the journey, carrying the bulk of the conversation while Ben remained mostly silent, consumed with too many thoughts to contribute much to the conversation. Thankfully, Caleb was more than willing to pick up the slack.

They dismounted right on the edge of the town and tied their horses’ reins on a low-lying branch to continue on foot, not wanting to risk any trouble on the way in or out. Dusk colored the sky above, and soon the land would be concealed in darkness, which they welcomed. It lowered the risk of associating with anyone with any loyalist leanings, though Caleb had his doubts as it pertained to the people of Kent. But it was better to be safe than uncertain and sorry.

It didn’t take long to locate him, considering how there were only so many taverns the county housed. With a little bit of luck, they managed to find Tobias sitting at one of the tables, his pint of ale untouched. Once he caught their eye, he gave them a subtle nod before flagging down the owner to pay his bill. The three men relocated to a more remote location, with Ben and Caleb leaving first and the other man not too far behind them.

Almost as soon as they were alone, Caleb walked over to Tobias and gave the men an amicable hug, which the other man returned in kind. They briefly exchanged insult laden pleasantries as if they hadn’t seen each other in years when they had only recently met roughly a month or so prior in which Tobias had requested the meeting.

Ben observed the pair with barely suppressed impatience until he inquired after the information that Tobias had for them. The interruption was rather abrupt, but he cared little about the way he asked. This was all a matter of business.

Tobias shared with them the amount of ammunition, number of new recruits, and other camp supplies his camp had obtained in the past year, along with the current spirits and sentiments of the officers at even the hint of a potential French alliance with the rebels.

“They’re nervous, practically affright,” he continued, eyes practically glowing. “They try their best not to show it, but they are. It’s clear from their mannerisms and routines now. Of course, they don’t word of that getting around. They’re still licking their wounds from Saratoga.”

“Serves them right,” Caleb remarked, sounding just as gleeful. “Those stuffy toed bastards.”

“While certainly this is valuable information to have,” Ben remarked for the first time since his meeting-led inquiry, “this doesn’t appear to be significant enough to risk meeting in person.” He met Tobias’s gaze levelly. “Unless you have something you haven’t told us yet.”
Tobias’s expression remained carefully veiled, but even in the dim light of dusk, Ben could see the flicker of dislike in his eyes. “I do,” he remarked quietly. “It’s important enough to warrant meeting face-to-face. Two pieces of information to be precise, which I think would require your immediate attention.”

Caleb jabbed him lightly in the arm. “Well, then, out with it, man!”

Feigning injury to the whaler’s playful punch, Tobias remarked, “General Howe resigned and has been replaced by a General Sir Henry Clinton. He’s considering evacuating the troops from Philadelphia back to York City sometime in the new year. It’s to increase the British defenses in New York against the alliance with France.” He paused. “According to a reliable source.”

Both Ben and Caleb perked up at this, expressions both mirroring alerted keenness at this new piece of vital information.

“How confident are you that this is to be certain?” Ben demanded.

“I’d be willing to take it to the bank,” Tobias remarked confidently. There was no hint of doubt in his face.

While Caleb appeared close to breaking out in the direction of the horses to get the news to Washington as fast as humanly possible, Ben was less enthused and more suspicious. He had no doubt the information wasn’t factual. It was only the way Tobias had been able to obtain this information he questioned.

For a while now, this concern had been at the back of his mind whenever he had received word from him over the years. In the beginning, Tobias’s information had been anything at all, but anything insignificant had been better than nothing at all. But as the years had gone by, anything he had passed onto him through Caleb had gotten progressively better and significant, impressively so, so much in fact it might have helped them secure victories the Continental Army hadn’t been expected to win.

So, it was only natural for him to wonder just how the man with strong Loyalist familial ties had procured such vital information. He had a few guesses, none of which particularly surprised him. Infuriate and upset him to the very depths of his being, yes, but surprise him? Absolutely not.

Tobias’s loyalty for the cause was never the question. Ben had no doubt the man’s intentions were anything other than pure and patriotic. Having grown up with him most of his life, he knew that all too well. What he also knew was former childhood friend’s tendency towards moral ambiguity, especially pertaining to chastity and virtue.

“And what’s the second thing?” Caleb inquired, eager to know more so that the major and himself can set off back to camp at once.

At his words, Tobias’s expression shifted into a cool mask, his eyes hardening. “Ah, the second thing. Well, I believe this is the most important out of the two, though it may not mean anything to you it seems.” He paused before turning his cool gaze onto Ben, eyes narrowing. “Or perhaps I should correct myself and say that it does, as it pertains to my wife.”

Ben’s gaze refused to break from his cool one, knowing the other man knew all too well where Abigail currently resided. He recalled Abigail’s recount of the occurrence in the forest back in Trenton but the additional information pertaining to her husband only came later when she had confronted him about Culper. He hadn’t had the chance to inform Caleb of this and knew this discussion would be better with only the two of them.
“Caleb, can you give us a moment?”

The whaler took one look at the tense profiles before him and immediately shook his head. “I really don’t think that I should,” he remarked doubtfully, eying both Tobias and himself as if he were waiting to see who would strike the other first. Considering the growing animosity between himself and the undercover Continental agent over the years, it wasn’t totally farfetched.

“It’s fine, Caleb,” Ben assured him. “We won’t be that long. Besides, it’s best if at least one of us is ready with the horses to return to camp with this information.”

Reluctantly, Caleb nodded and turned to head in the direction of where the horses were left but not before throwing a suspicious glance at Tobias before he departed. This grimly satisfied the major.

Once alone, Tobias demanded, “Is she still with you then?”

Reluctant to break her confidence but also knowing that – no matter how much he loathed to admit it – a husband had a right to be informed about the welfare of his wife, Ben replied practically through gritted teeth, “Yes, she is.”

Tobias glowered. “So instead of sending her back, you decided to keep her for an entire year, in the army where it’s dangerous for any man, let alone a woman. With you.” He shook his head in derision. “Oh, bravo.”

Ben’s eyes narrowed at his tone and his words, not acknowledging the heavy implications behind his use of “with you”. However, it was clear that both present knew all too well of what he had implied, and he, for one, did not appreciate the insinuation. Instead, he continued rather coolly, “And what would you have me do? Send her away right when battles are becoming increasingly frequent? When it’s dangerous to send a lone soldier into the woods without getting attacked, let alone like a woman as you said? I think you should know better than I that could easily happen again to her. Sine you were there.”

And since he had saved her life. Ben could and never would grudge him for that. Tobias had saved the woman he loved, who also happened to be the woman he loved as well.

“I understand that, but you should have sent her away as soon as she first arrived,” he insisted, to which Ben scoffed.

“Yes, that would have been easy for me to accomplish. Send her away when she and a fresh batch of recruits have only just arrived in time when the army needed them most. Send her away while in uniform and let her be caught by any number of enemies, let alone being spotted by one of our own and have her being reported as a deserter.” Ben leveled him with a pointed glare. “You do know what the sentence is for desertion is, don’t you? I would imagine it to be the same for the British as it is for us.”

Tobias glared back. Despite the increasing darkness from the waning dusk, Ben could see that the other man’s face paled and knew he was picturing the very image of his wife, disguised as a Continental solider, hanging from the gallows. The image alone made the major feel violently nauseous.

After a moment or two of silence, Tobias returned, apparently have just collected his bearings, “But you cannot tell me you’ve allowed her to stay purely out of the goodness of your heart. You may be a reverend’s son, but even I know that you may have trouble with the commandment ‘thou shall not covet thy neighbor’s wife.’”
He gritted his teeth, unable to deny the accusation entirely because that would be a lie, another sin against the Commandments. But he did not appreciate the underlying message Tobias continued to send, that he was simply biding his time before pouncing on her in a moment of unrestrained lust. He flushed, the images of his and Abigail’s intoxicating kisses resurging in his mind, but forcibly removed them from his thoughts, his heart thudding inside his chest in increasing tempo at the memory. But no, he knew that what Tobias was suggesting was more than kissing, and he was rapidly reaching his breaking point in his tolerance.

But still, Ben remained calm, saying, “She hasn’t stepped foot from camp, not since the events in Trenton. She also hasn’t returned to patrol duties either. I won’t allow it.” He paused, wondering if he should tell him of Abigail’s involvement with the Culper ring but quickly decided against it. “She remains safe.”

He had noted the relief and approval on Tobias’s face as he learned she no longer performed patrol with the other man nor had she been on the battlefield. However, his expression hardened as he stated bluntly, “Yes, she remains safe, but what’s to stop her from becoming your whore?”

The moment the words left his mouth Tobias’s eyes widened imperceptibly, regretting the words immediately. Not for the affect they would have on the other man but for carelessly disrespecting and denigrating his wife with the loaded term.

Without even a moment’s hesitation, Ben advanced on him and slammed his back into the nearest tree, his arm pressing dangerously firm against his throat. Insult his own honor for all that he cared. He knew in his heart just what kind of man he was, no matter the moments of doubt and crisis of faith he suffered. Others insulting his honor had never perturbed him. But insult Abigail Williams’ honor…

Ben pressed his arm more firmly against his throat, his glimmering in barely restrained anger as the other man gave quiet wheeze, though he made no attempts of struggle. They both knew that Tobias was in the wrong here.

“I have a question about your ‘reliable source’,” Ben remarked coolly, the press of his arm remaining firmly at his neck. “Well, I suppose it’s really more of a hunch than it is a question. I’ve always wondered how your intelligence collection had improved so dramatically well within the past year, especially in the past few months to be exact. We needed vital information, and you said you could do it. And, to your credit, you did. We couldn’t have won that battle without you.

“But I’ve always wondered,” he continued, almost conversationally if he hadn’t continued to hold the other man firmly in his grasp, “exactly how you got it, what your methods were. No other soldier or spy for that matter could have gotten such detailed information, let alone an officer. Now tell me, what exactly happened when you attended that redcoat gala back in York City, when you introduced yourself to one of the women there. Rumor has it, you two got along quite well and still carry on. It’s been at least six months, hasn’t it?”

Ben barely finished speaking when Tobias broke from his hold and aggressively shoved him backwards. There wasn’t enough force to knock him down, but there certainly was enough that he had to catch himself before nearly toppling over an above ground tree root.

He hadn’t said anything directly accusing him of any form of indiscretion, but judging from the way he was breathing heavily in his anger but with the absence of a denial, the major knew he had landed on target.

“So, I find it very rich coming from you,” Ben concluded, countering Tobias’s heated, angry expression with an icy expression of his own, “for you at call any woman a whore, especially her. If
“anyone fits that description here, the title belongs to you.”

Eventually, he thanked him, albeit a bit sardonically, for the information he had provided and would be returning to camp with the news. Or at least he would figure out how to present this news, considering how he was no longer the head of intelligence. He turned to leave when he heard the defensive voice from behind him, “I did what I had to do for the cause.” He couldn’t hold back a scornful scoff even if he tried.

“A better question is, are you going to use this information against me for your own personal gain?”

“No,” Ben replied quietly, hardly glancing at him over his shoulder. “I’ll leave that up to you, when this is all over. Unlike her husband, I refuse to be the cause of her heartbreak.”

Chapter End Notes

While I was going over the chapter, I hadn't realize that a particular plot point fit so very well into the link below I've embedded below. If you can't determine which character best reflects Abigail, Ben, Tobias etc., reread the section just before Ben and Caleb meet with Tobias and watch the clip again ;)

[click for hilariously unintended parallels!]
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Valley Forge
January 1, 1778

The new year had arrived sooner than Abigail had expected it would. Like the previous year, the first
day of January had snuck upon them as a surprise. Time dragged on slowly within the parameters of
the camp, though she supposed she was rather fortunate for having yet to see battle – although it was
only a matter of time before she did. Now that she had work with Dr. Anderson in lieu of patrol
duties, the passage of time was not nearly as stagnant as it had the previous year.

Ben and Caleb had already set out on their transfer to Baltimore the day before the new year. None
of them were sure how long they would be gone for, but it was long enough that she knew she
would worry for them both.

But on the day they had returned from their meeting, the major had requested to meet with her alone
in the barn so that he could speak with her privately. It was there he told her that the source he had
traveled to meet was her husband. Shocked by the news, she had asked what any good wife would
ask of her husband – his welfare, how he looked, etcetera – because even after everything that had
happened, she still cared for Tobias, although her heart belonged to someone else.

Ben had answered every one of her questions patiently, though there had been an underlying layer of
tension the more he spoke of her husband. Abigail suspected the reason to be the obvious but for
some reason felt there was more to his tension than that. For once, she didn’t push, instead allowing
the conversation to be turned to the news Tobias had shared with them.

With all this new information plaguing her mind, Abigail had no time to sort it all out. Dr. Anderson,
having grown more confidence in her capabilities as a future physician, now entrusted her with more
responsibilities, which meant more tasks and duties to consume her time, of which she wasn’t
entirely ungrateful for. With the increasing numbers of injured soldiers, the camp physician allowed
her to help tend to the sick on her own when she proved competent and resourceful, though he still
insisted on working with her when tending to the wounded.

She brewed teas with medicinal herbs for the soldiers to drink to help alleviate fevers and created
salves from Anderson’s recipes to be applied to any rash or sore to decrease their pain. One morning,
she had been doing just that for a soldier whom she had nearly suspected to be in the initial stages of
smallpox, forcing a mug of tea into his reluctant hands. At the feeling of the warmth between his
hands against the January winter winds, he had accepted it rather easily after that.

“Don’t take this the wrong way,” the soldier mentioned as she applied the salve to his skin. “You’re
very good at what you’re doing. But it seems you have a woman’s touch.”

There was surely meant to be a compliment in there somewhere, but Abigail wasn’t certain where to
start. Instead, she snorted indelicately and gave the ill soldier an amused grin, remarking ironically,
“I should take that as a compliment, seeing as how healing a woman’s touch can be. Although I’m
afraid I can’t be of assistance in the way that phrase most often suggests.”

At this, the soldier laughed so heartily, she had to thump him on the back to keep him from choking
on his tea. She always had a problem with speaking before thinking, but at least this time it hadn’t
landed her in much trouble. Quite the opposite in fact.

Most of the ill Abigail tended to generally possess some level of humor, though there were of course one or two crochety old men that would give her a challenging time and being sick only made them worse. Overall, however, her experiences with working alongside Dr. Anderson provided her with a renewed sense of purpose, a sense that most people never seem to really find in this life. She was fortunate to be one of the few who found it.

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The day descended into dusk which soon became night. After a long day’s worth of work, Dr. Anderson all but shooed her out of the tent, insisting that she should get some rest. “Heaven knows when you’ll be able to get some next,” he had remarked wryly before actually giving her a light shove out of the tent.

She ate dinner with Christopher in front of a crackling fire surrounding by a handful of fresh faces to whom he introduced her to. Two of them she remembered seeing before around the camp, but the other soldier sitting beside them she most certainly did not recognize. It turned out the young boy was a recruit at the age of fifteen, even younger than Christopher himself. She tried very hard not to let her pity show on her face although she was incredibly tempted to scoot closer towards the boy, wrap her arms around him, and protect him from the world.

For the most part, she let the other men do all the talking, too perturbed by this baby-faced soldier to strike up a conversation. There was talk of whispering rumors that with the increasing presence of officers in the camp, there would be a higher demand for tents, which meant the non-ranking soldiers, meaning their group included, would more than likely wind up sleeping in the fields without even the flimsy tarp material of their tents to shield them.

Abigail should have been more concerned about this, but she was too focused on the young boy Ernest beside her to pay any mind. Over the course of their meal, he had sported a decent attempt of an expression of bravado, but the longer the other soldiers talked, the paler his already porcelain pallor became, even in the flickering lights of the fire.

Meeting his gaze, she gave Ernest a sympathetic smile and passed him her cup of ale, untouched. He accepted the cup with a nervous but grateful smile.

After dinner, Christopher invited her to join them to peruse some of the smuggled crates that Caleb had brought in a week or so ago, but she politely declined the offer although she fondly referred to them as troublesome miscreants before departing.

She should have gone straight to her tent to rest, while she still had one, but as tired as she was, she felt an odd sense of restlessness. Her mind felt detached from the rest of her body, her feet propelling forward without her mind’s consent.

Soon enough, Abigail realized where she was when a row of larger tents appeared ahead, General Washington’s tents. She wondered if the information Ben had given him, Tobias’s information, had been enough to reinstate him as head of intelligence, if Ben had the time to inform Washington at all. She hoped he had, but given the circumstances, she wouldn’t have been surprised if the news hadn’t reached Washington’s ears.

Or if it had, it needed to be confirmed through the proper protocol, of course.

Abigail was just rounding the log cabin when a vicious grip on her arm yanked her forward. Suddenly, the force that grabbed her slammed her into the side of the cabin. She wheezed harshly
from the impact but made no other sound. Whoever grabbed her was a large, imposing form, at least from what she could tell from her limited view. It wasn’t until the form stepped back did she get a good look at her assailant, and once his face registered, she gaped.

Abigail’s eyes met with the intense, furious gaze of George Washington himself.

“I…” she tried to speak but no words came out. What could she say? She had never met the man in the flesh before, at least not face-to-face. He was just as impressive and just as imposing up close and much closer than she would have ever thought.

Just as quickly as it came, the furious intensity of the grey fox’s eyes shifted into startled bewilderment, reflecting her own gaze.

“Are you all right… your excellency?” Abigail asked, her voice sounding choked to her own ears, but it had nothing to do with his grip on her throat, where there was none.

A look of recognition flashed in his eyes. General George Washington recognizes me? she thought in a daze, but before she could even utter those words, he released her at once.

“I… I heard a noise from behind me and thought someone was coming to attack me,” the commander-in-chief murmured, completely abashed. “My apologies, young Thomas.”

Abigail stared at him even more incredulously. Given his rank and general reputation, she never expected George Washington to apologize for anything, let alone for fending off what he believed to be an attempt on his life. “A completely understandable reaction, your excellency,” she replied. “Given the circumstances.”

The commander-in-chief smiled briefly at her kindness before unconsciously drawing himself to full height – as if he wasn’t already tall enough – and departed from her company. She remained against the log cabin, as if still pressed against the hard word by strong, solid form.

The crunching of his boots in the evening snow drew out her curiosity. She pushed herself away from the cabin and poked her head around the side in the direction she had last seen him. She spotted his tall, proud form heading in the direction of the forest, unaccompanied and unarmed.

Suppose if an enemy soldier lurked about in the woods waiting for such a golden opportunity? To kill or even capture the grey fox himself?

What if a traitorous Continental decided to take matters into his own hands?

As quickly as she could, Abigail took the shortest possible route to her tent and grabbed her pistol and some extra ammunition just in case before walking out into the wintery night to retrace his steps. It was much too risky and would waste too much time to grab the musket.

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The trek towards the forest was dark and dreary, as the cliché always goes. But only that, it was dark and dreary and painfully cold, cold enough to see her own breath in front of her face. That alone could have alerted anyone to her presence, but still Abigail persisted, determined to see this self-assigned mission through.

Somehow, she managed to successfully keep good enough distance away from him to keep his profile in her line of sight but far enough to not alert him to her presence. Of course, this was a silly presumption, one that she oddly enough hadn’t considered, too stubborn to not to try.
They were now on the outskirts of the camp, close to approaching the frozen pasture where the horses normally grazed and dozed. More than likely they were all housed cozily in the stables, Cantor being among them. The proud little beast was probably lying in a pile of warm hay at that very moment while Abigail was trudging through the snow, the melted patches of icy water seeping into her boots.

“If you’re going to continue following me, Williams,” Washington remarked dryly, “you may as well own up to it.”

Abigail stopped as soon as he spoke, frozen to the spot and eyes widened in shock. She wasn’t shocked that she had been found it. It was apparent she hadn’t gone to great lengths, apart from distance, to conceal herself. But the fact he paused to address her, that threw her off entirely.

He turned his head slightly, observing her over his shoulder before giving her an encouraging nod to come closer. Stiffly, she forced herself to move forward towards him, and upon closer inspection, she noted a muted expression of amusement on his face.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Abigail apologized quietly, face flushed. “I saw that you were approaching the forest unaccompanied, and I become concerned for your safety.” The fact that he had shoved her against the cabin only half an hour prior because he had thought she had been an assailant went unsaid, but both had heard the words regardless.

For a moment, he didn’t say anything but merely observed her carefully. His expression turned thoughtful. “I think I could use the company this evening,” he decided.

She stared at him in amazement and then walked towards him so that they were now walking together towards the forest.

They discussed numerous topics along their journey, despite his initial desire for privacy and solitude. When they passed the stables, she couldn’t help but make a passing comment about the horses, saying at least someone could be warm, which made the commander-in-chief chuckle.

The conversation than turned to the topic of horse breeds, and Abigail admitted that she was perhaps a bit biased in this area, mentioning Cantor and his interesting flare. When Washington inquired about his breed, she told him that Cantor was a Narragansett Pacer.

He smiled widely at that. “I owned a Narragansett Pacer a few years back. Wonderful breed of horse, a true pacing breed. I raced one in ’68.”

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The moment they entered the woods, the silence descended upon them, weighing down like a heavy blanket, though not as comfortable. Still, Abigail willingly maintained the silence the further they walked, sensing Washington desperately needed to be alone with his thoughts in some form or another. With a quick scoping glance of their surroundings, she kept pace with him for several more minutes until she felt a heavy hand on her shoulder.

She hadn’t realized they stopped moving until he spoke softly, “I must go the rest of the way alone. You can stay, if you like, but this… this I must do alone.”

Abigail wasn’t certain what he referred to but nodded solemnly in agreement. She watched him travel several yards further into the forest until he reached the clearing, halting all movement and taking in his surroundings.

Although the distance between them equated to his form being slightly larger than the size of her
thumb, the commander-in-chief remained firmly in her sights. Perhaps that was how he intended it to be, knowing more than likely she wouldn’t leave and realizing that it was wise to have someone else there with him to keep an eye out.

She divided her observations among their surroundings and Washington himself, her pistol ready at her side should she require need of it. The bitter winter winds nipped at her skin and was the only thing keeping her awake, apart from her characteristic stubbornness to be certain of his safety.

Several yards ahead of her, Washington was speaking, to whom she did not see. Shifting from her position, she stepped a few paces back, hoping to see she could see the person with whom he was conversing. She walked back as far as she dared without Washington leaving her line of sight, but from the looks of it, there was no one else there.

Confused, Abigail observed this exchange with this invisible person, unable to hear any sides of the conversation, although the wind occasionally carried a word to her ear, such as “…everything… taught me… brother.”

Without any form of context, the blonde was unable to come to any conclusions, so she remained stubbornly at her post. Despite her overwhelming curiosity to learn more, she respected the man’s privacy and knew it wouldn’t be right to pry into what was evidentially a private matter, a moral dilemma.

When he fell to his knees into the snow, Abigail instinctively began to run toward him but stopped herself just short from going to his aid, knowing whatever inner battles Washington warred with were his and his alone. Any interference on her part would only debilitate the situation, not help.

She had gotten close to hear his next uttered words of despair and torment, “I’m not who they think I am,” and once again, she became immobile.

Those words. Those words struck a chord inside her, making her chest ache with sympathy and her own self-pity. She wasn’t who everyone thought she was either, in a more literal sense. She was not the medical prodigy that Dr. Anderson thought she might be (for one thing, she wasn’t male, which hindered her changes of that completely). She wasn’t the brave soldier that Christopher thought her to be. She wasn’t even the brave, wonderful person that Ben considered her to be, and he had known her all her life.

The truth was that she was a foolish, lost girl who didn’t know her place in the world. She pretended to know all that there was to know, yet she knew absolutely nothing. Her truth hid underneath an act of make believe, a dangerous one at that.

So yes, Washington’s words resonated with Abigail more deeply than she ever could have anticipated.

After a time, a considerable amount, the commander-in-chief, the grey fox, composed himself and rose to his feet. He took carefully measured breaths, his face expressing the last few remnants of his struggle before smoothing into a decisive expression. Whatever decision he had made, she could not guess, nor would she attempt to.

He turned to Abigail when she was close enough and requested quietly that she would not speak of these night’s events to anyone. She promised him sincerely she would not breathe a word of this to anyone, and on her life, she meant it.

The two made the journey back to the camp in silence, both contemplating the night’s turn of events from their own perspective. Whatever had transpired that evening, no matter the level of
involvement, was life-altering.

By the time she reached her tent, Abigail was all but dead on her feet. As soon as she reached her cot, she already had her decision made. It was the right thing to do, no matter the risk.

The moment she could get him alone, the blonde would enlist Caleb in helping her get her divorce.

Chapter End Notes

I know this is an unusually short chapter from me! This might be a relief for a lot of you XD

For some reason, as I was writing the scene where Abigail follows Washington into the forest and he invites her to walk with him, I pictured the scene from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* where Lucy and Susan followed Aslan and walked with him unknowingly to meet his fate at the stone table. It seems rather fitting, and it makes me happy.

Again, thank you so much for reading, kudoing, subbing, and commenting!! It means the world to me <3
I'm so sorry for the long delay in posting! I should be getting back into my regular posting schedule soon. Thank you guys so much for your continuing support on this fic! I hope you enjoy this chapter! <3

Continental Outpost

By the time they arrived at the continental outpost, Ben knew their cause was lost. The sight that greeted them was nearly too horrific for words. Fellow soldiers were strewn along the ground, bloodied and unnaturally contorted. Nearly everything else was destroyed as well and saturated in blood. The work of the Queen’s Rangers no doubt.

The sight was sickening and blood-curdling, even after all his years serving the army. One would think witnessing things like this would become customary, but to the major, they never would.

Not far from where he dismounted, there was a stone erected in what appeared to be a grave. He approached the grave and halted in his movements as soon as he read the words. His blood froze in his veins.

“‘Here lies Major Hewlett’, “ Ben read aloud, “‘the devil incarnate’. Christ.” He covered his mouth and turned away as Caleb walked over to examine the grave himself. He heard him curse colorfully from behind him and wholeheartedly agreed with the sentiment.

Ben then told him how Washington had written a letter pardoning the major, thereby saving Abe from his own careless actions that had landed him in British custody. Apparently, word hadn’t reached the outpost quick enough, since the British major was murdered in cold blood, and they could not even investigate since the Queen’s Rangers appeared to have taken matters into their own hands.

Abe’s life was now over. Ben said as much with a sickening twist in his gut.

“Not if I can help it,” Caleb remarked after a few minutes of silence. When Ben gave him an inquisitive look, he said he would go get the rascal himself. He wasn’t entirely sure how he would go about it, the whaler admitted, but he absolutely refused to allow their friend to rot in a British prison, knowing fully well it was essentially their roping him into the spy ring that had landed him there in the first place.

With little argument from the major, the two began to formulate a plan, willing to do whatever it took to save their friend from the gallows. Caleb would travel to York City to retrieve Abe while Ben would return to the camp, though the decision to inform Washington of their plan or not remained strictly with Ben.

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Valley Forge

The officers couldn’t enforce the soldiers to carry out their assigned duties in the camp throughout
the day, but Abigail suspected they hadn’t the heart to do so. Ever since the news reached the camp about the establishment of the treaty of alliance between France and the United States, there had never been such a low level of productivity. But, then again, there had never been such high spirits and morale within the troops either.

Spirited whooping and shouting carried on throughout the night, so much so it was a wonder that no one had gotten hoarse. Mugs of ale and other smuggled forms of alcohol were shared generously throughout the camp, and with the officers’ seeming reluctance to squelch the celebration, the sharing was overly generous indeed.

Abigail refused to partake in the indulgence, although she eagerly wanted to. Every time Christopher or another soldier she was somewhat familiar with offered her a mug, she politely turned them down, using her position in the infirmary tent as an excuse to remain sober. This was a smart decision, considering how she had witnessed Dr. Anderson partaking in some of the celebratory drinking himself. She knew she was in for a long night.

Not drinking didn’t stop her from feeling the effects of the high spirits of the other soldiers, who desperately needed to hear something as monumental as this. With increasing reports of Continental defeats and British gains, despite the amount of victories of their own side, morale had significantly plummeted, especially coupled with the worsening conditions of soldiers.

With the increasing presence of soldiers in camp, there also came an increase with officer presence as well, which meant the needs for officer tents came in high demand. Many of the soldiers who had first enlisted and had shared tents from the beginning, herself included, had to “temporarily” offer the use of their tents for the officers until the request for more supplies, i.e. shelter, could be made. Though not all the soldiers were as highly educated as the officer who had made this request, they all knew this temporary offer was anything but.

To avoid any trouble, Christopher and Abigail had been among the first to volunteer their tents for officer use. As far as where they slept now, it was either the fields or stables, depending on several factors which determined the ease of access. During the wintery nights, the stables were significantly warmer than the fields.

Despite these recent events, Abigail did her best to look forward to the future. Accompanied with the news, it was also learned that Major John Andre and the British troops in Philadelphia had been ordered to evacuate from the city, which proved Tobias’s information to be true. Whoever his source was, she felt compelled to thank them.

Abigail stepped out of the infirmary tent, cleaning her hands of the grime that often came with combing through those fossilized medical tomes of Dr. Anderson’s. She was just thinking she ought to tell him to make a request for newer editions, so their books wouldn’t fall into disrepair – though she already suspected how that conversation would go, it wouldn’t – when the sound of galloping hooves drew her attention towards the outskirts of the camp.

“It suppose that’ll be Major Tallmadge,” he remarked passively before his face suddenly lit up. “I wonder if the news of France has reached him yet.” The excitement of spreading the news was clear on the young man’s face, but Abigail already had her decision made.

“I’ll go tell him myself,” she remarked, tossing the cloth to the side. Before he could interject, she added, “Why don’t you go fetch some ale? He deserves to take part in the celebration after his travel.”
The soldier grinned and headed off in the direction to resume the merriment of the night’s festivities, though she suspected he wouldn’t return with ale for either of them, if he hadn’t already drunk them first.

He had barely left when she broke out into a run, uncaring of any of the odd looks she received, though she doubted there would be many. It was a night of victory after all.

Before long, she made it to the edge of camp, stopping to catch her breath. The stupid binds made endurance a challenging task.

However, her wait wasn’t a long one. By the time she stopped running, the major had already dismounted and was walking towards the camp. When he spotted her, he paused briefly before heading in her direction. Once he noticed it was her and not another soldier, his pace quickened.

The closer he approached, the better she could see his face and his increasing expression of bewilderment at the loud whooping and boisterous sounds of the men in camp. She could see the questions forming in his eyes, but before they were spoken, she found herself asking breathlessly, “Any word on Abe?”

Ben told her of the events at the continental outpost, of the Queen’s Rangers attack and the grave they found of Major Hewlett. Abigail felt her face growing increasingly paler with every word, but he was quick to reassure her Caleb had gone to retrieve him by any means necessary, which explained the whaler’s notable absence.

When he voiced his concern about the possibility of him not returning, Abigail assured him, “If anyone can get out of a sticky situation, it’s Caleb.”

Ben gave a reluctant smile, which became more genuine at her insistent expression. Another series of high-spirited, brash hooting from the center of camp regained his attention. “What’s going on? What’s happened here?”

With the news of the French alliance refreshed in her mind, Abigail’s flushed with excitement, thankful for the night’s darkness to conceal the warmth in her cheeks. She fought back a smile and answered him, “Word has gotten around the camp about a… certain alliance, as you may already be familiar with. But it’s not just the news that has the men so excited.” She gauged his suddenly intent gaze, knowing she ensnared his undivided attention, adding, “Apparently, word has reached the ears of the British, who have been ordered to evacuate from Philadelphia, just like Tobias said they would, which means…”

“Negotiations with France have finally begun,” Ben finished for her, eyes widening.

She wished his expression was more visible, but what came with the benefit of concealing her rosy cheeks, the darkness made it all but impossible to see his face properly.

But she didn’t have to worry about that for long when she felt his arms wrap around her, drawing her against him before she quite literally swept off her feet. She released a surprised squeak as he spun them around in a half-circle, his laughter of disbelief and joy warming her heart. She tightened her arms around his neck and giggled softly into his ear, far too elated to care about subtlety. The risk of suspicion be damned.

He set her down back on her feet, his hands steadying her as she stumbled against him, her cheeks warm and only just shy of hurting from grinning. The soft, tender look in his gaze caused her heart to race and ache all at once. There was nothing she wanted more in that moment than to close the distance between them even further.
Noticing his similar warring desire in his gaze, she knew he was feeling the same.

The moment grew somber, not completely but the excitement and delight from moments ago gradually faded into the background. There were too many witnesses around them, no matter if they weren’t paid any mind or not. Just being as their intimately close proximity was enough of a risk, but in that moment, nothing else mattered.

And yet…

Ben murmured softly, tender and restrained, “I would really like to kiss you right now.”

Unconsciously, Abigail licked her lips and noted with no small amount of pleasure and guilt as the major’s keen eyes tracked the movement. “I would really like to be kissed by you right now,” she replied in kind, her hands untangling themselves from around his neck to slide down and settle against his chest. Oh, how she desperately wanted to tell him about her intentions for her divorce, how as soon as Caleb returned, preferably with a saved Abe in tow, she intended to ask for his assistance in the matter. But she couldn’t do that, at least not that. Why ruin a perfectly joyous occasion with the reminder of their situation?

However, it would seem from the way they stood so close but remained so far was more than an indication their situation still weighed heavily upon them.

Before either of them could say anything more, Ben leaned forward and pressed his lips to the crown of her head, settling for this small display of affection in preference over than none at all.

“Should you put a stop to the men’s revelry?” Abigail asked, teasing after a few precious moments of silence. “Caleb will not be pleased to find his stash liberated.”

She felt his smirk against her forehead and shut her eyes briefly to savor it. “Caleb will get over it, once he learns the news. Besides, I don’t think it would do me any good to put a damper on the festivities. They’re well-earned after all.”

Parting rather reluctantly, the two made their way back to the camp, keeping a respectable distance between them. Even with the distance, Abigail felt the effects of his warmth and lips throughout her entire being, providing her with a warmth she hadn’t realized she had been missing until now.

She was so very in love with Benjamin Tallmadge, and she could not regret it, even if it afforded her nothing but trouble.

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Two Weeks Later

By the time Caleb managed to return, the revelry had long subsided, though there were still few cases of mild drunkenness which now dealt with more severity than the previous week of permissiveness. Though when he did arrive, Abigail hadn’t even recognized him, too accustomed to his typical unkempt appearance to expect anything different. Even as he made his way into the camp, she had paid him no thought, though the instinctive curiosity had prompted her to glance up in the newcomer’s direction when he had passed her.

It wasn’t until they approached Ben and herself did she realize it was, in fact, Caleb himself.

“Sorry for the delay,” the familiar timber of Caleb’s jovial voice pulled them both out of their conversation to stare in mutual confusion. The man before them could not be Caleb Brewster. How could it be?
Caleb’s voice trailed off as he noticed their staring and frowned. “What?”

Abigail was the first to speak, prompted out of her stupor by his questioning look. “Your face.”

“What about my face?” Caleb retorted.

The blonde blinked. “It’s… visible!”

“What… oh that.” Caleb brought up his hand to his completely shaven face and frowned deeply.

“Well, we all make our sacrifices, don’t we?”

Shaking his head, Ben couldn’t help but ask, “I’m sorry but what the bloody hell did you do to your face?”

The whaler threw his hands up into the air. “Is it that much of a dramatic change to warrant such a response from the both of ya?”

Neither of them hesitated to that question. “Yes.”

He chuckled, a tad rueful. “Fair enough.” He proceeded to fill them in on his plan to retrieve Abe from the British by disguising himself as a redcoat to blend it. Of course, his usual appearance would draw in too much suspicion, which meant he had to part with his beard. And oh, Abigail would have gladly paid money to have witnesses this transformation. Yes, she loathed the redcoats as much as any of them, but just the thought of Caleb walking around pompously in a white wig and a freshly cleaned face was nearly too much to contain her laughter.

“But the little shite decided to stay,” Caleb concluded, shaking his head in dismay. He informed them of Abe’s intentions, but he himself had decided to stay longer on the off chance the shite changed his mind.

And it was a good thing he had stayed too, he added, as word reached them that apparently Major Hewlett had managed to escape the outpost at some point during the Queen’s Rangers’ raid and had returned to his Setauket post, which meant Abe would be receiving his pardon from the British major any time now, if he hadn’t already received it.

Abigail breathed a sigh of relief, nearly collapsing from the weight of it as Ben and Caleb embraced with echoing laughter of disbelief over this miraculous turn of events.

Abraham Woodhull would live to see another day.

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“Caleb, may I speak with you for a moment?” Abigail asked quietly. It had taken a few days after his arrival to determine how to best to approach him, but ultimately, she decided to find him that moment he didn’t appear busy.

Glancing up, the whaler gave her a smile. “Of course. What is ya need, las… laddie?” He pressed his lips together firmly, obviously an attempt to keep hold in his laughter, which she couldn’t help but mirroring. And his beardless face did little to help matters.

“Privately?”

He agreed, and together they relocated to a more remote location. As soon as she felt it was safe to speak candidly, Abigail decided directedness would be the best option for her request.
“Has Abe completed his legal studies?” she asked suddenly. The question was out of the blue, and judging the confused look on his face, it was a question Caleb hadn’t anticipated.

“I’m not sure,” he remarked carefully, “though more than likely he knows enough to get stuff done.” His gaze became wary. “Why?”

Abigail took a deep breath, steadying herself by silently reciting a prayer of forgiveness. “Is it possible to secure a divorce if you’re in another country? I mean, technically speaking of course, since I’m not where I’m supposed to be, namely in Ireland with my Aunt Claire.”

She didn’t want to look at him, fearing for the judgement and incredulity in his eyes, instead, choosing to look anywhere but at him. “I know it’s completely selfish of me to ask, which was why I’ve tried to wait as long as I could before asking, especially giving everything that’s happened in the past two weeks with Abe and the British.”

“Well–”

“And you must think I’m a truly awful person but I–”

“Oi!” Caleb seized her by the arms, drawing her reluctant attention to his face. To her amazement, there was no judgement on his face, though there was a hint of stunned astonishment on his face. Astonishment but not judgement. “I have a few bones to pick with you over what you just said, but to save us time, I’ll settle for the highlights. First, yes, I think we can get this done. There’s a good chance we can make this work. We can come up with a plan that Abe and I can work something out on my next trip to Setauket.”

“But you would be risking yourself on my account…”

The whaler shook his head. “I’m happy to do it. Besides, with my face, no one’s going to recognize me anyway. You certainly didn’t a few days ago.” He grinned and wagged his eyebrows, which drew out a reluctant laugh from her. His grin widened at the intended effect, but it dimmed as his expression sobered. “Secondly, you’re not an awful person. Believe me, I’ve seen a lot of those in my life, and I don’t believe you fall into that category.

“You’re brave, kind, and one of the least selfish people that I know,” Caleb added, lifting his eyebrows challengingly as if sensing she was ready to make a rebuttal. “And don’t you dare ‘but’ me there. Because you ain’t got one.”

Abigail’s mouth dropped in shock, knowing fully well what he meant, and instinctively reached out to smack him, which he immediately deflected with a cheeky grin. Another attempt to distract her from her distress, but she wasn’t going to let that comment slide.

“Nah, actually, you’ve got a pretty great arse, not that I’ve been looking!” Caleb corrected himself, taking several steps backward when it she prepared for another swing at him. He chuckled good-naturedly, though he narrowly missed another half-hearted attempt for a swing. “Don’t tell Tall-boy I said that. He’ll skin me alive.”

“I’ll just add that to the list,” Abigail remarked dryly, though she was trying her best not to grin despite everything and failing miserably. Her grin died down when she reconsidered his words. “Actually, that’s another favor I need from you.”

Caleb’s amusement faded into a knowing look. “You don’t want to tell Ben about this.”

The blonde shook her head slowly. “No, not until it’s finished. Just… just in case it doesn’t go according to plan. I don’t want to get his hopes up.”
The whaler smiled sympathetically and walked over towards her. He wrapped a comforting arm around her shoulders. “Just as I thought,” he remarked. “One of the least selfish people I know.”

“Don’t be so certain about that,” Abigail replied ruefully, leaning into his comforting presence. “But all things considered… thank you, Caleb.”

He smiled. “What are friends for?”
Within a day of Abigail’s request of him, Caleb had set off for Setauket. He had brushed aside her insistence of not making a special trip just for her and had reassured her that the trip was primarily to check on Abe’s welfare and any possible information he may have gleaned during his time with the British and any time after.

Neither of them had come up with a plan for how to acquire the divorce, but he insisted it would all work out, despite Abigail’s uncertainty. The only choice she had left was to leave it in their hands and the hands of fate, the latter of which she was very unaccustomed. She preferred a less fatalistic approach to life.

Over the course of the next few days prior to Caleb’s departure, Abigail kept herself busy, which wasn’t a challenging task to accomplish. More soldiers arrived with more serious injuries, which demanded both her and Dr. Anderson’s full attention, though the increasing number of serious cases wasn’t a drastic uptick.

The most serious case was ruled an accident where a soldier, in a fit of buffoonery in Abigail’s opinion, had been playing around with his pistol and had forgotten the bloody thing was loaded and shot himself in the foot. Dr. Anderson had been busy tending to another patient suffering from gunshot wound to the shoulder, leaving her with the task to dig out the bullet with the forceps and bandaging the wound with a makeshift cast for his foot. She gave her patient more alcohol than she would have liked, but it had been the only way to keep his overly embellished howls to a minimum.

When she wasn’t in the infirmary tent, a rarity these days, the blonde spent most of her free time with Christopher, realizing she hadn’t been around much lately with Culper and her new position as Dr. Anderson’s assistant. It was high time she made up for that, and there was no time like the present.

She hadn’t seen much of Ben either over the past few days and thought it perhaps it was for the best. A major’s duties were hardly ever done, and considering the recent number of more serious cases she and Anderson attended to, Ben had more pressing matters to attend to. That didn’t stop her from missing him, but just catching a glimpse from him in camp was enough comfort for her, as silly as it sounded.

Christopher shared with her of his most recent activities, apart from the assigned patrol duties and the like. He had been assigned to mentor the young Joseph Martin, the young soldier of fifteen she had met not too long ago, to show him the ropes and to make his transition into army life more stabilizing.

“They probably think we’re a good match because of our ages,” the raven-haired boy remarked, “but they’re not fooling me.”

Abigail raised an eyebrow. “Oh no?”

Christopher shook his head, grinning in amusement. “They’re pairing us together because we both have the youngest faces in camp, possible the entire army. I overheard an officer tell another that us learning to shave together would bond us.” Considering how many of the soldiers, with the exclusion of the officers, sported stubble or fully-grown beards, this wasn’t a surprising remark to be made. Not once had she ever seen Christopher pick up a razor, and he had just made it to his early
Abigail laughed and gave him a playful shove as they headed towards breakfast.

Over their morning rations, the pair discussed an array of topics, many of which were rehashed from conversations past. Though they had each developed other acquaintances among the soldiers—more so Christopher than herself—it was nice to return to the company of an old friend, although they had only known each other for two years.

But all things considered, their near constant proximity had led to the creation of an intimacy only developed after several years, if not decades, of friendship. She felt as if she knew everything there was about him, from how much he talked about his childhood and family, and despite the number of secrets she had to keep from him, she felt as if he knew her, too, although perhaps not as well.

They had developed something that went beyond the realms of friendship. There was a sense of kinship between them though, although it was rarely verbally acknowledged. From the very beginning, Abigail had the protective motherly instincts to keep him under her wing, and it was a struggle every not to manage those feelings. However, from time to time, those mannerisms emerged, much to Christopher’s great amusement as well as quiet appreciation for those protective gestures.

Christopher wasn’t like family. He just was, as she was to him. They didn’t have to speak of it to know the truth, but she couldn’t help herself and told him so. Her heart warmed as he responded in kind.

There was such an openness about him, an innocence often lost within the first step of entering war, yet somehow, he had managed to keep it. She prayed that fifteen-year-old Joseph Martin would be able to do the same under Christopher’s guidance.

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Waiting for the end of Washington’s meeting with Major Bradford, General Lee, and the other generals, Ben considered the best course of action of approaching the commander-in-chief. Ever since his dismissal from head of intelligence, he had been hard pressed to even getting near Washington, let alone find a way to speak with him privately. It concerned him greatly that he was currently presiding at a meeting with the man who proved himself to be a traitor.

Now if only he could open Washington’s eyes to that.

Scarcely half past the hour did the flap of the tent push back to reveal the exiting generals from the meeting, with Washington stepping out last, with his servant Billy Lee close behind him. Ben took half a step forward when Washington saw him, but as quick as the glance came, his attention was drawn elsewhere.

The major began to approach him just as Washington and the others crossed his path. He barely got out a quiet “sir” before he was looked over completely.

Billy stopped him before he could attempt to follow him. “I’m sorry, sir. He won't see you.”

Ben suppressed his frustration but barely. “Does he still hold me in such contempt he won't even meet my eye?” He prepared to turn to go, where exactly he wasn’t certain until the other man placed
a restraining hand on his arm.

“Wait. I never done this before, talk behind his back,” Billy began quietly, his face expressing his conflicting struggles, “but he been through some rough times and I worry about him.”

Ben frowned, his gaze honing on Washington’s servant vigilantly. “Well, what is it, Billy?”

With his decision made, Billy looked around their surroundings briefly before dropping his voice for the major’s ears only. “The general, he just gave General Lee half the army. Gonna go attack the redcoats while they retreat.”

Ben looked at him with disbelief. Maybe he had misunderstood. There was no way General Lee would be trusted with that many men, whether Washington believed in Ben’s efforts or not. “Half the army? Are you sure?”

Billy nodded grimly. “If I didn’t hear it with my own ears, I wouldn’t have believed it myself. I know you don’t trust that man, and I don’t neither. But the general…” He released a sharp breath, rubbing the back of his neck anxiously. “I think he was fooled by his apology.”

“Lee apologized?” Ben asked, incredulous. He couldn’t imagine the man ever would. From what he had gathered, Lee had been unapologetically blasphemous in his letters regarding Washington. It had to be a rouse. “You were right to tell me this, Billy. But whatever you do, don’t tell anyone else.”

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Later in the evening, Abigail found herself making that ever familiar trek to Ben’s tent, a walk that, no matter where they relocated, she knew like the back of her hand. It was hardly a surprise for her to be seen traveling in that direction to the casual observer. Christopher had already confirmed long ago word got around that she was friends with Ben or at least had his ear. If nothing else was suspected, she didn’t mind this piece of information being public knowledge.

As if anticipating her arrival, the flap to his tent was already opened. She took this as an invitation and stepped inside.

Abigail took one look at lines of frustration coupled with worriment in the major’s face and shut the flap of the tent securely so that she could embrace him comfortingly.

“You looked like you needed one,” she said, voice somewhat muffled against his shoulder. She felt his arms slip around her waist securely, as if finding an anchor to stay afloat. His face pressed the crook of her neck and sighed, whether out of frustration or contentment she wasn’t certain since she couldn’t see his face.

“I really do,” Ben replied into her neck, his lips brushing along her neck with every word formed. She fought back a shiver, though unconsciously stepping closer.

Several minutes passed before she finally asked him what was wrong. Unable to contain himself any longer, he confided his frustrations and worries regarding Washington and the war, mostly for the former.

Apparently, he remained in the commander-in-chief’s ill graces, and it was difficult to determine how long he would stay there. She asked how he could still be upset about Ben’s rouse to lure out Lee, but he said there was more to it than that, though that was perhaps what had led him down this uneasy road with Washington thus far.

“There’s information that he needs to know, but it’s increasingly difficult to get Washington to
actually see me,” Ben remarked, beginning to pace back and forth in the tiny space that was the tent. Abigail had taken to sitting at his desk, watching with him a concerned, thoughtful gaze.

He informed her of how Washington had stonewalled him after his meeting with the generals and what Billy had shared with him after Ben had attempted to speak with Washington.

Abigail bit her lip, recalling that New Year’s evening walk she had shared with Washington. As much as she wanted to lambast the man for being so unhearing to Ben’s warnings – and yes, she recognized her own personal biases in the matter – she could not in good conscience bring herself to do so, remembering that private moment she had witnessed of Washington in the woods. Nor would she break Washington’s confidence over what had transpired. She still never mentioned anything to Ben, nor would she, knowing even that would break her word.

Still, the blonde remained sympathetic to her… what was Ben towards her now?

Friend hardly seemed sufficient.

Best friend was closer but didn’t hit the mark.

Lover… not quite, but depending upon the success Caleb found in Setauket, that could be changing rather soon.

There wasn’t really a term to describe just what they were to each other, in that moment in time, but she knew it extended well beyond the realms of friendship and perhaps even lovers. There was so much she felt for him, for so many years, but so much she couldn’t act upon, at least not just yet.

She would do just about anything for him, even if it meant risking herself for him.

With her thoughts running along these lines, Abigail considered something for a moment, a seed of a passing thought slowly blossoming into a potential course of action.

If Washington was unwilling to meet with Ben, perhaps she could find a way to pass along Ben’s information herself.

It was a risk, of that much she was certain, but she thought an even bigger risk was giving the man who scorned Washington which read as treasonous in the written word half of the army to serve in battle. Another risk had been Benedict Arnold’s presence in the army at all, and even with his transfer to head off the recapture of Philadelphia, she felt wary of him, even though she had never met the man personally. She considered herself lucky for that alone.

Still, the idea of trying to pass long information to Washington on Ben’s behalf did have its appeal.

“What precisely do you intend to tell Washington?” Abigail asked cautiously, keeping an observant gaze on his face.

For the first time since she stepped into the tent, he hesitated. She knew it was something confidential or as close to as confidential as it could be. Normally, he felt comfortable in confiding even the most privileged information, if not to seek her council, but if it was something he hesitated or was unwilling to share, it was implied the information could get her into trouble or hurt.

Still, she held his gaze steadily, stubborn to the end, until Ben sighed heavily before beginning to speak. He wasn’t completely forthcoming, which proved her theory correct, but he gave her a vague description of what he planned to inform the commander-in-chief.

“I’m sorry, but I’m afraid that’s all I can tell you,” Ben remarked. “It’s for Washington’s ears only.”
He paused before adding wryly, “Though I know I’ve already told you too much already.”

Abigail’s lips twitched upwards. “Don’t fret too much about it. I’m a compelling audience.”

The major snorted at that, making her grin grow wider. For a while, they settled into a comfortable silence, until he asked the reasoning behind her asking of what he wanted to tell Washington.

“What makes you think I have an underlying motive?” Abigail inquired.

Ben gave her a knowing look. “Because I know you, and you’re hardly an innocent wallflower fishing for conversation topics.”

“Fine, you’re right,” she conceded, noting his surprise at her quick yielding but choosing to not address it. Instead, she offered to attempt to slip everything he had just told her to Washington somehow. She hadn’t thoroughly considered just how she would accomplish this and admitted as much, since the thought was only brought into fruition a few minutes prior, but she was more than willing to try it. It was better than doing nothing at all, she reasoned.

After a moment of silence, Ben commented doubtfully, “I’m not sure how you’ll be able to do this. You don’t have a rank. And secondly, you would be opening yourself to exposure.”

“Oh, give me some credit,” Abigail remarked. “There are ways of getting around that ranking business. Besides, I’ve survived this long, haven’t I?”

“Barely,” he interjected, eyes narrowing further. “By the skin of your teeth as I recall.”

She knew exactly what he referenced to, the very reason he had essentially grounded her from patrol duties. He needn’t remind her of that day. The faint scar on her forehead, self-inflicted or not, was reminder enough.

“I’ll be fine,” Abigail insisted gently, rising to her feet once he stopped pacing. “Obviously, I wouldn’t approach Washington myself. I’m not that foolish. It would have to be someone close to Washington. And before you think of saying it, approaching any of the other officers wouldn’t be wise. So that narrows down the list easily enough.”

Ben raised a questioning brow, prompting her to answer, “Billy, Washington’s servant.”

“I’m not sure about this…” he said, though he appeared less unconvinced than he had been when she first brought up the idea. That was some progress at least. “You don’t have the full extent to the information I need to share with him. Who knows if he’ll take it into consideration?”

Abigail shrugged. “Then I’ll tell Billy exactly that – that I don’t know all the information, that you were reluctant to share information with a soldier without a rank and had sworn me to secrecy. However, out of concerned conscience, I felt compelled to inform Washington, and the best way I knew how would be through Billy.”

Ben stared at her with amazement before chuckling to himself. “You would make a great politician or even a lawyer, wouldn’t you?”

She smiled with a hint of irony. “Maybe in another life. For now, I’ll settle for being a physician.”

After she left the tent and went in search of Chris, she was struck by a moment of clarity. It struck with such force it could have easily knocked her off her feet.

*He’s mine, she realized, and I’m his.*
That was all she needed to know.

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Although the information she had been given would hardly garner Washington’s consideration, Abigail decided to see her plan through regardless. Though she didn’t receive Ben’s approval verbally, her decision was already made. Besides, what harm could it possibly do?

Fortune appeared to be on her side the following morning. As she prepared to head towards breakfast, the blonde spotted Billy Lee amongst the men, carrying what either appeared to be correspondence or laundry in a large, brandless sack. She couldn’t judge from this distance as it which it could be.

Seizing this opportunity, she quickened her pace and offered to help him carry his load, which comprised of three sacks, not one, and all appearing rather heavy. Grateful for the assistance, though somewhat embarrassed, he sheepishly took her up on the offer and handed her one of the three sacks, taking her small stature into consideration before walking in the direction of the commander-in-chief’s tent.

“I’ve been hoping for the chance to run into you,” Abigail commented, lowering her voice when the passed by some soldiers.

“Have you?” Billy asked, sounding mildly surprised but also lowering his voice to match her volume. “Can’t say I hear that kind of thing often.”

Abigail smiled sympathetically, quelling the urge to give the poor man a hug before launching into the story she had told Ben. She began with she had news for Washington, but she wasn’t sure of the proper channels to speak with him. Knowing none of the officers would believe her, considering her lowly position as a foot soldier, she realized her best option would be to consult with the man closest to Washington, Billy himself.

“Going to the man that does his laundry and has his ear,” Billy mused, lips twitching slightly in amusement. “A clever tactic if I ever heard one.”

She didn’t rise to accept that praise except with a smile before continuing. Washington needed to know that Lee was not to be trusted by any costs, and that he should look again at the intelligence that had been gathered on him. She couldn’t say more beyond that, nothing more than what Ben had told her, and used the limited knowledge to her advantage, claiming she couldn’t very well in good conscience let this information go unheard, even as she had been sworn to secrecy.

Recalling Ben’s mention of Billy’s concern for Washington, she knew there was a good chance he would help them, if not to ensure Washington’s welfare above all else.

“I’m hoping you can pass this information along in some way,” Abigail concluded quietly just as they approached his quarters, knowing their conversation was well approaching the end. “If it helps, I can give you my name for verification of my reliability.” She knew Washington knew her name – well, her alias, anyway – ever since her recruitment into Culper. That would hopefully be of some assistance.

“Thomas Williams,” she remarked when he inquired of her name.

Billy’s face lit up in recognition of her name after a moment or two of puzzlement. “I’ve heard that name before… Ah, yes. I believe he mentioned you some time ago. Around New Year’s, was it not?”
Feeling like a deer trapped in a hunter’s gaze, Abigail nodded mutely, hoping the feeling didn’t show across her face.

Billy set down his bags and took her hand in his, giving it a firm squeeze. “Thank you for that evening,” he spoke softly. “I’m glad he wasn’t alone, that night. After everything… well, I’m sure you’re aware, on some level about it of course.”

Knowing just what he referred to, she nodded again. Once she recovered from her momentary shock, she squeezed his hand back before their hands returned to their respective sides.

“As far as getting your message to Washington,” Billy continued, “I can’t make any promises, but I do promise to try.”

Abigail smiled. “That’s all I can ask for, what any of us can ask for. Thank you, Billy.”

Chapter End Notes

Some quick things to touch on before we get further into this trash!

- Quick reminder that Mary Woodhull basically has Anna’s plot line with Major Hewlett, which is very important to remember, especially as we're quickly approaching the season 3 plot of this adventure.
- As you’ve probably figured out, each chapter has essentially been a chapter by episode. For instance, this chapter takes place in 2x09. For the next chapter and more than likely subsequent chapters, there may be multiple chapters per episode. I'll start writing the episode numbers in the chapter notes at the beginning or ending of the chapter if it'll help you guys keep up with the timeline.

Also, I've made a tumblr! So if you guys are interested, come follow me here! I make fanvids as well, including a few about this fic - one of which was made around the time of this ship's inception in 2014!

Thank you to everyone who has subscribed, bookmarked, commented, and given kudos! I hope you continue to enjoy <3
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place in 2x10, and more than likely so will the next chapter. You'll see why soon enough!

Trigger warning: graphic depictions of war violence.

Every capable man was tasked with gathering all camp equipment – supplies, tents, and other necessities – before the first light of day. Abigail and Christopher paired themselves together when faced with the daunting task of heavy lifting. While both were individually weaker in strength when compared with the other men, their combined efforts would allow them some progress, Abigail reasoned, a logic filled with both amusement and sense.

The previous morning, the soldiers had been divided into groups – those who would follow General Lee, Colonel Branford (Colonel Pita), and Major Benjamin Tallmadge. Those assigned with General Lee and Colonel Pita served essentially as the reinforcements to Ben’s dragoons, who would serve at the forefront of the battle. Many of the men, including Bartholomew, Jasper, and Decory, had been assigned to Lee and Branford. Those remaining would serve as additional footmen in the dragoons.

“I suppose we’ve got what we wanted,” Christopher remarked ironically, passing part of the folded tent into her hands. “We’ve always wondered what it was like outside of the base. Now we’ll find out, eh?”

Abigail and Christopher had been among the remaining soldiers of the drawing pool, which meant they would serve under Ben. She took comfort in the notion he wouldn’t be far from her sight, but considering her obscene amount of luck thus far, it seemed that very luck was close to running out.

She wondered if Ben knew that she had been assigned to him. After his meeting with the generals and colonels, they were supposed to meet in his tent as soon as they were able. Once the camp equipment appeared to be in good hands, she managed to slip away to the major’s tent unnoticed, though she suspected she felt Christopher’s curious gaze on her retreating form.

His tent, or what remained of it, was one of the few tents left untouched. They weren’t to set out until later that morning, which was much too soon for Abigail’s liking, but the earlier they left, the better, as was the best interest for the army’s chances.

Within moments of seeing him, Abigail knew instantly he had no knowledge of her assignment nor was she inclined to inform him quite yet. His mind was on other things, focusing on the upcoming battle as he should. Her presence would only distract him, that much she knew.

That was why, in those first few moments, she thought it best not to tell him.

Now remained one more thing she wished to tell him, but she wasn’t certain how to do it. What was the best course of action of announcing one’s impending divorce?

“The base will more than likely serve as a temporary flyaway camp, at least during the battle,” Ben
remarked, “before relocating back to Valley Forge, as far as I’m aware.” He hadn’t stopped talking
the moment they were alone, giving her pieces of advice and information he felt it vital for her to
know. From his almost nervous chattering, she deduced this came from the notion they might not see
each other again for quite some time… if not at all. The thought alone held an icy, cold grip to her
heart.

“Why do I get the feeling you’re trying to say goodbye to me?” Abigail asked softly. Knowing time
was precious, especially then, the decision to be direct was the best option in that moment.

“That’s not…” he trailed off helplessly, closing his eyes as he sighed. Not bothering with the
pretense, he opened his eyes, and the look her gave her was so pained, she had to bite her lip to keep
from making a sound. “It’s just a precaution. There’s nothing more that I want than to keep you safe.
Your safety is my main priority, Abigail.”

_Oh, if only you knew_, she thought regretfully but kept her mouth shut. With the knowledge there
would be no roll call due to the urgency of moving out as soon as possible, she knew there was little
chance for Ben to realize where she would be. Not until… not until after.

So, yes, it was best that he didn’t know.

“I understand,” she said, then added more firmly, “And your safety is mine.”

Taking her by the arm, he drew her towards him, unable to help himself. The need to reach out and
touch her had grown too great, and she shared that same feeling by pressing closer to him, taking
comfort in his warmth even as she herself felt like a bundle of nerves. For more reason than one.

His lips brushed her forehead by instinct, an act he had bestowed so many times she lost count, but
every time he did, it sent a rush of warmth through her body.

There was a rather large opening in his shirt, an unusual state of dress for him, large enough to reveal
a good portion of his chest. Before he could realize his error and button his shirt, Abigail leaned
forward and pressed a kiss right above his heart, his skin comfortingly warm and alive under her lips
and cheek.

It was an incredible temptation to reach up and kiss him, to refamiliarize herself with the taste of his
mouth on hers. The memory of their last kiss – tender, passionate, and oh so loving – felt so long
ago, but she could still easily recall how easily the kiss filled her with pleasure.

It was one of the very reasons why they avoided the barn and the stables for their more recent
meetings. The tent gave them some form of privacy, but there was only the thick material that
separated them from the camp.

With her lips barely a hairbreadth away from his chest, she wondered if maybe she just told him, told
him of what she had asked Caleb to do, that perhaps it would be all right. Having received no word
from Caleb of any trouble from his procurement, she felt in her heart he must have succeeded,
otherwise he would have sent word if something had gone wrong as he had promised he would.

Just maybe then…

“Ben…” Abigail murmured, her lips brushing against his chest as they formed his name. She smiled
a little as she felt his barely repressed shiver. Reluctantly, she took a step back so that she could see
his face and even more reluctantly watched as he slowly went to the task of rebuttoning his shirt.

“There’s something I have to tell you,” she began, pausing for a moment. “Something I think you
should know.”
Nearly finished with the task, Ben took in the serious, almost nervous look on his face and stilled his actions, allowing his hands to fall at his side. “What is it?”

Taking a steadying breath, Abigail’s lips parted. “I’ve been meaning to talk to you about this for a while now, but there hasn’t been the right moment to mention it, until now I think. Caleb’s –”

“Major Tallmadge?” The soldier’s voice disrupted the moment and whatever she had been prepared to say. Hardly a second passed when the flap was opened, revealing an officer, a new one from the looks of him, who claimed Ben’s presence was requested at once.

Ben thanked the officer and saw him out before turning to Abigail with an apologetic gaze. “I’m sorry, but I must go. Do you think we can table this conversation for when I get back?”

There were too many meanings behind his words for her to sort through, but all she could do was smile. “Of course. What I have to say can wait.”

Although, she would wonder later, should she have told him sooner?

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**Kerr Farm**

The journey from Valley Forge towards Kerr Farm was a long and strenuous one, especially for those who weren’t on horseback. After enduring the horrible winter months at Valley Forge, it was a miracle the men were even capable of being upright, let alone making the long trek towards Monmouth, New Jersey. While many of the men appeared to have recovered, that didn’t mean there weren’t lingering effects from the prolonged period of near starvation, illness, and desperation - and not just from physical injury.

Abigail overheard some men murmuring bitterly about the officers having horses while the rest of them had to walk on foot since they were “piss-ons”, as many had made the case. She had wisely chosen to keep her mouth shut whether their complaints were shared with her directly or not. Animosity towards the officers, while understandable, was increasing among the regulars, and many of the newer recruits were getting drawn into their web, preaching about the deplorable conditions and defaming officers like it was the holy scripture.

Christopher and herself, along with a very small minority of other soldiers, did their best to keep out of it, knowing that it would only do more harm than good to get caught up in a simmering pot. Sooner or later, it would overflow, harming anything and everyone in its path once it boiled over.

They walked alongside each other towards the back of Ben’s dragoon, which she believed to be a good thing. She was able to keep him in her sights while she remained out of his.

Guilt clawed at her already frayed nerves, but she did her best to thwart them. It wasn’t as if she had lied to him, but she had kept something from him. That in itself didn’t sit well with her. However, would it have made a difference if she had told him?

Yes, it would have made a difference but not a positive one.

Instead of dwelling on her guilty conscience, she decided to focus on the task at hand - mainly keeping one foot in front of the other and preserving a strong grasp on her musket, which pressed uncomfortably heavy into her shoulder.

With a brief glance towards her left, she could tell Christopher was faring no better, not even double her size in build. His usual pale countenance was now a faint hue of pink from exertion, which she
deduced was from the combination of the journey and the heavy weight of the musket along with everything else they must keep on their person, namely ammunition. She felt equal parts of pity and assurance at his struggle, as terrible as that sounded. At least there was someone that shared her burden. She couldn’t imagine how poor Joseph was managing.

There was an uneasy silence among them as they marched on, a tension so thick a bullet couldn’t pierce it in one shot. While many of the men had seen battle, a lot of them hadn’t, and the silence only brought on more questions that plagued their minds:

What would happen to them? How would they fare against the British? Would this be another victory to be claimed, or would it be another loss?

How many of them would survive?

Abigail would be lying if she wasn’t pondering those very questions herself.

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Caleb had nearly missed them by a few hours. Fortunately for him, his connections in Setauket were very good at what they did, otherwise he wouldn’t have reached Kerr Farm when he had.

Beyond telling him about checking up on pain in the arse Woodhull, the whaler didn’t tell Ben anything else about his trip to Setauket. Abigail had asked him not to, and he was a man of his word, at least to his family and friends. He hadn’t breathed the word “divorce” to the major, though how it would come up in casual conversation was anyone’s guess.

Well, there was an obvious answer there, but it was none of his business.

With a click of his tongue and a kick of his heels, Caleb pushed his horse into a swift gallop as soon as he caught a brief flash of a Continental uniform. Soon enough, they caught up with the dragoon, galloping past the rows of soldiers standing at the major’s command. For a moment, he thought he spotted a familiar face among them, but the thought quickly passed as he made his way towards his friend.

With the British only several yards away, it was clear the battle was imminent, their numbers appearing to outman them even with the most cursory gaze. Grimly, he pushed his horse even faster, and the poor bugger acquiesced. The shout of a soldier announcing his presence as courier drew the major’s attention in his direction, and soon enough he was close enough to ease the horse into a trot.

Imperceptibly, he patted his side until he felt the slight bulge of his coat pocket, his fingers tracing the outline of the leaflet of parchment tucked securely inside his coat – the divorce papers which he planned on delivering himself once the day was done. But first he had to get to Ben.

Upon his arrival, the major took one look at him and chuckled. Caleb looked at him with a raised brow, to which his friend replied, “I’ll never get used to seeing you with such a boyish face.”

Caleb huffed with feigned irritation. “That’s it. I’m growing it back out, and I’ll never shave ever again, even if I look like a creature you’ve read about in your classics.”

Ben grinned mildly at the retort, but it didn’t linger long as they got down to business. Caleb had information from Long Island, an unexpected extension of his trip which turned out to be invaluable considering the dire importance it presented.

“Well, anyway, have I got a story for you. Read this,” Caleb remarked, holding out a folded sheet of parchment towards him.
Ben told him to hang on for a moment before ordering the men into a forward march.

“Where’s Washington?” Caleb asked as he and Ben followed the men as they marched forward to meet the British.

“He’s with the main company, a day behind us.”

Oh, boy this wasn’t good. The whaler turned to Ben, insisting, “Ben, he's in danger. It's an inside job.”

A look of dawning horror overcame the major as he took in their surrounds. Filled with dread, he murmured, “Oh, God. I knew it.”

Caleb frowned. “What do you mean? I just got it from Long Island.”

Ben looked around just in time to see redcoats beginning to spill over from the forest’s edges, stepping out from the trees to enclose them. With a quick glance to his right, he observed the same occurrence on their other side. They were being surrounded. “It's a trap. Lee's marching us straight into it.”

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Not after this alarming discovery, the major had spotted Colonel Branford’s group falling back and heading into the trees even as the shooting began. He had called for the men to remain on the battlefield, ordering them to remain where they were with Caleb echoing his orders in a mighty bellow.

Many of the men ignored his orders and retreated into the safety of the trees – under other orders no doubt – deliberately ignoring Ben and his shouts. By the time the retreating soldiers made it passed the trees, only a dozen or more soldiers remained on the fields, forcing Ben to call his men to fall back.

If General Lee and Colonel Branford wanted a confrontation, who was he to disappoint them?

By the time he spotted Lee, Ben was already fuming but did his best to contain much of it as he trotted his horse to reach him.

“General Lee, sir!” he called out as he approached, prompting the Lee and Branford to a halt. “Generals Wayne, Scott, and Maxwell are withdrawing through the orchard, and all of our men are falling back at once.”

“Yes, I know,” Lee remarked, “I ordered them.”

Ben maneuvered his horse to cut them off from moving any further with Caleb right behind him and insisted, “But, sir, if we do not rally the men and form a defensive line, we will not be able to hold them.”

Lee demanded, flabbergasted, “Hold them? Hold them how exactly? Clinton has sprung a trap, and we are outnumbered. Retreat is our only option.”

“Washington expects us to hold,” Ben persisted, refusing to back down from Lee and his traitorous heart.

Lee sized him up before addressing Branford beside him, not once breaking eye contact with the major, “Colonel Bradford, if Major Tallmadge does not clear the road, he is to be hanged from that
tree as a deserter.”

Bradford smiled twistedly, the smug son of a bitch, and there was nothing Ben wanted more than to punch his teeth in.

“A deserter?” Ben demanded angrily.

Bradford released his sword from his hilt. Caleb wasted no time in raising his gun in retaliation. The tension was immense but not enough to keep the quiet murmuring of the soldiers from occurring. The news quickly traveled from man to man until it reached the very back of the lines where Ben’s dragoon was catching up.

As soon as the words “Lee”, “Bradford”, “Tallmadge”, “hanged”, and “deserter” were uttered, Abigail grabbed her musket and began pushing her way through the dragoons, ignoring Christopher’s cry, “Thomas, wait!” to try and stop her. If Ben was in trouble, she was going to help him, consequences be damned.

It wasn’t until she heard horses approaching did she stop but only for a moment. The sound of new arrivals made her instantly wary. Were they friend or foe?

But taking one hard look at the familiar long, dark cape and the strong, broad-shouldered figure underneath it, she felt the breath go out of her as if in one blow.

Washington.

Washington and a company of men arrived, just how many she wasn’t certain. The sight of him provided her with much needed comfort. She knew immediately that his presence would save Ben, but this didn’t stop her from getting closer to make sure everything went smoothly. But what could she do on her own if not?

“General Lee,” Washington greeted him with a frown, “I’ve had a most disturbing report from a young fifer traveling in the wrong direction from the battle.”

Lee stared at him, mouth agape before stuttering out, “Sir, I… I thought you a day behind us.”

Washington’s frown deepened. “Why are your men in retreat?”

“They… there has been some confusion, sir.”

“Clearly, there remains some,” the commander-in-chief remarked scathingly. “Why are your men in retreat?”

Lee answered that he believed they lacked a “proper advance” and thought it best not to pursue the battle, as he stated, “a major action was not in the best interest of America at this time.”

Although she might not be very knowledgeable in military strategy, Abigail felt she had a good sense of character in others, and she sensed bullshit coming from Lee.

Apparently, Washington sensed the same thing and ordered Lee to fall into the rear of his company but only after giving him a verbal lashing.

*Good riddance, asshole*, Abigail thought with no small amount of satisfaction as Lee directed his horse to do just that.

Washington then asked Bradford far away was their cavalry, to which Bradford remarked they were
fifteen minutes away. Nodding, he ordered both of their detachments into the woods to ambush the nearer British columns.

He then turned to Ben and ordered him to ride out to Generals Wayne and Scott and have them hold up the enemy while he himself formed a defensive line with artillery, which Ben accepted with a respectful and emphatic, “Yes, sir.”

Abigail’s heart, which she had thought nearly stopped at the sight of Bradford and Ben with their swords drawn, thumped heavily against her ribcage, which only increased at the realization the battle was only moments away.

Before she could be spotted by any familiar faces, she slipped back into the lines and made her way back to Christopher to share what she had learned.

It would be their last chance to speak to each other before hell reigned down upon them.

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Future historians would refer to that day The Battle of Monmouth – the name which would come from Clinton’s withdraw from the Monmouth Court house in retreat. Although there would be a British retreat, it historians would still look upon that battle as essentially a draw, that no side truly outmaneuvered the other, at least according to written accounts several decades or even centuries prior to their own scholarship.

Like many of the battles and wars of history, they would be glorified with beatific terms such as honor, dignity, and glory. They would be used for future politicians to both inspire and manipulate public sentiment, to sustain national pride even if to a fault.

But Abigail wouldn’t describe battle as glorious, dignified, and honorable. It was chaotic, harsh, and hardly honorable.

It was hell on earth.

Washington’s strategy was carried out before her very eyes. Two divisions of men descended about the British’s rear with no warning, the element of surprise serving them well – at least for the moment.

Recovering from the surprise attack, the British met the onslaught head on with vigor and a great amount of skill. Swords clashed and bullets whizzed through the air, often missing their intended targets but striking some unfortunate soul nearby. If it was the enemy, it made little difference to them.

Not that any thought went through the soldiers’ heads as they fought of their lives. It was pure instinct that was acted upon, and they couldn’t be blamed for it.

Abigail did her best to keep to the woods, the trees being the only shield between herself and British fire. This line of thought appeared to be echoed among others as she, Christopher, and a handful of others fired at the British behind the trees.

Smoke sparked from several muskets across from them, and soldiers from both sides fell. Just a few yards from her, a redcoat grabbed one of the rebel soldiers and ran him through with the sharp blade of his bayonet. Abigail held back a scream, biting her lip so hard she could taste the coppery tang of blood. Before she knew what she was doing, she aimed for the British soldier and fired. She coughed against the smoke from her shot, eyes watering as she kept her gaze forward.
She wasn’t sure if she hit him until the smoke cleared from her vision. In the moment, she hadn’t been sure which part she had been aiming for, knowing all she wanted was to hit some part of him.

Instead of checking to see if her aim had been true, she turned her attention back to the chaos before them, knowing it was only a matter of time before the redcoats figured out there was a line behind the trees.

And that moment was now. A line of British soldiers, perhaps five or six, charged in their directions, arms at the ready and began shooting into the woods. They were trying to draw them out and into the open, otherwise they would be killed on the spot.

A soldier right next to her and Christopher dropped suddenly. She didn’t have to get closer to see the bullet wound to the head. Realizing what they were doing, Christopher gestured for her to follow him, out into the clearing. It was an insane move, one that would get them shot certainly, but she trusted Christopher and his instincts.

Besides, bullets were descending upon them anyway. What difference did it make if they were shot on the field or waited to be shot in the trees? At least this way, they could take some redcoats down with them.

They didn’t make it far before Christopher dropped to his knees with a startled cry, his musket on the ground beside him. Abigail’s gaze snapped to meet his before quickly trailing down to the large blooming patch of blood high on his thigh. It was nearly the same spot where he had been shot in Trenton. Or had it been Morristown? She could hardly think.

“Oh, God, Christopher,” Abigail gasped. She went to lower herself next to him, but he adamantly shook his head, giving her a painfully rueful smile.

“You can’t save me this time,” Christopher Morgan said in a poor attempt at comfort.

“No,” Abigail shook her head. She refused to believe it, looking around them frantically to see if she could safely relocate him. Even in her harried state, she noted there were significantly less soldiers around them, at least those who were on their feet. It looked as if the British retreating. Did the rebels win?

She couldn’t think of anything beyond Christopher right now and began to reach for him when a thunderous shot from behind her nearly destroyed her eardrums.

One moment Christopher had been kneeling a few feet from here, and the next, he was lying on the grass, a dark red mark spreading across his forehead, his blue eyes open staring at the sky without seeing.

Abigail jerked around in the direction of the shot and lifted her musket at the British soldier who was preparing to aim for her and shot him before he could finish loading. He fell with a sharp cry, clutching at his side before dropping his musket.

Trembling violently, she lifted the musket once more and walked closer to the soldier who had taken her friend’s life. The weapon, already heavy for her small form, felt even heavier as she held him at point blank, which proved to be even more difficult by her violent tremors.

“Do it,” the redcoat hissed, clutching at his die with pain. “You don’t have the balls.”

Abigail wanted to laugh, feeling the hysteria bubbling inside her but did her best to squelch it.

“You’re right about that,” she admitted. After a moment, she gave up on the musket, tossing it to the
ground and reaching for her revolver instead.

A sound like thunder and a force like lightning threw her to the ground. Met with the hard earth, she tried to suck in a breath and found that she couldn’t do so easily, having the wind knocked out of her.

With a groan, she forced herself to roll onto her side, despite that every inch of her ached in protest.

The summer sun shone down on her unmercifully. She squinted at the glare and brought a hand to shield herself from the sun’s rays. When she was capable of receiving air in her lungs again, Abigail realized she needed to move and find safety.

Something warm and wet dripped onto her cheek, drawing her out of the shock of her fall. Blinking against the sun, she drew her hand closer to her body to prevent drawing attention to herself, but when she drew it closer, she noticed a strikingly dark red covered her hand.

She hadn’t tended to Christopher before… before he had been shot the second time.

Her body throbbed with pain, but there was one area that demanded attention especially. With some difficulty, she curled in on herself to get a better look and felt herself grow pale.

Right in the center of her abdomen, blood pooled quickly, a striking contrast with the stark white of her shirt. She bit her lip and cringed. It was one thing tending to others’ injuries; it was another entirely to witness one’s own.

Swallowing, she pressed a hand to the wound and grimaced as that only seem to make it bleed even more. Possible internal hemorrhaging, and if the bullet was still instead… if it hadn’t already shattered…

Millions of medical thoughts swarmed in her mind, but it did nothing to change the facts. She had to get out of there. But the question was as to how.

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From the woods a distance away, a Queen’s ranger lowered his musket with satisfaction. He hadn’t seen who he had struck, but knowing that it had been a rebel was enough for him.

“Good shot,” Simcoe commended him with a satisfied expression. He knew he would receive flak from Andre for firing after being ordered to withdraw, but it didn’t matter much to him. What harm could he have possible caused? One less rebel scum was certainly justified in his book.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys so much for your support for this fic! It means so much to me you don't even know 😃

Here's the video that started all of this mess. If you're interested in my other head canons for the other OCs, let me know ;)
Not long after the battle was won – a symbolic victory, as Washington would call it – Ben and Caleb had devised a plan to draw Bradford out. It had been clear to both from the beginning Colonel Bradford had held some part in Lee’s traitorous deeds; they only hadn’t been sure just how deep, until now.

The task of luring Bradford out hadn’t been at all difficult. He reacted just as they had anticipated he would when Ben had purposefully made a provoking remark – he had taken the bait like the foolish fish that he was. The heavy stench of smuggled liquor on the colonel’s breath, a result of the camp’s impromptu celebration of the day’s perceived victory, served as a help to their plan and a hindrance to Bradford’s self-preservation.

Once Caleb had Bradford safely secured, Ben immediately set off for Washington’s tent. At first, he wasn’t allowed entrance, but upon hearing his voice from inside the tent, Billy stepped out and said Washington wished to see him and allowed him inside.

The major and commander-in-chief discussed the day’s battle, which eventually segued into the topic of Lee, of whom Washington remarked he knew was in communication with the enemy. He had known of this communication ever since Ben had passed along the message from agent 355 in Philadelphia, Abigail, Anna’s former servant. All he had to do was wait for the proper time to deal with him and proper amount of discretion. Better to have Lee court-martialed as a failure than a traitor.

Ben then shared with him of news regarding to Culper, more specifically Abe’s release upon Major Hewlett’s return to Setauket after having managed to escape the Continental Outpost during the Queen’s rangers’ raid. He also informed him of their new man in York City, Robert Townsend, who they now refer to as Sam Culper Jr., and how Townsend had discovered a conspiracy against Washington. The letter he received through Caleb detailed Townsend’s findings, which he passed to Washington as soon as he stood to receive the letter.

He called for Washington’s guards to enter the tent and shared with Washington that one of the conspirators was on lockdown, and the name of this conspirator was Colonel William Bradford. Instead of Washington going to confront him personally, the major turned to the guards and asked if they could quietly retrieve Bradford and bring him in. The younger of the two quickly volunteered, and under Ben’s observant gaze, exited the tent to retrieve Bradford.

As it turned out, the young guard didn’t have any intentions of returning Bradford alive. Anticipating the betrayal by one of Washington’s guards, Caleb had volunteered to stakeout the small stoned cabin to play witness to any foul play. He hadn’t been disappointed, interrupting the guard’s intention of slitting Bradford’s throat but only barely. If he had lingered a minute or two longer, Bradford would have met his maker.

With both conspirators secure, the whaler met with Washington and Ben to share the news. The major assures Washington there were other charges that could be brought upon them, so if they were
to be hanged, no one would be none the wiser. As Washington said, discretion was their utmost priority during these trying times of war.

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“Have you seen… Williams since you’ve come back?” Caleb asked, catching himself just in time from saying Abigail’s name. While much of the men were in various stages of revelry, it was never a bad thing to exercise caution, just in case they were to be overheard – however, considering the overly generous passing around of cups, it was highly doubtful they were being paid any mind to.

But Washington was right about discretion, and from there on out, caution to be exercised more expressly, even in the smallest of measures. However, Ben would never consider Abigail’s safety a small matter.

He tried to recall if he had seen her around the camp when they had returned, and his frown deepened upon the realization that he hadn’t.

“No, I don’t believe I have,” he remarked slowly, a sense of unease creeping upon him but did his best to push it down. They had been so busy with the matter of the conspirators he had all but forgotten to meet Abigail at their previously agreed upon location – a barn of all places – to check in with each other. Being familiar with the flexibility of her patience – as flexible as a piece of wood – he knew he was in for a world of trouble and said so as much when he mentioned heading towards the barn.

But Caleb intervened. “Actually, I need to speak with her first. Alone.”

Ben paused and gave him an odd look. “Alone?”

The whaler shifted awkwardly from foot-to-foot, not meeting his eyes directly. “It’s… a private matter.”

“Private?”

“Yes. You know, private – remote, sequestered, limited to people in the know of a matter that’s not meant for public consumption –”

Ben interrupted him with a hand raised in exasperation. “I believe I know the definition of private, Caleb.” He lowered his hand and his voice before adding, a touch of concern coloring his voice, “I only wonder what it could possibly be that she wouldn’t tell me herself.”

For several minutes, Caleb looked at him, frowning, before looking away and back again. It was highly suspicious, and Ben continued to stare him down, knowing that sooner or later his friend would crack, which was incredibly odd considering Caleb’s position in Culper.

“All right, fine,” Caleb relented, sighing heavily. He shoved his hands deep into his coat pockets, searching his pockets. The sounds of ruffling papers drew Ben’s attention even more but made no further comment until he explained himself. “I figure you’re going to hear about it soon enough anyway.”

He pulled out a packet of papers, turned them around, and inspected them carefully before covertly passing them into Ben’s waiting hands. The night made it nearly impossible to read, but even in the dimness of the camp fire could he make out the calligraphed title pertaining to divorce. Without hesitation, he flipped through it until he found both signatures of the parties in question: Tobias Edward Hawkins and Abigail Elizabeth Williams Hawkins.
Ben stared at the signatures until they blurred.

He wasn’t even aware that Caleb was talking until he finally looked up to see his friend nervously gesturing with his hands.

“She wanted to tell you but thought it would be better,” Caleb explained, “until it was done. Not wanting to get either of your hopes up. So, it was better in her mind to let fall on her and not you.” His expression was contrite when he added, “I’m sorry for not telling ya, Tall-boy, but I promised her.”

“Aye,” Ben croaked out but quickly cleared his voice. “She didn’t sign this.” He held up the packet. “I know her handwriting.”

“Yeah, about that…” Caleb trailed off, a strange combination of giddy and apologetic. “Her signature had to be forged or well, it had to be signed by someone with given expressed permission to sign. Since she’s supposed to be in Ireland and all. Trust me, it wasn’t easy seeing this through, but Abe and I managed just fine.”

“Abe knew about this?!”

“Well, of course. He’s a lawyer, ain’t he?”

As far as Ben was aware, Abe hadn’t completed his legal studies at King’s College, but he didn’t have enough information to point that out. Instead, he sat there, staring at the legal documents – what appeared to be legal anyway – and realized exactly why she hadn’t told him about this, apart from Caleb’s verbalized rationalizations.

“She did it for you, mate,” Caleb spoke quietly, speaking Ben’s thoughts. “She did it for the both of you, so that you could finally have a chance, after all of this,” he gestured to the camp around them and even more so to the ongoing war outside of the camp’s walls, “is over.”

Folding the documents carefully, Ben held them for a moment before saying, “I’m going to go find her.” He returned the documents to Caleb. “Hold these until we figure out what to do with them.”

“Absolutely.” Caleb accepted the documents and tucked them securely back into his coat. He suddenly grinned, even batting his eyelashes playfully. “‘We’ is it now? Oh, you two!”

The only dignifying response Ben gave him was a punch to the shoulder before heading off, smiling with no small amount of satisfaction at his friend’s exclamation of pained indignation.

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The moment he stepped into the barn and didn’t see her, Ben knew something was wrong. After receiving no response from his knock on the barn door, he let himself in and called out, “Williams,” hoping she would answer him. When she did not, he called out her name. Still, no response. His nervousness grew, but he forced it down. Surely, she would arrive in a few minutes.

Ten minutes passed, then fifteen, and there was still no sign of her. With each passing minute, he became increasingly anxious when he doesn’t catch a glimpse of her profile entering the barn and soon found himself pacing, unable to fully contain his nervous energy. He had only felt this way once before, and it had been a scenario very much like this, with her disappearing without a trace and him nearly putting his fist through a wall with worry.

Only it was much worse now. He could feel it.
As if the walls were closing in on him, the major surged out of the barn and headed straight to the center of camp, stopping just short from searching every place and interrogating everyone on her whereabouts like a madman. It was possible that Abigail was just fine, that perhaps she was off celebrating with that friend of hers, Christopher, and had forgotten to meet him.

That sounded nothing like Abigail.

Swallowing back a lump of increasing panic in his throat, he called out to Caleb as soon as he spotted him and gestured for him to follow. Once they were alone, he told him Abigail hadn’t shown up and asked if he had seen her among the men. Caleb shook his head, his expression turned somber, as he reported he hadn’t seen her at all since his return.

It wasn’t in her nature to disappear without a trace, at least not willingly. There weren’t many reasons for her to leave camp. She hadn’t been on patrol duty with the others in little over a year. He wouldn’t allow it after Trenton.

“I could ask around,” Caleb suggested, “see if anyone knows the whereabouts of Thomas Williams?”

Ben shook his head firmly. “No. That wouldn’t be a good idea, especially after her last disappearance with that friend of hers. They would’ve been marked as deserters if James Sanford hadn’t come to me first with their names. What’s to stop someone else from going to someone above me with her name?”

It was the most disturbing sense of déjà vu he ever experienced. Everything was just like it had been a year ago: returning from a battle only to discover she was missing, only this time there was one difference. No one had approached him to inform him of any missing soldiers.

Well there was another difference. Nearly all the men from the camp had been drafted into the battle, with only less than a handful remaining behind, if any. Had Abigail been part of the recruited?

Ben’s blood ran cold at the startling realization. Of course. That was it. Of course it was. It was the only logical explanation he could think of as to why…

“Christ, Ben, you look like death warmed over,” Caleb observed, eying him with great concern.

“Don’t say ‘death’,” Ben begged, pinching the bridge of his nose as the icy grip of fear tightened on his heart. “I think… I think she may have been at Kerr Farm, with one of the… detachments…” He couldn’t finish the sentence, but he didn’t have to.

Catching his meaning, Caleb let out a colorful string of curses, and Ben was not far behind from echoing them. Immediately, he turned around and made a mad dash for his horse, with the whaler hot on his heels.

He had to go back. He had to go back and find her. Consequences be damned. He had to see if she was all right, if she was injured, if she was even…

No, no. She was alive. There was no alternative that Ben would allow himself to consider.

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Abigail had been grateful when dusk had begun to descend on the battlefield. Sweat trickled down her face uncomfortably and had her clothes clinging to her like a second skin. She felt entrapped in her own damp uniform. The stickiness was even worse further down across her abdomen, and a fresh round of lightheadedness struck her before she could attempt to take another look.
The fields of Kerr farm were eerily silent, the silence broken by an occasional groan, whimper, or curse. But even those had grown rare. It was a wonder if any of the soldiers were alive. If their wounds hadn’t killed them, the unforgiving heat of the summer day most certainly had. The night would be even worse.

She considered more than once as she waited for dusk whether to strip herself of the thick material of the blue Continental coat and weighed her options on keeping it versus its removal – an attempt to keep her mind focused on something other than the throbbing intense pain of her wound as well as something to distract her as the time slowly passed on. If she removed it, it certainly lowered the risk of suffering heat stroke. It also provided her some disguise in that she couldn’t be identified by the enemy as a rebel soldier.

But that also came with the problem of any Continental soldier not being able to identify her either, if they didn’t recognize her.

Soon enough, her discomfort won the argument. Shifting with a quiet hiss, she began to un成功cantly slip her arms out of the coat and found it increasingly difficult to manage it. With every movement, her wound throbbed and, as if as a reminder, more blood blossomed across her shirt, encouraging her to give up the endeavor.

In the process of giving up, she stopped herself just in time to keep from toppling over onto her front and onto the prostrate form next to her. She squeezed her eyes shut, breathing laboriously from her foolish efforts, and did her best to not open her eyes. She knew exactly whose body she was all but pressed up against. A deep shudder run down her spine, and her heart ached with grief.

She wished more than anything that she could take him with her, when she attempted her escape from the battle’s death field, but as much as it pained her, she knew it wasn’t feasible. Christopher had been right. She couldn’t save him now. Those words, his final words to her and the world, would haunt her for the rest of her days.

Moments before they had assembled to set out from Valley Forge, Christopher had gestured for her to come closer to him. As soon as she had, he had pulled out a locket from underneath his shirt, opening it to reveal two portraits. One was a picture of his family, and the other was dedicated to a lovely young woman. She couldn’t have been much younger than Christopher himself.

“That’s Grace, my sweetheart,” Christopher had answered her unspoken questions, smiling down at the portrait with such fondness it was nearly heartbreaking. “She had this made for me when she learned of my intentions of enlisting. She…” he choked up, blinking rapidly before clearing his throat, his voice catching. “She wanted me to have something to hold onto, when things go to hell.

“I want you to do something for me,” he continued, his gaze imploring. “If anything happens to me, I want you to take this. Take this and find her. Tell her… there was never a day that I never thought of her. I’ll love her to the day I die, even if that may mean today.”

With this promise in mind, Abigail opened her eyes and barely suppressed a sob at the sight of his pale face and opened eyes, staring at the sky without seeing. Biting her lip, she forced herself to scoot closer to him, and, with trembling hands, she reached for his shirt, touching him carefully until she felt the outline of the metal locket underneath the thick material.

Managing to remove the locket after some time, she clutched pendant until it dug into her skin almost painfully before slipping it inside her pants pocket.

Reverently, she placed a hand over his eyes, gently closing them shut. She brushed his thick, black hair over his forehead, covering the ugly gaping hole in his forehead. When she moved her hand, she
blinked and took a breath. It almost looked like he was asleep. But she knew better.

The sun settled low into the horizon. Knowing this was her moment, perhaps her only chance at survival, she knew she had to go. Leaning forward, she pressed a tearful kiss to his cheek and sniffled quietly.

“May you be in the arms of the angels, brother,” she murmured. After sending a silent prayer above, she bid goodbye to the young soldier who had saved her life in more ways than one. The boy, turned man, who had come to be like her brother.

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Abigail had barely been able to crawl her way towards the forest edge, hindered both by her wound and the nearly paralyzing fear of being shot down again by a redcoat, or even worse yet by someone else. The act alone had been tiring and had taken more time than what it ordinarily should, but with every rustle of leaves or a shifting body, she had halted, bracing herself for assault. Only when none came had she begun to move again, until the cycle happened again.

Once inside the woods, she had slowly pushed herself into an upright position, using the base of a tree for support, the old gnarled bark digging into her sides as she pushed her way up. Risking precious seconds to catch her breath, she then shoved herself away from the tree and began to run – a task that proved rather difficult but boy did she try. Putting any amount of distance between herself and the field had to be beneficial on some level.

Unfortunately, she didn’t make it as far as she would have liked. It couldn’t have been more than half a mile, perhaps even less, when she had grown winded and needed a rest. Taking this as an opportunity to assess her wound, she had looked down and had cursed at the sight of it.

Not only was the front of her shirt covered in dark patches of blood, even more blood was now seeping through the material and down her thighs. It was then she knew she had to stop. If not, she would lose more blood. Any more vigorous activity was not conducive to blood loss.

Her options had been very limited and in poor supply, but ultimately, she forced herself to make a decision, which prompted her to find a reasonable hiding space – one that wasn’t too far from the path that she could signal for help but not so close that she couldn’t keep herself hidden from trouble. So she had lowered herself behind the largest tree so could find, with only a handful of bushes that would only partially conceal her. It didn’t really matter at this point. The chance of survival was growing slimmer and slimmer with each passing minute.

As dusk settled into early evening, Abigail contemplated how best to treat her wound. Remembering her father’s medical knowledge and her experience with Anderson, she tried her best to think of the best course of action to remove the bullet, if it would be wise at all.

She didn’t have access to a forceps nor anything sharp on her person. She could have used the blade of a bayonet of a fallen soldier if she had thought to take it but even that would have been a stretch of logic.

Besides, with nightfall, it would be next to impossible to attempt searching for the bullet even by touch. There was too much blood and possible inflammation for her to really tell, apart from the fact it would be more difficult to treat herself than someone else.

The only thing she could consider using was her revolver. If she could take it apart, perhaps it could serve as a temporary forceps somehow. Either she let the bullet stay inside her and eventually die from lead poisoning or get the bullet out and die from potential hemorrhaging. Even if the left the
bullet inside her, there was a significantly good chance she would bleed out, having lost a significant amount already.

So yes, from a medical standpoint, she knew she was done for.

Slowly, she shrugged out of her coat and pressed the heavy material to her abdomen, hoping to stop the bleeding while giving her more time to consider her options. She would have to come to a decision quick.

Night drew out its animal brethren not long after night descended on the earth. Cricket chirps and rustling feathers of nesting birds synchronized in a peaceful woodland melody. The calmness helped her to relax, the tension in her muscles easing little by little until the tree all but replaced her spine, keeping her upright.

The pain was almost secondary as numbness settled over her. With the comforting sounds of nature accompanied with this feeling, Abigail felt herself drifting, her eyelids feeling increasingly heavy…

The blonde started at a loud whickering. It sounded very close, coming certainly from the path.

She tried to search for her revolver, but her limbs felt detached from her, moving at a sloth’s pace. Whoever would find her wouldn’t be at a disadvantage. She could hardly search herself. How would she could defend herself?

“Oh, let them come,” she murmured tiredly. There wasn’t anything she could do.

But that didn’t stop her from finally managing to slip the revolver from her pocket and placing it directly by her side. The appearance of the weapon was better than none at all, even if she doubted she could handle it in her state.

“Wait, I think I heard something,” a voice came from the darkness. She tensed, tightening her grip on the revolver.

“Do you think it’s wise?” a second voice asked. “You don’t know who or what is in these woods.”

With a quick dismount, the stranger disregarded his companion’s warnings. The sound of footsteps approaching her spot had her heart beating wildly inside her chest. This was it. This was how she was going to die.

Finding what little energy she had, Abigail adjusted the revolver in her hand so that it rested on her thigh. She refused to go down without a fight, even if it was a short one.

“She could be here,” the first voice insisted stubbornly. More than a hint of pain colored his tone. “If she’s not, we… we’ll keep going.”

There was something familiar about the timber of the stranger’s voice that gave her pause. She frowned, cocking her head slightly to the side, and concentrated. The voice sounded so familiar… but there was no way…

Could it be?

It was well worth the risk of finding out.

“Ben,” she croaked out but found her voice was hoarse and too low to be heard.

The footsteps paused a moment after. While too quiet for even her own ears, he must have heard
something. Hope bloomed inside her chest. Clearing her throat, she shifted a little against the tree and summoned up all the energy she could muster. “Ben, is that you?”

“A… Williams?” the voice demanded, breath caught in his throat.

She nodded, then realized foolishly he couldn’t see her. “Yeah… it’s me.”

No sooner had the words escaped her did twigs snapped and leaves rustled furiously as the footsteps reached closer at an increasing speed. In two slow blinks, she gazed up at a dark looming form over her, but the shadowy figure quickly made his identity know, squatting down beside her and cupping her face so tenderly she didn’t need sunlight to know who it was.

“Abigail,” Ben breathed, his hands trembling slightly as he cupped the sides of her face. She could have wept with relief at the sound of him, at his touch, and nearly did when his mouth found hers. The kiss was brief but frantic, and before she could truly savor it, he pulled back search her face for any signs of harm. With her eyes having adjusted to the darkness, she could just make out the lines of his face and noted the fear warring with relief in his expression as he asked if she was hurt.

At this, Abigail huffed in amusement, causing Ben’s brows to furrow. Was she hurt? Now that was a loaded question. Loaded like a gun. She held back a snort at the pun and pressed her coat more firmly against her.

“It’s only a scratch,” she replied, smiling faintly with irony, which faded slightly at the sight of his growing frown.

Ben took her in more fully until he noticed her coat pressed against her abdomen. Alert, he said, “Let me see,” already moving her hands aside to get to the coat. She didn’t even make an attempt to fight him on it, which prompted him lift the coat more insistently.

A string of alarmed curses escaped him. Suddenly, she was grateful for the darkness.

“‘Only a scratch,’ she says,” Ben muttered, the trembling in his hands increasing nearly tenfold as they pressed down on her wound. She hissed, and he quickly withdrew his hands, making a pained sound as if he had been the one shot.

It was clear from the stark silence he was staring at his own hands, which were now covered in her blood.

“Son of a bitch!”

Abigail glanced upwards to see Caleb hovering over Ben’s shoulder, face full of horror. She hadn’t realized the other voice had been Caleb’s. She felt foolish for not piecing it together.

“We have to move her,” the whaler remarked, squatting down to assess the situation. “How bad is it?”

“Very,” Ben replied faintly before pressing her coat back over the wound. “There’s still so much blood.”

The pain in his voice was palpable. There was nothing more she wanted in the world than to reach out and tell him everything would be okay, but she had never been a good liar in her life. She reached for his hand and found it clammy, though it was still much warmer against her clammy skin.

Instead, she spoke quietly, “The moving might be tricky, considering any vigorous riding would only
make the wound bleed more. It’s already bled more when I attempted running for half a mile or so before I had to stop. Jostling the bullet any further would only make things worse.”

She rattled off her assessment in a detached voice, which was only assisted by her fatigue. Both men absorbed her words with deepening frowns, with Ben’s grip tightening on her hand with reassurance, for her and himself.

Ben then ordered Caleb to go back to camp and gather some men so they can tend to the dead, and if there were any other injured men, they could be transported back to camp via wagon. His gaze pointedly landed on her before returning to Caleb, who promptly rose to his feet to carry out the task. When asked what he would do, Ben said he would remain with her until Caleb returned with the wagon.

Abigail began to protest, but the words died on her tongue when the major shut her down, “No, don’t even think about it. I’m not leaving you.”

The words “not again” went unspoken, but everyone heard them.

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“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Abigail made an inquisitive noise, lifting her head from where it had been resting against Ben’s shoulder, and looked at him. From this angle, the outline of his clenched jaw was clear, even in the night. She knew he was angry, and he had every right to be, but she wasn’t about to apologize for keeping this from him. It had been in his best interest, and she told him as much.

“What good would it have done if I had told you?” she asked. “You had so much on your mind already, and this would’ve only served as a distraction.” At his silence, she added pointedly, “Am I wrong?”

“I could’ve done something,” he persisted, though he hadn’t denied her point. “I could’ve prevented this. You shouldn’t have been out there.”

“And where precisely would you have me?” she asked incredulously. “Stay behind and disobey a direct order to risk being branded as a deserter? I think we know what the alternative would’ve been if I had.”

Caleb had set out find help back at the camp what felt like hours ago but what was most likely an hour at the most, perhaps less. Both Ben and herself were leaning against the tree, with him shielding her from any harm, whether from mother nature or an enemy soldier. Now if only he could protect her from herself.

He scowled into the darkness, knowing she was right. Her situation had always been precarious. Perhaps he had grown too comfortable with the idea of her being in camp that he hadn’t realized the possibility of her getting pulled into battle could easily become reality. And so it had.

And to have her join Culper on top of it…

“I know you’re upset with me for keeping this from you,” Abigail murmured. She returned to resting her head on his shoulder. His grip tightened around her protectively, his heart skipping a beat as she sighed quietly, content. And then she added quietly, “I am sorry for that.”

Ben pressed his lips together before taking a deep breath to calm himself. Conceding in an argument absolutely went against her nature. She was being almost… passive, and it unsettled him.
“Don’t think that I don’t know what you’re doing.”

Turning, he looked down to her smiling up at him, an alarming combination of sleepy and serene. “You’re trying to provoke me to keep me awake, aren’t you?” she asked knowingly.

“… maybe?” He felt more than heard her chuckle against him, which quickly turned into a small hiss of pain as she shifted. “Don’t move,” he scolded. “Moving is only going to make it worse.”

He doesn’t have to see her to know she rolled her eyes.

*

“Tell me a story,” Abigail asked a little while later, her head nestled comfortably into the crook of his neck.

Ben pressed his lips against her forehead. “What kind of story?”

“Any kind of story,” she said, deferring to him, “if it isn’t a stupid one.”

He huffed in amusement, shaking his head. “That limits my choice in stories then, doesn’t it?”

“I believe in you. It’s time to put your education to good use. And God help you if you go with Shakespeare.”

There was no love lost between Abigail and the bard, so Ben knew that the classics were disqualified from consideration.

When they were younger, he had once compared her with the triple goddess of Irish lore, a symbol that represented the maiden, mother, and crone. Each figure represented a different aspects of femininity: the maiden as enchantment, youth, and energy; the mother as power and stability and the crone as wisdom and compassion. It had been the closest he had come to revealing his feelings to that point, and every time he thought about it, he wanted to smack himself. He had been spectacularly drunk when he told her that but to be fair so had she, which perhaps explained her indignant fixation on incorrectly called a crone.

So mythology and lore were excluded from his options.

Instead, he decided to tell her about a story of a boy who was friends with an incredibly infuriating girl. He grinned as she pinched his thigh in warning but carried on in spite of it. The boy and girl had several arguments over the years, evolving in frequency and tone as they progressed into adolescence.

Every now and then, Abigail interjected, with a comment to correct him or to defend the actions of the nameless girl. Talking helped take their minds from where they were, bringing them back to a time when things were simpler, though unfulfilled.

As the story progressed further, Ben noticed her interjections decreased over time until they ceased altogether. He glanced down and saw that she was beginning to nod off. Alarmed, he shook her gently awake, mindful of her injury, and reminded her to stay awake.

Not long after, this became a frequent occurrence, with Ben giving up on storytelling and focusing his attention on keeping Abigail awake.

“Abigail, stay with me, please. Caleb will be here any minute… Abigail!”
Blearily, she opened her eyes, her gaze a little unfocused. Ben swallowed down his panic and pulled her close to him, bringing himself forward to catch her eyes. “Stay with me. Please.”

“Sorry,” she mumbled. “S’tired.” Her words slurred together, and it was a matter of time before she fell asleep against him.

“Christ Jesus,” Ben murmured, feeling the color drain out of his face. “Just a few more minutes. I swear to you, love. A few more minutes, and Caleb will be here with the wagon.”

Cupping her face, he swallowed hard. “Please. Just stay with me, love.”

Blinking slowly, she stared at him, for a moment not comprehending, but finally nodded her head. “I’m trying.”

“Don’t try, do,” he almost retorted, his fear nearly getting the better of him, but he managed to rein it back and kissed her firmly on the mouth. “Just a few more minutes,” he promised. He repeated the promise until the words nearly lost all meaning.

After what felt like a handful of years taken off his life, a chorus of hooves, whinnying, and rolling wheels drew his attention back to the path. For safe measure, he reached for his closest weapon, shielding her from whoever it was.

Not long after did Caleb appear with two other soldiers, ready to move her. It took some convincing on the whaler’s part, but he finally rose to his feet, allowing them to take her, barely footstep a behind them. The sight of the wagon and the men made him breathe a little easier. She would get the help she needed.

“Don’t leave me,” Abigail murmured once safely inside the wagon, her hand reaching for him.

Ben took her hand and squeezed it, stopping himself from lifting her hand to press to his lips. “I’m not going anywhere,” he swore passionately, keeping his voice low for her ears only. With a quick glance at Caleb, who have him an affirmative nod, he hopped into the wagon and sat beside her, clutching her hand between the both of his, hers having grown much colder in the passing hours since they discovered her.

The major was faintly aware of other wagons moving in the opposite direction, back towards Kerr Farm. His eyes were for Abigail and for her alone as Caleb hopped into the driver’s seat of their wagon, urging the horses into an energetic trot.

If she wasn’t all right after this… Ben would never forgive himself.
Somehow, Abigail managed to stay awake through the journey back to camp, but by the time they stopped the wagon, she was drifting, and when the major hopped out from the wagon to pull her into his arms, her head rolled to the side, unconscious. Panicked, he leaned forward to assess her breathing, and sighed in relief at the sound of her breathing, though it was shallow.

Scooping her up into his arms, Ben rushed her into the infirmary tent, with Caleb hot at his heels, and called out for Dr. Anderson, the camp doctor and Abigail’s mentor.

The good doctor jerked up with a start, and with one look at the three of them, he leapt to his feet and had them lay her down on the nearest cot.

“What happened?” Anderson demanded, tilting back Abigail’s pallid face. A look of recognition lit up his face, and he murmured a brief curse.

“Gunshot wound,” Caleb remarked. “From a redcoat most likely, at the battle.”

“The battle the ended that ended well afternoon?” Anderson noted. He gave them a questioning glance. *And you’re just bringing him to me now?*

The question didn’t need to be spoken, but everyone heard it, especially Ben, whose gaze hadn’t left Abigail’s limp form the moment they had lain her down on the cot.

With a quick glance at the ashen faced major, Caleb answered for them both, describing the conditions of finding her as Abigail had told them on the ride back to camp – that she had managed to crawl her way out of the battlefield and into the woods a little after dusk and had stopped to rest when the pain grew too much for her to keep running.

Anderson continued his assessment during the whaler’s narration, taking in the blood dampened shirt with a frown before reaching for the material and ripping the shirt open just above her navel and down. He prepared to give the rest of the shirt the same treatment when Ben’s hands snaked around his wrists, his grip tightening like a python’s.

The doctor looked up at him with a mixture of alarm and indignation. “What on earth –”

“You don’t want to do that,” Ben remarked, eyes glinting dangerously, his stance protective.

Anderson frowned. “I need to examine the full extent of the wound, to see if there’s potentially other damage.”

Ben was at a loss, something he wasn’t accustomed to. If he didn’t allow the doctor to operate, more harm would come to her, perhaps fatal harm. If he did allow it, then she would be exposed, with one more person knowing her true identity – a person who very well could easily report this to another
officer or to Washington himself.

But his decision was already made for him. He could protect her from everyone else, including Washington himself, if only she lived.

Ben went to open his mouth, but Caleb intercepted for him, apparently having followed to catch his train of thought. He briefed him on the highlights of her situation, keeping it as vague as he possibly could – that she was really a woman who had entered the war of her own volition and was an important asset of intelligence gathering.

As Caleb elaborated, Ben maintained a shrewd eye on the doctor’s face, searching for the slightest sign he would bolt.

To his credit, Anderson didn’t react at all and calmly said, “I’ll need my hands to tend to Williams.” Ben immediately released him and watched as he retrieved the forceps and his other supplies, his gaze torn between Abigail and the doctor’s probing hands.

While the doctor began to operate, Caleb excused himself to check on the status of the other men, hugging the major and whispering to keep him informed about Abigail’s welfare. He knew that Ben would absolutely refuse to leave the tent, even with Anderson in the know. Abigail had asked him not to leave her, and he made a promise he wouldn’t leave her.

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A few days passed since Abigail’s surgery. Having the fortune of not suffering from infection or fever, she began to heal in relative peace.

During these first few days, she remained in the infirmary tent under the combined watchful gaze of Anderson, Ben, and sometimes Caleb when he was able. It was a little unnerving, the amount of scrutiny she was under, but she supposed it was justified, after coming close to dying and all.

Knowing that the major would be busy now that he was back in Washington’s good graces, Caleb didn’t mind taking it upon himself and babysitting – her word, not his, because that was essentially what he was doing. Ordinarily, Abigail would have found this more annoying, but she was much too tired to consider being annoyed, let alone feel that emotion.

When she was deemed healthy enough to no longer be housed in the infirmary tent, the unfortunate situation of her lack of a place to go came to the forefront of her and Ben’s next conversation. To his appalled dismay, she very reluctantly admitted to him that a few months back, many of the soldiers’ tents had been taken to house more officers, leaving the majority to either sleep in the fields or find shelter elsewhere, which was when she mentioned she and a friend would take to the stables whenever they could. She couldn’t bring herself to say his name, but the mere image of Christopher’s boyish grin in her mind’s eye caused her heart to clench.

Outraged, Ben promised he would get to the bottom of this, not only on her behalf but for the other soldiers’ as well. There was so much more that he didn’t know, but she wisely chose to keep her mouth shut. It wouldn’t do much good to tell him, knowing that there had been attempts to make things easier in the past but nothing had come through.

“Meanwhile, you’re going to stay with me,” Ben insisted, raising his eyebrows in anticipation for a challenge, “while you recover. And maybe even after that.”

Sighing, Abigail replied with a mumbled “fine” before allowing herself be escorted by not only Ben but Caleb as well, walking on each side of her nearly like human crutches. She didn’t make a
comment about this either, another uncharacteristic behavior that had the two men sharing concerned glances over her head.

Once inside, they helped ease her down onto Ben’s cot with as much gentleness they could muster. Caleb took a step back as the major sat down by her side, an arm settling over her thighs which were tucked underneath a few layers of blankets.

“If you’re going to tuck me in like a child,” Abigail muttered, shifting a little even under his protective grasp, “I really must protest. Spare some dignity, won’t you?”

Ben’s lips twitched upwards, with Caleb huffing in amusement somewhere behind him. “There’s no dignity lost in being injured,” he assured her and took her hand in his. The warmth of her skin against his was an incredible comfort, the pulse at her wrist steady, strong, alive.

“That’s funny coming from you,” Caleb observed, mischief in his voice, “considering how petulant you were the first time you were cast to the sidelines due to an injury.”

Abigail raised a questioning eyebrow, and Ben shook his head in discouragement before leveling Caleb with an unimpressed look, to which their friend took with an unapologetic shrug.

At her persistent stare, Ben said, “It was a long time ago. Nothing for you to worry about.”

She made a quiet noise of discontent but said nothing more about it, especially as he brushed her hair away from her face with his other hand.

It was then she was told that the men were being gathered for another execution. Since officers were required to attend, Ben would be leaving soon, and Caleb planned to follow. With her injury, she wasn’t required to attend, of which she was immensely relieved. She’d had her fill of executions for a lifetime, the memory of the condemned Trenton soldier still haunting her two years later.

When she asked if it was anyone she knew, both men hesitated before filling her in on what she had missed. With each word, her eyes grew significantly wider. Apparently, Officer Pita was much more than the camp acquired moniker gave him credit for. He and his accomplice, who had been Washington’s personal guard, were set to be executed towards noon for theft and other charges, not for treason. It made sense, to be discreet in the name of France and their enemies.

Afterwards, Caleb would stop by and check on her while Ben attended a meeting with Washington to discuss official business. As much as she loved Caleb, the thought of not seeing Ben for a few more hours nearly made her frown.

“I mean, you could always just skip it,” Abigail suggested hopefully, “and just lie here with me instead?” She wanted to add more – snuggling and the like – but seeing Caleb’s eyebrows nearly disappear into his hairline prevented her from doing so. Barely.

“Are you trying to bribe me?” the major asked with a grin, which completely ruined his attempt at indignation.

She blinked innocently. “Maybe?”

Ben’s grin softened, his next words intended for her ears only, “You don’t have to bribe me. Holding you is a privilege.” He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to the crown of her head. She shut her eyes with a contented sigh.

“You two are sickening,” Caleb observed. “Seriously, I think my teeth are rotting from the sweetness.”
Ben and Abigail shared a brief grin before he leaned back and told her to get some rest, that he would be back before she knew it. She let him go reluctantly but was soon distracted by Caleb leaning over to give her affectionate peck to her cheek, making a playful remark she didn’t have the energy to swat him for before following his friend out of the tent.

And in one blink, then two, Abigail felt herself drifting back into sleep.

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She drifted in and out for the rest of the day. By the time she was fully awake, it was nearly nightfall. With a quick survey of the tent, she knew Ben hadn’t been back since they had left, which was understandable considering military developments. Caleb was supposed to be there when she waked, to keep an eye on her in no small measure of protectiveness from either of them, but apparently, he was shit at his job since as soon as she woke up, she was alone.

Tired of being cot bound, Abigail hauled herself out of the cot, dressing herself to the best of her ability – which isn’t a hell of a lot, considering she didn’t have much beyond the clothes she had been changed into after her stay in the infirmary tent.

With some minor difficulty, she stepped out of the tent and inhaled deep breath of the summer evening air, wincing slightly on the exhale. Giving herself a few moments to steady herself, she took a careful step away from the tent, then two, until she was far enough away to allow the flap to fall closed behind her.

No one paid much attention to her once she had stepped out nor did anyone try to approach her when she progressed further away from the tent. Taking this as a sign, she decided to take a walk around the camp, not the complete circle of course. If she could make it even half way, that would be a miracle.

Slow and steady, she strode past the rows of tents and around the few campfires which lit up the base. It was a lot more quiet than usual, with the men’s normal boisterous loitering transformed into somber murmuring, a difference stemming from the result of the mid-afternoon hanging.

And not just any hanging; a hanging of Colonel Branford and one of Washington’s personal guards, the former of which more startling than the latter. The only reason for this was because the men had grown accustomed to Branford’s ways and presence within the camp. While he was (mostly) despised by the soldiers, there had been a small bloc of soldiers that had warmed up to him or at least kissed up to him to receive special treatment, at least initially.

From what Abigail could see now, whatever Branford’s sentiments were seemed to have spread to his little band of merry followers, which was slowly threatening to blossom into a faction within camp. She needed to keep an eye on the situation whenever she could, recalling having witnessed three abhorrent soldiers of men, Bartholomew, Jasper, and Decory – who she always had issues with from the very beginning of enlistment – within this group as she passed. She maintained a safe distance whenever they were around, especially now.

There wasn’t much she wouldn’t put passed them.

Stopping to catch her breath, she leaned against a stack of crates and shut her eyes. Okay, she had pushed herself more than she should’ve. Maybe it was time to turn back.

She opened her eyes just in time to see two soldiers setting boxed items to the ground before making their way back from where they came. Curious, she observed the pair make the rounds, disappearing with empty arms and returning with boxes to set on the ground next to the others before disappearing...
again. Some of the items looked familiar, though. A pocket watch, a cap, some playing cards, a... copy of A Treatise of Military Discipline.

“Do you mind some company?” she asked lowly as soon as she approached the boy. She noted one of the manuals opened in his lap and smiled. None of the other enlistees seemed to be particularly bothered with them, especially the younger and middle-aged groups.

Jumping slightly, the boy peered up startled only to smile in relief. “No, not at all. You can have the top if you’d like. I’m nervous about rolling off and falling onto my face.”

Abigail grinned and set her satchel on the bed to stake her claim. “Well, if I do roll off, feel obliged to use me as a rug when you rise in the morning.”

His laugh was muffled by the roaring laughter from the other side of the cabin. She couldn’t help but jump a little at just how loud the others were and hoped no one would notice. “You seem like the quiet sort. I’d prefer your company over those lot,” he remarked lowly for her ears only. “My name’s Christopher. Christopher Morgan.” He extended his hand out to her.

These were boxes of discarded items, discarded items of fallen soldiers.

She slipped a hand inside her trouser pocket, feeling the warm press of the metal chain digging into the palm of her hand as she tightened her grip. His locket felt heavy inside her pocket.

Feeling sick and growing several shades paler, she stared as the soldiers continued gathering his belongings as well as the others who had fallen at the battlefield, leaning more heavily against the stack of crates beside her, suddenly dizzy.

A touch that felt suspiciously like fingers brushed along her arm, but she ignored it, transfixed by the sight in front of her. It wasn’t until the touch turned into an insisting grip did she finally lift her gaze to acknowledge the offending party, and her breath caught in her throat when she saw Ben staring down at her.

“Now, I don’t think this is what doctors refer to as bedrest,” he commented dryly, his expression hardened with severe disapproval.

She met his gaze levelly, undeterred by his disapproving gaze. “I just needed some fresh air and just needed to move around a little,” she confessed, not entirely apologetic. “I was going to head back, I was. But then I saw this…”

As she trailed off, the major looked in the direction of where she had been staring, an expression of recognition quickly lighting his face. The disapproval was quickly replaced by understanding and sympathy.

“Come on,” he spoke quietly, softening his grip and tone, “you really shouldn’t be on your feet right now.”

Ben guided her in the direction of the tent while they talked quietly along the way, with him carrying most of the conversation. He apologized for not being there when she woke up. Before she could dismiss his apology, he didn’t give her the chance, instead explaining he had more business to discuss with Washington than he had originally anticipated.

By the time he had managed to make his way back to her, it was only to discover she was gone. With another year or three taken off his life due to fright, he had immediately searched the camp for her until he found her where she had been resting. She gave him a sheepish look and apologized, regretful for having sent him into a fright not once but twice in the past seventy-two hours.
Caught up in the tumultuous waves of guilt, Abigail hadn’t paid any attention to when they were going, so when they walked through the rows of tents and passed his tent, she hadn’t thought anything of it. It wasn’t until they stepped into the woods did it give her pause.

She gave him a questioning look, to which he replied, “You said you needed air, so I thought there would be no place better here.” He gestured to their surroundings before dropping them to his side. “Under supervision, of course,” he added.

Abigail held back a smile at his poor attempt of subtlety and walked over to a fallen log. She nudged it lightly with her foot, assessing the sturdiness of it, and when it didn’t budged, she began to ease herself down into her newly acquired seat, with Ben quick to come to her aid. He sat down beside her, whether it was a protective stance or to give her someone to help steady her was anyone’s guess.

More than likely, it was both.

“When I saw what they were doing, with the boxes,” she began softly, “I saw something that belonged to someone... someone who’s gone now.”

Abigail removed the locket from her pocket and held it in her hands, turning it over gingerly in between her hands. She kept it close to her before opening her hands so that Ben could have a better look. “This belonged to my friend Christopher. Don’t worry. I didn’t steal it so you don’t have to worry about hanging me for theft.” The comment sounded dry and hollow and didn’t sound as amusing as it had in her head.

Ben wasn’t amused. He frowned. “That’s not even remotely funny.”

Nodding, she grimaced slightly. “No, I don’t suppose it is.”

Eventually, she began to tell him about Christopher, who he was, and how much he had helped her ever since their enlistment. He had been the younger brother she had never had, so young and kind and loyal and sweet.

When she began to tell him how he died, her throat constricted. She felt like she couldn’t breathe. Ben shifted closer to wrap his arm around her, his thigh pressed against hers. The contact steadied her, calming her enough to finish. His grip tightened around her when she described how he died, so suddenly and callously beside her.

When she told him what her friend had told her, about her not being able to save him, the major remarked that he was right, that there was nothing she could have done to help him, more than she already had by taking the locket as she had promised Christopher she would. She knew that, both at the time and now, but that didn’t stop her from feeling guilty that she was alive and he wasn’t, but she kept those thoughts to herself.

Somehow sensing her thoughts, Ben pulled her closer, pressing his face against the top of her head. “I know what you’re going through. There’s nothing that can be said to make what you’re going through any easier. It gets better in time though, dealing with it. All you can really do is try to live your best day to day. And let the people around you help you when you need it.”

She stifled a groan. She should’ve known he would throw that last part in. With a quiet sigh, she attempted to hide her face against his shoulder when he suddenly pulled back, forcing her to meet his gaze.

“All this time,” Ben began, his gaze troubled and tender, “you have taken care of me, even if it meant risking yourself.” He hooked a finger underneath her chin to coax her gaze upwards when he
sensed she considering looking away. “When will you let me take care of you?”

“Ben…” she started tiredly but he shook his head.

“We’re heading back, and you’re going to rest.” Rising to his feet, he turned and extended his hand towards her. “This time, I’ll be there to make sure you actually do.”

He had that stubborn glint in his eye. In all the years she had known him, she knew there was no arguing with that look, even from her.

Slipping her hand inside his, Abigail let herself be pulled up from the log and leaned into him as he led her back.

With his arms around her a little while later, they lied together on his cot. It was a rather snug fit, but neither of them didn’t appear bothered by it. She insisted on curling against him, and he allowed it but only as it didn’t disturb her wound. There was so much more they needed to talk about, but the talking could wait until morning.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Chapter takes place during 3x02

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail woke slowly. It wasn’t anything in particular that stirred her, no disturbance from the outside world which was what usually the cause. No, it was one of those moments when one just happened to slip back into consciousness for no outright reason. This should have been more vexing, but she found herself much too comfortable to complain.

Turning her head to the direction of the quiet sounds of her bed partner, she found herself smiling at Ben’s peaceful, sleeping face, his head barely inches away from her own on their shared pillow. His arm was warm where it rested along her rib cage, heavy but in a comforting way, an act that brought her side more firmly against him.

The major was curled protectively against her, blocking her from view from the tent’s entrance, which she suspected was a purposeful maneuver. Still, she snuggled further into his warmth and smiled to herself as his grip tightened instinctively. Even asleep he was determined to protect her.

He looked so peaceful she wanted to press a kiss to his cheek but feared waking him. He had always been a light sleeper, even when met with exhaustion.

It had been roughly a week since their conversation about her divorce. She didn’t know what made her think of it now, other than lying in the arms of the man she… cared for, had always cared for, for as long as she could remember. Of course, she had wished she had told him sooner, but her reasons for not having done so earlier had been valid and still remained so.

Thankfully, she hadn’t needed to fully recount her reasoning.

“I wanted to tell you,” Abigail began, “That’s what I was trying to tell you, before we were interrupted. And then there was everything that happened, afterwards…”

She attempted to explain, about why she hadn’t told him to begin with, but Ben quickly interjected, “Caleb already explained, though he didn’t say much. He was very reluctant to break your trust.”

She wasn’t angry with Caleb for telling Ben. In fact, she was quite relieved, that at least while everything else had happened, at least he knew. Now came the conversation that was long overdue.

“Maybe I don’t have to explain how, but I should still explain why,” Abigail continued, folding her hands carefully across her lap. She was in his cot, sitting up despite his many protests. This wasn’t a conversation where she could let herself lie flat on her back, gunshot wound notwithstanding.

And so she told him. Everything. She told him why she had to do it, that she had done it for them, so that they could finally have a real chance. When the war was over, they could finally start a life together, the life they should have had without circumstance or other people coming between them. Inside her heart, she knew she had made the right decision and perhaps she had known it long...
before the decision had been made. It was the right thing to do, not just in the sense of morality but for them, for their future.

She wasn’t accustomed to making herself so vulnerable. It wasn’t a feeling she fancied very much, but if she wanted to do this, she had to be completely willing to allow herself to lay her heart on the table, no matter the consequences.

Though she stopped herself short from uttering those three little words aloud. She wasn’t quite that brave enough for that yet.

Abigail paused to catch her breath, fighting the urge to resist his gaze. Ben stared back at her, a mixture of several emotions surging across his face.

After a prolonged silence, Ben spoke softly, “What you’ve just described... There’s nothing that I want more.” He crossed the short distance between them to kneel down beside her next to the cot, his hands covering hers. “It’s something worth fighting for – God only knows how long I’ve...” He trailed off with a half choked laugh, prompting a soft smile from her. “But I think we’ve waited long enough.”

With such gentleness, he reached over to cup her face, his expression so tender it nearly made her breath hitch. She felt his thumb lightly graze her lower lip, and that time her breath did hitch quietly in the back of her throat.

She wasn’t sure who leaned in first, but soon their mouths found each other in a soft but lingering kiss. She felt his thumb lightly graze her lower lip, and that time her breath did hitch quietly in the back of her throat.

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She wasn’t sure who leaned in first, but soon their mouths found each other in a soft but lingering kiss. She settled her hands along the nape of his neck, steadying herself before drawing him closer.

They had shared kisses before, but this was the first time they weren’t shackled by anything else – near death experiences, arguments, or even husbands, or rather ex-husbands as the papers demonstrated.

Abigail could still feel that kiss, warming her straight down to her toes. She nestled more closely to the man beside her, content and happy. There wasn’t anything holding them back now, aside from the obvious restraints placed on them by her situation.

But knowing there wasn’t anything else to prevent them from being together, for the first time in a long time, she felt a blossoming sensation inside her chest. Hope.

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It was barely dawn when Ben woke, stirring them both as he rose to prepare for the day. There was much work to be done and meetings to be had. Abigail didn’t envy his position and observed him from his cot. While she was healing, there wasn’t much for her to do duty-wise, so she was able to lie back and pose the occasional comment. Perhaps getting shot and nearly dying did pose some benefits.

She didn’t realize she voiced the thought aloud when she met his steely glare, which she easily dismissed as she drifted back to sleep.

Unfortunately, the rest of her day didn’t last this way. By the time she woke again, it was near mid-morning. She could hear the bustling of camp activity outside the tent walls and felt a strong yearning to join them, having been cooped up for nearly two weeks now.

Was it possible to grow weary from restlessness? Now that was a conundrum.

With her decision half made for her, Abigail rose to her feet and got herself ready. Her strength had
returned enough that she found dressing to provide her no great difficulty, though it took her much longer than it ordinarily would have.

The desire for activity was far too great for her to ignore. Purposefully ignoring Ben’s adamant insistence she could practically hear at the back of her mind, she walked out of his tent and headed straight for the infirmary tent.

She hoped to regain her position as his assistant, but from what she had been told, Anderson now knew her identity. It had to be done, if he had intended to save her life. As the weeks went on, there had been no mention of this reveal to anyone, no whispering about the camp that could’ve reached their ears. It had taken a week of quiet observation, but she knew she could trust the doctor.

Still, with this in mind, the encounter remained a bit awkward when coming face to face with Anderson. However, he didn’t appear to act as if anything was amiss, only making a wry comment about her being up and about when she should be recuperating.

“If by ‘recuperating’ you mean to coop me up like a hen, then I believe I’ve recuperated quite nicely,” Abigail remarked dryly, once again her mouth getting the best over her head. There was nothing to fear, seeing his lips twitch faintly upwards at the retort, and she knew her secret was safe with him.

Grateful for his discretion, she then asked if he needed any assistance. Her reasoning was twofold: first, she was indeed growing stir crazy and needed to do something productive and secondly, it only made sense to be physically active if she wanted to get better faster. She used both of these reasons to appeal to his medical nature, vaguely worried he would insist otherwise.

“The most common medical opinion would be to discourage any type of physical activity until your wound was safely healed,” Anderson commented, looking her over with an assessing eye, “but I suppose I can’t ignore that logic.”

He agreed to let her come back to work with him on a few conditions: that the work would not be physically strenuous and if she felt any ill effects of any kind, she would inform him. She agreed instantly, eager to be of use once again.

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Over the course of the next few days, Abigail was able to establish a balance between working with Anderson and recovery. Having grown familiar with Ben’s routine, she found a way to work around it but always making sure she returned to the tent in time for whenever he returned to check in on her, a very challenging task in itself. So far she had managed it surprisingly well.

During these times, Caleb dropped in and provided them with Culper updates after asking how she was faring. With each update, Abigail grew increasingly concerned about Abe and the challenges he was facing. It was a wonder he hadn’t been discovered before, and now it sounded as if his position was compromised.

From the looks of it, the whaler had been carrying out more and more courier duties within the past few days, if not the last couple of weeks. Courier duties she had initially volunteered to share with him, but Caleb was now bearing the brunt of the work. Guilt settled in the pit of her stomach, as foolish as it was. Of course, she hadn’t planned on getting shot, but she still felt guilty all the same.

Just the thought of performing courier duties, doing something active and giving Caleb a hand, gave her the very goal she needed to get better faster. Even more so, she wanted to see Abe was all right with her own eyes, but she knew she didn’t have the strength for that just yet. But still, this provided
her with a tangible goal, one she always kept in mind as she snuck out from Ben’s tent to assist Anderson.

Her secret trips to and from the infirmary tent proved to be rather beneficial for more reasons than one. Primarily, the walking did wonders for her health, both physical and mental state of being, the latter she found even more important. But perhaps even more importantly, it helped reestablish herself among the soldiers, reconnecting with acquaintances she had met through Christopher and on her own.

It was a good idea to revisit these social channels. They were the very reason of how she had learned of Benedict Arnold returning to camp.

To say Abigail had never been a great admirer of the man would have been putting it lightly. More often than not, she had actively despised him, even though it was mostly on hearsay rumors, at least according to Ben when she had originally brought up her issues with Arnold.

However, the problem she had taken with that particular term was that the best way to understand a man’s character was through the eyes of others and how they viewed him. Although not the perfect measure to assess a person’s true nature – because there were a great deal amount of flaws by solely relying on group opinion – it did provide an indication of what the man was like without meeting him herself.

And by all accounts in the last year, she hadn’t heard one kind word from any of the soldiers, not one. Even in group settings when discussing him, there had not been one soldier willing to come to the man’s defense. That had to mean something, right?

Maybe she wasn’t being completely fair in her assessment of him. It was possible she could’ve been asking the wrong people and not getting to the heart of the matter. There was a possibility she had it all wrong.

But there was also the possibility that pigs could sprout wings and fly out of Arnold’s arse as well, but it was highly unlikely.

Whenever she caught a glimpse of the proud general’s powerful stature, she did her best to conceal herself and avoid him, whether it meant nearly knocking the wind out of her by ducking behind a pile of ammunition or simply turning her back on him altogether.

Unable to let well enough alone, she took it upon herself to conduct some more field research between her shifts with Anderson, to learn all that she could about the man and general Benedict Arnold. She didn’t dare risk asking any officers herself, and meeting Arnold was absolutely out of the question. That only left her with making inquiries of the soldiers again, which, yes, limited her pool of inquiries, but it was the best she could manage under the circumstances.

It was apparent from the soldiers she spoke with that none of their opinions of Arnold had changed much in the past year. In fact, if any change was present, it was their opinions only became more negative. Apparently, a few of them had word from friends stationed in Philadelphia, where rumors about Arnold was gradually gaining momentum. His arrogance and entitlement were increasingly getting the better of him, causing him to become more alienated within the Philadelphia social scene, both military and society.

Unfortunately, there was nothing Abigail could do with this new information. As much as she loathed to admit it, the information did carry the burden of being labeled as hearsay. Without anything tangible to prove these rumors true, there was nothing she could do with it. However, that wasn’t going to stop her from sharing her concerns with Ben, even if it led to an argument. The more
important question that needed answering was just how she would go about broaching the topic.

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Another one of Anderson’s conditions to accepting her back had been an unspoken one, though she really should have anticipated it. With each day she arrived to assist him, the doctor would examine her, redressing her wound and checking for any signs of infection or inflammation. She had no qualms about this condition, acknowledging this was very much for her benefit.

The problem only made itself known days later. They had been too busy tending to other wounded soldiers and officers for Anderson to examine her, and by the time she had returned to Ben’s tent, she had thought he had long forgot. However, at the sound of the knock outside the tent had drawn to move back the flap to see the doctor standing there, with his bag ready and walked in without being invited inside to begin the examination, which was fine.

Fine right up until the good doctor was leaving the tent just as Ben was returning. Abigail heard the exchange from inside, more specifically hearing Anderson comment, “Williams is doing remarkably well. It’s a great help that she’s been getting herself up and about camp these last few days.”

She glared at the shadow of the man’s retreating form. There was no way he hadn’t done that purposefully.

With a quiet sigh, the blonde braced herself for the major’s ire, settling down on the cot just in time as Ben pushed back the tent flap and entered, gazing at her pointedly.

“What have you been up to?” he asked.

Abigail blinked innocently. “I haven’t the faintest idea what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, I’m sure you don’t,” he remarked dryly, letting the flap fall shut behind him. He pulled out the chair from his desk and sat down to face her, as if getting ready to interrogate a wayward soldier. Though considering the circumstances, that was probably an apt description.

Relenting the charade, Abigail admitted to having gone to Anderson and asking for her position back. It gave her something to do, plus a reason get exercise if she ever wanted to get back on her feet.

As expected, he didn’t react well to this, claiming it had more to do with her lying to him than her not resting. She then countered back with if she hadn’t lied to him, would he have been upset with her working then, recalling that the last time he had found her walking around camp he hadn’t been happy.

“If you hadn’t lied to me, I wouldn’t be upset,” he remarked, eyes narrowing into near slits when she snorted.

“Look who’s lying now,” Abigail retorted, raising a challenging brow. He opened and closed his mouth repeatedly like an angry fish before ultimately pressing his lips together in a tight, unhappy line.

Abigail sighed, rubbing her eyes tiredly. “I didn’t wish to start an argument with you. I just… knew you wouldn’t like it if I told you about my plans. I thought it would be for the best if I didn’t tell you.” She offered him a small, tentative smile, “I am sorry for that, for lying to you, but I’m not sorry for why I did it.”

“I understand why you did it,” he admitted reluctantly, “but it doesn’t mean I like it. I don’t want you
to push yourself too hard because you feel as if you need to prove something.”

Abigail shook her head. “I’m not trying to prove anything. It’s helping me. Walking around camp and helping Anderson is helping me. I’m getting stronger every day.”

As if to prove her point, she shifted her weight so that her feet rested on the floor. Before he could gear himself up to protest, she managed to get herself to her feet and walked over towards him, placing a hand on his shoulder before easing herself down onto his lap.

“See?” Abigail asked cheerfully. “Progress.”

Ben frowned, but she could see his stubbornness easing slightly. Another sign of progress. “I just don’t want you taking unnecessary risks.” He wrapped his arms securely around her waist, drawing her closer to him so that she wouldn’t fall. A soft smile tugged at his lips once he felt her nestle closer to him. “I want you safe. Is that so wrong?”

“No, it isn’t.” Abigail replied, her fingertips touching his jaw. She wanted to tell him that she wasn’t a fragile doll either, but given the circumstances, the claim wasn’t substantiated by much. Instead, she leaned forward and pressed her mouth to his, kissing him gently until his frown faded into a soft smile.

The information about Arnold could wait. For now.

Chapter End Notes

Aw, look at these two learning to communicate effectively!

Thank you so much for all of the kudos, bookmarks, comments, and subs! All of you wonderful lovelies make my day! <3
Over the course of the next two weeks, several things happened at once.

With Caleb’s news from Townsend that the camp’s Reverend Worthington was in fact spying for the British, a plan had been set in motion for Ben to deal with him in a discreet manner, which of course had been approved by Washington himself.

Ben hadn’t been forthcoming with Abigail on just what kind of manner that would be, but from just the tension radiating from him, she had known Washington had given him permission to kill Worthington. It would have to be as quietly done as possible, staged as an accident of some sort to avoid suspicion, but it was without certain that Reverend Worthington would meet the creator who he often spoke for.

Among the many changes occurring in the camp, there was also the integration of women, many of whom were the wives and lovers of the soldiers. Washington had given permission for women to be join the camp but under very strict stipulations.

First, they were assigned to reside just outside the camp and weren’t allowed to step foot outside those boundaries unless under official orders. Secondly, if they were to reside in camp, they were to earn their keep, which meant performing tasks which kept the camp functioning – cooking, washing, making new uniforms, and other such tasks.

Abigail had a rather strong opinion on this second stipulation, considering how many of these tasks had originally been performed by the soldiers themselves. She hated to think the women’s presence would be taken advantage of, but apparently, this worry was a little too late.

That didn’t prevent her from suggesting the women should be paid for their efforts to Ben every chance she was able, even if the conversation had nothing to do with that particular topic. When he asked if she would ever let this go, she always responded with, “When they start getting paid, I will.”

And so they were but very meagerly. The only reason she hadn’t pushed the issue any further was the fact the army wasn’t getting much money from the Congress in the first place. So she didn’t have much of a choice to let bygones be bygones. For now.

A few of the single women brought into camp found alternate paths to augment their meager salaries, seeking the physical comfort and pleasure from soldiers for a discounted price. The higher the rank, the higher the price, which could hardly be blamed.

Abigail discovered this growing trend for herself when she and Caleb had been passing through the women’s camp on their way to discussing courier duties in a more remote location. Caleb had stopped to examine a trinket an older woman was selling when Abigail herself had been approached.
by a younger woman. She hadn’t been dressed as scantily clad as what most had been described to her in the past, but seeing as how it had been early morning with the wind’s crisp chill, there hadn’t been much sense in that.

“Care to show a girl a good time?” the woman had purred, batting her eyelashes suggestively. She tried pressing herself against her, but Abigail was quick to put out her arms to prevent her for stepping any closer.

“No, thank you,” Abigail murmured, her face aflame. “Perhaps you can find a man more suitable for your, erm, activities.”

“Playing hard to get,” the woman remarked, her grin growing more salacious. “How adorable.” She reached up a hand and began to stroke the blonde’s face. “And such a pretty face, too. I normally don’t do this, but the first round is on me.”

Abigail’s eyes widened. “Um…”

The woman pressed further, taking advantage of her stunned immobility. “You won’t find a better offer.”

When she began to reach between Abigail’s legs, the blonde leapt back with a squawk, which prompted Caleb to return to her side and help ease her out of the woman’s clutches, checking to make sure she was all right once they were on their way with a concerned frown.

“Thank you,” Abigail murmured as they walked away briskly, purposefully ignoring the woman’s pouting expression as they made their escape. Her face was still burning a bright scarlet.

“What can I say,” Caleb replied, lips quirking into a smile, “except that you’re welcome.”

After that little misadventure, Abigail did her best to avoid the women’s camp.

With her job with Anderson nearly fully reinstated coupled with her recovery, she had her hands full. More soldiers arrived who needed tending to along with the gathering of more herbs required in Anderson’s medicines, the ones that could be readily located at least. So much of her time was occupied by the bustle that she had nearly forgotten about the Worthington plot.

That was until Abigail spotted Ben observing the reverend in camp. It didn’t take her long to figure out what would come next.

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“Reverend,” Ben greeted as he made his approach. Worthington looked up, a bit taken aback before settling into brief smile. “Good morning.”

“Ah, Benjamin,” was all he received in return as he continued walking forward, adjusting his satchel on his shoulder – the sight not escaping the major’s notice.

Falling into step with him, Ben inquired, “Will you be traveling along with the camp?”

The reverend’s footing faltered briefly as he paused, an odd reaction to such an innocent question, but Ben knew precisely why he would act in such a manner. After a brief moment, the reverend responded, “No, no. I’m off to Fairfield.”

“What, New Jersey?”
Worthington nodded. “Yeah, the good Reverend Martin has been ministering my home church in my stead. He hasn’t been paid in quite some time. Riding out after the morning benediction to see it done.”

Ben frowned. “That means you’ll be crossing through no man’s land. That’s far too dangerous.”

The reverend insisted, his tone a little too hard, “I can’t abandon my duties because the road is rough.”

“Reverend, you haven’t read the scouting reports,” the major insisted right back. “Tory cowboys hunt for men traveling alone. Let me send an escort along with you.”

Worthington shook his head in refusal. “I’ve made the trip before, my son.” Reaching over, he clasped his shoulder, an attempt to reassure him. “Don’t worry. I’ll be back before the camp reaches Middle Brook.”

The reverend released him and headed in the direction of the soldiers waiting for the benediction. Ben stared after him, barely concealing his grim determination. After a moment or two of observing the reverend and his flock before heading in the direction of his own tent. He didn’t have long to change into his civilian clothes before Worthington would set off.

The reverend may have made the trip before as he had claimed, but he had no way of knowing that this trip would be his last.

As the major prepared himself for the mission, another soldier prepared herself for the journey. Having moved a bit closer to better overhear the conversation, it hadn’t taken long for Abigail to figure out what Ben had planned. The reverend’s chosen path provided the perfect opportunity to eliminate him. What better way to stage an accident than in no man’s territory? It would be next to impossible for the reverend’s murder to come back to Ben, let alone back to Washington’s orders. Still, it would provide her with a world of comfort if she could see to Ben’s safety for herself. With this in mind, she had causally grabbed the first pair of clean civilian clothing she could find, swiping them off the nearest clothes line and slipping inside the infirmary tent to change, where there was oddly enough no patients or Anderson to be seen.

With her uniform stuffed into a bag, she carefully tucked it away underneath a crowded workbench, knowing Anderson wouldn’t find it in all of his clutter. It was a miracle he was able to find any of his basic instruments at all with his lack of organizational skills. Perhaps that was the reason he kept her around.

Shaking her head to clear her mind, Abigail returned to her back to grab her father’s pistol and pocketed it. It was the one consistent weapon she kept with her at all times, and the rest of hers remained in Ben’s tent. And that wasn’t an option for her at the moment.

Just as she slipped out of the tent, the blonde spotted the reverend making his way towards the forest, unawares that the major was keeping his distance in his pursuit. She counted to herself, calculating enough distance just as he had done before she followed.

Ben would be furious once he found her out, but then again, was that anything new?

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Ben followed Worthington further into the woods, unknowing that Abigail wasn’t much further behind him. It was a miracle he that he hadn’t, considering his experience and expertise, but she wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth by questioning her blessing.
Instead, she remained hidden in the trees, only stepping beyond them when she absolutely had to in her pursuit. Thankfully, those moments were few and far between.

It wasn’t much longer until she brought herself to a halt, watching Ben watch Reverend Worthington leaving a note at a dead drop. She smothered down an angry noise but barely. How could a man of the cloth commit such an act of betrayal?

Apparently she was not alone in her thoughts as the major stepped out from the trees, saying, “You’ve strayed from the path, Reverend.”

Startled, Worthington rose to his feet. “Benjamin. What are you doing here?” He looked as if he might make a break for it but ultimately reconsidered, seeing as he was being held at gunpoint.

“We received word that you were a traitor,” Ben remarked as he approached him, his grip on the rifle steady and ever present, “but now I have the proof.”

“Proof?” the reverend asked, forced confusion coloring both expression and tone. Abigail barely stopped herself from rolling her eyes.

“Oh, no, this… this isn’t what… let me, let me explain,” he continued, voice pitching higher in his poor attempt of sincerity.

Not buying it, Ben demanded, “Explain what? How you were paid by Royal Governor Tyron and Mayor Matthews to spy on our camp?”

The reverend shook his head. “No.”

Ben raised his eyebrows. “No? Well, perhaps the contents of that letter,” he gestured with a nod and a lift of the gun towards the letter the good reverend had carefully concealed underneath the pile of leaves near a rotting tree log, “can clear things up, eh? Why not read it to me?”

Slowly, Worthington dropped to his knees to retrieve the letter and took his time rising to his feet. He brushed the dirt from the letter and smoothed out the creases but had yet to open it. It seemed he was putting off reading its contents for as long as he possibly could.

Sensing this was the case, the major pressed forward, demanding through gritted teeth, “Read. The. Letter.”

Stuttering, the reverend incredibly reluctantly read the letter’s contents, revealing Washington’s movements to the British. He admitted to writing of the new location of the main camp as Middle Brook, which was near the Bridgewater Township.

When he finished, Ben demanded to know why, why he had betrayed them. The traditional motives – money, politics, simple greed – felt too light in the act of his betrayal, and coming from a man who had appeared nothing but a good man, there had to be something else lying beyond any material gain.

“As an act of grace,” Worthington admitted quietly, dropping the confused, innocent act as soon as he had finished reading his letter aloud. It was replaced by a resigned weariness, one that Abigail had witnessed far too often in the camp among the soldiers. “I see their agony while I pray for their deliverance.” His lips pressed into a sudden sneer. “Washington is a fool.”

His sentence barely made it out of his mouth before Ben fired the rifle. The bullet struck the man with a thunderous sound, so thunderous it rocked Abigail to her core. Instinctively, she clutched at her stomach, a flash of a blistering summer sun and her blood soaked hand entering her mind at the
mere sound. It had been a little over two months since she had last heard such a sound, the last time being on a body laden field of Kerr Farm.

Glancing down, she removed her hand, half expecting to find the wound open and bleeding, but all that remained was a scar underneath the rough cloth of her shirt – a long, deep, nasty looking reminder of that horrid day. A physical reminder of who she had lost and what it had nearly cost her.

But it was also a reminder of the very fact she survived, that she still lived. A reminder to not take anything for granted.

Distracted by her overwhelming thoughts, Abigail hadn’t registered the shocked expression on Worthington’s face at the shot nor had she heard the fall of his body once he collapsed to the ground, dead.

It wasn’t until Ben lower his rifle to the ground to move Worthington’s body to the river did she finally regain her senses. Instead of following him to the riverbank, she remained in the woods, keeping an eye on him from the underbrush. She wouldn’t reveal herself until he returned safely onshore. Besides, it was a better option to remain where she was, so she could keep an eye out for any strange persons who may happen to come across him, enemy or no.

That was until a tall, strange man approached the river’s edge, with his gun drawn. Breath catching in her throat, she wanted desperately to call out to Ben, to warn him, but the stranger did that for her. “Now that’s no way to treat a man of God.”

Fear gripping her heart, Abigail watched helplessly as Ben turned slowly to face the stranger, his expression carefully blank as he addressed him. As it turned out, the stranger was Worthington’s contact who had arrived to collect his information from the dead drop. Not only was he Worthington’s contact, but he had also been the redcoat who had arrived to warn Washington of the civilian’s alleged threat to the commander-in-chief, the very redcoat who had actually been a spy all along. Gamble was his name, Lieutenant Gamble.

The lieutenant than ordered for him to turn around and keep his hands raised to where he could see them. Oh God. Was he intending to execute him right there, right in front of her?

Sick with terror, she hurriedly grabbed her father’s pistol from the inside of her coat. She knew it wasn’t a smart option, but it was her only option. She wasn’t going to let Ben die, not when there was someone she could do to prevent it, no matter how small that chance was.

Unable to look away, she lifted her pistol and aimed at Gamble, keeping her gaze focused on him even after Ben had already turned his back to him upon his request. She readied herself to shoot him square in the back, if not the head, whatever came first.

But instead of raising his gun to shoot him, Gamble brought down the blunt end of his musket into the base of Ben’s skull, knocking him unconscious into the water.

Abigail stood there, stock-still and breathless as Gamble retrieved his body, assessing her options. Whatever Gamble’s intentions were, he intended for Ben to remain alive, of that much she was certain. Wherever he took him, she knew she had to follow, no matter how far and long it took her to trail them.

The opportunity would present itself for her to intervene, and when it came, there wouldn’t be any time for hesitation.

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By the time the major woke, nightfall had settled on the earth. Head pounding with a fury, he tried to ease himself up, only to find himself incapable of movement. Blinking, his gaze adjusted enough, thanks to the crackling firelight, to realize that he had been bound and slung over a horse – Gamble’s no doubt.

“Ah, he wakes!” exclaimed the man in question with mock joviality. Turning his head in the direction of the voice, Ben watched as he settled his bowl and spoon onto the log beside him. “Hungry?” He grinned provokingly, but Ben chose to ignore it.

“Where are we?” Ben demanded, unfamiliar with their surroundings. They were still in the woods, that much he was aware, but where exactly they were was difficult to determine.

“You’re on your way to meet Major André,” Gamble remarked. “That’s the least you could do for me, seeing that you fouled my mission.”

“I won’t talk,” Ben insisted. “You might as well kill me now.”

The lieutenant grinned wolfishly. “Oh, I’d love to. Give you a second smile like I did for your old man. Sackett, was it?”

The memory of Mr. Sackett still haunted him to that very moment. His loss would forever be felt by him, a loss that could have easily been prevented. As much as the memory of the man still cut into his heart, he couldn’t let himself be too affected by Gamble’s provocation.

A shadow not too far from where Gamble sat immediately seized Ben away from his thoughts. He wasn’t sure if it was a figment of his imagination or if there had been something there. As the shadow moved again, coming closer, his gaze focused on it. He wasn’t hallucinating then. Now was the shadow friend or foe?

“But I got chastised, you see,” Gamble continued, unaware of Ben’s shifting attentions, “Won’t make the same mistake twice.”

The closer the figure came, the more easily Ben was able to make out their features. The firelight provided him with a better glimpse. Realization dawned on him with nearly enough force of a musket to the back of his head. He knew exactly who it was.

Abigail brought her finger to her lips, eyes widening in warning. Ben pressed his lips together firmly, determined to keep her safety his priority while his anger warred with his senses. Why was she making a habit of risking herself?

“But I got chastised, you see,” Gamble continued, unaware of Ben’s shifting attentions, “Won’t make the same mistake twice.”

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“Though after the major gets done with you,” Gamble continued, “I’ll expect he’ll have me see you vanished.”

She crept closer, close enough that she was now in physical danger with her proximity. Ben gritted his teeth in frustration and began an attempt to remove the rope from his wrists, hoping this would distract the man enough to keep him from looking over his shoulder as Abigail stealthily retrieved his abandoned musket and rose to her feet.

“After all, you’re not in uniform, so the rules are off the table.” Those were the last words that came from Gamble’s mouth before Abigail slammed the butt plate into the base of his skull with a loud crack with all of her strength.

The British officer collapsed the ground with a low grunt. Abigail didn’t linger to witness the effects of the assault, instead dropping the musket to rush to Ben’s side. She fished out a blade, one she must have swiped from Anderson no doubt.
“Are you okay?” she asked breathlessly, her hands immediately setting to work on his binds.

“What are you doing here?” Ben demanded, his voice near choking on his anger and disbelief.

Abigail huffed. “What does it look like?” Her hands shook as the blade cut into the rope, which had loosened slightly from his earlier efforts. Knowing they didn’t have enough time for it, he had her put the blade away and maneuvered himself to get into a (mostly) sitting position on the saddle.

“Can you pull yourself up?” he demanded urgently, throwing a cursory glance over his shoulder. Gamble remained prostrate but was slowly stirring.

Abigail nodded hastily, reaching for the pommel and ungracefully pulling herself into the saddle. She had only barely managed to pull herself up behind Ben when he kicked the horse into a gallop, barreling deeper into the woods. Knowing the ruthlessness of the man they had just abandoned, it was clear that wouldn’t be the last they saw of him.

Chapter End Notes

A big thank you to everyone who comments, gives kudos, subscribes, and bookmarks! You're all wonderful! I hope you continue to enjoy it! I know I'm enjoying writing it <3
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

I feel like a broken record, but I have to say thank you all again for your support of this fic! It really means so much to me! You all give me the motivation and inspiration to keep on writing and posting. I hope you enjoy the chapter! <3

This chapter takes place during 3x04.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Galloping at a near breakneck pace through the woods, the major pushed the horse as far as he dared, with Abigail’s fingers digging into the material of his brown tweed jacket, her arms wrapped around his waist to keep from falling over.

Above them, the sky rapidly transformed into a whirlwind of sound, quite literally. Rumbling thunder clapped above them and the winds picked up speed, even as they raced through the trees. If it weren’t night, she suspected the sky would have been a rapidly darkening grey, ominous and threatening, mother nature’s warning for a terrible brewing storm.

It wasn’t long after she felt the first droplet on her face did the torrential downpour rear its ugly head. The ground quickly became sloppy puddles of mud. The horse slipped more than once underneath them, hooves skidding through the slop enough for Ben to ease him down into a trot and eventually into a walk.

The rain was so thick it was near impossible to see whatever lied before them. She shouted over the roar of the rain, asking what were they to do now. Ben shouted back they needed to find shelter to wait it out, his voice barely heard over the howling winds and the pounding rains, and she was practically plastered against his back.

He kicked the horse back into a brisk trot despite the weather. They needed shelter quickly and going any slower would only serve as another obstacle. Abigail kept a sharp eye out for anything that could harbor them for the duration of the storm, a depilating shack, a bloody cave if anything else.

With her clothes clinging to her form, she began to feel the stirrings of a chill against her skin. Every inch of her was drenched, even her bindings which felt more restricting with the absorption of the water. At the first opportunity, she was going to take that bloody thing off, consequences be damned.

Almost like a desert mirage, a looming dark shape appeared through the curtain of downpour. With rain clinging to her lashes, she blinked rapidly, hoping against hope the shape wouldn’t fade into obscurity. It didn’t.

Grip tightening on Ben, she drew his attention towards it and promptly tightened her grip on him as he spurred the horse towards it at an elevated speed.

The closer they came, the shape became more visible. It was a logged cabin, small in size but seemingly relatively secure. Not even half a yard away was a stable, or what seemed to be a stable in this near blinding downpour, which was not even the quarter of the size of the cabin, but this was more than they could ever ask for.
No horses or other forms of life appeared, with the exception of small garden bed, which was all but drowned now. At a glance, the place looked abandoned.

Ben hoped off the horse and asked for her to remain there while he checked to make sure the coast was clear. Abigail began to protest, in favor of joining him instead, but the steely look he gave her silenced her almost instantly. Even in the rain, she could spot the dangerous fury in his gaze. So he was still annoyed with her then. Stifling her protests, she begrudgingly nodded in agreement, pulling out her father’s pistol at his suggestion, and watched him head inside.

After several miserable minutes, he jogged back out to meet her, saying everything appeared sound. Abigail quickly dismounted and led the horse towards the small stable, the poor beast looked as much of a drowned rat as they did.

Ben decided to untack the poor bugger once they were inside, acknowledging it looked like it likely be awhile before the rain cleared up. It was clear from his tone and stance he intended to go at it alone. Knowing better than to agitate him when he was in a mood, she agreed but insisted that she would examine him the minute he set foot into the cabin, referring to the blunt force knock to the head she had witnessed Gamble deliver to him.

One her way out, she could’ve sworn she heard him mutter, “Something you wouldn’t have witnessed if you hadn’t followed me,” along with a few choice words she couldn’t quite make out but was much too tired to deal with it.

Making a mad dash towards the cabin, she grasped the rough wooden door and pushed inside, shutting it soundly behind her. The coolness which greeted her prompted a shiver down her spine. Whoever owned this place must not have returned in a long time. The lack of warmth encouraged her to blindly search the darkened space for a candle and match of some sort, anything to provide her with light.

She knocked something over in her hasty search and immediately picked it up. It felt cool and waxy beneath her fingers. Upon further examination by touch, she was delighted to find a candle. Miraculously, it didn’t take long to find a match to light it.

With the discovery of the candle, it made it that much easier to find the rest, lighting each candle with the original until the cabin was lit in a soft, warm glow.

The setup was simple and functional. A small table with two chairs sat in the center, a few shelves built along the walls not far behind them.

Across from the table and chairs a short distance away stood a very basic kitchen with a proportionally sizes fireplace, a small wooden counter for cooking space, and a few pots and pans that appeared to have seen better days.

Propped up next to the fireplace were a few stacks of firewood, which she would certainly revisit soon, along with the sacks of what appeared to be food poking out of the storage cupboard – whatever was salvageable.

But her eyes were all for the clothes tucked away in the corner dresser in the small cabin bedroom, a discovery perhaps more delightful than that of the candle. Without much thought or fear of consequence, she stripped herself out of her wet clothes, beginning with uncomfortable, cloggy rain drenched leather boots which were already too large for her person.

It took some considerable effort, but she managed to peel off her clothes and laid them out to air dry on the available space of the shelves, shivering even more so as the cool cabin air nipped at her skin.
She shivered even more with the removal of her bindings, her nipples stiffening when the cool air greeted them.

Grabbing the closest dry article of clothing, she unfolded it to reveal a white shift of somewhat rough material but a shift nonetheless.

Dear Lord, she could hardly remember a time where she hadn’t worn trousers, tunic, and a soldier’s uniform coat. As much as she appreciated (and actually preferred) the practicality of men’s clothes, a small yearning stirred inside her for something familiar, a memory of her former life.

Without another moment’s thought, she lowered the shift over her head, tugging the material over her body until the shift covered her completely. While significantly better than being in the nude, the material hardly brought her any warmth.

Searching through the clothes, she happened across stays and stopped herself short from hissing at the sight, specifically choosing to ignore the wretched constraining device as she reached for the under petticoat – a skirt-like undergarment which tied around the waist and reached just below her ankle – made from what she suspected to be wool. She used it to layer for warmth and sighed happily. That was much better.

Of course, her feet were cold, too, so she couldn’t help but reach for a pair of stockings, rolling them eagerly up her legs, an act she hadn’t realized how much she missed until that moment.

Removing her hair tie, Abigail let her hair fall loosely along her shoulders. The drenched tendrils fell a little below her collarbone. She knew she would have to get another haircut if she wanted to keep up appearances, having gotten away with putting it off for the past few years by simply tying it back, but there were other matters to attend to know, namely assessing the kitchen supplies.

There wasn’t much in the cupboards, as was to be expected, but what she did discover was better than nothing. Small sacks of turnips, cucumbers, and walnuts had been tucked away in deep inside the bottom of the cupboard, perhaps attempting to mirror the preservation effects of cold storage of a basement or root cellar. There were a small number of potatoes as well, but she eyed them suspiciously, not trusting their state of edibleness.

The shelf above housed some rudimentary cooking ingredients – flour, salt, pepper, a few other recognizable spices, and cooking oil of some sort. Paired with the vegetables and walnuts, the quantity was nearly scarce, but it was enough that she could manage something with it.

She felt a twinge of guilt as she looked over the pots and pans, knowing that she was essentially plucking at their unwitting host’s food supply. However, it was apparent the cabin’s residents hadn’t returned in quite some time. If the food wasn’t eaten, it would eventually spoil, whether it was preserved or not. That logic was enough to soothe her guilty consciousness. Well, almost.

The sudden sound of gusting rainy winds drew Abigail’s attention towards the door, which nearly slammed against the wall if it had not been for Ben’s intervening hand. The wind had gained traction, picking up speed with rain splattering onto the wooden floors before he managed to slam the door shut behind him.

Lowering his coat collar he had used to try to shield himself from the worst of it, Ben began to toe his boots off, apparently coming to the same decision she’d had moments ago regarding the desire for the removal of uncomfortably wet attire. He shook out his hair, sending even more rain droplets splattering along the table and God only knew where else.

She didn’t have the heart to reprimand him, although the instinct to do so was present. It was a habit
picked up from the years of being a wife. Although she was no longer Tobias’s wife, the remnants of that role still lingered, leaving an imprint on her psyche she wasn’t sure she could ever shake. But the presence of the instinct to scold him, the domesticity of it, didn’t bother her at all, not when it came to Ben.

Ben, who was now standing there inside the cabin, his clothes clinging to him like a second skin. The stubble sprouting along his jaw and neck added to the disheveled look, but... it was quite a nice look on him. Even appearing half-drowned and unkept, he still managed to look so very attractive. Blast him.

Forcing her gaze away, Abigail cleared her throat a little, finding her mouth having gone suddenly dry. She made a mental note to fetch some water, which shouldn’t be a problem considering their current predicament. “There’s some clothes in the bedroom, towards the back,” she spoke quietly, though it sounded almost deafening in the quiet atmosphere of the cabin, even amongst the howling winds of the storm. “You should really get out of those clothes, unless you want to catch a cold. I’ll look you over once you’ve changed.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him turn in her direction to address her, but when no sound came, Abigail lifted her gaze towards him and found him staring at her, whatever words he had been about to deliver dying on his tongue.

She slightly raised an inquisitive brow but received no response. After another few minutes of silence, she asked, tilting her head to the side, assessing with growing concern, “Or maybe I should examine you now?”

Blinking, Ben started slightly before shaking his head. “No, it’s not that. It’s just… ah,” he paused, gaze sweeping down her form before snapping back up to meet her eyes, his cheeks suddenly scarlet, “that.”

Abigail’s mouth formed a small “o” in realization, glancing down sheepishly at her poor attempt at dressing herself. It wasn’t the completely finished result of a proper woman’s attire, with nearly half a dozen articles of clothing and accessories missing from making her presentable. At least she had the forethought to put on the under petticoat and stockings, but her top consisted of the shift and nothing else. The shift fitted a loosely along her form already, which she attributed to the weight loss from the meager soldier’s scraps of army life. With the petticoat waist strings tied around her, it drew attention towards her waist and everything above it. The shift would have fallen off even further off her shoulder had it not been for the lack of binding which helped fill her out.

Abigail tried her best not to think about it, although the heat of his gaze made it difficult to forget. Instead, she chuckled, though it sounded a bit strained to her ears, “You haven’t seen me in one of these things in a long while.” She paused, considering. “Though, I suppose you’ve never seen this much of me before either.”

Ben made a strangled noise in the back of his throat, which he made a poor attempt of concealment as a chuckle. He then took her advice and went to change but not before walking straight into the wall. Flushed, he gave her brief glance, sheepish and something else, and disappeared behind the wall in search for dry clothes.

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While Ben changed in the other room, Abigail went about setting up in the kitchen, giving herself a task to focus on. Since there were enough ingredients, she decided to make fried cucumbers and boiled turnips, if they manage to light the fireplace. If not, they would just have to settle for walnuts
and raw vegetables, but beggars could not be choosers.

With everything she needed laid out on the small counterspace, she took a bucket from the corner and set it out on the porch where it fill in no time, considering the wind and rain, to boil the turnips on the chance the fireplace could be revived.

Shivering a little, she reached for a well-worn quilt tucked away neatly in the corner and brought it around her shoulders in a makeshift shawl, both serving as protector from the cold and an attempt at modesty for both of their sakes – though it still seemed rather foolish. It wasn’t as if she had been naked in front of the man.

But with societal expectations for women, modesty, and the like, she might as well have been.

Squatting in front of the fireplace, Abigail observed the kindling with a small frown. Interestingly enough, the fireplace was quite large for a cabin so small. She placed her hand along the stone mantle, wondering if it would be even possible to light, let alone cook anything over it. Still, she had to try. Giving up just wasn’t in her nature. She possessed a stubborn streak that could make the most patient person throw up their hands in frustration. Ben knew this better than anyone, although he was already the most patient person, at least not when it came to her.

Though she would never admit it, a good bit of his impatience towards her was well earned.

She began to clear the sooty, used logs to make room for the fresher ones when she heard Ben remark, “Here, let me take care of that.”

Before she could properly look up at him, he walked over to the fireplace and squatted beside her, taking the logs from her hands and setting them near the hearth. He took her hands in his, turning them over and rubbing his thumbs against her palms until the dark smudges faded from her skin.

She lifted her gaze and found her eyes locked with his, for one charged, breathless moment before he unceremoniously dropped her hands and turned his attention to the fireplace and hearth, leaving her more confused than ever.

They worked together in strained silence, with him finishing clearing out the pit to make more room for the hearth. She passed him the logs when he asked for them but noticed he was careful not to touch her again.

At one point, she leaned forward to point at something, her chest brushing against his back, her loose hair accidentally grazing his neck. She felt him stiffen beneath her, and for a moment, she couldn’t understand why, until she recalled once again she was no longer wearing her bindings. If the sight of her in a shift and petticoats wasn’t apparent of that, this was more than a confirmation of it.

Whatever progress that had been made came to a halt, at least momentarily. Ben’s head turned slightly in her direction but not much more than the slightest shift. If he were to turn more than that, their faces would only be a hairbreadth apart, and they both knew it.

Ben cleared his throat nervously. “Could you… could you just, um…” She was close enough to see the redness of his cheeks, the blush stretching down his neck. It would’ve been so easy to press her face to the side of his neck, to nuzzle into that heat for herself, maybe brush her lips against his neck, his cheek…

“Get you something to clean your hands off with?” Abigail finished for him, as if that had been the true request. Ben grunted quietly in assent, only daring to move, breathe even, after she went off in search for a clean cloth.
While he worked, Abigail began cooking preparations, starting with the turnips. She reached for a small knife and began paring the turnips, peeling away the purple and white outer layer until the vegetable remained bare. She repeated the action with the rest of the turnips she deemed edible, cutting the larger ones into quarters and setting them into a bowl along with the others.

Initially, she thought she wouldn’t be any good at this, her cooking skill unused for a number of years now, but she was pleasantly surprised at how easily she fell back into the motions of cooking, of chopping and paring the vegetables with relative ease. It brought her back to a different time, a simpler one, though a far more restrictive time.

Even so, this sense of familiarity was welcomed. It gave her something to do with her hands, wielding a knife in meal preparation, not in self-defense on the battlefield nor cutting into the flesh of a wounded soldier. She had always enjoyed cooking. The activity of bringing multiple ingredients together in one recipe to create something for the consumption and pleasure of others wasn’t something she realized she would miss until then. The saying “you don’t realize how much you love something until it’s gone” was a funny thing.

After multiple attempts, the fireplace crackled with newborn flames, which greedily devoured the new wood with a single-minded determination. Before she could even ask, he grabbed one of the larger pots and set it on one of the hooks along the lug pole which stretched across the hearth.

“What’s for dinner?” he asked, a light grin lighting up his face. Thankfully, the tension from earlier had eased, at least for the moment, and she found herself grinning back with amusement. She told him of her plans of fried cucumbers and boiled turnips, the latter of which she planned on cooking first since it needed more time to boil. While it boiled, she planned on checking him over, whether he liked it or not, and she told him that.

To her surprise, he agreed. “But how exactly do you plan on boiling...” he trailed off when she retrieved the bucket from the porch, which was practically overflowing with rain water. She already knew he was going to make the inquiry and had already set off towards the door before he could have even halfway through his inquiry.

She placed the bucket onto the floor with a small thud and gave him a facetiously sweet smile. “I’m more than just a pretty face, you know,” she remarked, tone teasing with a slight undertone of challenge in her voice.

“Trust me,” Ben said, grabbing the bucket of water to fill the pot, “I’ve known that for years.” After a moment, he added, “And you’re right. You’re more than a pretty face. You’re beautiful.”

Now it was Abigail’s turn to blush, and she was quick to hide it, busying herself with the bowl of turnips to hide her flaming cheeks. She could’ve sworn she saw him smile out of the corner of her eye, but by the time she reached him, the smile was concealed. But barely.

As soon as the turnips were added into the boiling water, she led the major over towards one of the chair, encouraging him to sit with a gentle but insistent shove to his shoulder. He sat down without much of a fuss, which was a little more than she expected from him.

She asked him what he remembered prior to waking up on Gamble’s horse. After a moment or so, he recounted the events with relative accuracy, beginning with his mission to deal with Worthington up until Gamble had discovered him in the river after disposing of the reverend’s body.

While he talked, Abigail looked him over for any physical symptoms. His color appeared normal, if not a little flushed. She gently touched his face before sliding down the side of his neck. His skin was warm and vibrant underneath her hands, not at all clammy and pale.
He stumbled a little over his words as she stepped closer so that she could examine his pupils but pulled back a little with a small concerned frown at his sudden difficulty at speech.

“Are you having trouble remembering?” she asked kindly, her fingers comfortingly stroking the side of his neck.

Breath hitching, Ben murmured, “No. It’s not that.”

His pupils told a different story, blown wide and dark. If one had been larger than the other, she would have feared a concussion, but they were both equally round and dark. Frowning, she asked, “Does anything not feel right? How about dizziness? Are you tired?”

“No, I’m fine,” Ben insisted, frustration seeping into his voice before he sighed. “Sorry. I am fine. Just the back of my head smarts a bit.”

Disregarding his retort and the apology the quickly followed it, she slipped her fingers into his hair, pressing against his scalp lightly until he finally winced. That was to be expected, considering the heavy bulkiness of the musket butt. No wonder.

Overall, he appeared fine, but with the tenderness at the base of his skull, they would have to keep an eye on it for the next few hours, which meant little sleep for either of them, and she told him as much. Besides, it wasn’t like they would get much sleep anyway, seeing as how the storm still raged on, if not having picked up speed and strength in its rage.

She prepared to release him when Ben brought his hands up to cover hers, keeping her close. “I’m sorry if I’ve appeared to be acting strangely for the past few hours,” he murmured, meeting her confused gaze steadily. “It’s just… seeing you, like this. It’s just… different.”

Abigail tilted her head, confused. “Because I’m wearing a dress?”

“No… yes, I mean,” he paused, frustrated at his sudden lack of eloquence. “It’s only because… I haven’t seen you, like this, in years. Fully dressed of course, not like…” He made another frustrated noise, and she smothered a smile.

“I understand,” Abigail replied as she took pity on him.

He smiled gratefully before taking another breath. “It’s only that, seeing you standing there, like this… It takes me back to a time where I… I wanted you, but I knew that I couldn’t have you.”

And that was the crux of it all, wasn’t it? A series of ill-informed choices and unforeseen circumstances that had led them to this moment.

She thought of it all the time, if she had chosen differently, if he had acted when he had chosen not to, how different things would be. It was futile to look back and wonder about what could have been. There was no changing the past.

Even if it were possible, she honestly didn’t know if she would change anything, not if it brought them here. Even though she was divorced and thereby ruined in society’s eyes, Abigail wasn’t bothered in the least, now that she had the knowledge that her lifetime’s worth of feelings for this boy, this man, weren’t in vain.

“You can have me now,” Abigail spoke softly. Her blue eyes widened as the implication registered. “Oh, not… You know what I mean.”

“I think I do,” Ben remarked, teasing. She grinned a little and joined him in a quiet chuckle, slightly
uncomfortable at the unintended double entendre.

Not because of the inappropriate nature of it, but because, while neither of them were willing to admit it, it was something desired very much.

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Not long after the charged moment did she manage to put some distance between them, if only for a short period of time. She kept a careful eye on him as she tended to the turnips and wasn’t even covert in her observations, not even bothered that he had caught her multiple times.

She began her work on paring and slicing the cucumbers once the turnips were nearly done. Drying them with a clean cloth, she then floured them liberally on each side before setting each finished slice into a smaller pan filled with oil, which hung next to the pot of turnips.

He offered to help her numerous times, but she refused every time, although she appreciated every time he offered. Instead, she turned around the conversation back to how they would return to the camp base if the storm didn’t abate anytime soon.

“I’ve already made some contingency plans with Washington, if something were to happen,” Ben remarked, idly running a hand along the spines of the few books sitting on a bookshelf. “If anything were to go wrong or anything to prevent me from getting back to camp before the move to the next site, it was agreed I would just meet them at Middlebrook.”

“Oh,” Abigail hummed after popping a walnut into her mouth. “It’s lucky you’ve found yourself a horse then.” She grinned cheekily at his exasperated expression as she passed him the small sack of walnuts to hold them over until the food was ready.

“Yes, quite lucky,” Ben remarked dryly, accepting the sack to procure a few walnuts for himself before passing it back to her. He popped one into his mouth and then quickly another. Neither of them had eaten anything since the previous evening. It was a wonder how neither of them hadn’t attacked the vegetables on sight.

Not long after the cucumbers were put on the fire, Abigail checked on the turnips and found they were tender. Pulling the lug pole towards her, she attempted to lift the pot without splashing any of the boiling water onto her, but before she could manage a good grip, Ben was there beside her, easing the pot away from the hearth and set it on the limited table space in the kitchen area.

Carefully, she spooned out the turnips into a bowl, allowing them to cool before turning her attention back to the cucumbers, which needed to cook until each side turned golden brown.

Soon she was grabbing a thick cloth to wrap around the handle, easing the cast iron skillet off the hearth and away from the flames so that she could more easily transfer the cooked cucumbers into a waiting dish.

Just as she was preparing to, she felt more than heard Ben walk up behind her to peer over her shoulder and observe her handiwork with an appreciative glance. “It’s done,” she told him. She couldn’t hold back her giggle as he leaned closer and sniffed, more loudly than needed for effect. “Just give it a few minutes to cool. Then you can… oh!”

The blonde playfully smacked his hand away as he reached for one of the turnips. At least he had the forethought not to attempt to reach for the one thing she had just taken off the hearth.

“What was that for?” he asked, laughing and ruining his attempt at feigned indignation.
She shook her finger at him, eyes narrowing, partially teasing. “I told you to give it a few minutes. Am I suddenly speaking to Caleb and Abe?”

Growing up, out of the three of them, Ben had the most self-control when it came to eating after a long day’s work, but Caleb and Abe on the other hand were in a league of their own, wolfing down their meals as if they hadn’t eaten in weeks even though they had breakfast earlier that morning. And they always went back for seconds, sometimes thirds if their stomachs permitted.

“Now that stings!” he complained.

“Well, if the shoe fits!” she countered easily, a grin breaking out across her face.

She was about to turn back to their dinner when she caught the sudden shift in his expression, the dip of his gaze as it softened. Tilting her head, she asked, “What?”

“What?” he echoed back innocently.

Abigail huffed, unable to suppress her amusement. Then she asked again, meeting his gaze directly, her smile still in place, “You’re looking at me like…”

“What?” he prodded.

“What?” she asked back innocently.

Abigail grinned and bit her lower lip as she leaned into him, unable to prevent herself from saying, “But don’t we already do that?”

“Yes, but not quite like this. Squabbling over dinner, living together, sharing our lives together. This,” he confessed, his arms slipping around her waist tenderly, protectively, “is what I want. What I’ve always wanted.”

“Me, too,” she admitted softly. She turned her head to the side so that her lips brushed against his temple. “And now, we can have it. When the war is over, we’ll have it.”

The strength and solidness of his body drew her further into him, generating near explosion of heat that practically stole her breath. The tension from before returned with a vengeance. All of her senses fixated on him, making it impossible to ignore her growing desire.

Licking her lips, she took a breath, an attempt to calm herself and her racing heart, though with his hands on her he was hardly helping. She heard his breath catch as she accidentally shifted against him, and she knew, right then, she needed to put distance between them.

The problem was, however, she didn’t want to.

With a controlled breath, she suggested that maybe he should set the table. There were enough plates and cutlery in the cabinet for two people, which more than suggested the owners of this cabin were man and woman, strongly implying husband and wife if their clothes inside the bedroom were anything to go on.

The major agreed, but judging from how slowly he took his time in releasing her, he would preferred
staying right where he was. And to be honest, she very much would have preferred the same.

Chapter End Notes

Oh the tension. I wonder what's gonna happen next!

Also, the fried cucumbers thing is totally legit. I found the recipe while doing some research on colonial cooking and decided to give it a try. SO GOOD! The recipe is right here!
The fried cucumbers and boiled turnips were devoured with a barely restrained zeal, hunger nearly consuming their every thought as soon as the crisp cucumber met their tongues. Abigail could hardly prevent herself from wolfing it down. By the time the food filled her, she reached for her second helping with a calmer state of mind.

As they ate, the pair discussed what their next move would be. The storm had let up in the past hour but not by much. Ben said they needed to leave by first light or whenever the storm dissipated, whichever came first. She agreed. It was the most logical plan, given the circumstances. It only made sense.

Besides, she grew rather fond of their current accommodations, and the knowledge they didn’t need to travel any time soon was more than appealing.

Suddenly parched, she rose with the intention of filling some cups with water. As delicious as the cucumbers were, salt wasn’t conducive for a dry throat.

When she voiced her intentions, he offered to do that himself, insisting that she sit, since she had prepared the meal The least he could do was get them drinks.

“Found any good wine?” Abigail teased a few minutes later, eyes twinkling with mischief as he placed a mug into her hand.

Lips twitching into a grin, Ben remarked, “Unfortunately, no. The cabin’s quite dry, though I really suppose we shouldn’t push our luck in search liquor.”

“You’re no fun,” she remarked, feigning a pout, “but I suppose you’re right.” She took a sip from her mug, welcoming the water to counteract the drying effects of the salt.

It was probably for the best that alcohol wasn’t in visibly in reach. The last time they had gotten spectacularly drunk together had been the night before Ben had left for Yale so many years ago. And that night had been very interesting to the least. The night remained a blur, but the feelings that had been stirred within her that night – the longing, excitement, arousal – those were hard to forget, let alone ignore.

Feelings that had never diminished over time either, which certainly didn’t help her in their current situation, stuck in a cabin in the middle of a torrential storm and isolated from the rest of the world, at least for the moment. They were going to be in for a long evening.

Once Ben reclaimed his seat at the table, the conversation turned to sleeping arrangements, which became quite awkward upon the realization there was only one bed.

Even in the dim candle light and firelight, Abigail could make out the growing pinkness in his
cheeks, and for once, she found her own warming as well.

“You need your rest, far more than I do,” she insisted. “It’s been a few hours, and your symptoms haven’t gotten any worse. It doesn’t appear you have a concussion, so you could definitely use the sleep.”

“And what about you?” Ben asked, incredulous.

Abigail shrugged. “I can keep watch while you rest, though I hardly think anyone will be dropping in during a storm like this.”

The major gave her an unimpressed look. “You need rest, too. Do you really think I’m that selfish, to claim the bed while you remain up for all hours of the night?”

“I’m not the one that nearly had my bloody skull crushed from a musket butt,” she countered back, eyes narrowing further to match his own narrowed gaze.

“I’ll remain on watch, and you take the bed. That’s final.”

“Your stubbornness knows no bounds, doesn’t it?”

“Look who’s talking!”

“Very clever. I’ll make sure to write that rejoinder down in my journal as to remember to throw that back at you next time.”

Ben’s jaw clenched in irritation. He appeared as if to make another retort but ultimately thought better of it. Instead, he took measured, calming breaths, his chest rising and falling slowly with each calculated breath. She recognized this technique immediately, having witnessed him using it on well more than one occasion with her. She was well aware she inspired his irritation readily but couldn’t find it in herself to feel guilty about it. Usually, he brought it on himself. Usually.

Finally after some time, he took a sip from his own mug and set it down tiredly, the fight all but fading from him. She observed him keenly in anticipation for a victory. Instead, he took her by surprise and said, “I think we can find a compromise here.”

Abigail asked, puzzled, “Compromise?”

“Yes.” He took another glance at his mug before grabbing it once again, draining it of all its contents as if it had magically turned into rum before setting it down firmly to the table. “Since we’re insistent on the other to take the bed and it seems neither of us are willing to budge, we’ll just have to share.”

“Share…the bed?” Abigail asked, eyes widening a little.

Ben nodded, appearing a little less confident now. “Yes.”

The blonde’s heart began to race at the thought, though she found it incredibly silly. It wasn’t as if they hadn’t slept together before, literally having slept next to each other countless nights now in the camp. How was this any different?

After a moment or two of hesitation, Abigail agreed. A little surprised but pleased with her agreement – though there was a flash of nervousness in his gaze, he returned his attention to his plate, and she forced herself to do the same.

However, she didn’t miss the furtive glances he threw in her direction when he thought she wasn’t
looking, but only because she was doing it, too.

The rest of the meal carried on in relative silence and not a completely comfortable one. There was an underlying tension that hadn’t been present before, or at least if it had, it hadn’t been noticed. Now, though, oh now it was noticed, but neither were willing to acknowledge it. As soon as they were finished and the dishes were put away, they knew the bed would be waiting for them, and the thought was nearly overwhelming.

While yes, they had shared sleeping accommodations before, this was by far drastically different. A cot was a cot, and a bed was a bed. That was a very important difference.

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The storm raged on outside the cabin walls, the howling winds clashing with the loud claps of thunder. Some water managed to trickle down from the roof, but the droplets were few and far between. Apart from that, the cabin was sturdy, a safe haven in this wild storm. Not for the first time since stepping foot inside the cabin Abigail thanked her lucky stars for their discovery of the cabin. God was looking down on them kindly, it seemed.

Or perhaps He had a more mischievous intentions in mind.

The warmth from the fire in the hearth, partnered with the dim candlelight glow, created a cozy, comfortable atmosphere. She tugged the blanket from her shoulders and draped along the back of the chair on which she sat, the chill from the storm having long since disappeared from her skin.

After they were finished and contently full from their meal, Abigail rose from her seat so that she could gather their dishes and wash them. It was the fair thing to do for their unknowing hosts.

“I can manage it,” she said when he offered to help, stacking her plates together carefully on the table. But he was already standing to help, despite what she said, reaching for a plate at the same time as she did.

Their fingers brushed, his warm skin against hers. Her breath caught in her throat, and she turned to look up at him but found that they were so very close. She looked at him from underneath her lashes over her shoulder, which grazed his chest.

As if broken from a spell, Ben’s gaze moved away from their hands towards her, his blue eyes meeting hers. The tension from before returned with a vengeance, stealing her breath and causing a stuttering of her heart.

Now there were only so many of these moments a woman could handle.

Before she was aware of what she was doing, Abigail faced him fully and drew him in to a searing kiss.

His lips met hers without any hesitation, and her world narrowed down to only him and this moment. The cabin seemed to disappear, the storm outside fading into a distant echo.

His arms were around her, his grip tightening on her waist as he pulled her closer. Her hands sought for purchase against his chest, her fingers curling into the material desperately. She faintly thought it was a good thing she hadn’t been holding any dishes when she kissed him, otherwise they most certainly would have dropped to the floor. But none of that mattered, not now.

Her hungry mouth fused with his, matching his growing passion with her own. The tip of his tongue grazed hers, insistent, and she parted her lips for him all too willingly, welcoming intense wildfire of
emotions racing through her body.

They had shared kisses before, some verging on this level of intensity and heat, but they all paled in comparison to this. It was full of need and desire. It was too much and not enough. The kiss was all lips and tongues and some teeth but not at all sloppy. It was too much and not enough all at once. She didn’t want it to end. She wanted more, craved more.

By the time their mouths parted, they were both breathing hard. Ben’s eyes were dark with desire, the blue in his irises a tiny ring in contrast with his blown pupils. His lips were red and swollen, his face flushed with ardent excitement. If she had access to a mirror, Abigail would have seen she didn’t look much different.

She saw the look in his eyes, the raw desire, and knew precisely in that moment what he wanted, what they both wanted. But still she had to ask. “Are you sure?”

Ben tucked a golden curl behind her ear, his fingers lingering against her cheek. Abigail’s eyelids threatened to flutter shut instinctively. “I’ve never been more certain of anything,” he answered. “Perhaps I should be asking you?”

The flicker of nervousness in his gaze prompted her to lean forward and kiss him softly, careful not to spook him if he were so inclined to be spooked. As far as she was aware, neither of them had been raised to engage in sex before marriage. Out of the two of them, only Abigail had been married.

The kiss started as a soft press of lips, before transforming into another kiss, and then another before Abigail guided him towards the bedroom, kissing him all the while.

It seemed tonight would be full of firsts.

Once inside the bedroom, they kissed again, hungry and hard, but Abigail broke the kiss without stepping back, physically incapable of doing so. She breathed hard and took a minute to calm himself, though seeing him standing there looking like that, looking at her like that, it was all she could do not to throw herself to his mercy.

“I have to know,” the blonde began softly, “And please be honest with me.” The only sounds in that room were their harsh breathing. Suddenly shy – which went completely against her nature – she forced herself to keep his gaze. “Does it bother you that I’m not a virgin?”

A woman’s reputation relied heavily on her virginity. If there was an unmarried woman and her virginity was questioned, whether or not the rumor was true, the damage to her reputation would be irrevocable. Not that Abigail gave a damn about her reputation anyway – although it was probably shot to hell if word of her divorce reached any gossip seeking ears and mouths – but she knew that there weren’t many men who thought kindly of nonvirginal women.

The blonde also knew better than to think Ben as most men, but still the doubt lingered, distracting her from her lust.

“No, it doesn’t.” Ben answered honestly. The complete and utter sincerity in his eyes was doing dangerous things to her heart. Then he added, a tad sheepishly, “As long as it doesn’t bother you that I am, of course.”

Abigail had suspected as much, but to hear his confirmation brought in a rush of feelings she hadn’t anticipated, namely pleasure. She would be the first woman he would ever see in the way that Adam had first met Eve – though that analogy was a rather terrible one, considering how that story played out.
She would be the first person he would ever be with, in the most intense and vulnerable expression of intimacy that any person could share with another. A surge of satisfaction swelled inside her chest, but she did her best to squash it. Now was not the time for such foolishness.

Instead, Abigail took a step back, strongly aware of the increasing beating of her heart. She brought her hands to her waist, her fingers finding the ties of the under petticoat. Ben’s eyes were all for her, gaze tracking each and every movement with a soldier’s keen observation. She licked her lips as she untied the petticoat ties with slightly trembling hands, hardly able to contain her desire. With a quick manipulation of the strings, the petticoats came undone and pooled at her feet upon her release. She was in her shift and nothing else.

Lips parting, Ben observed her mutely, his hands clenching and unclenching reflexively at his sides. He reached for the collar of his shirt and pulled the white, rough material over his head, all the while keeping her gaze firmly.

Unable to keep herself still, Abigail walked towards him, watching as the shirt slipped from his hands. She ran her hands over his chest, her fingers trailing greedily over his muscles in growing fascination. Oh my, army life had done his body wonders, in more ways than she ever could have imagined.

Ben shivered in pleasure with each and every brush of her fingers. She felt every tremor underneath her fingertips. Suddenly, he gripped her waist and pulled her against him. She could feel the heat of his hands through the thin material of the shift. It was as if he was practically touching her skin.

He bunched up handfuls of the thin material right at her hips, and as if sensing his hesitation, Abigail nodded her approval, smiling. He eased the material upwards, exposing more and more flesh in the ascent but adamantly refused to look at her, propriety and chivalry still stubbornly intact. With a fond huff, she lifted her arms to help him along and let the shift fall to the floor beside their other discarded clothing.

She was left completely nude, with no article of clothing to speak of concealing her form. Before the war, she knew she looked better, her body fuller and more vivacious then. She was thinner now, but her breasts remained round and full, a feat most woman would covet though she often cursed, mostly due to her need for tighter bindings prior to her enlistment. Her nipples had stiffened into hardened peaks, aching for attention, as was the rest of her.

Her heart pounded even faster, if that were even possible. Facing his transfixed scrutiny, she felt overwhelmed, yet she felt no desire to shield herself from him. She had never been ashamed of her body, and she wasn’t going to start now.

As he continued to stare, her desire drove her forward. While incredibly pleased with his awed expression, she preferred to experience more of a physical sign of his appreciation and pressed herself against him to act on this line of thought. Her breasts pressed against the bare flesh of his chest, and it took all of her strength not to shudder.

Abigail could feel his arousal pressing against her and smiled a bit coquettishly to herself. Well, she had desired a physical sign of his appreciation.

Their mouths met eagerly as Ben led her back towards the bed. Abigail followed his lead, blindly walking backwards, trusting him to keep her steady.

They fell onto the mattress in a graceless heap, with her giggling against his mouth and the major kissing away her giggles with a grin on his own face. Soon enough, the laughter turned into quiet moans and other sounds of pleasure as he began to nuzzle downwards, starting at the crook of her
neck, kissing the soft skin there, and then traveling down to her collarbones. Abigail’s breath hitched, arching her chest upwards in anticipation for his mouth on her breasts.

But apparently he had other plans.

Drawing back onto his haunches, Ben’s gaze never left her, trailing down her form as if awestricken. He gazed upon her as if she were the only thing in the world to gaze upon, and that notion alone did things to her and not just her heart.

He reached down her stocking clad legs and carefully slid them down her calves one by one. The act was so incredibly sensuous, so seductive she half wondered if he had ever done this before, but feeling the slight tremor in his hands, she believed his admission even more.

Reaching for him, Abigail’s fingers found their way to the front of his trousers but only at the hem. She reveled at his gasp and tugged him forward, encouraging him to come down and over her, though she didn’t have to pull very hard. He came to her all too willingly, eager and wanting.

They were soon kissing again, deep yet tenderly. Her hands ran down his back. She felt him shudder underneath her roaming hands and decides to lightly scrape her nails down his back, enough to elicit another shudder.

Then, she dipped her fingers just under the hemline of his trousers at his waist and paused, both teasing and cautious. He made an impatient noise at the back of his throat and nipped at her lower lip, encouraging and surprising her. No more encouragement was necessary.

Abigail eased his trousers off his hips and assisted in pushing them down his thighs until he had to pull back to kick them off impatiently.

The sudden look of annoyance flickering across Ben’s face when his foot caught in the material had Abigail biting her lower lip to conceal her giggling. He caught the sound in spite of her efforts and smiled, sheepish, before returning to cover her body with his.

He was nervous, that much she could tell, as he hovered over her, kissing her so thoroughly while his hands lingered at a respectable distance, one in which she had no desire for distance.

An idea sparked inside her. “Do you trust me?” she asked softly, reaching up to brush her fingers tenderly along his jaw.

“Always,” he responded without hesitation, with complete sincerity. “With my life.”

Smiling, Abigail encouraged him to lie on his back, and he did, pressing into the mattress. She draped half of herself against him, waiting. “If you’re not comfortable with anything at any time, you can say no. You won’t offend me.”

Ben pulled her close and kissed her, encouraging her to continue, which she did.

She began kissing his chest. The very warmth of him drew her in further and encouraged further exploration. Her hand slid up his side and rested against his chest, fingers grazing his nipple with the lightest of touches before circling the stiffened nub with her thumb.

He inhaled sharply, lips twitching upwards when he met her gaze steadily. She grinned coquettishly.

Then slowly, she moved downwards, kissing her way down his chest and taking her time about it, so much so every now and then he squirmed a little with impatience from her purposefully slow paced ministrations. She watched him the enter time through her lashes, maintaining eye contact with him,
right to the moment when positioned herself between his thighs and lowered her mouth onto him.

“Christ,” Ben gasped, his head falling back onto the pillows. She would have smirked, but her mouth was otherwise occupied.

After a moment, she removed her mouth from him so that she could drag her tongue up the root of him, making sure she absolutely took her time. She then swirled her tongue around the tip, enticing and a little bit cruel. His flushed face lifted to stare down at her, his eyes growing even darker with desire.

Smiling, Abigail brushed a light kiss against him before once again taking him into her mouth, little by little until he began to writhe.

Meanwhile, Ben absolutely no idea what to do with himself. He was nearly, utterly gone. As she continued her ministrations on him, her blonde head bobbing lightly between his thighs, he quickly found himself becoming a trembling mess. A stream of curses, moans, and gasps of pleasure tumbled out of him, as if torn from the very center of his being. He had no idea it could be like this, just how tantalizing the act truly was. Now he understood why lust was considered one of the seven deadliest sins.

Being enveloped by her wet heat of her mouth, the intense pleasure, was intoxicating.

Two warring desires battled inside him – to shut his eyes and lose himself completely or to keep his eyes on her, to move her hair away from her face to witness the very magic with which she was using to bewitch him. He kept lifting his head to stare at her, transfixed, before closing his eyes and allowing his head to fall back in his pleasure with another gasp.

Soon enough, too soon, he felt the telltale signs of heat pooling in the pit of his stomach. Every inch of him was abuzz with the energy, every nerve ending taut as a piano string. Although he had never lain with a woman (or anyone else for that matter), he knew what was rapidly approaching and reached down to thread his fingers through her blonde locks, which made her hum in pleasure.

“Fuck,” Ben gasped, hips twitching upwards of their own accord. Her blue eyes were on his, and good Lord above, was that effective and not at all helpful to what he was trying to accomplish. “Wait, Abigail. I – ah Christ, God – I need a moment.”

She released him immediately, her brows furrowing in concern. Concern for him. He wanted to hit himself. Before she could ask, he shook his head. “Trust me, I didn’t want to stop you, but I had to. I’m afraid… I was coming to the quick, rather quickly.”

A flash of relief flickered across her face before being replace by flirtatious grin. “I thought that was the idea?”

The major was already flushed as it was, so he knew the increasing warmth of his cheeks from her comment wouldn’t be noticed. “It would be,” he said, “but I wouldn’t be able to continue if you kept carrying on as you were.”

Catching his meaning, Abigail continued to smile as she crawled up his body and kissed him as soon as she was able. Then, she was on her back with him pressing her gently into the mattress.

She let out a surprised noise by the maneuver, but she wasn’t complained. Nor was she complaining when she felt him against her.

She parted her legs for him and kissed him hard as she felt him against her entrance.
When Ben entered her, they both gasped, overwhelmed. He entered her slowly, carefully, making sure to balance his weight on his forearms, which rested on either side of her head.

They stared at each other, enamored and open and utterly trusting it nearly took both of their breath away. It was a moment neither had experienced before, certainly never Ben nor had Abigail. Even on her wedding night, she had never felt quite a connection as this. It was as if he owned her soul, and she wasn’t sure she ever wanted it back.

After a long pause for her to adjust to him, Abigail wrapped her arms around his waist, encouraging him to move. And so he did.

Ben began moving slowly at first, her legs entangled with his, sliding with his with each and every thrust of his hips. She clung to his him, gripping at his arms, while he kissed her with urgency, each thrust pressing her further into the mattress.

The storm raging outside the cabin was nothing compared to their passionate embrace, the sweaty tangled limbs, each grasping at the other in desperation. Need and desire overrode everything else, their senses all focusing on the other – the feeling of heated, soft flesh, the sight of mussed hair and flushed skin, the sound of every little gasp, moan, and noise of pleasure, and the smell of the strong scent of sex. The world didn’t exist. It was just them, in that moment.

When her legs slipped around his hips, their grip tightening in encouragement, he began to move faster. Abigail whimpered, clinging to him for dear life as his thrusts increased in speed and strength. She was very vocal in her encouragement, which she nearly shouted into his shoulder whenever he hit a particularly good spot.

He was hardly the silent lover himself, swearing so colorfully it was difficult to believe that he was a reverend’s son.

“Ben,” she gasped when she felt herself getting close, “Ben, kiss me. Please.”

Ben kissed her firmly, meeting her desperation with his own. He had been struggling to fend off orgasm ever since she had taken him into her mouth. Feeling her trembling all around him, the desperation in her kiss, he realized she was close and quickened his pace to have her meet him at the edge.

Abigail arched into him, keening in pleasure as she tumbled over the edge, shuddering and gasping in sharp spasms of pleasure. Her body shook as wave after wave of pleasure washed over her until she was left in the warm afterglow, her body going all but comfortably limp.

She hadn’t realized he had stilled until she opened her eyes slowly, glowing. Ben continued to look at her in that same way that had nearly made her want to hide, that she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life.

“Keep going,” Abigail murmured, nodding a little for him to continue.

“Aren’t you sore?” he asked, concerned, though she could see and feel the strain he was experiencing to keep himself still.

“I’ll be fine.” She lifted her legs, planted her feet on each side of him before pressing her thighs into his sides insistently. “Come for me.”

It didn’t take him long to finish. Only a few stuttering thrusts had him joining her over the edge. She watched him the entire time, committing the image of his pinched brows, squeezed shut eyelids, and lips parting to memory. He shuddered violently against her, his arms threatening to give out on him.
in any moment.

She was prepared for when he did and welcomed his full weight happily. To be honest, she thoroughly enjoyed having him completely on top of her, with nothing separating them. Maybe it was selfish of her, but she couldn’t care less, instead pressing against him and nuzzling into his overheated flesh, much like a purring cat waiting for a rub.

After the aftershocks of his orgasm faded, Ben returned to himself. He shifted so that he was on his back, relieving the burden of his weight from her. She curled against him instinctively once the settled, her legs entangled with his. Their harsh breathing began to ease in time with the slowing of their pounding hearts.

No. He hadn’t just witnessed the most beautiful sight in the world. That privilege belonged to her, having this beautiful man in her arms. A man who was almost too good for this world.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x04.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Does it still hurt?”

Abigail lifted her head from where she rested against Ben’s chest and gave him a mild inquisitive look. She was about to ask him what he meant when his hand grazed her side, fingers brushing near her stomach, just below her scar.

The blonde shifted a little, causing the blankets covering them to slide further down her form, but she didn’t mind.

It had been over two months since Kerr Farm. She knew that she had made more progress than most that had been in her condition, pushing herself to become more active to get better, perhaps pushing herself a little too hard some would say – Ben would say. But even if it did still hurt, it wouldn’t prevent her from lying next to him like this.

“It doesn’t hurt as much as it used to,” she replied softly, almost afraid to disturb the peaceful stillness consuming the room. “But it’s healing. It’s getting better.

She leaned forward and kissed him, basking in the warm softness of his lips in contrast to the growing stubble along his jaw. A curl fell over her face as she pulled back, and she blew it back.

“I’m going to need a haircut soon. It’s getting too long,” she said, not really expecting a reply from him.

“Don’t you dare,” Ben murmured. He reached for the stray curl, stroking it fondly. She didn’t bother to stifle a giggle. As reluctant as she was to cut her hair, he seemed even more adamantly against it, even if it was only a logical necessity for her to make.

“What is with you and the fascination with my hair?” Abigail demanded playfully. “You used to tug on my hair all the time when we were children. I thought you’d have quit that habit by now.”

“You know what they say,” Ben said casually, running the curl through his fingers, “old habits die hard.” As if to prove his point, he tugged gently, and she huffed in mock irritation. Before she could say anything else though, he leaned in forward for another kiss, which she happily gave him.

“My hair must be your favorite thing about me,” she remarked, eyes twinkling with mirth once she pulled back. “You can’t seem to prevent yourself from touching it.”

Ben grinned. “While I do admit I’ve always been fond of your hair, there are other things I admire about you.”

Intrigued, Abigail scooted impossibly closer and rested her chin on his chest. “Such as?”

He chuckled incredulously. “You actually want a list?”
“I certainly do,” she replied, grinning.

Ben looked upwards, feigning a look of intense concentration before settling into another chuckle as she lightly scraped her nails against his side. “Of course, there’s your hair. All golden curls and wild.” He paused before adding playfully, “This is in no particular order, mind you.”

“Oh, of course,” she nodded seriously, puckering her lips into a ridiculous pout enough to make him laugh.

“Then there’s your eyes,” he continued, once the laughter escaped him, though the smile remained. His arm that was around her shoulders pulled her closer, his hand slowly tracing circles along the smooth, bare skin of her back. “They’re just so blue, practically the color of larkspur. I could just lose myself when looking at you. It’s probably half of the reason you’ve won many of our arguments. Driving the opponent to distraction.”

“Really? I thought it was my cleverness and wit that stumped you,” she teased.

“You’d like me to admit that, wouldn’t you? Ah, well, where next? Oh. I know. Your heart. That definitely tops the list. You care so much about others, your friends, family. You’ve always had the biggest heart, even when it could lead you to trouble – which it has, I’ve noticed.”

Face growing warm, she pressed her face into his chest with a dramatic groan. Oh, that smooth bastard. He had always been such a talented speaker, knowing exactly what to say to stutter her heart. But she knew deep down that he meant every word.

Sensing her internal struggle, Ben grinned and pressed a kiss to the crown of her head. “Your legs,” he continued after a moment.

Peeking upwards, Abigail laughed. “Seriously?”

He nodded sagely. “Oh, yes. Trust me, seeing you walk around camp in trousers has been absolute torture. Now, though, I’m not sure how I’m going to be able to keep my hands off you, now that I’ve seen them in all their glory.”

Stifling another giggle, she promised she would try not to make it too unbearable for him any longer, though her grin absolutely ruined her sincerity. He nipped her lower lip in reprimand, smiling despite himself.

Soft kisses were exchanged for quite a while, slowly and languidly as if they had all the time in the world. In that moment, they did. Nothing else mattered other than the two of them. This was all she had ever wanted. It was more than she could have asked for.

“Is there anything else?” she asked curiously. She poked him lightly in the side in jest. “I feel like you’re holding back on me.”

Ben pressed his lips together, his face suddenly red. Abigail was even more intrigued. Oh, this was interesting. He had just described how much he liked her legs. What else could he admire that would make him blush?

“Your arse,” he admitted, chuckling nervously.

Abigail stared at him for a moment before laughing in shocked delight. She wasn’t sure why, but the thought of the major admiring her arse brought her no little amount of amusement. Or pleasure.

He was blushing but began to grin as she rolled herself on top of him, his hands settling on her hips.
His fingers twitched a little against her skin, as if they wished to explore but were restricted by societal propriety.

Sensing this, Abigail pressed her mouth against his, murmuring with a teasing grin, “Don’t be shy, love.” She placed her hands on top of his, which still remained stubbornly on her hips. “You weren’t an hour ago.”

Slowly, she brought his hands downward to cup her bottom, a hand on each cheek. She hummed contentedly as he began to palm her with little hesitation after that. His hands were a decent size, and they cupped her perfectly.

“I can’t blame you for admiring it,” Abigail teased, pulling back a little. “I have it on good authority that I have a ‘pretty great arse’.” She had Caleb Brewster to prove it, the whaler having bestowed the title upon her himself. Not that she would ever admit that to Ben though.

“And who’s this authority?” Ben asked, playful at first but when she stubbornly refused to answer, his eyebrows arched in suspicion. “Seriously, who said this?”

Abigail shook her head. “A good spy doesn’t betray her sources.”

His eyes narrowed even further, and he demanded to know who said it. She leaned forward and pressed her mouth to his, kissing him to distraction.

He kissed her back instinctively, and for a moment, she thought she had earned victory.

But then, he asked, “No though, who was it? Was it a man?”

Abigail pulled back to rest her forearms across his chest. She brought her fingers to her lips, making a locking motion with her hand before tossing the invisible key over her shoulder. Before he could say anything more, she rocked her hips against his, grinning sharply at his gasp.

Caleb was safe once again.

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The major awoke to sunlight filtering through curtained windows, the warmth from the sun stirring him back to the land of the awakened. The complete and utter stillness outside the cabin prompted him to open his eyes and lift his head to peer out of the window without disturbing his bed partner.

The dark, thunderous storm clouds had faded in the night, replaced by the greyish blue hue of a cloudy morning.

The storm had come and gone over the course of the night. It was difficult to assess the damage from his vantage point, but that didn’t concern him. All that mattered was they could finally get moving.

Dropping his gaze from the window, Ben shifted further down into the bed, having been careful not to disturb the sleeping form beside him. With his arm securely around her middle, he was wrapped around her comfortably, protectively, perhaps even greedily. There was nothing more that he wanted than to burrow himself into her soft warm, and so he did.

Unable to help himself, he dropped a kiss to her shoulder, exposed a little by the shift she had changed back into the night before when she had claimed to be cold. The soft, pale expanse of her neck was all too inviting, but he resisted the urge to continue kissing her awake, though barely. While they needed to get moving as soon as possible, he was reluctant to wake her, knowing that upon their arrival at the new camp base, sleep would be a rare commodity.
He couldn’t recall the last time he had slept so well. The reason could easily be amounted to the previous night’s activities, but it was much more than that, although he didn’t discredit that fact, not at all. Lying there with the woman who always had his heart, the woman he had just given all of himself to, nestled securely in his arms brought out an overwhelming surge of emotions he hadn’t expected to feel, namely in the form of one word which kept thrumming in his mind.

Mine.

Giving in to the urge, the major began softly peppering her neck with kisses, smiling against her skin as she stirred in his arms. She sighed quietly, contently after a while, subtly arching her neck against his mouth in such a manner he knew she was almost awake and continued to carry out his dutiful task.

After a moment – more like several, Abigail stirred further and turned so that she was lying on her back, careful not to slip from underneath his hold. He pulled her closer, and she smiled at him sleepily, causing his heart to swell so much inside his chest it was nearly fit to burst. “I love you, I have always loved you, and I can’t imagine loving anyone else the way I love you.”

The words went unspoken, but with every gentle touch, every kiss they were expressed. Actions spoke louder than words, as someone wise once said, though later Ben would discover that words were just as important.

He leaned in to kiss her warmly, his hands pressing into the soft, morning warmth of her back. Getting ready could wait.

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Eventually, the pair did get up, as unfortunate as it was. They had to get moving as soon as possible, and they couldn’t afford to linger any more than they already had.

Ben rose from the bed and went in search from his clothes prior to the storm, which would now be blessedly dry. Abigail lingered a moment to admire the view she received in return but eventually forced herself up and out of the bed before she instigated something neither one of them would regret.

While he dressed, Abigail took it upon herself to clean and put away the dishes, which she had neglected to do the previous night, though for very good reasons. It was the least she could do by trying to clean up their mess, not knowing when the cabin’s original occupants would return. They had been fortunate they hadn’t returned already, which she took as a blessing.

Once they dishes were cleaned and stacked, she returned them to their original places in the cabinet, already having returned the ingredients to storage the previous night. There wasn’t enough time to do a thorough job of cleaning, especially with the bedroom, but surprisingly – or perhaps not too surprisingly – she was much too happy to care about that.

By the time Ben reemerged, Abigail was folding a blanket carefully and tucking it back to where she had originally found it. He walked behind her, settling his hands low on her hips and dropping a lingering kiss to the nape of her neck. Abigail’s eyes shut briefly at the contact, smiling.

“Is this your idea of leaving immediately?” she asked. Her leaning into him, pressing herself against his chest contradicted the poor attempt at a reprimand, and they both heard it.

“Are you complaining?” She could hear the smile in his voice but more so felt the smile against her neck, threatening to send a shudder of pleasure through her.
“No,” she sighed, smiling, and turned in his arms so that she could wrap her arms around his neck.

Abigail looked at him, really looked at him. The blissfully happy expression on Ben’s face nearly stole her breath and stopped her heart. There was nothing more than she wanted in this world for Ben – apart from his safety and well-being – than for him to be happy, whether it was with her or not. But just seeing the look on his face and even suspecting she had some part in putting that expression on his face…

“I love you.” Those three little words sat on the tip of her tongue, ready to tumble past her unwilling lips for so long. In the past few years alone, there had been many opportunities for her to say them whether in a quiet murmur or a confession, but she never had, whether it was from cowardice, self-preservation, or both.

But those words were all she could think about. She knew it was much more than the effects of afterglow because she was more than well acquainted with this feeling, of loving someone so much you put their needs above your own.

“What’s wrong?” Ben asked, his smile fading a little at her brief turn into distraction.

Smiling more fully, Abigail shook her head. “Nothing. Absolutely nothing. In fact, I think it’s about time I tell you this now before any more years are wasted.”

She was just about to tell him, the words more than ready to reveal themselves, when suddenly there’s a heavy pounding on the door.

Jolting apart, they faced the door with growing dread. From behind her, she heard Ben take a few steps back, and when she looked over her shoulder, she found him grabbing a rifle that had been hanging along the back wall.

“Hide yourself,” Abigail urged when there’s another insistent pounding on the door. A sudden stroke of inspiration sparked inside her, and she knew she had to see it through. She pressed a hand to his chest and pushed him back, but he wouldn’t budge.

“What about you?” he demanded, his tone quiet but firm.

Abigail shook her head and retrieved the blanket to cover herself. “I have a plan. Go hide. Just in case it’s someone who recognizes you. Go.”

“Abigail…”

“Ben, what if it’s Gamble? What if he’s searching for you? Think,” she insisted, wrapping the blanket around herself more firmly. “Now if I don’t answer the door by the time they knock a third time, they’re going to kick the door in and find the both of us here squabbling. I have my father’s pistol on me, so I have protection. Please, go.”

Ben didn’t like where he suspected this plan was going but knew there were no other options for them. He hid himself behind the wall before she walked towards the door, watching her like a hawk.

Abigail took a calming breath and quickly approached the door, her hand on the knob. She grabbed a knife on her way and tucked it carefully into the pocket she had tied around her shift, her father’s pistol still in her coat pocket in the bedroom, and opened the door.

It took every ounce of strength she had not to gasp at the sight of Gamble standing before her, looking as disheveled and sleazy as she had ever seen him. Behind him stood two other men, assuredly British soldiers in civilian clothing or Tories at the very least.
“I’m sorry to disturb you, ma’am,” Gambles apologized, though it didn’t appear as if he sounded all the sorry about it. He should attend acting classes if he wanted to appear more believable. “May we come in?”

Before she could even ask, he pushed himself inside, nearly shoving her into the wall as he and the other men entered the cabin.

Catching herself, Abigail pressed forward to make sure she was standing right in front of them, preventing them from coming in any further.

“You don’t have the right to come in like this. What is the meaning of this?” she demanded, her frayed nerves making her tone higher pitched with alarm. Given the circumstances, it was understandable, and from the looks of the men, they understood this, too, at least the other two. Gambles didn’t appear to give a shit.

“I’m sorry to cause you any disturbance, ma’am,” the younger one remarked, his tone sounding sincerely apologetic. Now him she actually nearly believed. “We’ve been going from cabin to cabin asking those residing there if they had seen a pair of strange men running about. Now we’re asking you.”

“ Asking me what?” she asked, burying her hands into her makeshift shawl to hide the sudden tremors in her hands.

“ Asking,” Gambled remarked impatiently, “if you’ve seen these men? They’re dangerous rebel soldiers, one of them is a rebel officer. It’s hard to tell about the other. I was a little indisposed when he arrived.”

“You mean you were knocked out on your arse when came up behind you with your own musket,” the other man, taller and ganglier, supplied, his near toothless grin dying when Gambles fixed him with a glare.

Abigail barely hid her smile. Barely.

“I haven’t seen any men by your description,” she responded. “I never left the cabin all evening due the weather. I assume you know there had been a nasty storm last evening. If there had been anyone foolish enough to run about out there, I’m sure they hadn’t made it far from where you left them.”

Adjusting the blanket over her shoulders, Abigail continued, “My husband will be returning any minute and wouldn’t appreciate you barging in here like this, especially those who may fall into his regiment.”

Gamble’s brows lifted questioningly. “Are you saying your husband’s a British officer?”

“I surely am,” Abigail asserted, though that was only a partial truth. Her husband was in the British army when she had been granted her divorce. What these men didn’t know was that he was truly serving for the Continental Army, but that was obviously not something she was going to admit.

Impulsively, she added boldly, “He’ll be arriving her on his way to meet Major Andre. Wrote it to me himself in a letter. Would you like to see for yourself?”

That was a major bluff she had just made, so risky in fact she nearly cursed herself for making it. Somewhere not too far from where they stood, she knew Ben had overheard everything, including what she had just said. She had a feeling she would never hear the end of it from him, if they managed to make it out of there unscathed.
For several minutes, the trio assessed her suspiciously, trying to gage if she was in fact telling the truth or if she was just bull shitting them. Abigail tilted her chin upwards a little in defiance, another bold move, which each man took in with a little flicker of surprise. The longer the silence stretched, the more nervous she became. She did her best not to show it.

Finally, after what felt like ages, but was more than likely a few minutes, Gamble grunted a little. “That won’t be necessary, madam. We’re sorry to have intruded.”

He and the men turned to head for the door when Gamble paused and turned back to stare at her, gaze piercing, “If you could mention it to your husband,” he paused purposefully before continuing, “if you recall seeing any strangers in the area, please tell him to let us know. These men are dangerous and need to be captured.”

“Of course,” Abigail replied. And just because she couldn’t let it slide, she had to get one final dig in. “I’ll let the major know as soon as he arrives.”

She was almost certain that Gambles was a lieutenant himself. Judging him upon first impression, he seemed like a power seeking bastard of sorts, desiring to work his way up as fast and dirtily as he needed to. So knowing that her alleged husband outranked him must have burned him up on the inside.

The shorter man tugged at Gamble, whose glaring gaze refused to leave hers, until the pack leader ducked his head through the doorway before shutting the door behind him.

Pushing back a curtain slightly, she watched as they approached their horses, Gamble looking far from pleased as the shorter of the men tried to talk him down.

As soon as they mounted and rode off, Abigail rushed into the bedroom to change back into her male civilian clothes, bindings and all, after a clipped remark from Ben that he would be tacking the horse for their departure.

Soon enough, in record time, they were riding away from the cabin, on Gamble’s horse, with little nothing more than the clothes on their backs and the few weapons they could manage to “borrow.” Unfortunately, it was doubtful they would ever be returned.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys are enjoying this fic! Thank you all so much for the kudos, comments, bookmarks, and subs!!! Things are going to begin taking some interesting turn, very soon.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x05

Update: Please see end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Middlebrook, New Jersey

The journey to the new Middlebrook camp had been blessedly uneventful. There hadn’t been any more run-ins with Gamble and his men nor had there been any other delays preventing Ben and Abigail to reach Middlebrook other than the storm.

It had been a few days since they made it back to camp, and soon they had fallen back into their patterns of every day camp life. With each of them returning to their duties, they were lucky to catch glimpses of each other, let alone speak or have a moment alone. There was nothing they could do to about it, which made it all the more frustrating.

Even more so that whenever Abigail saw him now, she remembered his hands on her bare skin, his mouth against her breasts, the way his brows pinched together when he…

She slammed Anderson’s old copy of medical procedures closed with more force than was necessary, her body growing warmer than the morning air permitted.

The camp doctor had loaned her a copy to allow her to further her knowledge, with absolutely no fuss. It was a little surprising, now that he knew who she was. There was a part of her waiting for the other shoe to drop, waiting for him to discourage her from asking about some medical question a woman shouldn’t be privy to or anything a woman shouldn’t be knowledgeable about – something she found completely ridiculous, clearly. But so far, Anderson continued to answer all of her questions and instruct her as he had always done, not once treating her any differently. Maybe he was open-minded. Or maybe he was in denial. Whatever it was, she wasn’t going to mess with this opportunity, and that included taking better care of his books.

Tucking the book carefully under her arm, Abigail rose from her seat, about to return the book back in the hands of its owner when she spotted Ben walking through the center of camp. Walking towards her with such a single-minded purpose she couldn’t help but meet him halfway. The silly book could wait.

“Morning, stranger,” Abigail greeted as soon as she reached him, lips instantly turning upwards into a smile.

Ben grinned, asking, “Is that how it is now?”

Abigail shrugged, eyes twinkling with mischief. There was so much more that she wanted to say – so much she wanted to do, actually – but given they were out in the open in the camp, a certain protocol had to be maintained, especially between a soldier and his superior, perhaps even more especially due to her disguise as being male. “How am I supposed to react? You don’t write, you’re
never around, you… Oh, you shaved.”

The complete absence of stubble for some reason derailed her from her intended line of teasing. His jaw and neck were smooth and bare, completely unlike how he had appeared when they made it to Middlebrook. The last time she had seen him, had actually spoken to him, he had still sported the stubble, which she couldn’t deny looked rather attractive on him. Not that he wasn’t attractive when he shaved, but there was just something about the scruffy look that… well…

Maybe it was for the best he had saved after all.

He brought a hand to his face, almost self-consciously, and let out an almost nervous chuckle, bless him. “Yeah, it was about time for that look to go. It’s not exactly a look I can pull off. Besides, I don’t want Caleb feeling threatened, now that he’s growing his back.”

Abigail snickered quietly, ducking her head a little to avoid any direct eye contact with soldiers passing by them. “Yes, we wouldn’t want to do that.”

After a moment, she looked up, giving him a quick assessment of appreciation before quickly veiling the expression on her face. “Though I’m not sure that I agree with you on one point, major. I think you carry the stubble look quite nicely.”

Nodding, Abigail prepared to take a step forward, hesitating for a moment to see if anyone was watching them. Only when it was apparent they were not being watched, she stepped closer and added lowly, for his ears alone, “I like the way it feels between my thighs.”

She watched as the major’s lips parted, his eyes growing darker, and was very much looking forward to his response when out of nowhere an officer approached them, a Lieutenant Murphy to be exact. He apologized for the interruption, but he had a quick question for Ben, who looked ready to stuff the man into a box and ship him off very far away. Abigail couldn’t blame him. She shared the exact sentiment.

Sensing this quick question could take a while, Abigail figured she should make herself scarce. “I’ll leave you gentlemen to it,” she remarked, excusing herself from the conversation which would promise to be incredibly interesting – not. She never met the man before, but Caleb had told her that Murphy tended to be a long-winded fellow, which wouldn’t have been so terrible if he wasn’t also so extremely dull, or so she heard. Apparently, the middle aged lieutenant had the personality of a dead fish.

Ben fixed her with an partially envious glare as she made her escape, with more than a hint of barely concealed frustration in his face for more reasons than one. She pressed her lips together to conceal her own smile and turned around to head over to Anderson’s tent. Only when she was a half a dozen steps away from them did inspiration strike.

“Oops,” Abigail murmured as the doctor’s book slipped out of her grasp and landed on the ground with a resounding thud. She took her absolute time to retrieve it, too, bending low at waist so that her fingers brushed along the rough tome until she had a decent grip.

She heard a sudden choking sound from behind her. Peeking over her shoulder, the blonde spotted Ben’s very flushed face and watched as he struggled to maintain his composure. Fortunately for Ben, his conversational companion didn’t seem to notice, the lieutenant still carrying on with his monotonous monologue.

Abigail smirked a little to herself and straightened to her full height. Brushing some of the dirt off the book, she continued her walk towards the good doctor’s tent, knowing fully well she was going to
pay for that little stunt later.

And she was looking forward to it.

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After her mild indiscretion, Abigail managed to return the book to Anderson in one piece, thankfully with no physical damage apart from the signs of the early stages of a weathered, well-worn old book.

The most common cases seen in the camp were usually a result from illnesses and other physical ailments aside from battle injuries, which were less common than one would think. One of the worst shifts she had assisted Anderson with had been in the early days of her unofficial apprenticeship, back in Valley Forge during the harsh winter months when diseases and hypothermia ran rampant coupled with dangerously low food supplies, leading to starvation deaths of many. During that time, she had run on little sleep, practically up to her neck with ailing soldiers. How she and Anderson hadn’t contracted any of the diseases themselves had been a miracle in itself.

No such drastic number of cases did they have to tend to that day. In fact, the few patients that visited the infirmary tent had complaints more so dealing with arthritis. Abigail took over tending to them when more serious cases came to the doctor’s attention.

She assisted him when she could but for the most part helped treat those suffering from sore joints by rubbing their joints with a piece of dry flannel. Each of them confided in her that they preferred her touch to Anderson’s, who tended to be rougher in his massages than hers. She could’ve sworn she had spotted a flicker of a smile on the doctor’s face, but when she turned to face him fully, he had returned to treatment to his own patient.

Anderson dismissed her at noon as soon as her patients left. Accepting the unusually early dismal before he could change his mind, Abigail stepped out of the tent and didn’t make it ten steps before she ran smack into Anna Strong.

Abigail gaped. “Anna?”

Even with the smudges of dirt along her skin and sweaty tendrils clinging to the sides of her face, she could easily recognize an Anna Strong when she saw one.

Anna stared back, equally shocked. “Ab…” she stopped herself short, shaking her head a little. Her shocked expression slowly gave way to a growing grin. “Williams,” she greeted her, emphasizing her correction which only made the blonde laugh.

The two embraced but quickly, mostly in part to not draw too much suspicion. Wiping her hands on her skirts – she had been assigned to digging with some other women, hence her exhausted, grimy appearance – Anna then led her somewhere where they could speak more privately, an act that was very difficult to accomplish these days.

Soon enough the two women found a place in the woods, sitting on an old tree stump that provided enough room for two.

“What are you doing here?” Abigail demanded. It wasn’t that she wasn’t happy to see her friend, her best friend, but to say she was floored by Anna’s sudden presence would have been a major understatement.

The barmaid, or former barmaid now she supposed, tucked a stray dark curl behind her ear. “So much has happened in Setauket since you’ve gone, more than you realize.” She told Abigail of everything that happened after Abe’s release from the British prison, and his current standoff with
Major Hewlett, the deterioration of her and Abe’s relationship along with it, but not for the reasons Abigail began to think.

“Mary Woodhull fell in love with Hewlett,” Anna said, pressing her lips together in displeasure. “While Abe had been in prison, I suspect.”

Abigail stared in amazement, her lips parting in shock. “I’m sorry. I don’t…?”

Anna nodded, understanding her shock all too well. “I didn’t see it coming either, but I feel like I should have, considering how much time they had been spending together, how much he doted on her.

Apparently, Mary had the divorce papers ready for Abe as soon as he arrived back at Whitehall, claiming she wanted a divorce based on Abe’s past indiscretions… with me.” And Abe had apparently agreed, signing the papers with only the concern for their son on his mind.

No one had anticipated Mary announcing her engagement to Major Hewlett a few days later.

Of course, when the news reached Abe, chaos ensued.

“What about Thomas?” Abigail asked, the news so distressing she couldn’t keep still. She rose to her feet and looked at Anna with dismay.

Anna replied regretfully, “That’s a huge battle between them right now. As of right now, Thomas is currently in Abe’s father’s custody until they sort everything out. Mary wants Thomas to go with her and Hewlett to marry in Scotland, his home country, while Abe, understandably against it, wants to keep Thomas with him.”

“Christ, what a mess.”

“You’re telling me.”

Abigail hesitated before asking softly, “And how’s Abe holding up?”

The brunette’s hands clenched the material of her skirts. “I… he… I don’t really know. He’s pushed me so far away during these past few months, I don’t know where his head is anymore. I’ve tried, believe me, I’ve tried so hard being there for him, but he’s determined not to let anyone in. He thinks he needs to do all of this alone, but he’s not alone. I’ve tried to make him see that.”

A tear trickled down her cheek, which she stubbornly rubbed away with the back of her hand. Abigail’s heart ached for her. This wasn’t the same Anna Strong she had last seen on her and Ben’s last meeting with her and Abe. The woman who sat before her looked so completely, utterly defeated, the remnants of her broken heart clear on her face.

Kneeling at her feet, Abigail took Anna’s hands in hers and squeezed them reassuringly, hoping to provide even the smallest amount of comfort. Anna smiled gently at the gesture, her lips quivering to keep the tears at bay.

It took her several minutes for Anna to collect herself, which was an impressive feat in itself. Then again, her name wasn’t Anna Strong for nothing, whether she inherited the name through marriage or not.

“And so I thought since Abe no longer needs me,” Anna continued after a measured breath, “I decided I could better serve my country here.”
“First of all,” Abigail said, squeezing Anna’s hands, “Abe will always need you, no matter what he’s going through or how thick-headed he’s acting.” She smiled a little as the brunette huffed out a reluctant laugh. Goal achieved! “Second of all, and most importantly, it’s good to have you here. You’re needed here.”

Anna smiled gratefully as she slowly came back to herself.

Abigail suddenly grinned. “Now all we have to do is get you a uniform, a pseudonym, and enlist you, and you’ll be ready to go.”

“Don’t give her any ideas,” Ben remarked, drawing both women’s attention over Abigail’s shoulder. They watched as both Caleb and Ben approached them. Apparently they had been searching for them for some time.

Abigail ignored the jab and rose to her feet, countering cheekily, “Finally got away from chatty Murphy, huh?”

Ben sighed heavily, a look of intense relief flickering across his face. “Yes, all thanks to Caleb for intervening.”

The whaler grinned before bringing up a hand to his own ear and leaned towards Ben. “I’m sorry. I don’t believe I quite heard that. Thanks to who now?”

Ben huffed and aimed a playful punch towards Caleb’s arm, which the latter managed to dodge with perfect ease.

Anna shook her head. “It’s nice to see you’re still humble, Caleb.”

Caleb removed his hat and gave a half-bow. “I always aim to please.”

Abigail and Anna grinned while Ben was just left to shake his head.

When Anna asked what they could do for them, Caleb said they were actually looking for Anna. At her suddenly perplexed look, he said, “We were gonna offer you a rest from the digging, but it looks like you’re already doing that.”

Anna smiled sheepishly while Abigail lifted a brow as if to say, “And what’s your point?” Then Anna insisted, “I was on my way to find more shovels when I ran into her, quite literally actually. Besides, I don’t mind the work.”

“Yeah?” Caleb asked, amused. “Give yourself a once-over. You’ll want to wipe the grime off before you meet him.”

Abigail had been about to give Caleb a talking to when she found a twig caught in Anna’s dark locks. Whoops. She quickly plucked the twig out of her hair before Anna reached up to self-consciously brush at her hair and caught Ben’s amused gaze. She narrowed her eyes at him playfully, shaking her head just as Anna asked, “Meet who?”

Ben and Caleb shared a look, which they briefly extended to Abigail when they both chuckled. “General Washington, of course.”

Anna’s eyes widened. “Wait… you mean…”

“General George Washington, the Grey Fox? Yes,” Ben confirmed, smiling.
Abigail was grinning now, too, and placed a steadying hand on Anna’s shoulder. “Breathe, Anna. You haven’t even met him yet.”

She did acknowledge it was easier said than done. When she had first encountered Washington, she had felt just as breathless and startled by the sight of him. But then again, the commander-in-chief had just pinned her against the wall, believing her to be a potential assailant, so there had been that, too.

Realizing that Anna was already overwhelmed, Abigail decided the best thing to do was not go with them to introduce Anna to Washington. She didn’t want to add to the intense mixture of emotions she was already feeling.

Abigail didn’t phrase it exactly like that, but she made her excuses not to join them when Anna rose to her feet and followed Caleb to return to camp. Ben lingered behind to catch Abigail by the arm, pulling her close to say, “Don’t think I don’t know the reason of what you just did.”

Abigail smiled innocently. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

She went to leave, but he pulled her a closer still, his eyes narrowing slightly, “And don’t even think I don’t know what you did earlier either.”

The blonde smiled angelically at that, “I really don’t know what you’re talking about.” She winked, ruining the poor attempt at faux innocence, and easily slipped out his grasp to make her escape.

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Abigail didn’t see much of the trio until late into the evening when Caleb came to fetch her. When she asked him if anything was wrong, all he would say that Anna and Ben were waiting for them, and they shouldn’t delay. Needless to say, she didn’t waste any more time asking questions and followed him to where Ben and Anna were waiting for them.

It turned out Robert Townsend, or Culper Jr. rather, uncovered a rather insidious plot the British were cooking up and managed to report as much through the techniques Abe had taught him for when he need to get his message across. Counterfeiting racketeer. That’s how low the British had sunk to. Circulate false money enough to make the Continental Congress go bankrupt, thus defunding the Continental Army, and thus ending the war where the British essentially win by default. So much for integrity and honor during times of war. It appeared those ideas have long since died, at least on the part of the British. Oh, how very ironic.

Were the British so in desperate financial strain themselves that they would resort to this? Apparently so, which meant that nothing was off the table any longer.

Since Anna had been in enemy territory the longest out of the four of them, Caleb believed she was the next best thing to a British solider, having been acquainted with how they think and their usual patterns due in large part to having associated with them for the past few years. Especially with Simcoe and a few other British officers having been quartered in her home.

“Well,” Anna began after examining the documents they had brought with them, “I’ve been thinking about where the shovers would do their shoving. If they have all this money to unload, they can’t just spend it at some general store. They’d need someone who could take thousands in one go and spend it fast.”

“Well, loyal Tories, right?” Ben suggested. “I mean, they could spend it, but they’d have to do it
over time.”

Caleb shook his head. “No, no, too slow. The British need a flood, not a trickle.”

Abigail observed a sudden spark light up Anna’s face and leaned forward, asking, “What is it?”

“When Maarten DeJong bought Selah’s tavern,” Anna remarked, “he switched to buying cheap rum
from privateers so Patriot privateers have access to our lands and waterways. They trade on the black
market with anyone.”

Ben and Caleb shared a look as Anna spoke, realization dawning on the both of them. Abigail asked,
“So they might be greed enough not to ask questions about who they’re selling to or why?”

Anna nodded, smiling at Abigail. “Precisely.”

“Christ,” Caleb spoke, amazed. “She’s… she’s got it Ben. She got it!”

The whaler walked over to Anna, cupped her face, and kissed her on the crown of her head. “You
got it!”

Anna laughed while Abigail beamed in pride for her friend. With his arm around Anna’s shoulder,
Caleb turned to Ben and said, “All right, last week I heard a couple of whip jackets who do business
in Moodna Creek, right? They closed their shop. They stopped selling. They pulled all their tobacco
off the London trade.” He looked at each of them emphatically. “They pulled all of it.”

“Wait, how much did they have?” Ben demanded.

Caleb shrugged. “A shit ton, give or take.”

Abigail held back a snort but barely, knowing that wouldn’t be very productive in that moment.
Instead, she remained quiet as the three continued to talk. That was until she remembered one
relatively important detail just as Caleb and Ben were hammering out the details to go with a few
soldiers to intercept and observe the counterfeiters’ hideout and report back to Washington. “I think
there’s one thing you’re forgetting, boys.”

When she received blank stares in response, Abigail pointed out, “Abe? You were supposed to meet
him, right?”

“Ah, shit, she’s right!” Caleb exclaimed, after murmuring a curse. “Well, he’s going to have to wait,
until we see this through.”

“Or maybe not?” Abigail said. “I can go while you and Ben go take care of the counterfeiters.” Anna
and Ben both frowned at her while Caleb took on a more considering look. “And before you say
no,” she added directly to Ben, raising her eyebrows a little, “need I remind you that’s what shared
courier duties are for, right?”

As usual whenever she volunteered, Ben looked displeased, but this time Caleb helped her out. “I
think this could work out. If we each left tonight, she’ll probably beat us back here. Don’t you have
that thing in Philadelphia soon?”

After a few rounds of persuasion – which she was honestly surprise didn’t take longer than that –
Ben acquiesced. “Fine. That’s what we’ll do then.” He turned to Caleb and asked if he could make
the arrangements for each separate mission, to which the whaler agreed with happily and left the tent
with bounce in his step, a little too eager to see the looks on the British faces when they discovered
the rebels had bested them, of that Abigail had no doubt.
Before Abigail went to follow, Ben asked if she could meet him in his tent before she left, to go over some notes he wished to give Abe. But Abigail knew better.

There were no notes, at least none that she was aware of.

She didn’t say of this, instead agreeing that she would meet him there, barely concealing her smile as she walked in the direction of the major’s tent.

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The moment the tent’s flaps were firmly shut, Ben’s mouth was on hers, demanding and desperate. She matched him with equal fervor, wrapping her arms around her neck while his snaked around her waist pulling her closer. She grinned sharply against his mouth when she felt his growing arousal against her and suppressed a shudder of delight. It had been nearly a week since they had first lain together, which was far too long for her liking. Judging from his eagerly roaming hands, he agreed.

They were on borrowed time, the minutes ticking down against them with every passing second. Shoes were kicked off and trousers quickly removed and discarded and not much time for anything else, apart from loosening of Abigail’s bindings so that she could arch her chest against his eager mouth.

When he finally positioned himself at her entrance, Abigail met him halfway, moving forward just as he entered her, making the movement one, quick thrust. They hid their gasps of pleasure against the other’s mouth, knowing they needed to be quiet as well as quick.

Only one of the two was a realistic scenario.

It was rushed and frantic, hot and desperate all in one. There were so many things Abigail wanted to do for him, so many things she wanted to teach him. If only they had the time. But she was more than happy to have this, feeling his harsh ragged breathing against her neck, hearing his constant stream of “mine, mine, mine” no matter how hard he tried to muffle them against the pillow.

She loved it, every single time that word tumbled past his lips. She clawed at him eagerly, murmuring incoherent mumblings against his neck. Her hands slipped underneath his shirt, nails digging down his back until he shuddered violently against her.

By some miracle, they manage to stay relatively quiet, apart from the harsh panting and half-choked moans as they tumbled over the edge, one behind the other. They lied there together for a few precious moments, half-clothed limbs tangled together as they caught their breath.

“I think,” Ben remarked when breathing returned to him, “I should feel more embarrassed than I actually feel.”

Abigail giggled, and he pulled her closer as he kissed the top of her head, grinning sheepishly. “I think you get a pass, considering time constraints.” She looked up at him with an impish smile. “Besides, do you hear me complaining?”

Unfortunately, the afterglow couldn’t last. With the reality of their impending journeys lingering over their heads, they got dressed quickly, or as quickly as one could when the other kept coming in for distracting kisses – Abigail.

All there was left were their shoes, which Abigail found hers right beside the cot. She didn’t worry too much about her appearance apart from the obvious reasons; she was going to have to change into civilian clothing before she left anyway. Still, she carefully tied back her mussed hair into a careful bun. There was only so much she could do to conceal the… after effects of what they had just been
up to. It was a very good thing it was well beyond dusk.

“I really don’t like that you’re going,” Ben remarked from his place beside her on the cot. He looked over at her as he laced his boots. “I’m sure you know that, but I felt it needed to be said, just in case.”

“Oh, I know how your mind works,” Abigail remarked, reaching over to tuck a stray lock behind his ear. Her fingers lingered as she caressed the soft skin just below his ear. She smiled as he relaxed under her touch. “I’ll be back before you know it. Cantor isn’t known for his glacial speed, you know.”

He snorted indelicately. “Oh, that I know. I still have bruises from when he threw me off when your father and I first tried to break him.”

Abigail suppressed a smile by hiding her face against his shoulder, recalling easily how an overconfident fourteen year old Benjamin Tallmadge had been given a lesson in humility by that dramatic beast of a horse of hers, at the tender age of one year no less. He hadn’t suffered any physical injuries thankfully, but from what she remembered, the only injury he had suffered was his pride.

“I’ll admit,” Abigail murmured, resting her cheek against his shoulder, “I don’t really like you going either, but we have our jobs to do. And we can’t let Washington done. Besides, contrary to popular opinion, but I don’t actively seek out trouble. It… just has an unusual way of finding me.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Ben remarked wryly. He took both of her hands in his and brought them to his lips. She shifted a little so that she was now facing him fully. “Please, just be careful.”

“For Culper?” she asked.

“For me,” Ben said, giving her hands a firm squeeze. “I just got you to myself. I’m too selfish to give you up now.”

Abigail smiled and leaned forward to press a kiss to his lips, sealing the unspoken promise with a kiss. “Now, go off and be a hero, major. Give them hell.”

Chapter End Notes

Quick update: Sorry if there's any confusion pertaining to the Mary/Hewlett subplot. Basically, I gave Mary Anna’s storyline with Hewlett, but in this fic, they actually get married, which means Mary divorces Abe to be with Hewlett. I've mentioned it in a few chapters, but I haven't recently so I apologize for any confusion!
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x05.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As soon as she dressed in civilian clothing – consisting of dark brown trousers with an equally dark brown coat over her loose fitting uniform shirt and a brown cap to conceal her face – Abigail laced up her boots and set off towards the stable. She could only imagine how eager her horse Cantor would be for an adventure, having been pasture bound for the better part of two months, at least. He was probably giving the poor stable hand a fit, which meant she owed her dramatic beast a carrot and the unfortunate soldier that had to manage him a few more coins, the usual arrangement.

Only when she arrived, her horse was nowhere to be found. Oh, the soldier was there, nodding to her in greeting while holding onto the reigns of horse that decidedly was not Cantor. First of all, the horse was a mare. That was her first second clue. Her first had been the grey and white dappled coat.

At her puzzled expression, the soldier explained, “They finally managed to find a farrier to came care for the horses’ hooves. Yours was on the list to get his hooves done, and we didn’t think he would be done in time before you had to go, so we got you Penny.”

“Penny,” Abigail said, observing the mare warily. She didn’t have a good history with mares. One had refused to walk anywhere, no matter how hard she tried to coax or kick the horse into action. The second mare refused to let anyone but men ride her and always gave her trouble, why she had no idea to this day. Oh and another had apparently been in beginnings of her cycle, and every male horse whinnied and rushed after them to get to her. That was a fun time. These experiences coupled with several more accounts served as the foundations of her only riding geldings, i.e. Cantor.

“Penny”, the dappled mare, looked awfully young. She could see the whites in her eyes as the horse looked around, snorting quietly as she pawed at the earth. How long had it been since she had been broken?

As if reading her mind, the soldier said, “She’s a very smooth ride but is pretty skittish. She’s about two years old. And broken in about… three months ago? Maybe six?”

Three months at two years old. Christ. Oh, this wasn’t going to go well for either of them.

“All right,” Abigail sighed heavily, accepting the reigns from the soldier. She dropped the coins into his hands for his trouble but not without saying, “Consider this as a down payment on my funeral if I don’t return.” She smiled in jest, though she had to wonder if she was actually joking at all.

The soldier accepted the coins while a low chuckle and promised he would get on it. He returned to the stables after she mounted Penny, who shifted nervously from foot to foot underneath her weight. Horses sensed the moods of their riders, and often their own moods reflected whatever feeling they senses – confidence, energy, fear, nervousness.

Abigail took a calming breath and steadied herself, recalling this and doing her best to keep herself calm, more for this newly broken mare than herself. She eased the mare into a walk, laying the reins
lightly against her and clicking her tongue.

Penny stubbornly didn’t move, and Abigail sighed irritably. Bloody mares. She tried again, and the horse didn’t budge. She then gave a slight nudge of her heels into her side and had to hold herself upright as Penny broke out into a trot with absolutely no warning.

The trot was rough and terrible. It took a few minutes for her to adjust, and when she did, the trot wasn’t any better when she had her balance.

“Smooth ride, my Irish arse,” Abigail murmured through gritted teeth. All she could do was hold on and guide when she could as the mare trotted down the trail.

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The ride was rough and not at all fun, just as she had predicted. Call it a self-fulfilling prophecy all you like, but Abigail liked to call it intuition and instincts. And her instincts were telling her Penny didn’t particularly care for her. Well, sweetheart, the feeling’s mutual, she thought bitterly as she clutched the reins.

Somehow, they were making progress, with the horse’s inclination for brisk speeds and disinclination to stop whenever Abigail prompted to give her a break. Fine with her. Whatever got them to Setauket faster.

One of the problems they encountered was Penny’s skittish nature, something the soldier had actually been truthful about. The mare jumped at the slightest sound – twigs snapping, owls hooting, the rustling of leaves. Just about every sound found in nature the mare found offensive and suspicious.

Each time a bird squawked, the mare came to an abrupt halt. The first few times, Abigail had nearly fallen off head first over the saddle’s pommel. Now she was better prepared, bracing herself for the inevitable noise that would spook Penny.

How in the hell had this poor beast end up in the Continental Army of all places? Newly broken horses didn’t seem like the smartest idea, considering how many of them would be assigned to officers going into battle. There was no way Penny would be able to handle that.

Then she remembered someone in the camp mentioning getting a few new horses that were only recently broken. Looking down at Penny, she had to wonder again, what else had the solider had fudged to get her to take this horse.

Throughout the journey, despite the many setbacks, Abigail kept speaking to the mare in soft, soothing tones. She presented a calm front when all she wanted to do was hop off and continue the trek on foot.

“That’s a good girl,” Abigail murmured encouragingly when the mare remained at a consistently brisk walk for longer than five minutes. A mighty accomplishment! “As soon as we get there, I’m going to swipe you so many sugar cubes you’re not going to know what to do with yourself.”

Penny snorted, though her ears perked up with interest. Abigail grinned. Now she had her.

She reached over to run a hand over her mane in praise. But apparently she spoke too soon. Penny broke into a trot, a rather brisk one. Abigail sighed. Apparently, she didn’t like walking, and from the looks of it, Penny much preferred to gallop, if the tension in her muscles underneath her was anything to go by.
Against her better judgement, Abigail clicked her into a gallop with the barest press of her ankles. Penny shot off like a bat out of hell, her longs extending out as she pushed herself into a full out gallop. So the mare was runner. And it didn’t seem like she had much of a choice, so she went with it, although she was holding onto whatever she could for dear life, her heart clenched with anxiety for the duration of the ride.

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By the time they began to approach Setauket, Abigail was all but exhausted, the tautness in her muscles from holding herself together leaving her all but aching. Penny, on the other hand, had settled down considerably, even easing down into a walk whenever Abigail asked, her nerves eased after that night brisk run. Abigail wished the same could be said for herself.

After this, she would gladly ride Cantor exclusively, even with his quirks. At least he listened to her when she asked him to do something. Usually.

Though Penny kept twitching nervously at every little sound, twigs crackling and leaving shuffling along the woodland ground. Abigail soothed her each and every time, having more than grown accustomed to the mare’s nervous demeanor. Remembering the carrot, she retrieved it from her pocket and risked a stop so that she could lean forward and offer it to her, to which the mare accepted happily.

Abigail eased her forward into a walk. They proceeded further into the woods at this pace for some time when after a while the blonde took notice of something for the very first time. Having gotten used to Penny’s skittishness, she had learned to keep her eyes and ears sharp for any sight or sound that could disturb her. It was something she had gotten used to during the past several hours, which made the sound of silence even more palpable.

Who knew the sound of silence could be so deafening?

“It’s okay. It’s all right,” Abigail murmured, now to assure herself more than the mare. She grew more nervous, despite her best efforts, and she knew Penny could feel it too, from the renewed tension in her thighs.

Then out of nowhere a sudden light sparked, catching Abigail’s eye. Not even half a second after a thunderous noise followed, piercing the stillness. Gunfire.

Penny snorted loudly, throwing her head up and began backing up rapidly, dirt flying out rapidly underneath her heavy hooves.

“Come on, girl, steady,” Abigail coaxed, tightening her hold on the reins. She tried to get her to stop, but the mare wouldn’t listen, powering backwards until her rump bumped into a tree, startling her even more.

“Shh, shh. Easy!”

Before she could get another word out, Penny reared up, her front legs kicking out as she whinnied in alarm. Abigail lost her grip and slipped out of the saddle, landing on the hard ground, the wind nearly knocked out of her.

“Son of a bitch,” Abigail cursed under her breath. She winced as she forced herself up and approached the young mare cautiously, hands raised. The mare’s head swung around nervously, her gaze fearful and alarmed.

Penny still snorted nervously as the blonde finally managed to get her hands on the reins. Abigail
pulled her head down, whispering soothing encouragements, though the mare wasn’t having any of it. She was on all fours, but that didn’t mean she was any closer to calm. The whites of her eyes were on full display, a sure sign of trouble from any horse. Among other things.

After several attempts, Abigail thought she had finally regain control. That was until another shot was fired, this time much closer. Sensing this, Penny reared up again, her hooves dangerously close to her head.

Abigail dove down and out of the way before she descended, narrowly missing a hoof to the skull. Unfortunately, she wasn’t quick enough to miss the one to her shoulder, and she went down hard.

But she managed to curl herself up and roll out of the mare’s path, her shoulder throbbing like a mother f**ker.

When she was able to lift her head from the protection of her arms, Abigail spotted the mare’s retreating form far in the distance, galloping away to leave her in the dirt.

Great. Now what was she supposed to do?

She had to be close to Setauket, that much she knew, but how close was close, it was impossible to tell.

Wherever she was, she knew she had to get out of the line of fire and fast. Gritting her teeth in pain, she pushed herself up onto her hands and knees before rolling back onto her heels.

Reaching a low hanging branch, Abigail pulled herself upwards, leaning against the tree in support.

She prepared to turn around when she felt the all too familiar press of a gun muzzle against her back. Even through the material of the coat, she could feel the heat of the metal. The gun had been fired recently.

“Don’t even think of turning,” the armed stranger ordered. “Not until I tell you to.”

Who was this person?

Was he a redcoat? He sounded like a redcoat.

Or a bandit, which was also possible. It wasn’t unheard of for them to hide out in the woods, waiting for some dumb, unsuspecting idiot to plunder. Someone like her apparently.

Abigail held her breath, waiting for him to remove the gun from her back. The heavy press of her father’s pistol was pressed comfortingly against her side, hidden inside the inseam of her coat. All she had to do was get her hands on it, then turn around and face her assailant. Or turn around to face her assailant and get her hands on her pistol. Preferably in the original order.

“Are you holding any weapons?”

“No, I’m not,” Abigail remarked, lying through her teeth. Well, technically, it wasn’t a lie. He asked if she was holding any weapons, and currently, she wasn’t holding any, at least not presently.

“All right. Keep your hands where I can see them and turn around.” He pressed the gun further into her back for emphasis before stepping back. “Slowly.”

She did as he asked, keeping her hands where he could see them as she slowly turned around. The first sight she caught a glimpse of was red. She stopped herself short from cursing out loud.
Of course it was a redcoat. Of course, it was.

The soldier in question looked young, very young. Nearly as young as the young Joseph Martin, the fifteen year old soldier that had arrived at camp a year or so back, give or take a few months. Taking in his nervous expression and his awkward hold of the bayonet in his hands, he couldn’t have served with the British for too long. That and the fact he hadn’t searched her for any weapons and taking her at her word that she hadn’t any weapons.

Maybe she could use this to her advantage.

“What are you doing out here?” he demanded, gaze narrowing, His grip tightened on his weapon. She hoped with his inexperience he wouldn’t accidentally set the damned thing off.

“I was traveling home,” Abigail answered him, her breath coming out short, “when my horse got spooked by the gunfire. A mare. She ran off. And here I am.” At least that was the truth.

Before the boy could ask another question, two more redcoats cleared their way through the bushes. When they spotted the two of them, they approached them with a purposeful stride, each carrying lit torches. Abigail bit her lip to keep from cursing. More redcoats. Wonderful.

How was she going to get out of this now?

“What’s going on here?” the closest redcoat demanded. There was a hint of grey in his hair and a touch of wrinkles across his cheek. Judging from the difference in uniform style between himself and the other two redcoats, he was their superior, which meant he was an officer.

Well. Fuck.

“I found this man on his own on the trail,” the boy soldier replied proudly. “I thought it best to detain him and ask what he was doing here.”

The redcoat officer observed her carefully and asked without removing his gaze from her, “And his response?”

The boy repeated her response verbatim, making the officer to smile briefly in amusement. “Now why, my I ask,” he asked her, “are you traveling out in the middle of the night? On your own. Not a very smart move for a civilian.”

Panic seized her chest, but she refused to let it show. She couldn’t. “I’m a doctor. I was summoned to tend to a patient in the next town over. I was on my way home when my mare got spooked.”

The officer raised a brow. “And where is your medical bag, doctor?”

“On the mare,” Abigail remarked flatly, unable to help herself.

“Which has long abandoned you, yes?”

“Obviously.”

The redcoat officer smirked a little before turning to the boy soldier. “Does he have any weapons on him?”

The boy shook his head. “No, he said he didn’t have any.”

The officer’s gaze zeroed in on him. “You mean, you didn’t search him?”
“He wasn’t holding any weapons –”

“Jesus Christ, Jacobs, search the man, would you?”

The soldier named Jacobs approached her, staking his torch into the ground so he could better search her. Abigail tensed and waited with bated breath as he patted her down her sides, her chest constricting with anxiety. She wasn’t sure what would be worse: if they discovered her weapon first or the fact she wasn’t a man. A part of her hoped for the former.

“Ah, ha!” Jacobs grinned, patting the side of her coat where her father’s pistol rested inside her coat. He was quick to fish it out and held it out underneath the torch light.

The officer nodded in approval before looking over at the young soldier, eyebrows raised. The boy protested, “I didn’t know he was armed!”

“Clearly,” the officer remarked dryly. “I’ll deal with you later.” He nodded to Jacobs discreetly.

Before Abigail knew what was happening, she was forced to her knees by a heavy hand on her shoulder. She went down with a hard thud, hissing as her already sore limbs were once again jolted.

“Let’s take him in,” the officer ordered. He sized her up on the ground before him, his gaze calculating. “I believe a sufficient charge can be made against him. How does espionage sound, gentlemen?”

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to thank everyone for the kudos, comments, bookmarks, and subscriptions! You guys are what inspire me to keep on writing and posting 😊 I hope you’re still enjoying the fic. And there’s much more drama to come...
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place around 3x06 of the show.

trigger warning: references to sexual assault, possible attempt at sexual assault.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail’s arm struck hard stone with a bone-numbing blow as she was shoved across some sort of threshold, the sharp jab of the butt of a musket digging into the small of her back. Wherever they were now was shrouded in near darkness. She could practically smell the damp coldness of the place, which shouldn’t have been possible though she highly suspected the smell was mildew coupled with something else.

She didn’t have time to rub her sore arm or back for that matter before she was roughly shoved forward once again. They made brief, rare stops along their journey down the narrow corridor, their main reason of stopping was to exchange the stiff, rough thickly wrapped twine around her wrists for heavy, cold, clanging chains that nearly dragged her down. The cool metal did nothing to help the angry red blisters around her wrists. In fact, all they did was agitate them.

The journey from Setauket to wherever they had taken her had been brutal to say the least. Having been all but hog tied and thrown onto the back of a horse for half a day’s journey, her muscles had protested every shift of the horse’s haunches with every step the poor beast had taken. She had remained silent for the most part, even with their purposefully provoking remarks to get her to speak, just so they could discipline her for any perceived slight. The fight had been taken out of her when they had first asked for her name. When she had initially refused, each soldier, with the exception of the youngest, had taken turns beating her until she had finally, reluctantly, croaked, “Thomas Williams.”

So willing herself not to rise to their baiting retorts, while an unnatural feat in the blonde, had come rather easily after that.

After what felt like ages – at least to Abigail’s sore bundle of muscles and limbs, the officer and two soldiers led her towards another soldier, a prison guard as it appeared. She stopped herself short from squinting in the dimly lit corridor, but she didn’t have to see his full features as he assessed her, as if wondering the purpose of her existence. That was fine. In that moment, Abigail was wondering the very same thing.

The officer informed the guard that she was being charged under suspicion of espionage. Without any questions, he allowed them to pass, and the heavy feeling of dread landed hard in the pit of her stomach. She often had heard tales of the British’s overabundance of discretion when it came to so called “law and order” and justice. With vast power at their disposal, they could slap a charge on anyone they pleased, and that person could remain locked away unless either they decided to drop the charges or if the arrested person in question knew someone high in British ranking officers.

Charges of espionage, however, was an entirely different beast in itself. She had a feeling there was no easy way to get herself out of this. The most common result of a charge of espionage was not a public trial and a finding of guilt or innocence.
What was it Benjamin Franklin said? “We must all hang together, or we’ll all hang separately?”

Well, depending on how many other charged persons for espionage they had in their custody, she would be hanging either way.

Unless she could find a way out.

As she was being escorted down the corridor towards the containment area, which apparently housed all of the prisoners in one open area – ranging from poor debtors to violent murderers and suspected spies, as reported the soldier who had discovered her father’s pistol on her person informed her rather smugly, hoping to inspire some fear inside her (oh, he didn’t have to worry about that. It worked) – she spotted a few soldiers rounding the corner, walking in their direction. There was a familiar figure among them, but with the low lighting, she couldn’t figure out why. Perhaps the soldier had been quartered in Setauket?

The closer the two groups came, the realization became increasingly apparent as to why the soldier seemed so familiar. The tall height, the strong yet lean build, the heart shaped jaw… brown, sharp eyes.

Oh, Christ.

Tobias.

Her husband, or ex-husband to be more precise. The man she hadn’t seen since he had helped her and Chris hide from their British assailants back in Trenton. The man she had divorced nearly over a year ago, whose signature had somehow been obtained for the legal documents Caleb and Abe had drawn up for her upon her request – she had seen the papers herself; she had been married to the man for over three years and knew him for far longer than that, she was well acquainted with his handwriting.

The man who stared at her now, filled with alarm and dismay before schooling his features into a calm, detached mask. Even though he might have others fooled, she could see the swirl of emotions in his eyes. He could fool the world, but he couldn’t fool her; he never could. The shock and horror ran deep, that much she could tell.

Abigail craned her neck as Tobias’s group walked past them, unable to unlock her gaze from his, both essentially helpless in that moment. There wasn’t anything he could do. If he did, his cover would be blown. Years upon years of entrenching himself would have been wasted if he did.

Abigail felt the slam of the butt of the musket against her back and wheezed out a painful breath, stumbling over her feet just as the officer hissed behind her, “Keep your eyes forward, scum. And keep walking.”

The last glimpse she caught of Tobias was a brief flash of indignant rage in his eyes, his eyes narrowing into a cool, calculating gaze upon the officer’s back before a member from his group managed to draw his attention, though Abigail knew better.

For the first time crossing over the prison’s threshold, hope began to stir inside her chest.

Maybe she stood a chance after all.

Maybe.

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“Ah, fresh meat, boys!” declared a gruff, dirty looking man from a corner of the large, open area cell the moment the door shut behind her. It was difficult to pinpoint the origin of the voice, considering just about every single prisoner was worn, disheveled, grimy, and more than a little worse for the wear.

The cell was large but dank and overcrowded. There was hardly any standing space, let alone a place for anyone to sit. Considering how the tougher looking prisoners appeared to commandeerc the rare seating arrangements, it seemed a safe bet that she wouldn’t be sitting at any time soon. But that was the least of her problems at the moment.

Her top priority was not getting within touching reach of any of these men, though given the current situation, that would be very difficult. She wasn’t a fool. She knew what she looked like to these men – young, fresh faced, and slender, a young man that could easily pass for a woman (who actually was, in fact, a woman). She also wasn’t naïve about the ways of men, if over two years serving in the Continental Army surrounded by men was any indication. She heard the stories of men in prison, men deprived of many liberties and comforts of their former lives, of decent food, proper hygiene, and a woman’s touch. The latter of which often gave such men only two options: either fulfill one’s needs with another man, willing or unwilling, or take care of such matters into their own hands.

And judging from the faint, grunting sounds from around her, some of the men were more than happy to carry out that second option. She quickly turned her head away from one older, malnourished gentleman, whose hand was furiously moving about underneath his trousers. It was highly doubtful he was counting his change that frenetically.

She felt equal parts embarrassed and nauseous, though those were quickly forgotten when she felt a hand grope her arse appreciatively.

“Oi!” Abigail squawked indignantly, jerking around and leaping away from the roaming hands.

The man who grabbed her grinned toothlessly, “Looks like we’ve got a feisty one.” She recognized the voice as the one who had made the “fresh meat” comment. She swallowed hard at the sheer size of him, large, bulking and threatening. There was nowhere she could go to escape him. She missed the presence of her father’s pistol like something fierce.

The grizzly bear of a man took a step forward, looking her over with a quick roaming gaze. He adjusted himself briefly inside his trousers. Abigail wanted to vomit. “I call first dibs.”

“You’ll do no such thing,” Abigail snapped, panic and fear rising inside her. She looked around the room, looking for an escape route and found to her growing horror that her calculation from before had been correct. There was none.

Christ, God above.

The man chuckled darkly. “Keep talking like that, boy. You’re making me excited.”

“You’ll do no such thing,” Abigail snapped, panic and fear rising inside her. She looked around the room, looking for an escape route and found to her growing horror that her calculation from before had been correct. There was none.

Christ, God above.

The man chuckled darkly. “Keep talking like that, boy. You’re making me excited.”

“Leave him alone, Saul,” came another voice directly behind her. Both the man named Saul and Abigail turned to look for the source of the voice and found a British soldier standing in the room, with two others standing in front of the door preventing inmate escape, his revolver was drawn and pointed at the much larger man. “Or would you prefer it if your hanging was scheduled for this evening instead of three weeks from now?”

Saul grunted. “What difference would it make? You’re going to hang me all the same.”
“True,” the redcoat remarked, “but a lot can happen in three weeks’ time. The decision is yours.”

After a moment’s consideration, the large man backed off, returning to his corner of the cell. Abigail took a step backwards, not taking an eye off him until he bullied another prisoner into moving from the spot that had been “rightfully his” and then turned her attention back to the redcoat. “Where on earth did you come from?” she demanded, the first words she could think to formulate tumbling out of her mouth. Not quite what she had intended to say, but the sight of a redcoat, any redcoat, set her nerves on edge. Couldn’t imagine why.

“Not quite the ‘thank you’ I was expecting,” was the redcoat’s retort before he set a firm grip on her arm. “I have orders to collect you and remove you from this cell. Unless you have any objections.”

“None,” Abigail remarked immediately, which had the redcoat’s lips twitch imperceptibly upwards before he led her out of the cell.

As it turned out, arrangements had been made that she would be housed separately from the rest of the inmates in the facility, mostly because she was considered a person of special interest due to the nature of her charge – espionage. The redcoat assured her, as he guided her towards her solitary cell, that this was no luxury. “In fact,” he pointed out as he opened the door to push her inside, “some would consider this a fate much worse than for the others.”

If the corridors and open area cell had been dimly lit, this room succumbed to complete and utter darkness. There was so sliver of light to speak of. The draft was colder and wetter than the corridor had been. She pressed her hand against the wall only to find damp, cool stones against her fingertips. The only sounds she could hear were the jangling over her chains and the occasional drip-dripping of water from somewhere in the cell. Complete sensory deprivation, enough to drive a person to madness.

No wonder the redcoat had said what he said.

The reason behind her segregation from the rest of the population was obvious. They wouldn’t want her talking to anyone else in the open area cell. This way, she wouldn’t be able to make any contacts or find someone she knew with whom she already had a connection to.

Placing her hands against the stones, Abigail took a careful, hesitant step forward, then another, all the while keeping her hands pressed to the stones. She wanted to have some sort of an idea of how large the cell she was in, or if it was a cell at all, even if she couldn’t see it. Gaining more confidence that she wouldn’t trip over anything, she kept walking until her hands finally pressed against the wooden door, its rough texture contrasting from the smoothness of the stones. There was no doorknob. The latch must have only been on the outside.

Her best guess would have to be that the cell, room, wherever she was, was definitely circular. Just how large it was would have been more difficult to determine, but that didn’t stop her from her from trying to figure it out. No matter the size, she knew there was no ceiling, at least no ceiling she could reach with her fingertips.

All of this pondering and brainstorming kept her distracted, kept her mind focused on a puzzle she desperately needed to preoccupy herself. Lord knows how long she would be kept in there, or even how much time had passed since she had been in there.

With her jacket confiscated, there was only the thin material of her shirt to keep her warm. Rubbing her arms, she crossed them over her chest as she continued to pace, keeping herself busy for more reasons than one.
Abigail tried her best not to think of Ben, but inevitably her thoughts drifted to the major. Not long after his dragoon’s raid of the counterfeiter’s location, he had to report to Philadelphia with Washington and a handful of officers with little to no delay. He wouldn’t know she wasn’t there until he returned from Philadelphia, which would be days later, if not a week.

Now the question was, would she still be around by then?

“Oh, stop it, you foolish girl,” Abigail murmured to herself, giving her face a light slap to snap herself out of those dreary lines of thought. “You will get out of here. Being negative won’t get you anywhere.”

But it did belie the forced notion that everything would work itself out. She wasn’t a cynic or an optimist; she was a realist. And realistically, she couldn’t allow herself too much hope.

---

Creeek

Abigail’s head jerked upwards, her arms folded across her drawn up knees, breath catching in her throat. Her sight had adjusted to the dark, and now she could vaguely make out the shape of the door.

Someone was undoing the latch.

Scrambling to her feet, Abigail kept her eyes locked on the door, her back pressed against the stoned wall, the chilled dampness seeping through her shirt, her heart pounding inside her chest.

The door eased open, and a figure slipped inside, proceeded by a bright lantern in front of them. The shock of light caused Abigail to blink rapidly in succession and flinch away, an unwise but instinctive maneuver.

Once her vision readjusted to the light, she found Tobias standing before. He placed the lantern on a metal hook a few inches above his head. Now the room was cast in a dim glow. The room was roughly the size of an alcove, no more than seven feet wide all the way around. There was no furniture in the room, as what she had expected from her brief blind sweep the room – no bed to speak of, let alone any sort of basic necessities a prisoner might need, say a chamber pot. But this was the British and the charge was espionage. She should’ve expected even less.

With the door carefully shut behind him, with a small piece of lumber wedged between the door and wall to keep himself from being locked out, Tobias slipped out a canister from his coat and held it out to her. “It was all I could manage to sneak out on my way down here,” he said, his expression apologetic. He then added softly at her startled expression, “It’s water.”

Abigail hesitated for a moment, and a moment only, before accepting the canister from him, shakily, quickly, removing the cap from it. Bringing the bottle to her lips, she drank greedily, choking a little as she swallowed a bit more than she could handle before lowering it and wiping at her mouth.

“Thank you,” she rasped gratefully, screwing the cap back on before handing it back to him but he shook his head. He told her to hold onto it before he left. There was still more water in the container. She nodded gratefully.

There was a beat of awkward silence that followed after that, with neither quite sure how to proceed from there – one from the guilt over breaking the other’s heart and the other shame for finally having his years’ long affair with his informant revealed – or so he thought as he stood there, observing her quietly, painfully.
Before he knew what was happening, Abigail flung herself into his arms, hugging him as fiercely as she could, which wasn’t a whole hell of a lot given her weakened state. It was an awkward shifting due to her chains, but with that taken care of, she wrapped her arms around his neck and his arms around her waist. He dropped his head against her shoulder, absorbing the warmth he hadn’t felt in a little over six years, taking comfort in the sight of her he hadn’t seen in at least three.

Of course, he knew the circumstances were different now, but that never did stop him from loving her still, despite everything he had done leading up to their divorce. There were many things he regretted, but in his mind, he knew he wouldn’t have changed a thing. He owed it to his country.

But what had he owed his wife?

Or ex-wife, rather.

“You’re the one who pulled the strings,” Abigail said, her voice mumbled against the material of his coat. He had to strain to hear the rest. “You’re the one that convinced them to bring me here, didn’t you? To separate me from the rest of the inmates.”

“I wasn’t about to let you stay in there with those men,” Tobias replied fiercely, his grip on her tightening. “This isn’t exactly a place for a woman.”

“Aye, I’ve already come to that conclusion,” she remarked, chuckling dryly. She gave him another squeeze. “Thank you.” She leaned back a little and gave him a soft, tired smile.

In the dim glow of the lantern, Tobias could see the changes in her face, the slight discoloration of her cheeks, the cut to her lip. “May I?” She nodded lightly, and he brought a hand to her face, turning her head slightly to the left and right, assessing the damage. His frown deepened with every imperfection, knowing that within a day’s time, the bruises would be black and blue.

Taking a step back, Tobias’s hands dropped down to her wrists to where the chains rested heavily on her slender wrists. He pushed back her sleeves and the oversized metal wrist pieces and barely stopped himself from cursing aloud at the sight of her wrists, blistered, bruised and bleeding. He could only imagine what the rest of her looked like.

“That son of a bitch,” Tobias swore venomously under his breath.

“What?”

“Tallmadge,” he hissed. His brown eyes glimmering in barely suppressed rage. “I’m going to kill him.”

Abigail shook her head. “Tobias…”

“No,” he insisted. “The next time I see him, I’m going to kill him.” He took another look at her wrists and this time didn’t censure the stream of curses from coming out of his mouth. “This is all his fault.”

She blinked. “I rather think it’s more of the fault of the redcoats who brought me here in the first place.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Of course it is. I’ll deal with them, too, eventually. But overall, this is Ben’s fault. And I’m sure he bloody well knows it.”

“No,” Abigail shook her head firmly. “My choices are my own. I volunteered for Cu…” she nearly said Culper but thought better of it, correcting herself quickly, just in case, “this on my own. My
actions are my own. So are my mistakes. And I take full responsibility for them. None of this falls on Ben.”

Tobias glared stubbornly at the ground. Clearly, he disagreed but knew better than to continue arguing his point. It was futile. Besides, he was already on borrowed time as it was. After having convinced Officer Hastings, the officer responsible for bringing her in, to remove her from the general population, he had managed to convince the soldiers he had been with he would interview the new prisoner himself, to see if he could get anything out of “him.” What they didn’t know was that whatever information Abigail gave him, he was taking with him to the grave.

“I’m going to get you out of here,” Tobias promised, squeezing her hands comfortably. “It may take some time, but I will get you out of here, if it’s the last thing I ever do.”

Abigail bit her lip. “Don’t you put yourself in danger because of me.”

He shook his head firmly. “This is nonnegotiable. You can’t talk me out of this.”

After another pause, she added quietly, “You’ll need to get out of here, too, as quick as you can. They’ll suspect you had something to do with my disappearance, since you suggested moving me in the first place. Your position will be compromised.”

Tobias couldn’t say anything to the contrary. He couldn’t disprove her point. More than likely, Abigail’s prediction would come true. If he did manage to get her out of there, suspicion would automatically shift to him. There was no way around that. Plus, his cover would be blown. All the years built up establishing his place, would be wasted.

But was all of that worth Abigail’s life?

The answer was no. He couldn’t bear it. He wouldn’t put his duty before her, not again, not when it could cost Abigail her life.

Tobias might have been accused of being a slow learner, but he did learn, after all was said and done.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys so much for your continued support of this fic!!!! Seriously, it means a lot to me. All of your comments, kudos, bookmarks, and subs motivate me to keep on writing!! <3333333

Hintful suggestion: you may want to take a quick look back at the beginning of chapter 7 before the next chapter is posted. There may be something important there... Just saying ;)

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x06.

Trigger warning: depictions of attempted sexual assault and graphic violence

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail wrinkled her nose in her sleep – or an attempt at sleep – as a drop of water landed on her nose.

She rolled onto her other side along the cold, hard, stoned ground, conscious of her tender ribs where one of the redcoats had landed a solid punch. All it had taken was one punch for her to crumble to her knees, much to the amusement of the redcoats, who had taken great pleasure in taking the piss out of her, making jabs at her manhood.

Considering she had no such things, their words had done not insulted her; their blows, however, had been another story.

Stirring, unable to full sleep, the blonde opened her eyes and stared upwards at the ceiling, or where she assumed the ceiling would be, in the darkness. Her stomach rumbled pitifully, even though she had just eaten what Tobias had managed to smuggle to her a few minutes ago. Or was it a few hours ago? A day? Days?

Everything passed by in a blur of darkness, pierced by rare flashes of light whenever Tobias would bring her smuggled food and water. She remembered him promising he would visit her at least once a day, more often if he could manage. She lost count of his number of visits already, which made it nearly impossible to know for certain how long she had been locked away in that solitary cell.

Nearly impossible.

If she had to hazard a guess, based on his numerous visits alone, it must have been at least a couple days since she had been brought to the prison. Just how many was more difficult to estimate.

The familiar sounds of the door being unlatched coaxed her into pulling herself up into a sitting position. The door opened, followed by a long, groaning creak. The harsh glare of the torch caused her to turn her head away, blinking rapidly to adjust to the light. But when she turned around again, it wasn’t the sight of her ex-husband that greeted her.

It was two of the redcoats who had arrested and brought her there.

“We’ve been ordered by the lieutenant to retrieve you,” the youngest one remarked before she could prepare to use her rarely used vocal cords to ask about their sudden presence.

Struggling to get to her feet, Abigail leaned against the stone wall for support and after a moment, asked, “And pray tell, what am I being retrieved for? Or is this another matter that the English don’t find fit to disclose to the accused?”

Tobias had warned her not to give any lip, but she couldn’t really help herself. Tired, hungry, and thirsty, it was a miracle she was even standing, let alone speaking. How could one expect for her to
fight her natural born instincts on top of that?

Choosing to ignore her sarcasm, the one who had searched her in the woods walked over to seize her by the arm in order to personally escort her out the chamber himself. Meanwhile the youngest of the two held the door open for them. As they passed him, the boy redcoat remarked, “He’s expecting your arrival promptly. Don’t dally about.” And then, he added with an unusual tone, “He’s eager to meet your acquaintance again.”

Abigail began to turn to him, frowning, when the other redcoat shoved her forward, so much so it nearly threw her off balance. Luckily for her the corridor was narrow enough she caught herself against the wall before they began to move.

After that minor kerfuffle, their journey went relatively smoothly and surprisingly quickly. She was led into a much better lit room, a room that appeared roughly 10x10 – much improvement from her previous quarters, although anything would be really. In the corner stood a writing desk and a wooden chair, with no paper or quills or ink to be counted for. Across the room was a cot, or what appeared to be a cot, a long, wooden rectangular figure with a mattress consisting of a few layers of well-worn sheets.

What in God’s name was this place?

“Up,” ordered the redcoat at her arm, jerking her forward until she fell into step with him. She was led to the center of the room where a large, rusted iron hook was embedded into the ceiling. The redcoat forced her arms up so that her hands were above her head, and she realized what they intended to do, only she was too short for even her fingers to brush the hook’s edge, so they had to procure a heavy crate from somewhere for her to stand on.

“And up you go.”

Abigail’s shackled arms were forced upwards after her as soon as her second foot set on the crate. The chain that held metal cuffs together hooked easily over the crook of the iron hook. All the redcoats had to do was kick the crate from under her, and she would be dangling like a helpless kitten in mid-air. For a moment she was grateful for their starve-the-prisoner-out technique.

She wisely kept her mouth shut during the entire process, knowing that any and all prepared remarks would only land her in more trouble. For once, she heeded Tobias’s advice and kept her words to herself, an unnatural act, yes, but one that might very well save her neck.

Not a moment too soon did the door to the room open. The lieutenant in question no doubt. She rolled her head to her side, wincing a little as the crick in her neck ached further as she attempted to get a better look but to no avail. If she could get a good look at him, that was all the more information she could glean and deliver to Ben once she made it out. If she made it out.

No, she thought determinedly as the chains above her rattled a little as she shifted her weight. I will get out. Come hell or high water, I’ll get out of here.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Williams,” a familiar voice spoke quietly. Too familiar. “Though I doubt you’re very pleased to meet me.”

It took everything in her not to yank her arms down from the hook, jump down from the crate, and face the man, but she knew by doing so that would accomplish nothing short of a bullet to the head.

Instead, she refused to rise to the bait, refused to turn around. She waited for him to take his cue, and so he did without hesitation. She could hear his approaching footsteps coming up behind her in a
confident, deliberate stride.

“I didn’t realize we captured a mute spy,” the lieutenant remarked sardonically. “No matter. You’ll be talking soon enough.”

His voice was much closer now. Before she could contemplate turning her head towards the sound, the man now stood before her. It didn’t even take her a second to wonder where she knew him from. Abigail could never forget such a face.

Gamble. Lieutenant Gamble.

The redcoat who lied his way into the Continental base and murdered Mr. Sackett, stealing several of his notes and journals pertaining to Culper. The man who had been Reverend Worthington’s contact and whom the late reverend had been set to meet before Ben had killed him. The man who had then taken Ben with the intentions of bringing him back to enemy territory before she had knocked him out with his own musket. The man who had tried to intimidate her back in the cabin when she had refused to be cowed by him.

That Lieutenant Gamble.

She had gotten a good look at the man’s face that day. She only hoped he hadn’t gotten a good look at hers.

Gamble assessed her with an inquisitive gaze. She then realized that her face decorated with various hued bruises and dirt, perhaps she stood a chance of him not recognizing her. It was a ghost of a chance, but she latched onto it desperately.

“Perhaps,” he carried on, nonplussed by her silence, “you would be interested in my investigation. Top secret business. Something a spy like yourself would chomp at the bit to access. Do you mind if I sit?”

Oh, sure, go ahead, Abigail thought dryly, make yourself comfortable. At least one of us is.

Gamble retrieved the chair from the writing desk and placed it right in front of her before sitting himself, undoing the button of his coat as he did so. “So where to begin,” he considered, pausing for a moment. “Well, I suppose to start at the beginning. That makes the most logical sense of course. Originally, this investigation did not belong to me, though it was more or less handed to me after Captain Simcoe had been court-martialed in Setauket. Perhaps you’ve heard of him? You had been on your way to Setauket, hadn’t you?”

When she refused to answer, the lieutenant carried on, as if his question had been in fact rhetorical, “Funny thing, though, the investigation had been his idea. Simcoe’s. Some believe it was his personal vendetta, though others, while a minority, found it to hold some merit, which was why it was passed along to me.”

Sliding down a bit in his seat, Gamble made himself more comfortable, observing her almost casually, though she knew better. His expression might have been disinterested, but his eyes were sharp, calculating. She remained immobile, knowing that at any moment he could kick the crate from underneath her, then she wouldn’t have either leg to stand on. “The investigation was about looking into the families with the strongest rebel ties. The Tallmadges and Brewsters more specifically.

“Most notably the Williams family,” he added, almost as an afterthought as he began to pat himself, searching for something on his person until his fingers found what he had been searching for, a folded up piece of parchment, the edges crumbled and torn. “In his initial observations, Simcoe had
disclosed to the major stationed in Setauket at the time how very close these three families seemed to be, at least from what the townspeople had told him when he had approached them. Though quite a few people noted the closeness between the Tallmadge boy and the Williams girl – or Hawkins, as I suppose I should say, since she had gotten married when Tallmadge had set off for Yale.”

Tobias had given another surname upon his entry into the British ranks. Of that, she was absolutely certain, which was why she did her very best to keep her expression as blank and devoid of any emotion as possible, even though her heart rate steadily increased inside her chest, a cold sweat forming at the nape of her neck.

“Apparently, this Williams – well Hawkins girl as I should call her now, out of respect for her married status of course – was sent to Dublin by the girl’s father after both her husband and friend joined the war effort.” Gamble dropped his gaze to the parchment in his hands. The sound of the crinkling of the parchment somehow managed to add to the building tension of his narrative. “And, what has also been discovered, the girl’s father and the girl have kept in touch. For all these years.”

He held up the parchment after another moment of inspection nearly under her nose. “This is a letter from the girl’s father. Thomas Williams, I believe. Sweet and endearing man, or so it would seem from the contents of his letter.” His gaze upon her sharpened infinitesimally, but his eyes betrayed his interest. “It’s touching really. Just how much he loves his daughter.”

Abigail met his gaze defiantly, even as the backs of her eyes burned with threatening tears, even as her heart was fit to burst with guilt, longing, despair. She hadn’t heard or spoken to her father in nearly three years, not since he had arranged to send her off to Dublin to stay with his sister until the war was over – or so he had thought. She had sent the young blond house servant, Iris, in her place, a beautiful girl of sixteen or seventeen at the time, knowing how much the girl had longed to return to her mother country, knowing how many similarities they shared in their physical appearance.

“But I won’t trouble you with the letters contents,” Gamble rose to his feet with a quiet groan. “I wouldn’t want to bore you.” He walked over to one of the torches and brought up the letter to meet the torch’s flames. She watched helplessly as the flames licked at the parchment, the edges turning brown and then black from its devouring heat. A painful “no” remained caught at the back of her throat as she watched painfully as the lieutenant dropped the burning letter to the sand covered floor, the letter burning at their feet.

“So I took it upon myself to send someone to Dublin to inquire about the girl,” Gamble continued as if nothing had happened, as if he hadn’t just burned the one connection to her former life. But then his words began to register inside Abigail’s mind, of what he had just said. She listened with bated breath, waiting for whatever he said next. “It didn’t take long to find the aunt’s house. The problems of living the life of a socialite, no? So many people know your name and where you live.

A slow spreading smile crept across his face, chilling her to the bone. “And what do you know, after over two years of investigating and inquiry, we found the girl.”

He went on to say how he had intended to bring her back to the States, to lure out Tallmadge – because what better way than to get to one of Washington’s most trusted men? But then Gamble fell into another infuriating, pulse-racing pause. “However, girl, under extreme duress, claimed she was not Abigail Williams-Hawkins but was in fact a mere house servant that had been sent to Dublin in her place.

“She confessed to everything,” the lieutenant murmured, his voice dipping into a near purr. His face had taken a nearly glazed over look as he recalled every detail of the interrogation of the poor girl, almost as if he were relishing in it. Abigail wanted to vomit. “About how her mistress had no desire to leave the war, not when she feared for her father’s intention upon entering the war himself. The
The Hawkins girl wanted to save her father from a military life, knowing that his health was precarious enough without the harsh conditions of battle and camp life.

"The girl intended to take his place."

All the blood rushed from her head, leaving the blonde lightheaded and almost detached. It nearly felt like an out of body experience, as if she wasn’t there, that she was watching this happen to someone else. But she was there and it was happening to her. And she had been caught.

It was all over.

“She begged so prettily after that,” Gamble smiled with great satisfaction. “She had told us everything we needed to know and so desperately wanted to live. She realized, not long after she had done so, that she was going to die anyway. And so she did, but she didn’t go quietly, even after I bludgeoned her over the head. It wasn’t until I heard the sound of her skull cracking under the final blow that I knew she was dead.”

Gamble took a step forward, then another, until he was standing right in front of her, his gaze full of evil and malice as he delighted in his tale. The fucker was enjoying this. “There was another person with me, a civilian, who had helped track down the Irish girl. He had heard everything the girl had confessed before her untimely end.” He lifted a hand to touch her jaw, and she was too numb, too overcome, to shake it off. “So I put a pistol into his mouth and pulled the trigger.”

“Why?” Abigail choked out, tears running freely down her cheeks but was too far gone to care. Why would he kill his partner? Why would he kill Iris, after she had cooperated with him? Why tell her all of this in the first place? There were too many questions, too many whys whirring inside her mind that she had no idea what she was asking.

But Gamble decided to go with the most obvious question. “To keep the information to myself. To use this information to my advantage further down the line.” He paused and smiled, a feral flash of teeth. “Though I hardly expected to reap the rewards so soon.”

He leaned in close, his hot breath against her ear making her skin crawl, and whispered, “To finally get that Tallmadge bastard back for all the trouble he’s caused me.”

Gamble pulled back for a moment, considering before taking another step forward. “Though I suppose that none of this means anything if I can’t confirm my suspicions.”

With her arms chained and above her head, the blonde had little recourse to fight him as he stepped even closer and pressed his hand against her, cupping her firmly through her trousers. Abigail felt choked with fear, rage. Gamble grinned wolfishly. “Ah, there it is. Or should I say, there it isn’t.”

Abigail spat in his face, causing him to take a step back in shock. Before he could recover, she channeled all the strength she could muster and kicked him hard in the stomach. He stumbled back several steps, but he didn’t fall over, not as she would have liked, but she tried to take advantage of the distance while she could, rising on the tips of her toes to get the chains over and off the hook as soon as she could.

No sooner had she managed to succeed was she grabbed viciously by the shoulder and yanked down from the crate so that he now towered over her, dangerous and imposing.

Gamble then slapped her so hard she saw stars, knocking her to the floor in a painful heap.

“Leave us,” Gamble ordered sharply towards the two redcoats, who had merely observed the entire exchange with mild interest at best, as if they witnessed this sort of thing every day. “Guard the door.
Shoot anyone who tries to enter.” Without an argument, the two left the room to stand guard outside the room, the door shutting with a sound click.

“Customarily,” he remarked as he began unbuckling his trousers, “I don’t condone going to lengths such as these. But since you’re not a man, I suppose I can make an exception.”

Abigail backed away as quickly as she could, looking around the room wildly for any way of escape, anything that could help her escape him. Anything of use was just out of reach. Even if she made a mad dash for it, he would descend upon her like a fury, of that much she was certain. Her only true option was the door. Whatever she could grab along the way to fight him off, anything at all, would be welcome.

Before she could fully push herself up to her feet, Gamble seized her by the hair, forcing her back down. Tears stung in her eyes at his painful grip and the harsh slam of her knees against the stone floor. He stood before her, his pants at his ankles. Nausea threatened to overwhelm her.

Forced to her knees with nowhere to run, she began to believe there was no way out when a thought struck her. She wasn’t at all familiar with the structure of this prison nor was she certain just how far away they were from other guards or prisoners. Gamble’s investigation into Setauket patriot families and herself by extension was of high secrecy within the British ranks. As far as she knew, only a select few knew of the investigation itself, even less knowing the results of his tireless efforts. By following that logic, the only ones who knew what Gamble had done in Dublin were the other two redcoats and herself.

But that also meant that no one else in the prison knew what was going on. They didn’t know that she was a woman.

What she did next was incredibly risky, alerting anyone outside of those four walls and drawing attention by exposing herself. But it was a risk she had to take, if she wanted to save herself.

With her mind made up, Abigail took a brief, steadyng breath before opening her mouth and screaming as loud as she could. The loud, anguish, almost angry cry pierced the veil of quiet hostility and intimidation Gamble had created, filling the room from wall to wall and trickling through the door to where the other redcoats remained guard. She hoped they heard her. She knew they did. Let them know what Gamble was capable of, how truly evil and vile of a man he could be, that he was.

Surprised flickered across Gamble’s face before settling into a look of rage. He slapped her again to silence her, realizing exactly what she had done. “Don’t think that accomplished anything,” he hissed. “No one can save you. You can’t even save yourself.”

No sooner had he slapped her was there a sudden commotion outside the door. They both froze. Loud, angry voices turned into shouts and heatedly exchanged curses before a shot was fired, then another, before the door was kicked ajar.

Through a billow of gun smoke and dust, the youngest redcoat stumbled backwards into the room, clutching his side as he fell to the floor. Tobias stormed in after him, his face dark with rage as he aimed his pistol at the fallen redcoat.

Before he could shoot him again, the other redcoat grabbed him from behind, pressing the base of the musket to his throat in an attempt to choke him. Tobias slammed the back of his head into his assailant’s and took advantage of his loosening grip to turn on him in a blur of fury.

As soon as the boy redcoat had fallen, Gamble had moved away from her to reach for his weapon, stumbling over his trousers that were still around his ankles. He cursed and quickly bent down to pull
them up. This was the opportunity Abigail had waited for; Gamble with his pants down, or at in this instance, Gamble attempting to pull his pants up.

Ignoring her aching muscles, Abigail rose to her feet and surged forward, stretching her hands as far apart as she could until the chain was in a taut line, the perfect replacement for rope.

Gamble’s lowered height gave her the advantage she needed to bring the shackled wrists over his head and around his neck. She crissscrossed her wrists as firmly as she could, drawing him back and against her before he could reach for his gun.

The lieutenant gurgled and gasped, clawing at the metal against his throat. She tightened her grip and did her best to hold on as he tried to slam her into the stone wall to shake her off. She held on precariously, even as the air was knocked out of her, her head slamming against the hard stone. The pain was barely felt, the adrenaline pounding through her system helped her redirect her focus to the task at hand.

She couldn’t see anything beyond Gamble’s neck and the chain pressing even further into his flesh. The other noises in the room – Tobias’s fight with the other redcoat, the blows of fists and sudden glimmering of blades – were secondary. She felt and heard Gamble’s pained, ragged gasps as he fought for air, struggled for his life.

Exactly what Iris had done when he had killed her.

The thought of her former servant had Abigail’s hold tighten further, the metal digging so painfully into her fingers they might have bled.

She looked up just in time to see the other redcoat fall, a large patch of blood blossoming across his chest. Tobias stood there, breathing harsh and ragged, before his eyes landed on them.

His gaze flickered down to Gamble’s inappropriate state, and his gaze hardened further. His fists balled at his sides. The knife he had wielded against the other guard glimmered slightly under the torch light, stained with blood.

“Do it,” Abigail gasped, struggling to maintain her hold on Gamble. “I’m not sure how long I can keep hold of him.”

Tobias stalked towards them, raising the knife towards Gamble, who managed to choke out angrily, “Go…ahead…traitor. Do it.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Tobias needed no further encouragement and drove the blade straight into Gamble’s heart.

The lieutenant’s body shuddered violently against her before sagging almost instantly, dragging her down with him. Tobias caught her before she fell directly on top of him, pulling her arms from around Gamble’s neck and towards him.

Abigail stared at his body, shell-shocked and numb. Her gaze then traveled to the other bodies scattered about the room, blood spreading from their wounds across the floor. She felt a sticky substance trickling down her shirt, and she knew that the blood wasn’t her own.

Before she could give into the urge of falling to her knees and getting sick, Tobias grabbed her by the arm firmly. “We’ve got to get out of here,” he urged, and before she could say anything else, he was leading them out the room, only after they made sure each and every one of the fallen was dead.

Somehow, the pair managed to make their way through the winding corridors undetected. They both
knew they only had minutes, perhaps less, before someone would stumble across the room and realize what happened.

But before anyone could begin to put names and faces to who had caused such an atrocity, a so-called atrocity which resulted directly from self-defense, they planned on being long gone.

After making their way through a series of secret passageways Tobias had gleaned from his time at the prison – though Abigail hardly paid attention to where and how they managed to get out, the horror of Gamble’s body and what he had intended to do to her sending her straight into shock – they headed straight to the stables so they could steal a horse but not before Tobias snapped the chains of her shackles in half but was unable to remove the shackles themselves. They didn’t have the time.

Abandoning his red coat but managing to keep his weapons holster on his person, her grabbed the first saddled horse he could get his hands on. When she moved too stiffly to bring herself up, he slipped his arms around her and pushed her up into the saddle before hauling himself into the saddle in front of her.

He asked her for the location of Washington’s camp, and she told him without hesitation, wrapping her arms around him, her entire body breaking out into quiet trembling. She had no choice but to trust him now. He had just completely blown his cover to save her. Disclosing the camp’s location was a necessity, if they wanted to make it back out of enemy territory.

Everything that Gamble had learned of her, of whatever else he had discovered, remained in that room. Her secret, once again, remained safe.

After all, dead men told no tales.

Chapter End Notes

As always, I appreciate everyone’s continued support for this fic! Let me know what you guys think. I highly value your feedback! All of your kudos, comments, bookmarks, and subs never fail to make my day <3
Chapter 32

This chapter takes place after 3x06 but before 3x07

Roughly over a day had passed since Washington, his servant Billy, and Ben had returned from Philadelphia. Initially, the trip had begun as a visit to Congress to inform them of the British’s counterfeit scheme, but upon hearing their arrival into the city, Benedict Arnold had decided to host a ball in honor of Washington, delaying their return to camp by a day or so as originally planned. Unable to refuse, the commander-in-chief and agreed to attend the ball, inviting Billy and Ben to attend as well.

Arnold’s ball had certainly been an interesting affair. Having met the socialite Peggy Shippen and a number of other Congressmen in attendance, the major had been largely impressed with the ball’s turnout and Arnold’s having spared no expense to ensure a nice reprieve from war and an enjoyable evening. That had been what he had meant when he had found the man himself and offered him his praise. However, Arnold, having misinterpreted his praise for insinuations, had lit into him like short-tempered bear.

This had only added to his growing apprehension of the Philadelphia stationed general. After his first argument with Abigail about him, the major had discreetly begun his own investigative work of his own, casually asking among the men, mostly fellow officers of similar rank or lower, of their opinions of Arnold. And just as were the results of Abigail’s questions of the unranked soldiers, none of their opinions had been good either. If anything, many of the officers had been reluctant to say anything good as well as bad about Arnold, which only confirmed his growing suspicions, the seed of which had been planted by Abigail herself.

Speaking of whom, where on earth was she?

Adjusting his jacket collar, he stepped out of his tent, getting ready to meet with another officer to assess the needs of the camp when he spotted Anna heading towards him, making a poor attempt at concealing her eagerness to meet approach him as quickly as possible. Taking pity on her, he decided to meet her halfway.

“Good morning, major,” Anna greeted with a warm smile. “How was Philadelphia? Insightful, I hope.”

“Very,” he remarked dryly. He tried to return his smile, but his distracted thoughts limited the amount of warmth going into it. His gaze briefly skimmed the land around them, unconsciously seeking out a familiar blonde. When he saw no such person, his gaze returned to Anna, a sense of unease beginning to settle upon him. “How were things in Setauket? With… you know.”

He referred to Abe, and the fact that Wished desired to end his role in the Culper Ring. He couldn’t imagine the young farmer taking that well, considering how much he had sacrificed and how much time he had devoted to the ring. While he had disagreed with Washington about his decision – and still did – it wasn’t his place to question him, not when they were such a precarious situation in the war as it was.
Anna sighed heavily. “It went about as well as you would think, but there were some interesting developments.”

Now she had his attention. “Tell me.”

Once they relocated to a more remote area, Anna summarized the events at Samuel Townsend’s home, the home of Robert Townsend’s father, the father of Samuel Culper Jr. of the Culper Ring, and everything that transpired thereafter. By the time she arrived at the conclusion with Townsend throwing them out of his father’s house, declaring he no longer wanted any part of the ring, Ben was pinching the bridge of his nose, a headache threatening to overtake him. Now he had two problems on his hands: the removal of Abe, aka Samuel Culper, upon Washington’s request and now the apparent departure of their New York Man, Townsend.

Well, actually, there was a third problem, one that he dreaded to consider. But he had to know.

“And what of Abigail?” he asked. “What did she make of any of this?” Anna’s brows furrowed in confusion, so he added, “When you caught up with her. She left for Setauket days before you and Caleb. Surely, you must have crossed paths.”

“I… we never saw her,” Anna spoke slowly, her eyes beginning to widen with slow dawning horror. “We thought she had returned to camp. I thought she had gone straight to you this morning when you and Washington returned.”

The impending headache blossomed into a full-blown migraine. “That’s what I was afraid of,” he groaned before rising from the old tree stump he had taken as his seat when they had first arrived. “We should find Caleb. Maybe he’ll know where she is.”

“I’m sure she’s around here somewhere,” Anna assured him, following close behind her. “I mean, there aren’t many places for her to go around here.”

Ben let out a bitter chuckle. “You’d be surprised by what she can get herself into.” It wasn’t like this was Abigail’s first time at this.

For the love of God, he hoped this wasn’t another case to add to that list.

It didn’t take long to find the whaler, who apparently had been on his way to find them. Before either of the men could speak, Anna turned to Caleb and asked if he had spoken with Abigail recently, as in the past few days recently.

“No,” Caleb remarked, his concern etched into his face. “That’s actually what I was coming to find you for. I got a chance to speak with Abe, after… everything.” He looked over at Anna, who nodded, as if to acknowledge she had told Ben everything about that night. Then he continued cautiously, “Before he got off the boat, I managed to catch him off to the side, asking if Abigail had gotten the information he had needed to send to us. I don’t know what made me think of it at the time, but I asked anyway.”

Unblinking, Ben demanded urgently, “And?”

“Abe said he waited at our usual meeting place, which Abigail knows where it is since she’s accompanied me on a few courier trips. He waited several hours, well beyond midnight.” Caleb grimaced. “She never showed.”

Ben closed his eyes and tried to focus on his breathing. Losing his mind would solve nothing, although he was on the precipice of doing just that.
While she did possess a disturbing talent for finding trouble – or rather trouble finding her, as she had so infuriatingly pointed out, before, of course, she went missing, again – somehow, some way, Abigail always found her way back to him. That notion alone was the only thing helping him preserve his sanity.

The faint drumming of hoofbeats at a distance prompted him to open his eyes and perform a sharp turnabout, with Caleb and Anna doing the same. They spotted a figure on horseback thundering towards them at a near breakneck pace, the rider clutching at the reins as if their life depended on it.

“What on earth…” Anna murmured in dismay as Caleb took a step forward while Ben fished out his spyglass from his jacket pocket.

Extending the instrument into its full length, Ben brought the spyglass to his eyes and focused the device on their new arrival. After a moment or two of adjusting, he could make out the dark hair, the strong clenched jaw, and the familiar outline of the rider’s face. It took another few moments for him to process what his brain already knew.

Tobias Hawkins, riding towards them as if he were escaping hell itself, and out of his British uniform no less.

What on earth indeed.

“Tobias,” Ben remarked, a little more than stunned, speaking aloud more so for Anna and Caleb’s benefit than his own. Extreme confusion coupled with instinctive indignation and several other emotions swirled inside him, rendering him nearly incapable of explaining anything beyond the man’s name.

“What?” Caleb demanded, all but squawking in dismay. When Ben explained nothing further, the whaler snatched the instrument from his hands so that he could have a look. He released a surprised noise. “Well, slap me twice, and call me Sally!”

Anna barely acknowledged Caleb’s unusual exclamation and snatched the spyglass from him so that she could catch a look, not wanting to be excluded. When she saw it was in fact Abigail’s ex-husband riding straight towards them, she gasped quietly. “Now what’s he doing here? Isn’t he supposed to be with the British, undercover?”

“Yes, he should be,” Caleb remarked, his tone growing increasingly worried.

He kept sending rather not furtive looks towards the major, who hadn’t moved an inch since he had the spyglass taken from him. Caleb wondered if he was even breathing. Though judging by the growing high flush in his cheeks, he suspected his breathing was just fine, though he suspected his temper was another issue entirely.

What had Tobias done?

Once within half a dozen or so yards of them, they watched as Tobias maneuvered the horse so that he was coming up behind the stables, which was all but empty given this time of day, with the horses grazing in the pastures. With this change in position, it was easier to see there was someone else with him, a person of slender build and of much smaller frame, clinging to Tobias’s back as they began to ease into a slow trot. The brief glimpse of golden hair in the early morning light had Ben dashing towards the barn without a second thought.

Anna and Caleb were hot on his heels.

By the time the trio made it behind the barn, Tobias, already having dismounted and tied his mount
to the nearest hitching post, was just finished easing his riding partner off the saddle and into his arms, cradling her against his chest carefully and apologizing every time the move jostled their aching limbs.

Caleb was the first one to speak at the sight of Abigail in his arms, looking much worse for the wear. “Jesus Christ.”

Ben stumbled forward, his heart caught in his throat. Slowly, he reached out to touch her gently, as if approaching a half-starved, wild kitten – which sadly wasn’t far off from a physical description of her at the moment – and purposefully ignored who was holding her. As much as he would have loved to indulge in his baser desires and pull her into his own arms, away from her former husband, away from the man who so keenly wanted to take what was his (a thought he would feel somewhat foolish about later, considering how he never had a possessive bone in his body; somehow, Abigail managed to bring out the protective instincts in him).

The animosity between him and Tobias could be dealt with later. She didn’t need that now.

“Abigail?” he murmured, brushing away a golden curl away from her face. “Love, can you hear me? It’s Ben.”

Tobias stiffened at his words, his tone, or perhaps it was the combination of the two. Ben couldn’t care less about the other man at the moment. His main concern was the woman in his arms. His second concern was how to get her out of them.

With a quiet noise of recognition, Abigail stirred a little but not enough for her to be dropped accidentally. She opened her eyes slowly before turning her face so that she could see him fully. A soft, happy, if not delirious smile settled on her face when she saw it was him, but that wasn’t what caused Ben’s sharp intake of breath.

The various darkened hues of purple scattered along her face and the split him, however, ensnared his attention, much to his horror.

Swallowing down the urge to break something, he maintained his focus on her, returning her smile painfully, tears stinging at the back of his eyes. “That’s right. It’s me.” Never before had the blonde looked so delicate and frail. The only other time he could recall her being close to this state was when he and Caleb had discovered her on their way back towards Kerr Farm, where she had been resting against the trunk of a tree, her uniform coat pressed against her abdomen, her face drawn and pale.

That was one time too many.

“Can she walk?” Ben asked Tobias without looking away from her.

The other man remarked just as quietly, “I’m not entirely certain, but I doubt it. She’s recovering from shock and is still pretty weak. She hasn’t eaten much in days.”

“I’ll go fetch her something then,” Anna volunteered. She nodded towards Tobias. “And for you as well.”

Tobias shook his head firmly. “Don’t worry about me. Just see that she’s taken care of.”

Anna nodded towards him again and set off back to camp, already planning on bringing more than enough food for two if she could help it while Caleb took it upon himself to usher the rest of them inside the barn, knowing better than to linger out in the open for longer than necessary.
Once inside, Tobias attempted to set her down on her feet upon Caleb’s suggestion. She barely made it half a step before nearly falling on her face. The only thing that saved her from making direct contact with the ground were both of the major’s and her ex-husband’s strong arms supporting her.

With her safely back in Tobias’s arms – just for this final time – Ben and Caleb did their best to come up with a cot alternative for her to rest. The best they could come up with in such a short amount of time were a few pairs of tied off hay and several layers of discarded blankets to make it more comfortable. Seeing as how she had spent the past several days on the stoned floor of a British prison cell with nothing but her own arms as a pillow, they would get no complaints from her.

As she rested in a restless doze, Tobias began to tell them what he could, about how he had seen her being brought into custody by three redcoats under the charge of espionage. Knowing he’d had to act fast before she remained in the open area cell with the rest of the prisoners longer than she ought to have been, he had managed to arrange to move her into a separate cell away from the general population, solitary, which hadn’t been an ideal solution, but it had been better than leaving her in there with the rest of those men.

He also told them how he had visited her as often as he could, mostly to bring her food when he could smuggle some down to her. That had actually been what he was going down to her cell to do when he had spotted the two redcoats removing her from her cell and escorting her into another room, one in which interrogations were most commonly performed. So of course he had followed, with this knowledge in mind.

Only when the two redcoats that had escorted her had stepped out of the room to guard it did Tobias go and confront them, asking to know what they were doing. They wouldn’t tell him, and he persisted. It turned into an argument, and he was just about to threaten them further when he’d heard Abigail scream.

Tobias’s face took on a haunted look, his eyes glazing over slightly as he recalled that moment all too clearly inside his mind. “After she… after I heard the scream, I kicked down the door to get to her. I wasn’t even thinking anything when I did it. All I could do, all I could think, was that try to get to her before the bastard does anything to her, if he hadn’t done so already.”

He unclenched his fists, not realizing that they had balled up into fists almost as soon as he had begun recounting the day’s events. “I took the youngest down first, the one who had been closest to the door. Then, once I was inside, the other tried to grab me from behind, but his grip wasn’t any good, which made it easier to break away from him.”

Ben stared at him hard, demanding, “And you killed them? The both of them.”

Tobias nodded grimly. “Not just the two of them. The third one, too.” He misinterpreted Ben’s cool gaze as one of disapproval, and his jaw tightened. “I had to. And I don’t bloody regret it either.” He pointed a finger at him accusingly as he hissed out his next words. “If you had heard her scream and then saw that fucking redcoat bastard with his pants around his ankles, you would have done exactly same thing, and you know it.”

All the blood drained from the major’s face. It was as if all the warmth had escaped his body altogether. Choking on his barely contained rage, he managed to get out through gritted teeth, “…did he…”

Tobias leveled him with steady stare, a look filled with muted rage and pain that was beyond words. “I honestly don’t know.”
A time later, Abigail began to wake. Her stirring and shifting created a rustling of the hay which was currently used as her bed. By the time she was fully awake, Ben had already moved to sit beside her, reaching out to touch the crown of her head in soft, soothing strokes. The comforting presence of his fingers running through her hair nearly made her close her eyes and drift back to sleep.

Anna had already returned with food and drink as promised. Apparently while she had slept, she had managed to convince Tobias to eat something, much to his chagrin. Although she was still displeased by how little he ate, she still considered it a minor victory that he had eaten and drunk anything at all, so she kept her thoughts to herself.

The brunette tried to coax Abigail into eating, but the blonde refused with a slow shake of her head. She did, however, accept cannister of water, which she drank happily as soon she sat up with the help of Ben and Caleb’s steadying hands.

Once she had her fill of water, Abigail brushed away the droplets from her mouth with the back of her hand and took a careful breath before asking, “So what do you know already?” referring to what Tobias had told them, if he had told them anything at all.

“Just that you were brought to the British under an espionage charge,” Caleb answered, his arms folded over his chest as he leaned against the wall beside her, “and what happened right before you two escaped.”

Abigail nodded carefully. “I suppose it’s time for me to fill in the rest then.”

Tobias began to shake his head. “Abigail, you don’t have to right…”

She shook her head firmly, silencing his dissent. “No, I have to. They need to know.” She looked up at him. “You don’t even know everything either.”

With Ben and Anna seated on each side of her, she began to tell them everything, beginning with how she had been given a newly broken mare, Penny, to take on her journey and how the young mare had gotten spooked and had thrown her from her saddle, leaving her in the woods. She admitted she couldn’t have been far from Setauket when she had been thrown, when the redcoats had found her.

She didn’t want to mention the redcoats knocking her around until she gave them her name or alias’s name rather, but she knew if she didn’t, one of them – Ben most likely – would ask how she got her bruises. So she described it in as brief of terms as she could. Feeling Ben tense beside her, she pushed forward as quickly as she could, knowing it would only get worse the further she made it through her account.

When she got to the part where she had been brought to the prison under the charge of espionage, a charge which the British officer had made up on a whim, mind you, Abigail decided to bypass the one of the inmates’ attempt of making a pass at her (a poor choice of words to describe that, she knew) and instead picked up around where Tobias had left off, with her being escorted from the nice, cushy solitary cell towards the interrogation room.

“They wouldn’t tell me what it was for, of course,” Abigail remarked after taking another deep swallow of water. “Something about an officer having questions for me? I really can’t remember. Anyway, they brought me to this room, where they had me stand on this crate or something. And they forced my arms above my head, so that the chain could go over the hook that was embedded in the ceiling.”

“To keep you off balance,” Caleb remarked grimly. “Keeping you literally on your toes.”
“Quite right,” Abigail smiled mirthlessly. Then she continued as she felt a hand slide down along her wrists, until her fingers interlaced with theirs. Ben, who remained quiet throughout most of her narrative, squeezed her hand in reassurance, whether it was solely for her or for them both she wasn’t quite certain, though she wasn’t about to shake it off. “Then the other one came in. A lieutenant.”

She took another pause before looking over at Ben, repeating a silent mantra to remain calm. “It was Gamble. He was the one to come in and question me.”

Ben blinked, stunned. “Gamble? Are you sure?” he demanded.

Abigail nodded. “I could hardly forget the face of the man who had so viciously murdered Mr. Sackett, could I? Nor could I forget his face since our last conversation.”

While the others appeared a little confused at her last statement, the major was quick to pick up on her reference and her meaning. His jaw clenched in anger.

She began rubbing firm circles along the back of his hand with her thumb, all the while bearing the brunt of Tobias’s heavy gaze on the side of her head. But she couldn’t worry about that. There was still much more they didn’t know.

After another few precious moments to compose herself, Abigail then told them everything Gamble had revealed to her, about his investigation into patriot families of Setauket, of the Tallmadges and Brewsters specifically. Seeing both Ben and Caleb’s shared looks of alarm, she added, “He never mentioned looking any further into either your families. As far as I know, he gave up on that idea when he discovered an angle he could properly run with.”

“New angle?” Ann asked, confused.

Abigail’s gaze dropped to her hands, looking from the one which rested on her right knee before looking over towards her other hand, which was still held tightly between Ben’s. “Looking into the Williams, since our families are so close. Apparently, that part was Simcoe’s idea.”

Caleb looked very close to spitting nails. “Simcoe. I knew I should’ve killed that bloody bastard when we had the chance!”

Before anyone could say anything else, Abigail pushed forward, desperate to finish disclosing everything and not wanting to hold this information inside any longer than she had to. She informed them how Gamble had been assigned the investigation after Simcoe had initially been court martialed by Hewlett a few years back. To be fair, Simcoe had no involvement in this apart from it being his original idea. She didn’t know why she was defending the man to herself, but for the sake of fairness, she needed to let that be known.

When she got to the part where Gamble had traveled to Dublin, after learning about her connection to Ben through the townspeople, Abigail couldn’t help but find Tobias’s gaze. To his credit, he didn’t look indignant or angry or bitter; while there might have been a slight hardening of his gaze, his expression only expressed her growing concern, the slow dawning realization of horror settling into his features when he began to realize where she was going next.

“Gamble went to Dublin with the intentions of finding me and bringing me back to get Ben,” Abigail spoke quietly. A slight tremor ran through her, starting in her hands and steadily spreading through her. “Only he didn’t realize the girl he found wasn’t me. It was Iris. And even when she had told him everything, about why she was there and why I was not, after she had given him everything he could have wanted to know, he… he murdered her anyway. Out of fucking spite.”
Trembling, she sought out the cannister, which Anna passed to immediately when she realized what she was looking for. Abigail took a deep swallow, wishing intensely how much she wished it was something a bit stronger. She faintly heard Tobias swearing colorfully and perhaps the sound of something breaking? It was difficult to tell, as she tried to once again gather her composure.

And she hadn’t even made it to the one of the worst parts of it yet.

“You need to get some rest,” Anna implored, voice filled with emotion. Abigail felt her hand settle at the small of her back and start rubbing soothing circles. As much as she loved her friend for it, she could barely stand anyone’s touch at the moment while at the same time she did want them to let go. A swirl of contradictions and no solutions.

“No,” Abigail sighed quietly, which sounded more like a quiet groan than actual sigh. “There’s more.”

“No?” Anna echoed. Her brown eyes widened in alarm.

The blonde nodded tiredly, then slipped her hand from Ben’s so she could run her hands through her unruly golden locks. “Yes.” She snuck a brief glance in his direction and regretted it almost immediately.

At the beginning of her account of the past week, his face had increasingly grown flushed with barely suppressed rage, particularly when she had explained how she had acquired her bruises. But now, he was almost naturally pale, all color having drained from his face. Realizing that if she hadn’t enlisted with the Continental Army under her father’s name, if she had gone to Dublin as her father had wanted her to, she easily could have suffered the same fate of the young servant girl, or perhaps even worse.

It was almost as if she was damned if she did, damned if she didn’t. Either way, the odds never really seemed to be in her favor.

“After he burned the letter,” Abigail continued, picking right up where she had left off, “he came towards me. He… he, uh, wanted to confirm his suspicions. To make sure he had the right person.” She swallowed nervously and shut her eyes. That night she had acted on adrenaline. The fight or flight instinct presented itself, and she had chosen fight. She had no idea where that bravery came from, but she wish she had a little bit of that now.

“Well, he grabbed me… through my trousers,” Abigail admitted through gritted teeth, her chest seizing with anxiety, which only increased. “And I spat in his face and kicked him, which in hindsight probably wasn’t the smartest idea.”

She could still feel the force of Gamble’s blow as she recounted his retaliation, that he had knocked her to the ground. But when she got to the part when the lieutenant had begun to unbuckle his pants and what he had said while he was doing so, she could barely get it out but somehow she managed to choke it out before burying her head in her hands.

Unable to keep still any longer, Ben surged forward, fury and anguish tearing through him. He barely heard her utter he hadn’t gotten the chance to get his hands on her before Tobias had forced his way into the room, all the blood nearly rushing to his head but hear her he did.

But while those words brought him some intense relief, it didn’t change anything that she had gone through. It didn’t make her any less safe. And this knowledge didn’t provide him any sort of solace. The one consistent thought running through his mind somehow managed to ground him. And the
amount of anger and hatred in it should have scared him, but it didn’t.

He was glad that Gamble was dead. His only regret was that he hadn’t killed him when he’d had the chance.

If he had, Abigail wouldn’t have gone through any of this.

Overwhelmed in his own thoughts, Ben didn’t hear Caleb come up behind him nor did he even feel him clasping him on the shoulder. He looked over at him and found his own muted anger and horror mirrored in his best friend’s gaze.

“What are we going to do about this?” the whaler murmured. They shared a look before turning towards the others. Tobias was pacing in agitation, muttering barely concealed curses. Anna was flush against Abigail’s side, murmuring words of comfort while the blonde had her head between her knees, trying to control her ragged breathing.

Ben had sudden difficulty swallowing.

“I don’t have the faintest idea,” the major replied quietly. His gaze returned to Caleb’s, his blue eyes hard as stone. “But we will figure this out.”

“Aye, we will,” Caleb agreed firmly.

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It took some time, but Anna convinced Abigail to eat something, at least a few bites here and there. With some food in her stomach and water to hydrate her, the blonde was able to rise to her feet without much trouble. Only after walking well enough to his satisfaction, Ben asked Anna if she could bring her to the infirmary tent to look her over. Anna agreed but then asked what were the three of them going to do. All Ben was willing to say was that they needed to figure out their next step, now that Tobias was no longer with the British, and figure out arrangements for him, much to his own displeasure.

Anna did as she was told, leading Abigail down the narrow path towards the infirmary tent, making sure to keep her distance when they came into view of the camp and its residents. The entire journey back, the brunette had a sneaking suspicion that something wasn’t right, something the men hadn’t been quite forthcoming about.

So as soon as she saw to it that Abigail was safely under the camp doctor’s care, she made her way back up towards the barn, camp duties be damned.

Taking a moment to catch her breath after the steep hike, Anna smoothed down the fronts of her skirts and hurried forward until she found a spot where she could hear them easily but without them spotting her – a difficult feat which she somehow accomplished.

From the sounds of it, she arrived towards the tail end of the conversation, with Ben and Tobias’s minds already made up while Caleb trying to make them see reason, to come up with a different course of action.

Brows furrowed with concern, Anna pressed as closely as she dared, straining to hear what she could and to get a better idea of what the hell they were plotting.

There were several rows of bickering, mostly between Ben and Tobias (unsurprisingly) where Caleb more or less served as mediator. But as the conversation was nearing its end, the former two seemed more in line of agreement than Caleb was with either of them, which made her feel even more
confused and concerned.

But quickly, she began mentally putting the pieces together while trying to pay attention to what they were saying at the same time. It was certainly headache-inducing, but it had to be done. Though the conclusion she was slowly drawing was perhaps even more perplexing.

From what she could gather, Tobias and Ben had been trying to develop a story to inform Washington of what had transpired that had allowed Tobias to return to camp, after several years immersing himself among enemy lines. It was better to stick with the truth as much as possible, because being caught in a lie was extremely easy to do, but at the same time, they wanted to protect Abigail and keep her involvement out of it as much as possible.

However, with her out of the equation, it didn’t give Tobias much of a leg to stand on. Without Abigail as a defense, that he had gone in guns blazing to save her, he looked more like a rebel spy having gone rouge. And that was hangable offense all on its own.

Tobias didn’t seem the littlest bit bothered by this. His fate was sealed, and it didn’t seem to bother him at all. What he seemed against was Ben’s trying to help make his situation as bearable as possible, even if it meant throwing himself under the cart to save his neck. Tobias being sentenced to hanging for killing three redcoats without alleged prompting was certain. What would be more unclear was what Ben’s fate would be if he incriminated himself, claiming to have encouraged his actions in anyway.

Definitely he would be stripped of his head of intelligence position, if not his officer position of major altogether. Even worse yet he could hang beside Tobias in the alleged aiding of such an atrocity, as was the most probably conclusion that could and would be drawn by the a military court hearing.

This was the very argument Caleb kept pushing, but his words appeared keep falling on deaf ears. Ben and Tobias were willing to do whatever it took to protect the woman they loved, even if it cost them everything, even their lives.

Horrified, Anna stumbled out of her hiding place, staring at the barn as if she was staring directly at them in accusation. She had half a mind to go in there and smack them, to demand if they thought this was what Abigail would want, if they were actually thinking of her at all.

But she did neither of these things. Instead, Anna did the only thing she could think of. The right thing.

She turned and hurried down the hill, heading towards the infirmary tent. There was little time for her to reach Abigail, recalling Ben and Tobias had agreed to speak with Washington near dusk.

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Abigail was going to murder them, Ben and Tobias both.

With Anna’s frenzied words ringing in her ears, the blonde had convinced her friend she was going to have a conversation with them as soon as Anderson had given her the okay. Having ingested a few cups of calming chamomile tea and some liquid medication she hadn’t been entirely familiar with, she had already began feeling like her usual self by the time Anna had returned to the tent. So when the brunette had left and Anderson had disappeared somewhere, Abigail naturally had abandoned the cot for greener pastures, namely for one tent in particular.

And that tent wasn’t Ben’s. Nor was it Caleb’s.
With her frustration with those two fueling her, Abigail walked her way through the camp, making sure to keep her head down as to not draw any attention towards her face. She had Anderson to thank for that, whose cap she had swiped from his desk before leaving his tent.

It didn’t take her long to find Billy, who rarely strayed far from Washington’s tent, especially as of late. She waved at him when he happened to look in her direction. He waved back cordially in greeting, his smile quickly fading into a frown when he got a better look at her face.

“Good Lord, what happened to your face?” he asked, the words coming out of his mouth before he could stop them.

“Funny story,” Abigail started. “That’s part of the reason why I’m here.” She breathed deeply and exhaled slowly before adding, “I have something to tell him. Some news that he may find deeply troubling. News that he must know right away.”

“Why then by all means,” came the familiar, deep voice from behind her. Both she and Billy peered up to see the commander-in-chief stopping short at his tent, having caught the last bit of her words. “Let us speak privately.”

He nodded for her to follow him, and with a rolling stomach, Abigail followed him inside, doing her best to keep her nerves from getting the better of her. She could do this. Everything would be fine.

If Ben and Tobias were determined to do something stupid, she was going to stop them. Perhaps by doing something just as equally stupid. Or more.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place after 3x06 but before 3x07

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Before either man had stepped one foot inside Washington’s tent, their story was well-rehearsed, or as well-rehearsed one could be when having only so many hours to spare. While neither man no longer particularly cared for the other – actively loathing and despising one another didn’t even begin to describe the animosity between them – the one thing they could agree on, was Abigail’s welfare, and that was more than enough to see it through.

Washington had accepted Ben’s request for a meeting with little delay when the urgency of the situation was properly conveyed. Once Tobias had gone to somewhat hasty lengths to make himself more presentable, the two men had set off to meet with Washington while taking appropriate measures to take a more discreet route and away from the curious gaze of the camp soldiers, who seemed more apt to gossip than a group of society women.

He kept his expression neutral when Ben brought Tobias in, making it difficult to assess what the man was thinking. It was a particular talent the man had, which helped make him a gifted leader and commander-in-chief.

“It’s good to see you, Mr. Hawkins,” Washington remarked, “though I didn’t expect to be reacquainted with you so soon.”

Even underneath Tobias’s tanned skin, the major could see the other man pale a little from Washington’s blunt statement and the underlying implications, but under Ben’s advisement, he kept his mouth shut – the one time that Tobias seemed to actually value his advice.

“There is an explanation for this,” Ben intervened before Tobias felt inclined to speak on his own behalf. “An explanation which you really need to hear, as it may significantly impact our intelligence gathering.”

Raising his eyebrows slightly, Washington gave a permissive gesture of his hand. “Well, by all means, major, please continue.”

Tossing a cursory glance towards the other man behind him, Ben launched into the narrative they had prepared, beginning with the most obvious. “First, and most importantly, his position with the British has been compromised.”

When Washington didn’t respond, he took that as his cue to continue, though he began to feel sweat building at the back of his neck. He explained everything but the reason why Tobias’s position was compromised, instead choosing to argue that they needed to protect him since his information of the British had been invaluable to them thus far. Whatever else Tobias might have learned but had not been able to convey to them through Caleb was too much of a risk to lose.

To say he was not precisely Tobias Hawkins’ most adamant supporter was such an incredible understatement, but the man had saved the life of the woman Ben loved, who was also the woman
that he loved, too. For that, he couldn’t fault him, even if the manner in which the other man had pursued her and swindled her away from him he downright despised… But that wasn’t the point here.

Ben couldn’t in good conscience allow Tobias to be punished for something for saving her life, especially since, if he had been in his shoes in that moment, he would have done exactly the same.

When he came to the end of his argument, he took a breath. Now was the moment of truth.

“You may be wondering the reason for his compromised position,” Ben said.

Washington shook his head. “No, not at all.”

Ben’s mouth hung open for several seconds before he remembered to snap it shut. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Tobias experiencing the very same struggle with keeping his jaw from falling to the floor.

“I’m sorry?” Ben asked, staring.

Washington, not moving once form his hands clasped in front of him on his desk, remarked, “I’ve been informed of everything. I’m sure we can handle this as discreetly as possible.”

The commander-in-chief looked at his documents on his desk for a moment, thankful for having already established the workings of a plan on dealing with this mess. “Mr. Hawkins will remain within our regiment until further notice. Unless the man in question has any objections.”

“I… no, I do not,” Tobias croaked out before clearing his throat, clearly stunned. “Thank you for your generosity. And your leniency.”

“Oh, don’t thank me,” Washington remarked. “Thank your former wife.”

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A few hours prior

“Now, what is it that you wished to discuss with me?” Washington inquired, expression benevolent but firm.

Abigail clasped her hands in her lap, hidden underneath the table at which he had invited her to sit, her heart nearly caught in her throat. She forced aside her growing anxiety and instead focused on the reason why she was there, the reason that made it all that much easier to see this through to the end.

“That’s a complicated question, but I suppose we need to start somewhere,” she answered, lips twitching upwards into a nervous smile. After another brief moment of gathering herself, she continued, “To be perfectly honest, I’m here to prevent two very important people to me from doing something completely idiotic, I’ll preface this by saying that now. And if you feel the need to comment or interject, please wait until I’m finished.”

Washington’s eyebrows raised slightly, though the corners of his mouth twitched in amusement. She took this as a good sign. “I’ll take that into account. Please continue, Mr. Williams.”

And that was the issue right there, “Thomas Williams is the name of my father. My mother died during childbirth.” The thought of the mother she would never knew made her heart ache fiercely, but she continued, “He told me my mother wished that name to be passed down to me, if I had been
born male.” Not giving into the temptation of closing her eyes, she pushed forward, “My true name is Abigail Williams, your excellency, the daughter of Thomas Williams of Setauket, Long Island. His only daughter, no siblings, no brothers to be more precise.”

She told him everything, about who she really was, the lengths she had gone through to get where she was, about her learning of the spy ring and having participated in obtaining information to and from certain agents, about how she now shared courier duties with the Culper Ring’s current courier.

Then she arrived at the very reason for why she was there speaking with him now. She also told him of her most recent encounter with the British on her courier route back to Setauket and how that had led to her imprisonment. When she discussed how Tobias had saved her from Gamble and his redcoat guards, Washington’s eyebrows practically disappeared into his hairline, but she briefly paused in her narrative to defend Tobias’s actions.

“If there is one thing that is right about our world, your excellency,” Abigail began, “is that prison is no place for a woman. I was held there, confined in a room full of deplorable men having done even more deplorable acts until Tobias had convinced the guards to transfer me to solitary, to keep me from physical and perhaps mortal danger. And a few days later I was brought into a room and was questioned by the murdered officer in question. Do you want to know how he tried to get his information from me? Because I can. Chaining me to a hook on the ceiling and balancing on a box to keep me at his mercy was nothing to what he really wanted to do to me.”

She recounted Gamble’s initial investigation, the murder of her former house servant Iris, and the events that followed, how he had grabbed her between the legs to “confirm his suspicions” and everything that followed after.

To his credit, apart from his brief eyebrow raise, the man’s expression hadn’t changed once. She couldn’t read his expression, of whether he was shocked or furious or even surprised. It was somehow a small comfort to her, which made it more possible for her to continue. Perhaps that was the reason for his veiled expression, to give her the courage to continue.

“And he killed them, the two redcoats standing at the door, when he heard me scream,” Abigail said, having grown increasingly numb as she approached the conclusion. “But when it came to Gamble, he wasn’t alone in killing him. He may have driven the blade into his heart, but I was the one that held Gamble, wrapping the my shackles around his throat to hold him still. It’s possible I may have killed him before Tobias stabbed him.”

Washington blinked, unable to contain himself any longer, “I hope you realize you’re implicating yourself.”

“I realize perfectly well what I’m saying,” Abigail informed him. “I realize that everything I’ve told you thus far could a hangable offense alone, more so this than anything else. I acknowledge that.

“What would you do if your wife were in my place?” she asked suddenly, leaning forward as she pressed her arms on the table. “What if you had been sent to spy on the enemy in their ranks and witnessed as one of their officers placed their hands on your wife without her consent? Would you have acted any differently, if it had been Martha?”

Abigail was crossing the line, and she knew it. In fact, she had gone far so past the line, she wouldn’t have been able to see it if she had turned around and looked for it. It was a risk, but it was one she had to take, if she had any hope in protecting Ben and Tobias from their own foolish plan.

She knew the moment her words struck him was when Washington abruptly pushed himself away from the table and to his feet, walking to the corner of his tent while bringing a hand up to his face.
She couldn’t see his expression but noted the tension in his shoulders, the uncharacteristic slump in his ever present perfectly sturdy posture. Her words had gotten to him. As guilty as she felt for bringing up his wife, she couldn’t bring herself to regret from doing it, not if it meant it could potentially help.

The silence dragged on for so long she wondered if she should have left but thought better of it and remained in the chair, her nails digging into the backs of her hands with anxiety.

“How many others know?”

The words were spoken so softly Abigail had to strain to hear them. Turning around in her chair, she looked up just as he turned his head in her direction, staring directly at her, as if daring for her to lie to him.

She answered him honestly, “Ben, Caleb, Abraham Woodhull, Anna Strong, Tobias, and now you, sir.” She bit her lip and then added, “And I suppose the two redcoat guards and Gamble, but they’re dead. They can’t share anything they know now.”

Nodding slowly, Washington returned to the table and to his seat. “Of all the things I thought we would be discussing,” he remarked, his expression finally revealing how stunned he truly was, “I never would have predicted to bearing witness to your account of all this.”

Abigail smiled, understanding far better than anyone could have guessed. “Believe me, I never thought I would have divulged this much information either. It wasn’t that I didn’t believe you shouldn’t know, but it was to protect myself. But telling you now, today, it’s to protect someone else.”

After a moment to digest everything she had shared, they managed to come up with an arrangement that best handled the situation, as discreetly as possible. If the French had caught wind of such a scandal, it wouldn’t have been out of the realm of possibility for them to reconsider their alliance with the United States, which would have disastrous consequences. This piece of information alone had been what she was counting on when she had made her decision to meet with Washington.

Since there had been little to no information coming from Anna’s former servant, Abigail, as of late since her son Cicero had come to live with her upon her employer’s request, Washington decided to assign the blonde to assist her with her observations of Major John Andre. “As a woman,” he emphasized, raising his gaze to her pointedly.

Abigail nodded in agreement. “And to avoid any confusion between us, I’ll go by my middle name, Elizabeth. That’s how Abigail refers to me anyway, back in Setauket before the war.”

“Good, good,” Washington murmured while looking over his documents. He also agreed to keep Tobias in their ranks, acknowledging his wealth of information on the British was too valuable to lose.

Abigail then told him of Ben and Tobias’s intentions to speak with him, he told her that he would speak with them about their plans upon their meeting. Once their plans were solidified, he requested for to remain there when he summoned Billy inside, requesting to him to summon one of his guards to escort her back to the house.

While she might have just saved the major and her ex-husband, she knew very well she hadn’t made it out of the woods just yet.

“I trust you can take care of yourself, especially with all the years you acquired in the military.”
Washington made this comment with a wry smile, and after a moment, Abigail realized she hadn’t disappointed him at all.

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*Back to the present*

Before either of the two men could process what was going on, Washington proceeded to inform them of his intentions with Abigail. She would become acquainted with Major John Andre. It was her job to infiltrate his inner circle, to get the know the man, watch his every move and to monitor any British activity as it pertained to the man and his position. In exchange for her confession and willingness to cooperate with his plan, Tobias would remain in their ranks upon her request.

Washington dismissed them before Ben could get a word in edgewise, but not before telling him he was to escort Tobias to the holding quarters for the evening until arrangements could be made for Tobias’s reintegration into the camp.

When the major demanded to know what would become of Abigail, of when she would relocated and how, Washington informed him that he and Caleb would escort her to a drop off point close to York City. Tobias would remain behind, of course, being too much of a liability due to the bounty there was bound to be on his head.

Even with the briefest glimpse at the taller man’s profile, he could see that Tobias’s jaw was clenched, fighting to urge to make retort knowing that he was already on thin enough ice as it was. With a brief nod, he allowed himself to be led out by the major once Washington officially dismissed them, though as he did so, Ben could practically feel the white hot glare on the side of his head. And he knew for a fact that it wasn’t Washington’s.

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Dusk had given way to nightfall by the time word of Abigail’s predicament reached Caleb’s ears. As soon as he heard, the whaler took it upon himself to investigate himself after Ben’s multiple unsuccessful attempts to try and see her. Deciding that it was probably for the best that the major shouldn’t try to work Washington’s last nerve, Caleb volunteered to go another way about it, not by going directly to Washington himself but to Billy instead.

Billy was surprisingly forthcoming, despite the incredible amount of discretion in which Washington desired the situation to be handled. It was apparent from talking to the man that he wasn’t aware of what Abigail had done to be placed under house arrest, but he was aware of the logistics of her holding. Apparently, after having spoken with him, Washington had him fetch one of his guards to escort her into the house and into one of the guestrooms where the guard would remain outside her door. When he asked Billy how long she was to remain there, Billy replied that until Washington said otherwise.

“Oh, this is not good,” Caleb mumbled to himself as he left the house, after trying to determine what room Abigail resided in and ultimately failing.

He looked up and watched as Ben strode purposefully towards the holding quarters where Tobias was being held, his jaw set in agitation. Caleb sighed internally. Oh, this wasn’t good at all.

Making an executive decision, he took a brief detour to procure Anna, hoping that her presence would deter either man from attempting to kill each other.

By the time the pair reached the small cabin-like structure, both Anna and Caleb heard the
beginnings of an escalating argument. Whose voice he heard beginning to shout was quickly cut off by the other, making it impossible to determine who was doing the shouting.

“Oh, fuck me,” Caleb swore. After one look at Anna’s disapproving face, he turned sheepish and mumbled an apology before forcing their way inside.

The sight before them was hardly surprising but still alarming nonetheless. Ben and Tobias weren’t coming to blows, but judging from the tension radiating from both of them and how there was hardly any space between them, with Tobias glowering down at him with the intensity of a thousand suns, they weren’t far from it.

“This is absolutely your fucking fault!” Tobias accused, his dark eyes glittering with anger. “If you had sent her home as soon as you knew-”

“And do what? Send her off on her own in unfamiliar territory? Have her be cast as a deserter?” Ben demanded incredulously. “Are you seriously that thick?”

“Hey, hey, hey!” Caleb cried out over Tobias’s dark growl and quickly forced himself between them, shoving them apart with his hands, made only easier when Anna yanked Ben back by the tail of his coat. He looked over at her indignantly to which she responded with a raised eyebrow.

“Before you two men kill each other,” Anna began, looking at both men with equal levels of dismay and disappointment. “Wouldn’t you like to know all the facts?” She looked over at Caleb and nodded for him to continue.

Throwing her a grateful look, Caleb remarked, “I didn’t find out much, but from what Billy told me, they’re not releasing her from the house, per Washington’s orders. And when I went to inquire inside, they wouldn’t even let me step foot inside the house, let alone try to speak with her privately. So I reckon letting any one of us inside is out of the question.

“Not until it’s time to bring her to the drop off point anyway,” Caleb finished, his gaze fixed on the major. He knew better than anyone how deeply being incapable of taking control of a situation was cutting into him. He had witnessed it several times over the years, even more recently. However, this time it was much more personal. And this must have been killing him. Caleb could see it in his eyes. There was nothing more he wanted to do than to help his friend, the man who was a brother to him.

He couldn’t imagine what Ben was going through. And having the love of his life’s former husband taking shots at him, hitting him directly in his sore spots, wasn’t helping either.

Tobias jabbed a finger in his direction, furious. “This, this is your fault. Every injury she’s sustained, every time she’s been put in danger, I hold you personally responsible for all of it.”

To his credit, Ben didn’t back down from Tobias’s burning glares and barking tone, but at the same time, he didn’t deny his accusations. There wasn’t anything to disagree with him there, as Ben saw in his own mind. There wasn’t even a hint of untruth. It wasn’t as if he wasn’t saying what he had been thinking of himself more than a dozen times with every misfortunate that befell Abigail. The most infuriating part of it was that he couldn’t argue against him, because Tobias was correct.

But that didn’t stop Anna from coming to his defense. “That is not fair, and you know it,” she insisted. “How dare you blame him!”

Tobias’s narrowed gaze briefly flickered to her. “How dare I? I’m not the one who –”

“Oi!” Caleb shouted over him, effectively cutting him off. He gave him a measured look. He didn’t want to appear to be taking sides, but it was already clear whose side he was on, whose back he
always had. “Listen, mate. I know you’re upset, and you have every right. But don’t make this situation any worse. Besides, you should be thanking Ben, for protecting Abigail when he could.”

A small, bitter smile settled on the other man’s mouth, and his gaze shifted its focus back to Ben. “Yes, thank you, Ben. For being in love with my wife.”

The major gritted his teeth before retorting, “She’s no longer your wife, friend.”

“Now, how on earth is this being productive?” Caleb demanded tiredly after jumping back in front of Tobias to keep him from lunging at Ben.

“Caleb’s right,” Anna remarked, giving Tobias a look so severe it was a wonder he hadn’t been scalded. “None of this right now is helping Abigail. And both of you are better than this.”

Growing up, she had admired Tobias a great deal, though as he had begun to show his true colors in how ruthlessly he had pursued Abigail at his former best friend’s expense had quickly changed her view of him. And now, his cruel, scathing words only solidified her opinion of the man. Or should she say snake?

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Inside the Middlebrook camp house, Abigail sat on the floor, her legs drawn up to her chest and her arms around them, her back pressed against the wall. There was a bed not too far from where she sat, as well as a writing desk and chair, but she didn’t feel right utilizing either of them.

She’d been sitting in the same position on the floor as when she had first arrived with the guard. Granted, this time the escort was a legitimate escort, nothing like her previous “guides” had been. That much she was thankful for at least.

Did she regret going to Washington? Absolutely not. She would have done it again if she had to. It was worth it in the end, no matter the trouble it cost her, either presently or in the future. At least she could still serve inside Culper, if Culper even existed any longer. At least she could be of some use to the cause, even though her life as a Continental soldier was now over.

She had set out to protect both Ben and Tobias, and that was just what she did. There was no going back now. To save the man who had saved her life and the man who owned her heart, who saved her half a dozen times over, there hadn’t been any other choice for her to make.

Still in her uniform, the guard had no idea of her true identity. Washington wanted to keep it that way. He had already made arrangements to have someone approach Anna to retrieve the proper necessities for her travels. Not long after the brunette would arrive with a dress, cloak, and her other belongings that were possible to bring with her, there wouldn’t be much time before Washington would send Caleb to fetch her before he and Ben would bring her to York City.

Just the thought of not seeing Ben every day, even if she was only caught a glimpse of him, was Abigail’s only regret.

Chapter End Notes

Guys, thank you so much for all of your amazing feedback with your kudos and comments! And thank you so much for sticking around with me for this crazy ride. I
can't believe I posted this back in October. Look how far we've come!
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

The chapter takes place before 3x07

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A few hours into her stay in the guest room, Abigail heard a light knock at the door. Her stomach flipped at the sound. Had Washington sent someone to fetch her already?

But when the door opened, Anna was allowed inside by one of Washington’s men stationed outside her door. She looked at him curiously as he walked off with some parchment in his hands, and before she could ask, Anna explained that the letter had been from Washington, granting her entry to do the house laundry.

Once the door was closed, however, she uncovered the basket she had brought with her and set it on the bed. Inside wasn’t a mixture of undergarments and uniforms. Instead, there was a bag with a cloak and dress tucked away inside. Abigail stopped herself from pulling out the dress, to touch and examine it at a closer proximity.

Just the sight of the dress alone was almost a foreign feeling, after not having worn a dress in the past three years, at least not a complete dress.

She and Anna talked briefly before Anna had to depart, to avoid any suspicions upon the guard’s impending return, but not before the brunette gave her a fiercely warm hug.

Abigail wouldn’t change until after Caleb came to collect her and once they were certain they were out of sight from anyone from the camp. There was the barn, which was just on the outskirts of the camp, where she could change and dress before they set off for York City, as per Caleb’s suggestion through Anna.

It was a quarter to midnight when there was another knock on her door, this time accompanied by Caleb’s quiet voice.

At the initial sound of his voice, Abigail immediately hurried to open the door and was greeted with the whaler’s kind yet serious expression, the latter of which was usually atypical of the man.

“You ready?” Caleb asked quietly.

With a pasted-on smile, Abigail nodded, the words caught in her throat. She refused to let her nerves get the best of her, even though there was an intense rolling, fluttery feeling in the pit of her stomach.

She went to retrieve her bag but paused when a thought struck her. “What about the guard?”

“Washington called them off when he’d called for Anna to come to you,” Caleb answered.

Nodding jerkily, she grabbed the bag from where she had stowed it away, underneath the bed on the off chance someone came in.
Before she could follow him out, Caleb reached out and stopped her, his hand resting comfortingly on her forearm. Abigail gave him a mildly curious look.

“I just wanted to let you know,” Caleb began, voice serious and soft, “that what you did was a very brave thing. Stupid, perhaps but still brave nonetheless.” His lips twitched upwards into a lightly amused smile around the word “stupid”, which prompted her to smile as well.

“I know it was stupid, but I had to. And I think you know the reason,” Abigail remarked. She bit her lip, pausing for a moment. “Though to be perfectly honest, I don’t feel very brave,” she admitted quietly, huffing out a laugh with a slight tremor.

With a gentle shake of his head, Caleb walked over to her and enveloped her in a warm, tight hug. Abigail return the embrace with another watery laugh and sniff. She allowed herself the opportunity to gather herself, but in the back of her mind, she knew those spare moments were precious, and time was not on their side.

As if sensing her line of thought, Caleb took half a step back but not before giving her an affectionate bump to her nose with a light tap of his finger. Both grinned lightly as Caleb took the bag from her while they left the room.

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It didn’t take long for them to reach the barn, even more so due to the fact there had blessedly been no distractions or interventions in their path. With Caleb off to prepare the horses, Ben remained outside the barn as Abigail got herself ready for the journey ahead.

Even upon her former in-laws’ insistence of having servants, Abigail had always gotten herself ready herself, even right down to the tying of stays of her corset – though to be perfectly honest, she had always cheated and had never really tied them at all, because the idea of women in restrictive corsets to the point of fainting always seemed ridiculous to her.

However, over the past three years, she had grown quite out of practice, which made getting herself dressed all the more difficult. Fortunately for her, the dress had belonged to one of the camp’s women, which had been discarded because of its well-worn appearance, which was a relatively generous description. Overall, the dress was a dull brown. The skirts were stained beyond a good washing, and there were too many holes to be saved by any amount of sewing. The stitching in the dress was all but coming loose, with more than a few rips and tears along the neckline and sleeves.

In other words, the dress was perfect for Abigail’s plan, one she had yet to inform Ben and Caleb about. It was a plan she and Washington had devised as to how she would approach Major John Andre. The plan was incredibly risky and downright foolish, but it was also the smartest idea, at least in her mind. The perfect cover required remaining as close to the truth as possible, which made the dress a perfect accomplice.

There wasn’t much to the dress, especially underneath. Anna had been dismayed at the lack of a shift, but she had assured the brunette that it had been fine, that it actually might assist her. She wished she could have provided a better explanation than the one she had given to Anna’s skeptical expression, but in the end, there hadn’t been anything she could say without implicating her friend further.

“Damn,” Abigail cursed under her breath as she struggled with the stays at the small of her back. She kept missing loops, and every time the edge of the stay missed the knot, she wanted to scream in frustration.
“Are you all right?” came the hushed tone of Ben’s voice from just outside the barn door.

Abigail released a tiny, frustrated laugh. “Sort of. I… I think I might need some help.” She brushed her hair away from her face, then added, “With the stays.”

Not even a moment later she heard the barn door slide open and heard the quick, quiet footsteps approaching her.

“What do you need?” he murmured softly.

“Just, just tie them as best as you can,” Abigail replied, glancing at him over her shoulder. She just realized that her entire back was exposed to him, from the nape of her neck right down to below her waist. If she hadn’t managed to tie the skirts, there would have been a lot more to see, though nothing Ben hadn’t seen before.

“But not too tight,” she added almost as an afterthought, once she felt his settle at the small of her back.

With every brush of his fingers along her skin, a fresh patch of goosebumps rippled across her back. There was little time so he made a quick work on lacing her in. That was until he felt him pause behind her. Another realization that a very good bit of her body was still covered in bruises from the redcoats’ physical assault. She hadn’t stopped to consider the evidence would still appear on her back, even though sometimes she still felt the blunt blow of the musket butt slamming into her back.

To his credit, Ben didn’t comment on her bruises. He knew far too well how she had gotten them.

The major pulled a little too tight on the strays, causing Abigail to suck in an audible breath. He apologized profusely, flustered and ashamed, but she was quick to forgive him, though she did threaten to box his ears if he did it again, mostly an attempt of jest. When she caught a hint of a smile on his face over her shoulder, she considered her attempt a success.

Once her dressed was fully together, Ben remarked, “I’m not going to ask you why you did what you did, mostly because I think I know why.”

Abigail smiled. “Good. Because I’d hate to think you didn’t know me by now, after all this time.” She heard him sigh heavily and turned around to see his lips twitching into another reluctant smile.

She accepted the cloak from him when he offered it to her. The fabric was dark and thick, the perfect element of concealment. Ben gestured for her to turn back around to which she responded with an inquisitive brow. “Just humor me, please.” She complied, hiding her smile as she pulled her hair to the side just as he slid the heavy material onto her shoulders.

While tying the cloak closed, Abigail turned back around, remarking, “I know this isn’t quite my best look, but it’s fitting for the plan.”

Confused, Ben inquired, “Plan?”

“The one Washington came up with,” she replied. She didn’t mind fully crediting Washington with the plan, even though she had contributed a more than a few minor details. When Ben continued to look at her expectantly, she launched into her explanation, about how she planned on getting to Andre. Once in York City, she planned on turning up on Andre’s doorstep, completely disheveled and in a state of panic, begging for help. She would claimed that she had been assaulted by some
rebel soldiers on the outskirts of the city and had managed to escape. If the British major was a man of honor as she had suspected, he would have to let her in.

By the time she concluded the story, Ben’s expression was a mixture of consideration and concern. “That’s incredibly risky for you. It could work, but… I don’t care much for it. Because of the risk.”

He took her hand and held it between the both of his, gazing at her imploringly. “What if they push you for more information? What are you going to do then?”

Abigail lifted her chin stubbornly. “I don’t think they’re push a woman in hysterics for more information, at least for that evening. That would give me more time. But even so, the most important thing is to try to stick as close to the truth as possible. You and Culper have taught me the importance of that.”

Besides, it wouldn’t be that difficult to sell her devised story. All she was really doing was changing names and sides of the faces in her tale, with only some minor alterations and some obvious omissions.

After all, she was sticking as close to the truth as possible.

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Typically, the journey from Middle Brook to York City would have taken a little more than half a day’s journey on horseback, but considering the significance upon the fulfillment of the plan, the journey took a complete twenty-four hours to complete, so that by the time they made it to York City, it was nightfall.

Dressed in civilian clothing, the group had only stopped once during their travels. Caleb had gotten in touch with one of his contacts and managed to land them a place to stay, at least until the sun had gone down. When Ben had suggested that he and Caleb take turns keeping watch, the whaler had pulled him to the side, speaking in hushed tones, “You only have a handful of hours left with her, mate. Make them count.”

Needless to say the major hadn’t left Abigail’s side again until they departed at dusk.

As soon as they got within a mile or so of York City, they had no choice but to maneuver their horses of course and into the woods. Abigail’s grip instinctively tightened around Ben’s middle as he eased the horse – not Penny, thank God – into a brisk trot, with Caleb’s horse not far behind them.

Ben and Caleb dismounted to give the horses a much deserved a break, albeit a brief one, before they reached York City. Little did either man know, Abigail had no intentions of being brought all the way into the city.

“You should leave me here,” Abigail suggested a few minutes after the major had helped her dismount. She was sitting at the base of a tree, observing without really seeing, her thoughts nearly a thousand miles away, which was humorous considering the circumstances.

Ben frowned. “We’re only a mile away. We can bring you closer than this.”

Abigail shrugged. “I can travel the rest by foot.”

“But that’s a mile away!”

“I thought you said it was only a mile away.”
Ben gritted his teeth in agitation, and before he could say something he could possibly regret, Caleb quickly intercepted. “It isn’t safe to leave you alone here. To travel alone, at night, towards a British occupied city, wouldn’t be safe.”

“I’ll be fine,” she insisted. Or as fine as she could be as an eighteenth century woman traveling alone at night, just as Caleb had said. But she knew that if they didn’t separate now, it would be much more difficult to part later.

It’s clear from the unhappy expressions on their faces they didn’t feel comfortable leaving her there, alone and unarmored, but what choice did they have? This way, there was less of a chance of them getting caught returning to Middlebrook, and she presented this argument to the men, who very well couldn’t argue with that logic, though she suspected that wouldn’t stop Ben from trying, for her sake.

Abigail was thoroughly versed in arguing with Ben. So much so it was practically second nature. She knew his ticks, his tells, how to predict and counter his next words. She could argue with him for hours, but they didn’t have hours. They didn’t have time to argue, and judging from the frustrated look in his eyes, he knew it, too.

Instead of pursuing an argument, Ben walked towards her and extended his hand towards her. Without a moment’s hesitation, Abigail accepted it, cherishing the warmth of his skin against hers and allowed herself to be assisted to her feet. And he took his time about it, too, and she smiled sadly, knowing the reason behind his reluctance. Neither of them knew when they were going to see each other again, if they would be seeing each other again at all.

No. She refused to think like that.

Abigail was about to speak when Ben looked down and away from her. He procured something from his coat, a carefully wrapped object in dark cloth. Whatever it was could fit in the palm of her hand, though upon closer inspection, it was a bigger than that.

He passed it to her, and she unwrapped it curiously. When the object was revealed, her breath caught in her throat. She currently held her father’s pistol in her hands, the very pistol that had been confiscated back at the British prison.

“Where… how…” Abigail began multiple times to formulate her question, but with every attempt, her throat tightened with emotion.

“Somehow Tobias managed to grab it,” Ben replied quietly, “when you were first brought down. He told me it was completely by chance that he discovered it, and once unsupervised, he retrieved it. He’s had it on him ever since.” He took in her watery gaze and smiled gently. “I think he planned on returning it to you himself, but he never got the chance. He wanted you to have it.”

Choked up, Abigail said, “Tell him…”

“I will,” he promised. His sincerity shone in his eyes, and she knew that sincerity ran deep. He never broke his word. If he had to, it was usually for a very good reason, though he loathed to do so. He was a man of honor in a world where that quality in a person was startlingly disheartening rarity.

It was one of the thousands of reasons why she loved him.

Tucking the pistol back in its cloth, she slipped it underneath her skirts and used this as a distraction to keep herself from looking at him. Because if she kept looking at him, her reluctance to leave him would only grow. “I’ll be seeing you.”

With a heavy heart, she turned around and walked away from him. She only made it a half dozen
steps when she felt a hand on her wrist, jerking her around so that she was pressed up against a solid form.

“I… sorry,” Ben apologized breathlessly. He pressed his forehead against hers and squeezed his eyes shut before opening them again. A bleak smile formed along his lips. “I just wasn’t ready.”

Returning his smile, Abigail slipped her hands around the back of his neck and pulled him in close and pressed her mouth to his.

The kiss was tender, desperate, and far too brief for either of their liking, but it had to end. Closing her eyes, she murmured against his mouth, “Go.” She brushed one final kiss to his lips before rising on the tips of her toes to press another kiss to his forehead, unable to help herself.

She watched as he managed half a step backwards, his pained expression shaking her to the core. In that moment, she realized she was the one who had to leave. So without saying anything more, she turned on her heel and began to run, towards York City, towards her new, uncertain future and away from the (relative) safety of the Continental camp, away from Anna and Caleb, away from Ben.

Her tears ran down her face as he feet pounded along the forest floor. Whatever lied ahead of her now meant absolutely nothing as much as what she was leaving behind.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys so much for all of your support for this fic! We still have lots of fun left in store ;)
Abigail awoke to the several things she had grown unaccustomed to, at least over the past three years: solid four walls and a feather bed mattress. Her head rested comfortably against a pleasantly plump pillow, one of perhaps the highest quality in the colonies if not imported directly from England itself.

She had been given one of Abby’s (Major John Andre’s current servant) borrowed nightgowns so that she could rest more comfortably after a delightfully warm bath and had been treated as chivalrously and as respectfully as any other woman, which said a lot about the British major’s character.

However, even with all of his gracious generosity, Abigail couldn’t quite shake the feeling of unbelonging, if that was even a word – of course, after much thought of course it wasn’t but it very well damned should be – a feeling that she wasn’t where she was supposed to be, not where she belonged. Not with who she belonged.

That person was worlds away from her now, and she had no one to blame but herself for it.

Even though she currently resided in room of comfort that only the best money could afford, she hadn’t slept well, barely a wink since she first arrived. Still sore and aching from her treatment in the British prison accompanied with days on horseback from the journey as well as the mile run through the woods to get inside the city, one would think she would have fallen fast asleep before her head had it the pillow, but it hadn’t. Instead, her mind had raced a thousand thoughts a minute, wondering and worrying and plotting and thinking until she eventually slipped into a fitful doze.

She sat up in bed, the comforter falling from across her chest and into her lap, before shifting so that she could place her feet firmly on the floor. The first thing she noticed in the room was the floor length mirror. Upon closer inspection of her reflection, she really did look worse for the wear. Dark circles under her eyes, her face pale and bruised, she looked every bit the part of the damsel in distress.

She could easily recall the look of deep pity in the major’s gaze as he had gotten a better look at her once she had managed to collect herself, his eyes kind, sympathetic promising of swift justice in her honor.

With a glance at the clock, she noticed it was nearly half past noon. Was that right? Had it been more than twelve hours since her arrival? Somehow, it felt a lot shorter than that.

But then again, last night would be one time could never make her forget.

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Twelve Hours Prior
With a heavy sigh, John Andre adjusted the cufflinks of his uniform jacket, perhaps for the umpteenth time. This might or might not have had any reflection on his severe reluctance of attending the dinner this evening. It was nothing pertaining to official business, nothing to do with the war effort or intelligence gathering of any sort, nor was it an update on the current counterfeit plot to bankrupt the rebels. It had been merely a friendly gesture on part of the general, and if he hadn’t been John’s superior, he would have declined the invitation and felt no qualms about it.

But since the man was his superior, he felt obligated to attend, though there were other places he would rather be – in his study with a glass of brandy and wallowing in misery over a certain Philadelphia blonde socialite and what could have been.

“Now where have I put my…” John murmured, patting himself in search for his pocket watch. Blast, it wasn’t in his coat.

Spotting his servant Abigail’s son, Cicero, he greeted him with a somewhat distracted smile. “Ah, Cicero. Have you seen my…”

He trailed off when he looked up and saw the young man extend his hand out, the pocket watch resting in his palm. “Pocket watch. Good man.” John smiled gratefully. “Where was it anyway?”

Cicero remarked, “On your desk in your study, right next to your inkpot.” As if anticipating his suspicion, the boy’s eyes widened a little before hastily adding, “Not that I was going through your things.”

John smiled kindly. “I didn’t think you did.” Fishing out a schilling from his coin purse, he placed them in Cicero’s hands. “Take this for your diligence.”

Pleased, the boy smiled, “Thank you, sir,” before stepping into another room.

The British major had just pocketed his watch into his breast pocket when a sudden, furious knocking drew his attention towards the front door. “What on earth…”

He had his pistol drawn before he made it towards the door, but as soon as he opened it, the hand with the gun falling to his side in dismay.

Before him was a woman, battered and bruised, who gazed up at him with skittish, fearful eyes. She must have been resting heavily against the door, because when he opened the door, she pitched forward fell forward, prompting him to discard his weapon so that he could catch her before she crumbled to the floor.

“You must help me!” the woman begged him breathlessly, her slim body trembling tremendously. “Please. I… I don’t have anywhere else… to go. I… Please.” Her breathing became increasingly labored. “Don’t let them take me again!”

“Who?” he demanded, alarmed, but the only response he received was a choked off sob.

Gently, as if he were approaching a spooked animal, John tried to calm her and did his best to attempt to extract the full story from her, but when her breathing threatened to turn towards hyperventilation, he abandoned this tactic.

Instead, he shut the door and guided her towards the parlor. As he guided her, the woman apologized for her sudden appearance, but she had nowhere to turn. From the little information he gleaned from her in those few moments, she had apparently just escaped from her rebel captors and had nowhere to turn.
There wasn’t much else he could learn, given that she was half hysterical, and he wasn’t going to push her, not when it was apparent she had suffered a significantly traumatic ordeal already.

Once he helped eased her down into one of the plush, leather chairs near the fireplace, John summoned Cicero when he caught a glimpse of the boy passing near the foyer and asked for him to prepare a pot of tea. “Chamomile, preferably,” he added thoughtfully, recalling the calming effects of that particular tea blend. “Soothes the nerves and calms the spirit.”

“Yes, sir,” Cicero agreed, briefly eying the bereft woman with a mixture of wariness and curiosity before heading towards the kitchen to brew the pot of tea.

Now that the woman was sat in front of him, the British major had a better look at her. Her dress was all but in rags, torn and hanging from her frame as if something – or someone, he corrected darkly to himself – had tried to remove it from her. With her hands covering her face, he only caught glimpses of it, but he saw enough to know there were dark bruises coloring her cheeks, maybe even a cut along her bottom lip. Had she been struck perhaps? Punched?

His keen gaze caught sight of her wrists and barely concealed a sympathetic hiss at the sight of them, raw and black and blue. They must have been tied with something rough, like thick rope or perhaps even shackles.

John did his best not to push her while she composed herself. Experience, along with basic human decency, taught him well to never verbally accost someone who might have experienced sexual assault or attempted sexual assault, especially if that person was a woman. Chivalry and honor might no longer have had their place among those in the colonies, but for John, they were the fundamental truths that every man should abide by, should own and nurture.

Patiently, he waited and observed her quietly as her sobs gradually eased into sniffles. He reached inside his pocket and offered her a handkerchief, which she accepted gratefully, an almost sheepish smile settling at the corners of her mouth. His lips twitched upwards instinctively at the sight, which provided her expression much more animation than she’d had several minutes prior.

By the time Cicero arrived with the tea tray and pot, the woman managed to compose herself long enough to provide an introduction. She introduced herself as Elizabeth Williams from Setauket. As he poured her a cup of tea, he must have made an inquiring expression, for she nodded and admitted that yes, she knew she was a little ways from home.

Once she had a bracing cup of chamomile tea in her system, John began gently, “I know you must have been through quite an ordeal, but I need you to tell me what happened, as much as you can and as much as you can remember, if we are to properly deal with these… men?” He hazarded a guess of the sex towards her captors. Judging by the woman’s shudder, his guess had been correct.

“I would hardly call them men. Beasts would be more like it,” Elizabeth Williams remarked softly. “Though that’s hardly a fair comparison on actual beasts.”

She then proceeded to tell him everything, about how rebel soldiers had captured her on her journey home to Setauket, how they had roughened her up before she unwillingly complied to go with them, and how they had kept her in solitary until they decided what to do with her afterward.

The fair-haired woman then described to him with detailed precision how they had strung her up, with her shackled wrists bound above her head, as one of the rebel soldiers had grabbed her between her legs, at which point John drew himself straight, his jaw tightening with growing disgust.

Throughout her account, John grew increasingly horrified and enraged at her treatment by these low
lived men. Instinctively, he wanted to demand for physical descriptions of each of her captors, right down to the shape of their cuticles but thought better of it. As much as he wanted to see his men hang for this, it would be a crime – although perhaps not a legal crime – to push Elizabeth any farther than she had already managed to go. How she managed to escape her captors also crossed his mind, but that was another conversation best left for the morning.

“I promise you I will do everything in my power to see these men pay for their debauchery,” John swore, his eyes glimmering like a hound anticipating the hunt. If there was one thing he prided himself in, he was a man of his word. He never made promises he couldn’t keep.

“Thank you,” Elizabeth smiled faintly, her cheeks tear-stained and red. “I think I believe you. Forgive my hesitance, but I’m not in the best frame of mind at the moment, as I’m sure you understand.”

Nodding gravely in understanding, he offered her another cup of tea, which she accepted immediately, clutching the cup greedily as the warmth from the cup warmed her small hands. The poor thing must have had no rest for a number of days, let alone food or water.

“Do you have any family in the city?” he inquired gently.

Elizabeth shook her head slowly, her lips quivering slightly. “No. They’re… all sort of spread out. It’s only my father and I, and he’s traveling. He’s a doctor, you see, so it’s difficult to say where he would be.” After a moment or two, she added, her expression settling into one of guilt, “I was married, before all of this, but my husband abandoned me to join the rebels, leaving me with absolutely nothing.” Her guilt increased tenfold, and she dropped her gaze towards her cup.

John’s heart went out to her. To not only be attacked by rebel soldiers and have no family in the city but to lose her husband to fight with the very men who had attacked her, it was a wonder how she could even sit here and talk to him at all.

After a moment or two of deliberation, a decision formulated in his mind. “You can stay here, for as long as you need. At least until these men are apprehended.”

Elizabeth’s lips parted in a silent “o” of surprise. “But, sir, you don’t even know me. I mean, of course, I appreciate your generosity, but how can I impose on you in such a way?”

“You wouldn’t be imposing, since I had just made the offer,” John remarked, smiling kindly. “If it makes you feel better, you can just stay the night, and we can talk about your accommodations in more detail in the morning. But just so you know, my offer still stands.”

She bit her lower lip, conflicted. Gripping her hands together in her lap to control their trembling, she murmured demurely, graciously, “Thank you, sir. If there is any way that I can ever repay you…”

“Your safety and welfare is more than enough,” he responded, his kind smile still in place, “to give me peace of mind.”

Once the teapot was drained of its contents, John showed her to the guestroom where she would be spending the night. He asked Cicero to retrieve one of his mother’s night gowns from her quarters and promised to personally replace it while making a mental note to send Abigail to retrieve a dress for their guest when she returned tomorrow. He had a feeling Elizabeth’s exhaustion wouldn’t allow her to wake until well past noon.

Before the boy went off to retrieve it, he told him he would assist him in drawing a bath for their guest, realizing it was only fair for him to assist Cicero, after he sent a letter to the courier to deliver
to the house of Officer Sanders to apologize for his absence from that evening’s dinner.

Although the circumstances were very unfortunate, John couldn’t help but be grateful for the reprieve. Elijah Sanders was a talented and efficient officer, but as a dinner companion, the man’s conversational skills left a lot to be desired. In short, the man was an absolute bore. He highly doubted that opinion would be highly contested among the rest of York City’s British elite either. His longwinded stories even inspired the most devoted Quakers to overindulge in drink.

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Present Time

A gentle knock at the door lured Abigail out of her reverie. Padding towards the sound of the knock, the blonde opened the door to reveal an all too familiar face.

“Elizabeth!” Abby exclaimed. Her eyes widened a little at her volume and immediately dropped a voice to a lower decibel.

Overwhelmed by the sight of a familiar and friendly face, the blonde embraced her without any warning, her arms wrapping around her middle. She heard Abby give a small noise of surprise but felt her return the hug nonetheless, even though whatever the other woman had been holding pressed between them.

Back in Setauket, the two women always had a fondness for each other. They had agreed to refer to each other by a shortened version of their name and their middle name respectfully to avoid any confusion. The blonde had always enjoyed this, feeling as if they had secret language that no one could break. Abby was the only person who ever referred to her solely as Elizabeth. Even the blonde’s father never had used her middle name unless it accompanied her first name whenever she had been in trouble.

“It’s been too long,” Abigail said after they broke away from the hug. “There’s so much for us to talk about.” She paused with a brief glance around their new surroundings. “Though I suspect we’ll have enough time to sort out a place to speak privately.” Recalling the mention of Cicero, the blonde added warmly, “I know you must be happy beyond words, now that you are reunited with your son.”

Abby’s smile was just shy of blinding at the mention of her beautiful son. Though their circumstances were less than ideal, her son was with her now, and that was more than she could ask for – although freedom and equality in a white male affirming world such as theirs would have been nice as well.

Her smile dimmed when she took in the sight of her friend’s face, however. “Oh, dear! What happened to you?” she frowned with worry.

Abigail shook her head a little, smiling slightly. “It’s for the best you don’t know about that, just in case you’re asked about it.”

She looked down and noticed the garment bag in the other woman’s arms and inquired curiously, “What do you have there?”

Holding up the bag, Abby remarked, “A new dress, compliments of Major Andre.”

With the door shut, Abby removed the dress from the bag and spread it out for inspection. It was a rather finely made dress, and on such short notice as well! The sleeves, bodice, and top skirt were a
light golden color with in red and green floral patterns etched into the material. The underskirt was a shade lighter than the rest, with some sort of intricately designed etching strategically placed all around it.

Abby helped the blonde slip into the dress. Much to Abigail’s surprise, the dress fit almost perfectly. When she met her incredulous gaze in the mirror, Abby smiled, a little conspiringly, “When Major Andre mentioned the dress was for an Elizabeth from Setauket, I took a chance, since I remembered your measurements.”

Ordinarily, the blonde felt strange about being assisted with dressing and preparing for the day, but realizing this one would be one of the rare moments they would ever be alone, she gave in, letting Abby brush out the tangled mess that were her golden locks until they resembled the loose ringlets they had been once upon a time.

Culper was never mentioned in name, but they did touch upon the topic. Abigail didn’t go into as much detail as she would have liked – such as how exactly she had gotten involved in the first place – but she did mention she was a part of it and was tasked to help Abby in any way that she could. In the mirror, Abigail observed the other woman’s reaction carefully, and while she might not have appeared to have reacted much to her news, she could have sworn she detected a bit of relief in Abby’s warm brown eyes as she worked on a particularly stubborn lock with the brush.

At least the both of them had a friend on the inside now, someone who they could trust in a world where trust was difficult to find.

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Over the course of the next two weeks, Abigail managed to find herself a making progress. Not the kind of progress that would necessarily be of use to anyone, such as information for Culper, however.

During her first few nights spent in Major Andre’s residence, she had awoken the household with her screaming from night terrors.

With each episode, she had been incredibly embarrassed and apologized profusely to the major, who had never failed to rush to her aid.

After assuring Abby and Cicero to return to bed when everything settled down, he would lead Abigail to his study, the pair of them still in their nightwear though conservatively concealed in their respective robes, and would pour them each a glass of brandy to calm the nerves. Then they would talk until she grew tired, which sometimes hadn’t been until the sun began to peak over the horizon.

During these moments, she learned a lot about the man himself, but nothing that would truly benefit Culper, though that didn’t necessarily bother her.

The sleep terrors became less and less of a frequent occurrence, which she considered a miraculous blessing, though it seemed both she and John had grown used to their midnight talks. She could tell he was pleased with her progress and not just from the night terrors. The bruises had nearly faded away, and she was much less skittish and frightened as she had been when she had first arrived.

Much to her growing dismay, Abigail had grown rather fond of the British major. This would only make her mission much more difficult, but she had no choice but to persevere, despite her feelings.

Of course, he was quite an attractive man at that, but she absolutely refused to allow her mind to go there. She had enough man trouble for a lifetime. Besides, hear heart belonged to someone else,
another major and head of intelligence at that.

What on earth was that all about anyway?

Over the course of the second week, John had invited her to accompany him on some outings in an attempt to get her out of the house. The invitations were never prodding or insistent but instead were gentle and perhaps a tad persuasive. Initially, she had kindly turned down a few of his offers, uncertain whether or not she wanted to risk a chance of stepping outside the relative safety of his home. To him, it was because of her fear of her captors still running free, but to herself, it was much more complicated than that. What if she happened across someone who recognized her from Setauket? Or better yet, if someone recognized her from the camp?

This morning, however, would provide a different set of circumstances to be considered.

Every meal served under the major’s roof was nothing short of spectacular. Breakfast was no exception. Growing up, she and her father Thomas Williams, having never employed or partaken in the slave trade to have someone else cook for them, had always fended for themselves. Well, she had taken care of the meals as soon as she had been old enough, since her father had barely been able to cook a thing. But breakfast, that had been one of his very few areas of cooking expertise, although it hadn’t consisted of much – bread, cornmeal mush, and milk directly from their own cows.

Breakfast with John Andre, however, was a different experience. Poached eggs cooked to perfection accompanied with slices of savory ham and thick slices of artisanal white bread served with the heavenly aroma of black tea. It was a menu fit for members of the upper class and certainly fit for a royal officer. And if it tasted as half as delicious as it smelled, it would do in a pinch for the blonde.

And judging from past meals in his company, she already knew it would taste scrumptious.

“Every year around this time,” John remarked while buttering a slice of bread from his plate, “a group of us” – by “us”, she assumed he referred to redcoats, and as it turned out, she assumed correctly – “get together to put on a theatrical production of the failure of Guy Fawkes.”

Abigail raised her eyebrows with interest after lowering her tea cup from her lips. She licked away the remnants of the Lady Grey from her mouth. “A theatrical production? Is that a required component of royal officer training?” She smiled, teasing. “Training with weapons, becoming familiar with military hierarchy, reciting a little Shakespeare?”

Huffing out a surprised laugh, John turned his focus back to his plate a tad sheepishly. “Yes, it sounds odd, but it’s a way good way to promote solidarity, a small reprieve from the war.” He paused in slicing into the ham on his plate before asking, “I was wondering if you would like to accompany me.”

Judging by the slight lilt in his tone, Abigail figured he already anticipated what her response would be, given past experiences. She couldn’t blame him for that.

A twinge of guilt shot through her. Every time he extended an invitation to join him on an outing, she turned him down every time, and every time she did, she could have sworn she saw a spark of disappointment in his gaze every time. She hated to think she caused him any disappointment.

After taking another, considering sip of tea, Abigail remarked lightly, “I don’t believe I’ve ever seen a live production.”

She caught a glimpse of his look of surprise out of the corner of her eye and hid her smile behind her cup as she agreed to accompany him. The production wasn’t until Friday, which gave her plenty of
time to prepare. She suspected she would need another dress. Now all she had to do was figure out how to pay for one, not wanting to impose even further on the major’s generosity. More than likely, she would have to dip into her emergency stash of coins she had smuggled with her. Figuring out how she acquired the dress to him would have to wait until later.

After breakfast, the blonde headed outside into the gardens, the sight of lovely plants and creative landscape putting her at ease.

She hardly set foot into the garden when she felt a presence at her side. Cicero stood there, carefully sliding a small envelope into her hands.

“I was instructed make sure this reached your hands directly,” the boy answered her curious look.

“And who instructed you?” she inquired.

“One of the young street urchins in the market, ma’am.”

“And who told them to deliver this to you?”

“Whoever has connections with the letter writer, I believe, ma’am.”

Abigail had half a mind to insist on not calling her “ma’am”, but she realized it was a futile attempt. Instead, she accepted the letter and tucked it securely into her dress pocket, smiling gratefully at him.

She thanked him with a light peck to his cheek and smothered a chuckle at his bashful reaction before he disappeared into the house.

Finding a remote location in the garden, Abigail covertly opened the letter and read its contents. It was clearly in code. Thankfully, she still remembered the majority of the coding lessons Ben had insisted on giving her when she had first expressed an interest in partaking in Culper.

The thought of him made her heart ache, but she quickly pushed the emotion aside, instead focusing on the signature at the letter’s conclusion.

B. Rooster. Who in the hell was B…

B. Rooster. Brewster. Oh, for heaven’s sake!

Shaking her head in mild amusement, she pocketed the letter and rose to her feet to return to her room, mentally composing a response for Cicero to return through Caleb’s unique communication channel. Caleb had written to more or less a request to establish a meeting of some sort, to check on things and receive any updates if she had any. She was to write a reply if she was able to meet.

Fortunately for them both, Abigail had the perfect meeting in mind. What better way to start off a night of theater than a secret meeting, preferably with the curtain falling without anyone breaking a leg. Or a neck.

Chapter End Notes

Guys, thank you so much for all the love you've shown for this fic! It means the absolute world to me! Also, beaniebinch on Tumblr made an awesome playlist for this fic! You should totally check it out. It's INCREDIBLE! You can find the link here! <333333
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x07

The theater was nearly filled to full capacity by the time Abigail and John arrived. Society ladies and gentlemen exited their carriages and trickled inside the building. Redcoats of various rank and size surrounded the building, scoping the area for sign of trouble before gradually making their way inside. She couldn’t recall the last time she saw this many redcoats in one place, except for the battle on Kerr Farm.

She had thrown herself to the mercy of the dressmaker, who had made the dress Abby had brought to her after her first night in the British major’s house, trusting the older woman’s instincts to tailor a dress to her person.

Well, perhaps she should have given the dressmaker a bit of direction after all. There was nothing specifically wrong with the dress; actually, it fit quite perfectly, a little form fitting perhaps. Lace tastefully trimmed the square neckline, which was slightly more revealing than she preferred, as well as the three quarter inch sleeves. The color of the dress itself was a two tone deep red. The rich red color drew in the eye, but the style and cut of the dress caused the eye to linger. With her golden locks brushed back into a delicately crafted bun where a few golden tendrils framed her face, she looked the picture of a society Loyalist lady, a look she neither wished to exude or found inconspicuous.

Besides, blue was by far her better color.

When she and John made it inside, they were approached by a few of his fellow officers, who greeted them in various stages of intoxication – or at least that was what she assumed from the smell of them. Imperceptibly, John eased himself between her and the men, picking up on the potential for trouble. Ever the perfect gentleman, even if he was a redcoat.

Introductions were dutifully made between herself and the three gentleman – a James Randall, a Gregory Smith, and a Lionel Edgar, all of whom held different ranks within the British army. Abigail mentally catalogued their names for possible future reference.

“Good to see you again, Major Andre,” intoned Lionel Edgar, the eldest of the trio. His white wig had been apparently buggered off to greener pastures, and his cheeks were bright with merriment and drink, his beady eyes practically dancing with amusement, which could only be found at the bottom of a bottle. “I hear some rumors flying about that our leading man may have fallen ill – some sort of stomach bug. Maybe you would like to take up the reins and show them how it’s done.”

John smiled with amusement but replied humbly, “I’m willing to offer guidance if needed but surely this is what understudies are for, yes?”

“Amateurs,” Gregory Smith mumbled into his ale, “who barely know the difference between their cock and a pistol, let alone the difference between upstage and down.”

John’s gaze sharpened on him. “I would ask you to hold your tongue, sir. There are women present.”
His gaze shifted back towards Abigail in apology, along with the sudden embarrassed and regretful expression of the younger man who uttered the slur, but the blonde was quick to brush away the offense. “No, I believe Mr. Smith has a point. If you don’t know how to cock your weapon, how on earth is one supposed to strut about on stage?”

Her words startled all four of the men, each staring at her in various stages of shock before the trio of men burst into laughter. Even John coughed lightly to conceal his chuckle.

“My, what a sharp tongue you have!” exclaimed James Randall, clearly the youngest of the men. He turned to John with a cheeky grin. “But that’s hardly a surprise, given Major Andre’s taste for sharp witted blondes.”

A hush fell over the group just then. Lionel and Gregory appeared uneasy and more than a little unnerved, both casting discouraging looks in young Randall’s direction.

Curious, Abigail observed the interesting reactions of the men before chancing a glance upwards at her companion only to discover the dark flush rising in John’s cheeks – whether from anger, embarrassment, or indignation was difficult to determine.

Sensing the potential catastrophe looming over all of their heads, she took this as an opportunity to intercede, pressing a firm hand on John’s arm while suggesting they should try to find their seats. After all, she didn’t want to miss a thing since it was her first play.

Grateful for her quick thinking, John excused himself from the group but not before throwing an icy glare at James Randall, who had grown rather subdued from his realized mistake.

“You are an angel of mercy.” John thanked her once they were a safe distance away from them. “And one of tolerance of that. I apologize for their behavior, Smith and Randall specifically.”

“The strange behaviors of men aren’t lost on me, major,” Abigail remarked, “having grown up with a rather interesting lot myself. My sensibilities aren’t easily offended.”

Especially from serving three point something years in the Continental Army and observing more crass talk than she would have liked, but now wasn’t the time to bring that up.

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Roughly a little more than half an hour before the production was due to begin Abigail felt a light tap on her shoulder.

She looked over from her seat to see a tall, lanky lad right next to her, no older than the age of sixteen, eighteen maybe. His hair was almost perfectly coiffed if it weren’t for a stubborn ginger curl refusing stray from his forehead.

“Beg your pardon, madam,” he apologized quietly. He gave a brief cursory glance around the seating area before leaning forward, but as he did so, his pale, freckled cheeks became rosy. Abigail bit her lip to keep from smiling, already guessing why. “I believe there was a mix up with some of our women’s bags. A woman had returned with a bag, claiming to have made a mistake when looking for hers. Would you mind accompanying me to make sure nothing is out of place?”

Abigail caught a glimpse of his lapel as she considered his words, noting the green neckerchief tucked messily around his neck. It hardly matched the rest of his outfit, but the reason why he wore it was an obvious one, at least to those who were privy to its meeting.

“Of course,” Abigail agreed and rose to her feet to follow him. John had been cajoled and dragged
backstage to attend to meet some of the actors, all redcoats apparently, so she wasn’t too concerned about losing him. As long as she returned before the curtain opened. “And what is your name, may I ask?”

A little taken aback, the boy stumbled over his words until he finally managed, “Seamus.”

“Ah, Seamus,” she smiled warmly. “A proper Irish name.”

Seamus flushed from her praise and led her through the small boxed seating area, and down the corridor, passing by the room which housed men’s jackets, and women’s cloaks and handbags. Abigail never brought a purse with her that evening, and the pair of them knew it.

It had been all previously arranged in the letter Caleb had sent her – Seamus, the green neckerchief, and the story to lure her away from prying eyes and listening ears. Everything else – the when, where, and how – had been left to her choosing, which she had promptly written him back.

And now their plan was coming to fruition.

They slipped out the building through the servants’ entrance, which guaranteed that no one would follow them. Seamus led her through the small, winding corridor and out the back door towards the connecting building of what she could only think could be an office for the owners of the theater house, though she wouldn’t place any money on that bet, if she had any money left to bet that is.

Once inside, Seamus turned to her and informed her he would give a distinctive three tap knock on the door to alert her if anyone was approaching. She thanked him kindly and suppressed another smile as he smiled shyly before slipping out the office.

“My, my. I think you’ve bewitched that poor lad,” came an all too familiar voice from behind the desk.

Abigail turned around sharply and watched as Caleb poked his head from underneath the desk, his beard having returned with a vengeance. She couldn’t help but ask, “How long have you been under there?”

“Too bloody long if you ask me,” he grumbled as he struggled to his feet, sighing in relief as he stretched his aching muscles. “Let me tell you, riding horseback at a breakneck speed and directly crawling underneath a desk with no respite ain’t an easy task.”

Once the pleasant grumblings aside, Caleb rounded the desk and met her halfway for an enthusiastic, warm hug. “It’s good to see you, Williams.”

“Likewise, Brewster. You have no idea,” Abigail responded in kind, tears prickling at the back of her eyes. Having grown accustomed to seeing the man just about every day in camp for the past three years, it was quite a shock not to see him as often. Now that he was there again, his friendly, humorous presence was a much welcome familiarity she desperately needed.

“It’s too bad I never took up drawing or painting,” Caleb remarked a moment or so after they broke apart. He appraised her with interest, which only made her raise a questioning eyebrow. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but Torey red suit you very well.”

“Oh, stop it!” Abigail groaned quietly and gave him a playful smack on the shoulder, which he took the full brunt of. Good man.

“No, no! I’m completely serious. I’ll have to commit as much of this as I can to memory,” he continued cheekily, “so I can give a proper account to the men back at camp. Give them some
inspiration to keep on fighting.”

Abigail rolled her eyes, though a hint of a smile lingered on her lips. After serving in the army surrounding by a bunch of touch starved men – or at least women touch starved – his words did little to dismay her. However, she couldn’t help but wonder if he had intended for them to implicate two men in particular.

As if sensing the question in her mind, Caleb toned down the playfulness and offered her a sympathetic smile. “They’re both doing just fine, though Ben has remarked on more than one occasion how he would like to kill him, but I wouldn’t worry about it that much. Tobias vents the same to me whenever it’s just him and I.” He extended his arms in mock exasperation. “I have become the mediator.”

Abigail bit her lower lip guiltily, smiling faintly. “Not an easy task, I imagine.”

“It’s no picnic, that I can tell you, but that’s what we’re here to talk about.” Caleb pulled up a stool for her to sit before grabbing one for himself. As soon as she sat, he followed suit. “We’re here to talk about you. To make sure you’re all right. After everything.”

Her smile became more genuine. “Like a checkup?”

Caleb shrugged nonchalantly but his smile gave him away. “More or less.”

“I’m fine, now at least,” she said. “In the beginning, it wasn’t so… smooth. I had night terrors for first few nights. Woke up everyone, including the major, Abby, and her son.” She huffed out a tiny, humiliated laugh. “I felt so wretched for it.”

“But it was out of your control,” Caleb murmured, smiling gently. “It’s completely understandable.”

Abigail gave him another small smile before shifting to another topic. She informed him that she hadn’t gained much progress in knowledge collection, but she had gotten to know John Andre, the man himself rather than the British major and head of intelligence. Accepting his invitation to for the Guy Fawkes production had been the first step in the right direction.

By becoming more familiar with John’s inner circle and the workings of the British hold of York City, she believed she would have access to a vast wealth of information, and when she shared this with Caleb, he readily agreed.

With every possible detail considered, the pair agreed to biweekly letters with any updates she had for him as well as face-to-face meetings towards the end of each month. Caleb told her she needed to find an excuse to get away from those meetings, as discreet as possible so that she wouldn’t blow her cover. Nodding, she agreed and promised to come up with something.

She managed to return to her seat right before John returned from backstage minutes before opening curtain.

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By all accounts, Abigail’s attendance had been a surprising, resounding success. The next morning over breakfast John shared with her all thoroughly she had managed to charm the three officers she had met as well as many of the other guests in attendance, so much so in fact that her presence had been requested to join a group of women for high tea.

Attending a society tea with a bunch of gossipy biddies was the last thing Abigail desired to do, but realizing this was an opportunity to glean more information on the redcoats – through their wives,
fiancés, daughters, and sisters – the opportunity was too good to pass up.

However, after her first (ever) tea with these women, she actually contemplated if this opportunity was actually worth it.

These women, ranging in age but all sharing the commonality of vast wealth, discussed nothing of significance. Instead of discussing war efforts to best assist their men, the dominating subject of conversation was the scandalous affair of Penelope Halliwell having the audacity to apply too much rouge on her cheeks, especially considering she was married to Richard Halliwell, a prominent sort of fellow who came from some sort of old money or other.

Abigail hadn’t really paid much attention beyond delicately inhaling cup after cup of tea.

As much as she would’ve loved to cut her losses, she continued to attend these daily teas, partially because it gave her some sort of structure to her day but mostly it was due to the fact it gave her more opportunity to properly acquaint herself with York City society.

On one particularly sunny Thursday afternoon, Abigail reached her quota of pretentious, useless gossip and decided to make a suggestion, a rather counterproductive one at least on her part.

“While I agree there should be standards of propriety and… social responsibility,” Abigail began, coming on the heels of the conclusion of Mrs. Jenkins condemnation of the latest neckline style on dresses, which she believed to be far too revealing, “perhaps there is another route we can travel in discussing such matters.” A more productive way, she nearly said but knew that wouldn’t travel well with these women.

Beatrice Taylor, a comely brunette and closest to her own age and perhaps one of the more somewhat down to earth women of the group, eyed her with interest. “And what are you proposing?”

Suddenly, eyes of every woman present zeroed in on her, causing Abigail to shift slightly under the sudden attention. She wasn’t used to such scrutiny, often used to holding her tongue as the others discussed various hot topics of the day. For some reason, she couldn’t manage to keep up the routine.

“I’m proposing,” the blonde remarked, considering her words carefully, “that perhaps we can hold some sort of benefit or create some charity to support the Cause. Each one of you has a man fighting in the royal army. A husband, fiancé, brother, son. Shouldn’t we do something to help them? Wars can be awfully expensive.”

She paused for a moment, observing as she let her words soak in. After another pause, she continued, “We have a full room of intelligent, capable women,” all right, that may have been a bit of a stretch, “so surely we can figure something out, if we pull our resources together.”

Quiet murmurs of private discussions spread among the women like wildfire, their eyes alit with interest, though all discussion ceased when the frail yet regal hand of Mrs. Jenkins suddenly came up. Abigail bit her lip, nervous all over again.

A faint, rare smile slowly lit up the prim and proper older woman’s face. “That is a marvelous idea.” She gave a brief glance towards the ornate clock residing on the fireplace mantel. “One we’ll discuss in further detail at tomorrow’s tea.”

Abigail and Beatrice were the last to step out of the tea parlor and into the foyer where she spotted Major Andre himself approaching Mrs. Jenkins house through the large veranda window.

Apparently, Beatrice spotted him as well. She lightly grabbed Abigail on the arm, dropping her voice
in a quiet murmur meant for her ears only, “I’ve heard from a little bird that a certain major is quite
taken with you.”

Abigail blinked in surprise, her thoughts instinctively going to Ben, but then she remembered where
she was. “And what major would that be, if I may be so bold to ask?”

The brunette lifted her chin in John’s direction with a barely suppressed smile. Abigail released a
small huff of laughter and shook her head in mild dismay. “I hate to break it you, Beatrice, but the
only feelings there are platonic. Major Andre was kind enough to take me in when I needed shelter.
He’s a very kind man.”

“Mmm,” Beatrice hummed thoughtfully. “A very nice man who has abruptly visiting his other
blonde lady friend around the time of your arrival.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Not Peggy Shippen of course,” Beatrice continued, as if she hadn’t spoken. “That little tart blonde
prostitute who used to frequent his apartments.” She eyed Abigail coyly. “It seems his affections
have shifted to another.”

Abigail’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t care for the implication, nor will I give any credence toward it.”

The brunette’s eyes widened, as if she realized what she had just said. “Oh, I would never imply that
you were a woman of the evening, dear! I’m so dreadfully sorry if you thought that was my
intention.”

Although she sounded completely sincere, Abigail was far too annoyed to give her a response,
instead choosing to withdraw her arm from Beatrice’s hold and meet John half way up the walk
towards the house.

“Ah, Ms. Williams,” the British greeted her, face brightening upon her arrival.

Abigail couldn’t help but smile, though her amusement clearly shown through. He lifted an
inquisitive eyebrow, as if sensing her amusement, and more than a little curious.

After her first tea with those society women, he had asked if she had enjoyed herself. She had
paused, asking if he truly desired her honest opinion, and when he had cautiously said yes, she had
given her honest opinion, which had startled him into a near violent fit of laughter. Ever since, she
would return from each tea and repeat very salacious detail to a surprisingly intrigued John Andre,
especially when the gossip pertained to his fellow officers. It certainly provided to some insight into
those who worked for him and above him.

So seeing his barely suppressed curiosity at her amused grin, Abigail felt inclined to indulge him.
“It’s come to my attention that apparently you’re quite taken with me. Since you’ve been kind
enough to take me in, of course.”

At John’s suddenly unreadable look, she continued, perhaps a little hurriedly, “You are a man of
generosity and honor. I would never assume your feelings from idle gossip.” She paused carefully
for a moment, considering her next words, before adding softly, “Especially since you have feelings
for another.”

It obvious to discern a man who was in love versus a man who wasn’t. The way John carried
himself, how he talked about the subject of love itself, it was very much apparent the man was in his
own love story, though perhaps a tragic one.
“I promise not to speak of it again,” Abigail promised when his carefully concealed expression remained on his face.

After a moment, he blinked but then his expression cleared. “Well, let’s give them something to really talk about then, shall we?”

Before she knew what was happening, he lifted her hand and pressed his lips to the back of her hand. His eyes glimmered with mirth at her look of startled surprise.

From somewhere behind her, there was a collective feminine gasp, but Abigail refused to give them the satisfaction of turning around. Realizing what he had done, a slow grin slipped across her lips. “You’re just asking for trouble, aren’t you, major?”

He attempted a look of nonchalance, though his amused eyes gave him away. “Trouble has always plagued me. Why not entertain it a little?” He offered her his arm. “Ready to go, my dear?”

“Definitely,” Abigail murmured, still smiling at their inside joke as she accepted his arm and allowed him to escort her away from the house, away from the gossipy harpies.

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Since the weather was warm and lovely, John and Abigail agreed to make the journey back to his home on foot. She eventually told him how the women had decided to do something to support the war effort, and from her stolen glance towards her walking companion, she could tell that John was pleased.

“And who do we have to thank for presenting this idea?” he asked as they passed a pair of society women being assisted into their carriage.

“It was a group decision,” Abigail remarked, though it hardly could be referred to as that. “Everything will be discussed in further detail at the next tea. Though it would be very helpful to get a relative idea of what we’re hoping to achieve – if your men are in need of more food rations, uniforms, or money, and the like.” She looked up at him hopefully and not at all circumspect, which she highly doubted she would have been able to pull off even if she tried.

Abigail knew she was being forward, a risk to her cover, but she would be foolish not to make such a request from a perfect resource. Under the guise of wanting to raise support for British troops, she would theoretically have access to their inventory, their financial state, and any and all amenities their men required, not to mention supplies. You didn’t necessarily have access to general’s battle plans and strategies. Having knowledge of their resources and exploiting that to the rebel’s advantage was just as important, at least in her eyes.

“I’ll see what I can scrounge up for you,” John remarked after barely a moment’s consideration. “Since it’s for such a very helpful cause.”

“Thank you,” Abigail replied, gratefulness radiating from her smile. Grateful for more reasons than one, though there was a twinge of guilt that lingered within her. She did her best to ignore it.

They had just returned to John’s estate when the thundering of hooves drew their attention back towards the property entrance. A redcoat, a relatively young one at that, eased his horse down into a trot and hardly gave the poor beast a chance to come to a complete halt before dismounting.

“Major,” the young redcoat greeted, panting. “I have some news from the general.”

Which general he was referring to was anyone’s guess, but Abigail wasn’t too concerned about what
he had to say. What did concern her was the pallor in his cheeks, how he couldn’t seem to be able to hold himself still.

“Are you all right?” Abigail asked, unable to contain herself. She eyed him shrewdly, instinctively assessing him for any sign of ailment or injury. Pale, breathless, and swaying. That could be a number of things.

The young redcoat nodded, a bit slowly. “Yes, ma’am. Just been riding a bit of a ways. Ran into some trouble coming in. Nothing to worry about.”

Oh, yes, certainly nothing to worry about, even as he was beginning to slur his words.

“What kind of trouble?” John demanded. He was beginning to arrive to same conclusion Abigail was coming to.

The boy murmured something about a note and began to pat himself down almost absentmindedly. It wasn’t until he pulled back his hand, his palm was covered in a sticky red. A hit.

“We need to bring him inside,” Abigail urged, adrenaline kicking in. “I’ll alert Abigail to gather some hot water while Cicero…”

“Abigail has gone to Philadelphia, and Cicero has gone with her.”

“Well, then, grab this gentleman and bring inside, and I’ll look gather supplies myself.” Abigail rushed towards the front door and held it open so that John and the boy could stumble through, shutting it behind them as soon as they were inside.

Since she wasn’t sure what she was dealing with, she only went for the basics: clean cloth, a bucket of warm water, and brandy, both a rudimentary substitute for pure alcohol for cleansing a flesh wound as well as a decent pain numbing agent for the patient in question.

John had settled the boy on the first comfortable couch they had come across. The poor boy’s face was now covered in a sheen of sweat. It was a miracle he hadn’t bled out thus far over his travels.

She knelt beside him and rolled up her sleeves. While he was a redcoat and therefore an enemy, the blonde couldn’t very well in good conscience allow him to suffer or die, not if she was capable of helping him.

With her attention fully on the boy, Abigail hadn’t heard the footsteps or even registered the newcomers’ voices until she practically felt someone breathing down the back of her neck. And call her crazy but she had a feeling that person wasn’t John Andre.

“Let a doctor tend to him, madam,” a gruff voice suggested right over her shoulder. “There’s no reason to dirty yourself.”

She then felt a hand at her arm and immediately jerked it away before fixing the speaker with a remarkably cool glare. The speaker was yet another redcoats – blimey, they bred like flies, didn’t they – whose expression turned startled at the intensity of her glare.

“If you’re through interrupting me, perhaps I can help this man,” Abigail remarked coolly, her cover forgotten. Her patients came first. Turning her back on the redcoat, she continued to examine the boy, peeling back his layers of clothes until the wound was exposed.

A gunshot wound of course. She began to probe around the area of the wound carefully with her fingers, searching for any sign of a presence of the ball inside him. A flash of memory of her
performing the exact same procedure on Christopher entered her mind, and with a great amount of pain, she forcefully pushed the memory aside.

He must have just gotten shot, considering the wound appeared relatively new. There was yet to be any inflammation around the wound, at least not that she could see. Informing the group as much, she requested supplies to help patch him up without even removing her gaze or probing hands away from her patient: clean strips of cloth, sewing string, a sewing needle, scissors, a forceps – if they had one, if not than a letter opener perhaps – and brandy. The brandy itself would serve as a numbing agent for the boy as well as helping her clean the wound.

When she heard only one pair of boots (John’s most likely) scuffle along the floor in search of her supplies, she added over her shoulder, “You can have the remaining bottle of brandy once I’m finished with it.” That seemed to be enough motivation to inspire the other redcoats who had only just arrived to kickstart their search.

Bloody British twats.

Roughly half past the hour, she had the majority of the supplies she needed. With John shrugging off his coat and kneeling beside her – the only other person to volunteer his assistance, mind you – together they worked, with the British major dutifully following her direction to a near perfect science.

The boy kept wincing and shifting underneath her probing fingers when she had initially assessed him. When she had picked up the forceps, he absolutely blanched in mute panic, which was why John took the initiative to ply him with as much brandy as possible. By the time John was through with him, the young redcoat could barely keep his head up or his eyes open, which was probably for the best.

It took a quite a bit of time and careful precision, but Abigail finally managed to get the ball out, although in pieces and shards. She hadn’t been able to locate one ball and had suspected the ball may have shattered when he had been struck. Her suspicion had been proven correct. She could only thank the high heavens nothing had been ruptured due to the shattered ball. That was a miracle in itself.

“Where did you learn how to do this?” John asked, fascinated and impressed as he continued to observe her ministrations.

A few hours had passed since the removal of the bullet, long enough to make sure inflammation wouldn’t set. She had hardly risen to retrieve some oil to dip the cloth in order to allow the fluids to escape the body more easily when the other officers had been all but insistent upon traveling to the next city over and even more insistent on bringing the boy with him. As much as she had protested he needed his rest, the gruff one that had tried to pull her off him just told her to stitch him up so that he could make the journey on his horse, giving his word the boy would get checked by a doctor as soon as they had gotten to their destination.

Abigail had been extremely displeased but did as he asked, knowing she could only do the best she could for the boy. Everything else was out of her control.

She poured a bit of the brandy into a small glass before dipping the needle into the glass, allowing the alcohol to cleanse it before reaching for the string in preparation to begin on the boy’s stitches.

“My father is a doctor,” Abigail began without removing her attention from her task. “He traveled often, performing house calls whenever he was summoned. Many times as a child, I would wake up early in the morning to see him off, remaining home with my mother and waiting eagerly for his
return.” Her mother had died during childbirth, which was the falsehood in her story, but the rest of what she had shared thus far was true. A good lie was deeply rooted in being as close to the truth as possible.

Holding the needle by its flat side, she continued, “Sometimes, he would allow me to assist him but only on local calls.” Carefully, the thread went through the sewing needle after two attempts, and she pulled it through a bit more until it was adequately wrapped on the needle. “When he discovered I had an interest in healing, he allowed me to peruse his medical books, starting with the easier ones of course. He would only allow me to start proper procedures, suturing for instance, on injured animals that needed tending to.”

With a brief glimpse at the boy’s face to ascertain his level of consciousness, Abigail brought the forceps towards his skin, exposing the flesh towards the end of the right side of the wound, which granted her a better view and avoiding hitting any muscle she could possibly avoid. “It wasn’t until I was older did my father allow me to assist him with patients, starting out small of course.”

“Of course,” John remarked quietly, watching unflinchingly as she punctured the right side of the skin. It was roughly half a centimeter down from the end of the wound between the skin and the needle, twisting her hand ever so slightly clockwise for nearly half a circle. Slowly and carefully, she inserted the needle through the boy’s skin, making certain it exited on the inner side of the skin and went no deeper than half a centimeter or as close she could get to that measurement.

Her narration ceased, her need to concentrate outweighing everything else. She had only stitched a handful of patients from the Continental base, but even with that experience behind her as well as what she had just described to the major, anything could go wrong. This was why she often chose to remain on the side of caution.

The thread pierced through the skin, and she carefully continued to lace him up with the in-and-out pattern until the wound was sutured shut. Fortunately the wound had been a relatively small one, despite the ball had shattered inside him.

She took her time stitching him up, going even more slowly as she tied the string, cutting it off with the scissors, though she knew the boy would have to at least need a few hours to sleep off the effects of the brandy John had administered to him. Otherwise the young redcoat would fall off his horse before stepping out onto the street.

With this in mind, Abigail turned to the young redcoat’s fellow soldiers, superiors, whoever they were, and informed them as much as he was not fit to ride anywhere in his current condition and that perhaps they should allow him to sleep off the effects of the alcohol at an inn or wherever they had previously been quartered so that he could regain at least a quarter of his strength to ride.

When it was clear they didn’t like to be ordered about by a woman, John reiterated her orders in a more commanding manner, drawing himself to full height and rank at that. It was clear from the exchange between the three men he far outranked them. “I suggest you do as Ms. Williams suggested, in her own medical opinion, or perhaps I shall have you court-martialed for disobeying a direct order.”

“For disobeying a demand from this woman?” the older redcoat demanded, baffled.

“No,” John remarked, his smile unfriendly and sharp, “for disobeying a direct order from me.”

Needless to say, the other redcoats didn’t put up much of an argument after that.
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place after 3x07.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In a world where communication depending heavily on a system where a written response could take days, even weeks, to reach to someone, word traveled unusually fast in York City. Over the course of a matter of days, word had gone around of the blonde angel of healing who had saved a young redcoat’s life – believe her, those were not her words.

Before she knew what was happening, she began to follow in her father’s footsteps, arriving to calls when she was summoned, although she was not familiar with anyone who called her. However, that didn’t prevent her from making the rounds – from prominent redcoat families, merchant families, and to the destitute poor. Ranging from various ailments to physical injury, Abigail was certainly putting her experience and skills to the test.

With this new level of access, for the prominent redcoats and the wealthy class in particular, the blonde took full advantage in obtaining any information that she could get her hands on.

However, at the same time, she wasn’t above accepting money from her patients for her services, although she had never charged a patient before.

Before you judge her too harshly, she only charged the redcoat and wealthy patients, perhaps to a near point of exploitation, but considering their backgrounds of wealth, prestige, and the fact they were Torey bastards, she didn’t have any qualms about it. For the merchants who weren’t exactly Loyalists but were difficult to determine exactly what side they were on, she hardly charged them a thing. For the poor and destitute, whether Torey or Patriot, she never charged them a thing, knowing they were in no position to pay but also knowing it was the right thing to do.

The charges for her services weren’t for her own personal gain, at least not initially. The idea was to earn enough money that she felt appropriate would cover her stay with John Andre. It was the fair thing to do after all, so she believed.

When she had enough money to cover for rent, more than enough and a little bit extra to be more precise – because overcharging wealthy Torey families who could more than afford it was actually rather enjoyable – Abigail presented the money to John one evening in two small but full coin sacks and offered to him as rent.

Unfortunately, though predictably, the man was a stubborn mule and politely refused to accept her money he believed she rightfully earned. Although she tried to reason with him, her words fell on deaf ears, and she gave up relatively quickly, which of course was unusual for her. She had already made her mind up that she would return to his study and hide one of the purses in his desk drawer. Hopefully, he wouldn’t discover it until she was long gone, after the war was over.

The rest of the money she used to purchase more supplies – herbs, ointments, and the like which would be very useful to help her treat patients. At the apothecary she frequented for said purchases, she had her eye a medicine box the owner kept on display, knowing it would be perfect for her to
travel with all of her medicines, herbs, and surgical tools. Within a few weeks times, perhaps a month, she would be able to afford it. Fingers crossed of course if it hadn’t been sold by then.

With this traveling healer-doctor job she obtained for herself, it gave her much better access to the city, which was also the perfect cover to sniff out Patriot inclined individuals. Secretly, she hoped to gain access to the Sons of Liberty, but she suspected she wouldn’t. They were a very difficult group to find it seemed.

It also provided her the perfect opportunity to continue her meetings with Caleb without raising suspicion.

Another two weeks had passed before Abigail received word of their next meeting. Same location, same time, at least what she read from Caleb’s coded letter delivered by Cicero – the office just over a dozen steps from the city’s theater building.

Fortunately, Abigail managed to formulate a plan which granted her the opportunity to attend the meeting while giving her a plausible cover for her absence from her dinner with Major Andre.

So at her tea with York City’s society women, she suggested hosting a charity event for British troops at the theater, a soiree of some sort. By all appearances, all the women seemed thrilled at the idea. Abigail volunteered to visit the theater later that evening herself, so that she could get an general since of the theater’s capacity and any possible fees for the theater owners.

What she hadn’t anticipated was Beatrice Taylor requesting to go with her as well. The Beatrice Taylor who had all but implied she was John Andre’s whore. Wonderful.

She warily agreed to meet her at the theater at six o’clock sharp. Her meeting with Caleb was at seven. It would be cutting it rather close, and she knew she would be a nervous wreck the entire time. Hopefully, none of that would come across to her new companion.

Abigail arrived at the theater nearly a quarter to the hour only find the comely brunette waiting for her inside her carriage, stepping out when Abigail came into her line of sight. The two women headed inside, initial attempts of conversation all but forced and strained. However, once they were inside, the focus shifted to the charity event, the tension forgotten.

While Beatrice might have thought the tension derived from her remarks from their previous tea, that was the furthest thing from the blonde’s mind. She glanced at the time every chance she managed a furtive look. Each minute that ticked away brought her meeting that much closer, making her all the more anxious to rid herself of Beatrice, thus keeping her true intentions hidden.

When it was nearly five minutes to seven, Abigail made multiple attempts to politely wrap up their evening, but infuriatingly Beatrice would keep finding topics to distract her with – level of security during the event, seating arrangements of donors and soldiers, and whether or not refreshments should be offered in the theater or if they should be presented in the theater annex.

With her keen sense of observation and organizational skills, Beatrice was the perfect socialite planner in training. Mrs. Jenkins would be so proud.

However, Abigail didn’t give one lick about any of it, although the charity had been her idea. And why should she? The charity was meant to help the enemy, and she wasn’t exactly a proud and true Torey. Contrary to compliments of her dress she wore to the Guy Fawkes production, she never considered red to be her color.

She had always been partial to blue.
When the brunette suggested going to examine the theater annex for the refreshment area, the very place Caleb was waiting for her, at least for fifteen minutes now – Abigail smoothly cut her off at the pass and steered her away from the theater annex with what she hoped was a convincing calmness. Inside, she was a bundle of anxiety.

“I’m sure we can make arrangements with the theater owners in the morning, yes?” Abigail suggested. “You must be exhausted, traveling all this way by carriage. You live outside the city, yes?”

“A little over a mile or so, yes,” Beatrice replied. “A lovely little manor in the countryside.”

“A good thing about a lengthy journey,” Abigail continued, “is that it gives one plenty of time to think. In your case, you have a lot of planning to do.”

“Planning?”

“For the charity event, of course. Clearly, you have a much better eye for detail than I. Plus, you have far more connections than I could ever hope to obtain.” She placed her hand on Beatrice’s arm as she began to walk her out the theater.

With her finding herself following her father’s footsteps, Abigail had little to no time to plan a charity event, but what she did have time for was pawning off the tasks on someone else. That someone being Beatrice. Perhaps buttering her up with flattery and self-deprecating remarks would convince Beatrice to take up the task. And if she were being honest with herself, which she usually was, this was a task at which the brunette could excel.

She could see that the seed was planted, but it needed a bit more to grow, so she added, “I’ll be with you every step of the way. Major Andre has already agreed to give me the figures of supplies the sold… our men need. That much is taken care of. But the event itself, the décor, the food, the security, the seating – any vital components of any successful charity event – is in your capable hands.

“And if you need any advice,” Abigail concluded once they stepped out into the evening air, “I’m sure the other ladies from our tea will be more than happy to help you, seeing as how many of them have experience in organizing such events.”

“That’s true,” Beatrice murmured, expression thoughtful and more than a little pleased with Abigail’s praise.

Mission accomplished.

As soon as they made it to the brunette’s carriage, Abigail feigned forgetting something in the theater and needed to retrieve it. When Beatrice asked if she wanted her to wait for her, the blonde waved her off, claiming her ride was arriving at any moment. The other woman accepted her words at face value and stepped into her carriage without a second thought.

It wasn’t until she was out of sight did Abigail turn on her heel and scurry back inside, walking briskly through the theater, into the annex, and towards the office.

She knocked three times, as per the agreement, before quietly and quickly letting herself inside, shutting the door behind her.

“I’m so sorry I’m late,” she apologized, sighing heavily. “There were some complications…”

“Well, I’m glad that you’re here now. Though you did have me worried for a while there.”
Lips parting in surprise, Abigail’s grip tightened on the doorknob.

That wasn’t a voice she expected.

She whirled around and stood there, eyes widened in shock. “You’re not Caleb.”

“Not exactly the reaction I was hoping for,” Ben replied, the corners of his mouth twitching upwards slightly, “but I should know better than to try and predict you by now.”

Without uttering another word, Abigail launched herself towards him, her arms going around his shoulders. She nuzzled her face against his neck, sighing contently as she felt his arms snake around her waist and pulling her against him in a near vicelike grip. She didn’t mind his grip. In fact, she welcomed it and snuggled even closer.

“Hi,” she said, her voice muffled against his coat collar.

“Hi,” Ben repeated softly, squeezing her tight. “I know I’m not Caleb, but I had to see for myself that you were all right.”

Abigail pressed a kiss to the side of his neck and smiled when he inhaled sharply. “A month is far too long.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” She nestled against him, stubbornly refusing to release him, but he didn’t seem to mind. In fact, he shared the sentiment, not once removing his arms from around her waist.

She felt a gentle nudging against her neck, then a little higher along her jaw. It didn’t take her long to figure out what he wanted, what they both wanted.

What they both needed.

Their last kiss had been in the forest when he had been forced to drop her off for Washington’s plan to transfer her to York City. Every night since then she found herself remembering the kiss, the press of his lips and the warmth of his breath against her mouth before sleep lured her into its clutches. Even after the nightmares first plagued her, just thinking of Ben and his protective, warm embrace comforted her.

Ben kissed her within an inch of her life, and she returned his fervor with fire. She nipped at his lower lip and was very much satisfied when he gave a quiet grunt of approval.

An all too familiar warm, tingling feeling burned deep in her belly, though as much as she wanted to give into the temptation, neither of them could afford to do so.

Ben seemed to be of the same mind about it, as reluctant as he was to release her. She didn’t step out of his arms completely, only putting enough distance so that she could fully see his face.

Before they could get down to business though, Abigail couldn’t help but notice something she definitely should have noticed while she had been kissing him. “You’re scruffy again,” she remarked as she touched his jaw.

“I didn’t have time for a shave before I set out,” he remarked, “though I seem to recall you liking this look on me.”

Abigail grinned. “I really do. But you’re not helping matters any now, are you?”

Ben’s grin was sharp and wicked. He leaned forward to steal another kiss, but Abigail leaned back,
evading him while placing a finger to his lips. “Ah, ah. At ease, major.” She suppressed a giggle but barely. “Don’t you want your information or not?”

“I do, but first…” He brought his hands up to cup her face, dropping his playful demeanor to assess her carefully.

She knew what he was doing without any explanation. She looked almost starkly different from the last time he had seen her. The bruises had long since faded, with the cut on her lower lip healing quite nicely. With a more consistent diet of breakfasts dinners, she looked healthy, almost as healthy as she had been prior to her enlistment. It was amazing how much difference a month could make.

But if it meant giving up any and all personal progress to be with him again, even if it meant returning to camp as Thomas Williams again and all of the struggle that came with it, she knew without a doubt what her choice would be.

She remained silent while he continued to look her over, enjoying the gentle brushing of his fingers far too much but regretting it for a moment. It wasn’t until she caught him frowning that she realized her eyelids had fallen shut.

“Caleb told me about the nightmares,” the major spoke softly, his expression pained.

“They’re not so bad anymore,” she assured him, running her hands down the front of his dark grey coat. Her attempt at a smile was weak at best. “I hardly have them now.”

“I wish I could’ve been there for you. I should’ve been there for you.”

“You’re here now,” she said, snuggling closer to him. “You being here is more than enough.”

Eventually, they managed to shift the conversation back to the intention of the meeting at hand. When asked if she had any updates for him, she began with her patching up a redcoat soldier and how it had presented her the opportunity of the homes of wealthy Torey families and redcoats. She smiled a bit cheekily when she mentioned overcharging the bastards and grinned even more when Ben had to duck his head against his shoulder to smother his chuckles.

“But that was after I suggested starting a charity at a high society tea to raise money for the boys in red, of course.”

The major’s chuckles ceased, and he pulled back to look at her with a frown. “And why, may I ask?”

“Wellll…” Abigail began, perhaps a bit too lightly given the situation. Almost absentmindedly, her hands slowly worked at the collar of his coat and took her sweet time smoothing it down. “I figured if I couldn’t get any battle strategies out of Andre, I figured obtaining information on their supplies would be a start. Material for uniforms – cotton for shirts, trousers, metal for buttons, leather for shoes, etcetera – food rations, materials for tents, camp cooking supplies, and the like.”

Smoothing down an invisible crease along his shoulder, Abigail continued, “Honestly, the idea was spur of the moment and not a calculated tactical maneuver, but I thought why not.”

There was a prolonged silence. The longer he didn’t respond, the more nervous she because, but she refused to let it show. But when he finally returned her gaze, she could see more than a hint of pride in his gaze. “That’s actually rather brilliant.”

“Thank you. Now hopefully my efforts don’t help them.”
He snorted lightly. “Yes, let’s hope not.”

She then told him of her progress with Major John Andre, and she spoke of him honestly.

“It’s… this is much more difficult than I thought it would be,” Abigail admitted, lowering her gaze. “I’ve gotten to know the man. Not just John Andre the British major and head of intelligence but the man himself. He’s been incredibly kind to me.”

She hid her face against his chest and groaned. “Why does he have to be a redcoat?”

“Reconnaissance is a very difficult road to travel,” he murmured. He began to rub soothing circles into the small of her back, slowly and firmly. It was wonderfully relaxing. “I tried to warn you.”

“I understand just how difficult it can be, trust me. But I never thought it would be like this. Maybe that makes me a fool, I don’t know.” She sighed. “Even though he’s the enemy, I still feel guilty. I didn’t ask to find out he’s actually a good man.”

She felt him tense against her briefly, but she caught it nonetheless. “And just how close have you gotten to him?” he asked carefully after some time of silence.

Abigail pulled back, frowning at him. “What exactly are you implying?”

“Should I be worried?”

Irritation flared inside her, but for once, she was far too exhausted to start a fight. “Don’t be jealous,” she sighed, closing her eyes.

“I’m not,” Ben answered, a little too quickly. Abigail opened her eyes and stared until his façade faded a bit. “It’s not that, not really. In the back of my mind, I can’t help but envy the man.” At her growing look of reproach, he quickly continued, “Not because I don’t trust you but because another man gets you all to himself. He gets to see you every morning and most evenings, when I can’t.”

“Again” went unspoken.

Bringing her hands to cup his face, Abigail smiled softly. There was so much she wanted to say to him, but none of them sufficed in that moment, those three words once again on the tip of her tongue. “I can honestly say that, over the course of my life, the only boy I ever wanted to share my days with, the only man I want to share my mornings and nights with, is you.”

His gaze grew soft, and he pressed a tender kiss to her lips, which she returned happily.

There was no hint of untruth the words she had spoken with him. In fact, that was the closest she had ever gotten to expressing how truly deep her feelings ran. She wanted nothing more to tell him how much she loved him, but in the back of her mind, deep down in her soul, she knew that would only complicate things, so she kept those three words safely tucked away.

For now.

Chapter End Notes

Update: Thank you guys so much for the comments and kudos! I appreciate and enjoy hearing from you guys!
Come follow me on tumblr if you want! I've decided to post some 'verse related drabbles over there if you guys are interested. The first one is right here!
Prying his eyes away from the report in his hands, Washington slowly turned his gaze towards Ben, he frowned deeply. “Robert Rogers. I should have known.”

“He’s always been a thorn in our side, sir,” the young major remarked quietly. The mess of destruction Rogers had made would have been impressive to an outsider, but being one of the few directly impacted by the recent turn of events, it was certainly anything but.

With Washington’s previous dismissal of Abe and now Culper Jr.’s departure from the ring, everything was in shambles.

The general sighed heavily. “Indeed. But these wounds are self-inflicted.” His gaze hardened in frustration. “I feel as if my eyes have been gouged out. We are blind to the enemy in New York once again.”

Ben could feel the heat of shame in his cheeks, though the candle light did well to conceal it. A small mercy, her supposed, not that he believed he earned one.

As much as he wanted to give into the urge to draw into himself in disgrace, his posture dictated from years of military experience refused to allow him to do so.

Instead, he decided to do what he thought was best, as much as it pained him to do so, but with the mess they were in, there was little choice to be made in the matter.

With brief flicker of Abigail’s face in mind, Ben spoke, his expression and tone both sorrowful and resigned, “Sir, I have failed you. There is no excuse that I could possibly give you that would make any of this right.”

He paused, giving himself a chance to take a breath. “I don’t wish to resign my post, as head of intelligence, but I defer to your judgement.”

If it had been under different circumstances, Ben would have offered to resign his post effective immediately, but there was far too much at stake for him, on a much more personal level than any sort of head of intelligence ought to carry. He hadn’t been able to refuse Abigail when she had first arrived at the flyaway camp nor could he turn away from her now, at least not willingly in an official capacity.

“General Arnold once told me,” Ben continued when the general remained silent, “you can be a soldier, or you can be a spy. There is no middle ground to tread.”

Washington frowned. “Nonsense. They go hand in glove. There is nothing more necessary than
good intelligence, and nothing requires greater pains to obtain.”

Leaning forward in his seat, the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, the Grey Fox himself, stared at him as if seeing right through him, as if down to his very soul. “You did not retreat from the heat of battle, Ben. Why are you deserting me now?”

As much as he would have liked, the major couldn’t find it in himself to look away. It was nearly like staring directly into the sun, except the sun refused to break its hold on him. “Yes, there have been some major setbacks, but we still have some insight into the British’s military operations, thanks to Tobias Hawkins. And with that in mind, I do not have any intentions of removing you from your post.”

Washington rose from his seat with the grace of a lion, an apt metaphor for the man as there ever was one. He stood confident and calm, every ounce of the commander-in-chief an army desperately needed. “We may have lost out man in New York, but we have not lost our women there.

“And from what you have told me of your most recent report,” Washington continued, a small forming at the corners of his mouth, “the young Williams has been hard at work. Though I hope the effects of the charity rouse don’t benefit our enemy too well.”

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York City

Over the span of a few weeks, Abigail contemplated the merits of having thought up the charity event. Yes, initially it had been devised as a way to put an end to petty and idle gossip, but as it turned out, the event was on the horizon, having gone through several modifications and adjustments during this time. She couldn’t help but admire Beatrice and the other society women’s tenacity and dedication for organizing such an event in the course of little over two months.

In the meantime, the blonde had been busy gathering information on the British need for needs and resources, such as food rations, uniforms, ammunitions, and financial compensation for its soldiers. Surprisingly, John was very forthcoming with her, realizing that pussyfooting around the topic would not benefit the cause of raising money for the Crown’s army and supplies for its men, so he provided her with exact estimates, which she readily accepted and of course proceeded to share her findings with Caleb and Ben through Cicero and Caleb’s mysterious communication system.

The Crown’s financial expenses were unsurprisingly scarce. She wasn’t surprised truly, recalling their desperation of their attempt at sabotage of creating counterfeit bills to bankrupt the Continental Congress. She knew far better than most how desperately the redcoats needed this event. However, she could only hope this didn’t fatten the British pockets at the expense of the Continentals.

Though the more she thought about it, the more she realized this event was a setup of failure. Not to discredit Beatrice and all of her hard work – though that bloody woman had called on Abigail with every moment of self-doubt, which had been pretty much every second of the bloody day. The woman had pretty much taken control and relied heavily on the other society women for assistance, as the blonde had suggested.

After much deliberation and debate, the charity event had turned out to be an art auction, where the wealthiest Tory families could bid on the art and have some refreshments as they mingled with other families of the same alliances and pedigrees. Admittance to the event was not free nor was it cheap. Attendees would have to pay top dollar to be admitted, to which all proceeded would go directly into the British military’s pocket – an idea which had been more or less Abigail’s suggestion. Charge the bastards to the hilt, and hit them where their hearts lied, their purse strings.
Even with its organized structure down to a science, Abigail had it on good authority from reliable sources with patriot sympathies which shall remain nameless that money was tight in York City, even among the wealthy Tories. With this in mind, she had no qualms of suggesting the high admittance fee. Even if people did attend, it would come at a price, a pretty costly one, which made her doubt much would be raised for the British cause.

As neatly as she could, Abigail made sure all loose ties were threaded together, making sure each theoretical stone didn’t remain unturned. Of course she didn’t wish for the event to succeed, which was why she tried to do as much covert damage control as she possibly could.

There was no way the charity auction would do well.

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The charity auction arrived more quickly than Abigail would have liked. Between her tending to regular and new patients and assisting Beatrice in any small way she could, time quickly slipped through her fingers. So when the day finally arrived, she was caught more than a little off guard, which made getting herself ready an interesting affair.

Once again, she donned the red gown she had worn to the Guy Fawkes production but with several minor and major alterations on the part of the seamstress – because God forbid a lady to wear the same dress in public in the span of two months. The three quarter length sleeves were gone, only to be replaced by a short, off the shoulder look. The bustline and bodice were ruched but flattering to her figure – maybe perhaps a bit too flattering. The only familiar piece of dress Abigail could recognize was the skirts, which remained full and elegant, though there were floral embellishment of roses along the bottoms of the skirt.

So naturally she asked if the seamstress was purposefully trying to make her the center of attention once again. It wasn’t that she didn’t like the dress. It was a beauty to behold. Only she knew it would only garner more attention than she would have liked, more than likely even more attention that the original incarnation had delivered her.

In response to her question, the seamstress simply responded, “You can’t make a splash if you’re not willing to weather a few waves.”

Yes, that was all well and good, but didn’t the woman realize by now she never intended to make a splash at all?

But she had accepted the dress all the same, unwilling to admit that perhaps she didn’t mind a bit of controversy. Taking a closer look at the dress, she couldn’t help but marvel at its design. The seamstress was certainly ahead of her time.

Besides, if it caused too much of a ruckus, she could always the excuse it would save her time from rolling up her sleeves to tend to some unfortunate soul who sought medical attention.

With her hair having lacked the attention of scissors for the past few years, her loose, golden ringlets rested well beyond her collarbones, which helped to conceal her womanly assets the dress rather boldly advocated. Ah, well, there wasn’t much she could really do about that now.

Oh, if Ben could only see her now.

It was an unseasonably warm for an evening in early September, though cool enough to require only a light cloak. As the evening progressed, Abigail would appreciate her short sleeves, given whole numerous bodies in an occupied setting often elevated heat in a given room.
Yes, the turnout for the charity auction had exceeded all expectations, including Abigail’s, much to her consternation. Tories throughout the colony of New York seemed to have arrived in droves, an amazing feat considering the event was all but short notice. However, she thought she overheard a few admitting to having arrived from surrounding colonies to support the British troops, though it was near impossible to confirm without a glance at the guestbook.

But she couldn’t worry about the potential success of the evening or how much money and support this could generate for the British – although she was determined to observe this possibility shrewdly. It appeared that the crème de la crème of Tory society from New York had arrived, whether in support or curiosity didn’t matter. This was an opportunity she couldn’t afford to pass up.

And so Abigail greeted everyone that came through the theater doors with a welcoming smile and charming demeanor, pressing hands and exchanging air kisses with the women and allowing her hands be kissed politely by the gentlemen accompanying them. There were so many names and faces she was introduced to it was next to impossible to remember them all, but she did her best to memorize as much as she could, for her report to Caleb.

The seats on the bottom floor had been removed from the room, save a handful of seats placed strategically along the walls, making room for more people to enter and stroll about. The stage housed numerous paintings, vases, and other priceless treasures that any of these blue blood Tories would do anything to own. But could any of them truly afford to bid on any of it was the question, if the rumors she had gleaned from her sources were true.

Early on one of the society women from the tea, Mrs. Jenkins, introduced her as the orchestrator of the event, to which Abigail was quick to demurely deny, but of course the elderly would hear nothing of it and continued to introduce her as such from that point forward.

“Oh, no,” Abigail remarked for the umpteenth time after yet another proud and somewhat inaccurate observation. “I had nothing to do with the organization of this wonderful event. Beatrice Taylor was the mind behind this affair. The auction was her idea, actually.”

“But who inspired the idea of the charity itself, my dear?” Mrs. Jenkins asked, giving her a knowing look as if challenging to prove her wrong.

When Abigail said nothing, she continued to titter about society affairs as the blonde stood there rather dumbly, sheepishly looking about until she caught the glance of Beatrice herself. If looks could kill, then Abigail would be in her grave soon enough, with Beatrice holding the shovel to bury her.

She could feel the look distinctively through each and every praised filled introduction Mrs. Jenkins made on her behalf, especially when their guests shared in the elderly socialite’s praise and congratulating her on a job well done.

What was that dreadful pain in her back? Perhaps one of Beatrice’s daggers from the intensity of her glare.

Abigail managed to finally extract herself from Mrs. Jenkins grasp and wander towards the refreshment table. Of course, there were a handful of servants passing around hors d’oeuvres and glasses of the finest wine, but some of the silver trays and glasses of wine were spread out on a small table closest to the backstage area. Those little deviled cheese balls were calling out to her. Her stomach growled quietly in anticipation.

Before anyone could notice, the blonde plucked one from the tray and popped into her mouth, humming in contentment. She was in the middle of contemplating reaching for a second one mid-
chew when she heard a gentleman clear his throat lightly form behind her.

Abigail turned around, eyes widening at having been caught, but when she saw that it was John Andre, her alarm quickly faded into sheepishness. Swallowing the cheese-ham ball concoction, she admitted defeat. “You caught me.”

John chuckled at the sight of her, his face breaking into that grin of his that had become increasingly rare these days. “Yes, I can see that. Perhaps I should lock you up and throw away the key.”

“They’ve tried that already,” she remarked while reaching for a napkin to hand him one of those deviled cheese balls. “It didn’t quite pan out the way they envisioned it.”

The British major accepted the cheese ball slowly while tilting his head to the side, squinting in sort of a mock assessment. “I cannot for the life of me figure out whether or not you’re kidding.”

Abigail smiled innocently and reached for a glass of wine, choosing not to rise to the bait. She observed him over her glass as he took a bite of the cheese, watching with unsheltered amusement at the look of surprised delight flicker across his face. “It’s good, isn’t it?”

“Very,” he groaned immediately, mouthful before it was his turn to be sheepish. He apologized for his impropriety and reached for a glass of brandy from a young server right as he walked past. “I’ve always been more of a brandy man than one of wine.”

“That’s good to know,” Abigail said without missing a beat, unable to help herself. “I’ve always detested man who are whiners.”

John snorted indelicately into his brandy, which only made her grin even wider.

“I don’t believe I’ve offered you my congratulations,” he said after they sufficiently gorged themselves on a few more deviled cheese balls.

At her curious raised brow, John gestured around them. “It seems that your charity event has become a success.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” she said as she gave another cursory glance. “It doesn’t appear anyone has bid on anything yet.”

“Perhaps not yet, but there are quite a number of people that have arrived nonetheless. Give it time,” he assured her. He was going to say something else before smiling in amusement.

“What?” she asked. She huffed a little in amusement when he continued to chuckle at her. “What’s so amusing, major?”

“Nothing, it’s just…” he trailed off for a moment, his chuckling nearly getting the better of him. “You just have a bit of cheese… there.” He gestured to the corner of his own mouth.

Abigail shook her head in mild dismay, though her grin ruined it. “Oh, my. Such an unladylike behavior for a woman to possess. What ever will I do with myself?”

Reaching for a napkin, she wiped at the corner of her mouth. Her lips turned down in a tiny frown when he continued to chuckle in amusement, even more so when she failed to retrieve the offending piece of cheese.

“Here. Allow me.” Taking pity on her, John took the napkin from her hand and guided it towards the corner of her mouth, gently brushing at her skin until it was gone.
“Thank you,” she mumbled, feeling sheepish once again. “I suppose I’m not made to be a proper lady.”

John barely suppressed a smile. “Well, my life would be very dull if you were.”

Before Abigail could form a reply, an officer approached them and apologized for interrupting. John assured him he hadn’t interrupted anything and proceeded to introduce them.

“I’d like you to meet the woman responsible for tonight’s auction to support our cause, Elizabeth Williams. Elizabeth, this is General Henry Clinton, leading…”

Whatever John said next went in one ear and out of the other. Oh, Abigail knew exactly who this man was. She heard Ben and Caleb talk about the man often enough. Clinton was not only a high ranking redcoat officer, but he had just been named the bloody commander-in-chief of the British army in February of this year.

And the man was standing before her, as tall and proud as ever. It took everything Abigail had in her not to choke on her wine.

“It’s wonderful to make your acquaintance, madam,” General Clinton remarked, then added appreciatively, “And thank you for all that you’ve done to support our cause. We shall be forever in your debt.”

She held back a squeak as the British commander-in-chief placed a courtly kiss to the back of her hand. For once in her life, she had no idea what to think, say, or do. This wasn’t something she had anticipated.

Thankfully, she was saved the trouble from delivering a response. General Clinton turned to Major Andre and requested to speak with him privately, effectively ending their impromptu confab.

More than a little curious, Abigail intended to follow the two redcoat officers but played it smart. After a few minutes of mingling, she would find an excuse to slip out the corridor and follow their trail. Given the layout of the theater, there was only one place they could have gone, the office in the theater annex.

As she made the rounds making polite chatter with a few of the guests she had been introduced to, the blonde made sure to keep a subtle eye out towards the door leading out to the annex. With every passing glance, she spotted neither John or General Clinton, which meant their meeting could be anything other than brief. There was still a chance of her catching them.

“Oh, there she is. The woman of the hour.”

Turning at the sound of the unfamiliar voice, Abigail found herself face-to-face with a young blonde woman who observed her shrewdly and with perhaps a bit of dislike. Okay then, more than a bit of dislike. Was this woman one of Beatrice’s friends?

The woman was younger than her, of that much she was certain. She would have been considered shorter than her as well if not for the mountain of golden curls piled on top of her head, leaving a few curled tendrils along her shoulders. Abigail herself wasn’t familiar with the name of this particular style but had always associated the look of a well-groomed poodle. No offense to the woman before her, but she couldn’t help her own observations.

“I’m sorry, but have we met?” Abigail inquired politely. She smiled in what she hoped appeared to be a self-deprecating manner, while every inch of her wanted to bolt from the room to follow those men. “I’ve met so many people this evening. It’s difficult to keep track of names and faces.”
The best way Abigail could describe the young woman’s smile was simpering, borderline patronizing. “No, I don’t believe we’ve met officially, but I’ve heard a great deal about you.” Her hands remained fixed at her hips, her posture rigid and tense, as if she were a cobra ready to strike at her prey. “My name is Peggy Shippen. You must be Elizabeth Williams.”

Peggy Shippen… oh, dear. John Andre’s Peggy Shippen. The woman that had won over the British major’s heart and occupied his nearly every thought since their relationship had come to an end. This was rather interesting, enlightening in fact.

But more importantly she was Benedict Arnold’s Peggy Shippen, his soon-to-be wife, supposedly. What on earth was this woman doing here?

And why on earth was this woman child glaring at her with the intensity of a thousand suns?

Realizing what she had just stepped into, Abigail took a steadying breath, preparing herself for what promised to be a rather unpleasant conversation, or confrontation if Peggy got her way. All she knew in that moment was that she needed to set things straight and smooth things over as quickly as possible, if she wanted to make it to the annex in time.

Peggy saw the recognition in her face and gave her another simpering smile. “So you do know me after all. That’s interesting indeed.”

“Look, Ms. Shippen,” Abigail began after another measured breath, “I understand what you must be thinking.”

“Oh! So you’re a mind reader as well as a man thief! How lovely!” the younger blonde exclaimed in a stage whisper, her voice filled with thinly veiled scorn. “Perhaps you can also inform us on the outcome of the war, too, make a little money.”

Okay, that was it. She had reached her limit. “Madam, please. May we relocate to a more remote location to avoid a scene? As you can see, everyone seems to be enjoying their evening. Why spoil it for them?”

“Besides, your fiancé would hardly consider your being here good for his image,” she nearly added but refrained. Barely.

The two women managed to find two seats in a far off corner in the room as guests began to examine the pieces of art on the stage, giving them more privacy.

“I understand your anger and frustration,” Abigail began, “believe me, I do. If I were in your shoes, I’d feel the same. But I want to assure you that nothing, and I mean nothing, has transpired between myself and John Andre.”

“But I saw the two of you just now,” Peggy spat out, her eyes glimmering in accusation. “I saw the way the two of you were whispering and laughing as if you were in cahoots I saw the way he touched your face.”

Her voice cracked on the last word, and despite everything, Abigail’s heart went out to her. She couldn’t begin to understand why Peggy had left John Andre for Benedict Arnold or what circumstances had forced her hand, but what she could sympathize with was being separated from the man she loved. Of that much she could relate.

“I was in… very bad shape when I found myself at Major Andre’s residence,” Abigail spoke softly. “I had no money, no weapon on my person, and nowhere to turn. I had no idea if the men who had captured me would come to collect me nor did I have the inclination to know just how far behind me
they were. All I knew in that moment was I needed shelter, protection. And to my lucky stars the major opened his home to me and provided me with both.

“But what quickly became very clear to me,” she continued, ducking her head a little to catch the other woman’s eye, “was that his heart belonged to another. The way he speaks, the way he carries himself, it was clear to me then and it’s clear to me now, that John Andre is a man very much in love. And I have no intention of staking a claim on someone who has already promised his heart to another.”

Abigail observed her carefully as she spoke, noting with a great amount of relief the longer she talked, the hardness in the other blonde’s eyes thawed and her downturned mouth smoothed, perhaps even twitching upwards into a faint smile, though Abigail wasn’t holding her breath on that one.

Sensing the tide has shifted for the better, Abigail dared to reach over and take her hand in hers. When she wasn’t rejected, she gave the other woman’s hand a reassuring squeeze. “Believe me, being away from the man you love, away from the one person who completes who, is one of the hardest things a woman can go through. I understand, more than you can possibly know.”

The shift in Peggy’s expression was a subtle one, but when she spoke, Abigail knew her icy exterior was thawing. “Is what you say true?” she asked meekly, a stark contrast to the tough as nails persona she had going for her moments prior. “Does he… does he talk about me?”

“All the time,” Abigail smiled, “but never by name. It’s very obvious you hold such a special place in his heart.”

Peggy’s smile grew watery. She blinked rapidly before pulling out fan and began to fan herself, desperate to keep the tears at bay. Once she was a little more settled, she folded the fan back into her lap and sighed quietly. “It’s… a great comfort to me to hear that. After not hearing much from him in over a year, I…” She closed her eyes briefly before meeting her gaze. “It means a lot to me to hear those words from someone else, you know. An outsider’s perspective.”

Abigail nodded sympathetically and passed her napkin so that the other blonde could dab at her eyes.

“I apologize for being such a… a bitch,” Peggy admitted, huffing out a quiet, embarrassed laugh. “So much miscommunication and misdirection when it comes to listening to gossip, I’m afraid.”

“I’ve learned that from my stay in the city,” Abigail nodded gravely, which startled a laugh from Peggy. She smiled softly before throwing another glance towards the door. There was still time yet…

“Have you… do you have any idea where he’s gone?” Peggy asked hopefully. “I know it’s foolish of me to even be here but…. I know he’s here, and I… I just need him.”

As much as she would have loved to help this poor woman, Abigail knew she couldn’t allow this opportunity of listening in on John and General Clinton’s conversation pass her by any further. With a guilty conscious, she answered, “I believe he’s heading out of town. He stopped here as a courtesy for the charity auction, but he couldn’t stay long.” The lie felt heavy on her tongue, but in her heart, she knew it was for the best, for all matters of interests involved.

Peggy’s face fell. “I feared so as much. But to catch a glimpse of his face, even if he didn’t see mine… that’s all that I could ask for.”

After a moment or two, Peggy dug into her pockets, fishing for something until she pulled out a thin packet of parchment. “I know we just met, and that my first impression has not been the best, but… if it’s not too much trouble, could you pass this along to him, whenever he does come back that is.”
Abigail didn’t have to read its contents to know what Peggy was holding out for her. Letters. Letters to John. She should have politely declined and found a way to leave the conversation, but seeing Peggy’s earnest expression and understanding her plight to an alarmingly deep degree, she couldn’t find it in her heart to say no.

“Of course, I will,” Abigail agreed quietly, accepting the letters from her.

Peggy’s radiant smile nearly blinded her. She would have trouble forgetting that face for quite some time.

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Miraculously, Abigail finally managed to sneak away for some much needed air. However, she didn’t linger outside long, knowing that time was not on her side.

Hiking her skirts above her ankles, she dashed quickly into the annex and slipped inside, carefully toeing off her shoes to avoid the scuffing and clicking noises to alert anyone to her presence, but only as an afterthought.

The way to the theater office was one she knew by heart. A few turns and half a dozen steps later, she found herself outside the office door, which was oddly enough slightly ajar.

She didn’t need to peek inside, already knowing who was in there. All she needed were voices, which would be easy enough to identify.

But by the time she eased in to listen, it was apparent their meeting was coming to an end. She wanted to curse herself for not making it out there faster. But then words were said that quickly caught her attention.

“…wants a second bite of the apple, does he?” General Clinton’s voice drifted to her ears as she leaned in closer. "I'm so far recovered I can walk with ease and expect to be on horseback soon. £10,000 shall be engaged for my services whether the contest be finished by sword or by treaty." It sounded as if he were reading off a script, perhaps correspondence of some sort?

“Hmm… he seems to be requesting a meeting in person.”

“This could be our chance,” John remarked.

“Or this could be a hoax,” General Clinton countered. “I don’t trust the man. Why contact us now? Did they not exonerate him?”

Exonerate him? Exonerate who? There was so much information lacking there. Abigail was doing her best to assemble the pieces of the puzzle she had been given. So far, nothing made any sense.

But still John persisted, “Yes, but read closer: ‘I took Ticonderoga. I triumphed at Saratoga. I defended myself at Middlebrook, yet still they deny me what I am owed.’”

There was an elongated pause before Clinton pointed out, “Middlebrook.”

“This is strictly about his finances now,” John remarked, “or lack thereof.”

“He defended himself at Middlebrook, yes, but not in battle. From court-martial.”

Recovered and can walk. Taking Ticonderoga. Triumphing at Saratoga. Court-martialed… exonerated. Being denied what was owed…
Abigail’s stomach plummeted. Could they… possibly be referring to… No, it couldn’t be.

Oh, yes it could be.

Benedict Arnold was a traitor.

But the exchange Andre and Clinton exchanged next was an even larger bombshell than the Arnold realization.

Clinton continued, the realization sounding clear as day in his voice. “An officer of Arnold’s rank must be tried by a jury of his peers. The only place to find that many generals would be the rebel camp itself.”

Oh, God. Did they really just…

“Washington’s at Middlebrook.”

Abigail remained immobile, hear heart caught in her throat as she overheard Clinton beginning to make preparations to launch a direct attack on Middlebrook. And John, bless him, advised that an attack on Washington’s camp was a dangerous venture, but Clinton could not be convinced.

“Washington will never see them coming,” Clinton remarked proudly. “Washington will never see Arnold coming.”

With her blood pounding in her ears, Abigail slipped out of the corridor and out of the annex, only pausing to retrieve her shoes. There was no time to wait to signal a meeting with Caleb. This information was far too important and dangerous to wait that long. So she did the only thing she could do.

Abigail needed to contact Robert Townsend.

Clinton was absolutely right. Washington would never see Arnold coming, nor would Ben nor Caleb or anyone back at the rebel camp. But there was one thing that Clinton hadn’t anticipated, something he had failed to consider.

Clinton would never see Abigail coming.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x08

See the end of the chapter for more notes

York City

Abigail was quick to write everything down from the charity auction the moment she slipped into the privacy of her room. She wrote down everything, as much as she could remember. Half-finished thoughts and messy scrawl covered the pages, hardly legible, but that was something she could sort out later. There was too much running through her mind that needed to be put down on paper, whether fully articulated or no.

The majority of the blame on her incomplete thoughts rested squarely on Arnold’s shoulders and his betrayal. Just the thought of his face rolled her stomach, but just picturing that very man feeding information to the British through Andre, serving as a redcoat in the guise of a Continental, that made her blood boil.

She knew better than anyone how much soldiers sacrificed. While many of the British army had several noblemen at their disposal and other prestigious backgrounds, several of the Continentals were farmers, merchants, craftsmen, many of whom did not possess the military training of their British counterparts, many who had sacrificed their livelihoods, uprooting themselves for a cause they desperately believed in. And to have someone who fought for these men, fought with these men, to turn his back on that and to put his needs and desires above theirs…

That… *codfish*!

Abigail dropped her quill back in its inkblot. Inhaling sharply, she ran her hands down her face and took a moment to breathe, to recollect herself before she sorted through her dozens of pages of notes and doing her best make sense of them.

Then she retrieved the invisible inkpot and another packet of papers to begin three versions of correspondence – a note warning of the British’s discovery of Washington’s camp, a leaflet of parchment with more organized notes of her observations from the evening, and of course a note warning of Arnold’s betrayal. The last was of course the shortest, but she could only go on what she had heard. And from what she overheard, the proof was damning.

Once the ink dried, she rolled each carefully and tucked them away out of sight. In the morning, she intended to visit Robert Townsend and hand deliver the notes to him herself, both of which she marked in a way that he would be able to readily identify.

The charity event notes could wait.

She suspected he would be highly suspicious, considering the last time she had visited his establishment had been over a year ago and as a man to boot. She already had a plan in the works for that one, choosing one of the code words from the Culper spy book to catch his attention. It was a risky maneuver, but the risk was necessary.
Unbeknownst to her, however, getting the information to Robert Townsend would be trickier than she would have anticipated, considering he had discovered Abe and Caleb’s plan to inspire his enlistment into Culper and had performed an about-face and never looked back.

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“Good morning, Mr. Townsend!” Abigail greeted Culper Jr.’s back as she approached the Townsend boardinghouse. She hadn’t set foot near the place since her last visit, when she had all but coerced Townsend into a temporary room and board in exchange for cleaning tables for him.

Sunrise had barely begun, casting the city in a orangish-grey looking glow. Shadows slowly peeked out from the darkness, providing a quiet protection from the growing glare of the rising sun.

The storekeeper turned around in a start, pausing when he spotted her. There was a flicker of recognition on his face, but as soon as he saw her approaching him, the recognition faded into a look of mild confusion. She had a sneaking suspicion why. “Good morning, madam,” he greeted her cautiously, as one would a stranger. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

What he meant to say was relatively clear, seeing as how his horse was tacked, saddled, and ready to go. It was a miracle she had caught him when she had.

“I just had to get a little fresh air, before the blue bloods deem to rise,” Abigail remarked, smiling a little when she noticed a reluctant upwards twitch of Townsend’s lips. Ah ha!

Then she added lightly, observing him closely, “Who knows when they’ll wake? Seven in the morning or in the afternoon at two or three.”

Townsend’s already stifled amusement dimmed a little. He caught on but wasn’t certain of what he heard.

Seven, two, or three. 723. His numbered code in Culper correspondence. She had been more than certain that would get his attention, but just in case, she had another option.

“Perhaps,” he remarked carefully, his faint smile having grown dim.

Abigail looked up at the surrounding buildings, an attempt at feigned nonchalance. “Though, I suspect all that sleep helps them in some respect. Sleep, food, and money. The holy trinity.” *Trinity*, her code word in Culper correspondence, or rather her alias’s code name. Everything was so complicated and covert, this spy business.

To be honest, Abigail hadn’t realized she had a code name at all until she had been rereading over the codebook Caleb had slipped into her hands after their first meeting in the theater office.

She’d stumbled across it when flipping through the pages when the word jumped out at her and latched onto her like a long lost relative. Almost like an inside joke between them over the years between them, it was a reference to when Ben had made some obscure comparison between herself and the Celtic triple goddess, the mother, the maiden, and the hag. At the time, she had believed he was calling her a hag and proceeded to throw the nearest available objects at him in return.

No sooner had the words left her mouth did Townsend cross the distance between them, grab her lightly by the arm, and all but hauled her inside.

“You’re one of them, aren’t you?” he demanded, brows furrowed.

She nodded imperceptibly.
“Who are you?”

“I can’t tell you that,” she replied. “Call me Trinity, if you’d like though.”

“Unbelievable,” Townsend muttered, incredulous. “You people are unbelievable.” He fixed her with a steely glare, which she found rather impressive. Weren’t Quakers supposed to be pacifists? “I thought I made myself perfectly clear last week. I’m done. With Culper. With all of it.”

It took everything Abigail had not to let her jaw drop to the ground in shock. First she’d heard of this, though that wasn’t surprising. Communication had been at a near standstill as of late. But allowing him to know this wouldn’t do anyone any good.

Instead, she said, “No one sent me. I came here of my own accord.” She pulled out one of the rolled up notes and held it out for him. “This is very important –”

“No,” Townsend cut her off. He shook his head firmly and raised his hand to silence her when she opened her mouth in protest. “No, I told you, like I told them. I’m done. I want no part in this.”

Abigail stared at him, hard. “You don’t realize, just,” she emphasized her words with a shake of her fist that held the note, “how vital this information is.”

He continued to shake his head. “It doesn’t matter.”

Baffled, she demanded, “‘It doesn’t matter’? How dare you! I –”

Townsend’s jaw clenched. “Yes, I do dare, when those… those thugs of yours rouged up my father and destroyed our home, just to inspire me to do my patriotic duty and join the ring. Those are the type of men I’m supposed to just lie in bed with?”

This new threw her for a loop. And it was obvious he realized her confusion as he gave a tired sigh. “I was in way over my head, and seeing the look on your face, I fear you’re in no better of a position than I.” He collected his coat and keys, placing his hat atop his head. “I suggest you get out while you can. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to see my father.”

Abigail went to argue but thought better of it. His determined locked jaw and steely gaze left no room for argument, and when his firm hand reached for her elbow once more, she yanked firmly out of his grip, giving him a look of complete and utter disappointment. His expression was carefully blank, making it difficult to read him.

Once outside, Townsend kept his back to her as he took his time locking the doors of the inn, a clear dismissal.

She looked at him and went to turn around when she noticed his horse, unattended.

Throwing a quick glance over her shoulder, to make sure his back was still towards her, Abigail slipped her note into his saddle bag, securely looping the leather strap back into its buckle. This way, at least no one could say she hadn’t tried.

“You’re making a mistake,” Abigail warned him softly as she turned around. “But it’s not too late to do the right thing.”

Or so she hoped.

It wasn’t until she saw him riding past her did Abigail realize she had only given him the one note.
And it wasn’t until she was once again alone in her quarters, holding up the invisible ink to the flame to read the unsent note, that she realized the Arnold note remained in her position.

All she could do was hope to get it to him upon his return. If Townsend was ever to return, that is.

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Middlebrook

Anna was sewing together a makeshift American flag when Ben approached her. Tired from a long night of no sleep, the brunette had been awoken early in the morning by one of the women in the camps. She was among a handful of women to begin working on stitching together flags out of fallen soldiers’ uniforms. The one she was currently working on when he approached was her second.

Seeing her at work and the state of cloth she was working with, the major asked, “What happened?”

Anna glanced up from her work and responded, “The standard bearer was shot. They used the colors as a tourniquet.”

“Where was this?”

She paused for a moment to recall the location of the incident. After a moment, the name of the town came back to her. “Franklin Township.”

A light of recognition sparked within him at the name, though she could never guess why. He had only recently discovered the name on happenstance. It was the name of the place where Ben and Abigail had stumbled across the cabin during the horrific rainstorm. The very cabin where he and Abigail…

“Ben, you all right?”

Slightly flustered, Ben met Anna’s concerned but mostly confused gaze and shook his head lightly, clearing his thoughts. “Yes. I’m fine. I… just hope it can be mended.

“I... I spoke with Washington about the ring.,” he continued, after another brief pause for silent self-correction. “And, well, he reminded me that we do still have two assets left to us in New York.”

“Abigail?” Anna smiled knowingly.

Ben narrowed his gazed playfully at the jest but chose to ignore it at the moment.

“I haven't heard from her since I sent Cicero back.”

“And, your Abigail?”

Mouth curving into an instinctive smile, both at Anna’s phrasing and the memory of the blonde’s face, Ben walked over and sat beside her. “We have our monthly meetings with her. Caleb’s set to visit her again at the end of the month. Though personally, I think a month is far too long.”

Anna observed his restlessness, the irritable bouncing of his knee, and was careful to hide her smile. She suspected she knew the reason for his dissatisfaction of the monthly meetings. It had nothing to do with Culper.

She was just about to ask before Ben turned the conversation back around to the topic at hand.

“I was thinking that perhaps it’s time you renewed your acquaintance, then. With your Abigail, I
Eyes widening briefly, Anna set her sewing needle down in her lap. She reclined back slowly so that her back pressed against a wooden post of the open-air wagon, one that had belonged to the late Mr. Sackett. “I have no way to contact her,” she pointed out.

“You could pay her a visit. A man we'd have to smuggle into the city. Caleb can make arrangements for you.”

“I… are you sure about this, Ben?” she asked, uncertain. “I’m not sure how much I can accomplish. If Abigail… if Cicero’s mother has decided to step back from the ring, what makes you think she’ll confide in me?”

“You’ve been a part of her life for many years,” Ben remarked kindly. He placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. “That’s not something that can go away so easily. And besides, I have the utmost confidence in you. But at the end of the day, it’s your decision.”

Anna took a moment to consider her options, but when she did, she realized there weren’t really any options to consider. How could she not do what was asked of her? She knew if things had gone differently with Major Hewlett and Mary Woodhull and their unexpected relationship that things could have worked out differently. Gaining a pass into the city was far less complicated than the arrangements Ben and Caleb would make for her, but perhaps, in the end, this was for the best.

“All right. I’ll do it,” she agreed. Seeing Ben’s relieved expression, she couldn’t help but smile. She picked up her needle to resume her stitching and then decided to remark innocently, “Is there anything you would like to pass along when I arrive?”

“Pass along?”

Anna hummed affirmatively, careful as the needle pierced the thick fabric. “And I wasn’t referring to agent 335.” Agent 335 being Cicero’s mother and Anna’s former servant.

She grinned when she caught a glimpse of Ben ducking his head with a soft huff of laughter, the telltale signs of a blossoming blush rising in his cheeks. He was completely and utterly besotted, and it was absolutely adorable. But this wasn’t unusual, considering how he and Abigail Williams had danced around each other for the better part of their lives. Christ, for all of their lives, really.

“A love token perhaps?” Anna teased, her grin widening as his blush deepened. “Though I’m sure you’ve already told her that by now.”

Ben remained silent, which only made her more curious. “You did tell her, didn’t you?” she asked. When he still didn’t respond, her playfulness gave way to dismay. “Ben…”

“She knows how I feel,” he spoke softly. He paused, brows furrowing thoughtfully. “At least, I think she does.”

“So you didn’t tell Abigail you love her.”

“…no?”

Anna sighed heavily, placing down her needlework. She reached for the nearest item at hand, which happened to be small but thick tome of some undisclosed history of something important, and whacked Ben over the head with it.
“Ow!” he exclaimed, wincing as he rubbed his head where Anna had struck him. “What the f…” he caught himself just short of cursing and quickly corrected himself.

“What the bloody hell was that for?” he demanded.

“A wake up call,” she remarked. She emphasized each of her points with a threatening shake of the book at him. “Never, ever assume things, especially when it comes to love. That’s where you men get in so much bloody trouble.”

“Did you really have to hit me with that though?” he grumbled. His scalp still stung from where she had struck him.

“Yes,” Anna answered firmly. “You better tell her the next time you see her, otherwise I’m going to hit you with something harder. And if you think I’m going to tell her on your behalf, then you have another thing coming.”

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York City

Abigail was stressed. It wasn’t an unfamiliar feeling, but in the past few days, stress felt like an old friend. She hadn’t heard anything from Townsend since she had caught him just before leaving town to visit his father. She had no idea if he found the letter she had shoved inside his saddlebag or if he had found it and thrown it away without reading its contents. As far as she had been aware, Culper had been running relatively smoothly, but judging from her meeting with Culper Jr., the ring was anything but.

With this in mind, the blonde had been quick to write a quick message to Caleb, requesting an earlier date for their next meeting as soon as he could manage. Desperate to get both the news of the British’s discovery of their base and Arnold’s treachery, she hoped her message would reach Caleb in time, and going through the proper channels, she knew her message was on its way to him.

But when nearly a week had passed, she received no response from Caleb, which was incredibly unusual for him. There must have been something incredibly important for him to not respond or at the very least receive the letter. But boy was this a horrible time for a lack of communication.

She had always suspected Benedict Arnold being a snake in the grass, and now she had proof of it. Although she had this proof in hand, she didn’t feel vindicated by having been proven right.

Situated in York City without seemingly any means to communicate with anyone from Culper, with no news of the Continentals to speak of, she felt like a bump on a log, completely and utterly useless. Thankfully, however, there were always patients for her to tend to. At least, in that capacity, she was helping someone, in some way, even if it wasn’t Culper related.

Abigail hadn’t seen much of John since the charity auction. Between new military developments in his position and her house calls, she rarely saw him, with the exception of the occasional quick breakfast or dinner here and there. It surprised her that, despite everything, despite the fact that they were on opposite sides, she missed his company. Of course, this made what she must do, reporting his activity back to Washington.

His confidence, however, Abigail couldn’t entirely reveal, mainly his relationship with Peggy Shippen. She couldn’t bring herself to betray them, either of them in fact, understanding their forced painful separation entirely too well.

This included Abby’s travels from York City to Philadelphia. It was far better for Peggy, Abigail
believed, to continue to have a friend in her than have that arrangement exposed. And for what purpose would that serve? So with very little guilt, she kept the entire arrangement to herself.

By the time she returned to the manor – she had nearly caught herself thinking ‘home’ but knew in her heart this place could never be home – dusk had cast the city in a warm, amber glow. Granted, she didn’t have as many house calls as she typically had, but the distance was far greater than what she was accustomed to.

Borrowing one of John’s horses, she had ridden out before first light so she could have enough time to fulfill each call, four in total of the day. While that might seem like a large workload, the severity of each case varied from patient to patient. It just so happened that each call just shy of severe, requiring each patient her undivided attention, so by the time she dismounted at the manor, she was more or less dead on her feet.

She passed off the grey gelding off to Cicero, who waited for her at the end of porch steps, and smiled tiredly at him.

“Safe travels, ma’am?” he asked politely, his lips twitching upwards when she gave overdramatic sigh.

“Long travels but safe, yes. Thank you, Cicero. Oh! Before I forget!” Abigail dug in her pockets until her fingers found the papery packaging of the decent size parcel and procured it for him. “The woman who makes all those wonderful baked goods offered me any sweet of my choosing, as payment for handling her husband’s gout.” Abigail placed it in his hands. “And I know how much you enjoy chocolate.”

Eyes wide, the boy stared at the parcel in his hands, holding it as if it were a precious treasure. “Thank you, Ms. Williams,” he murmured gratefully, his large grin more than a little infectious.

“And what did I tell you about that?” she asked playfully, tsing playfully. “It’s Elizabeth. Or at least here it is. And you’re welcome.” She pressed a quick, affectionate kiss against his forehead. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, perhaps I’ll lie on these steps for a little while. Not sure if I have the energy to make it to bed.”

She hadn’t taken three steps before Cicero called out to her, “Before you do that, m… Elizabeth. There’s someone waiting for you inside.”

Abigail turned and gazed at him cautiously. Hopefully not another patient surely. “Did they give you a name?”

“She didn’t have to. Mrs. Anna Strong is residing in the parlor, at least she was when I came out at the sound of your horse.”

The blonde stared at him, wondering if she had heard him correctly. What on earth could Anna Strong be doing in York City? Perhaps Cicero was mistaken…

No, she didn’t believe that for a second.

Well, fuck resting on the steps then.

She took them two by two as she rather inelegantly rushed up the porch and stumbled her way into the foyer before making a sharp left towards the parlor.

On the plush, small settee near the fireplace sat Anna Strong who seemed rather out of place in this large, ornate Loyalist space. Abigail wouldn’t have it any other way.
“So Cicero spoke the truth,” the blonde remarked, prompting Anna to look up sharply before smiling warmly. She met the other woman half way and embraced her fiercely. “I’ve got to say, I wasn’t expecting company. You just caught me coming back.”

“Cicero guessed it was you coming up the drive,” Anna replied, smile still intact when they parted. She took Abigail’s hands in hers. “It’s so good to see you again.”

“You, too. More than you know.” Rapidly blinking back happy tears that threatened to overflow, she asked, “To what do I owe the pleasure? I know it couldn’t have been easy to get into the city.”

“It wasn’t. Believe me. Somehow Caleb managed something. He always manages to do that, doesn’t he?”

Thinking of his and Abe’s handling of her divorce, Abigail found herself nodding in agreement.

Then they finally got to the purpose of Anna’s visit. She needed to touch base with Abby and see where she was considering Culper. The blonde was initially reluctant to discuss the other woman’s interests without her being there to defend herself, but she did notice how Abby had begun to distance herself from the spy ring and from the war altogether, at least from the few months she spent there.

It must have begun when Cicero had come to live with her thanks to John’s influence. Not that was something Abigail could fault her for. Any good mother wanted their children to be safe from harm. She knew without having to ask that Abby was less than happy with Cicero delivering messages through Caleb’s channel between the whaler and herself, but she hadn’t done anything to discourage him either, which made her standing with the ring even less clear.

When Anna inquired of Abby’s whereabouts, Abigail reported that she had been sent out on an errand for John and should be back at any time – of course, she didn’t mention that errand was in fact Peggy Shippen.

She wasn’t sure why she felt she had to hide that fact from Anna, the woman she had always considered a sister, but if she were being honest with herself, she knew the true reason why she didn’t.

It was something she had been considering for a few weeks now, something she was absolutely unwilling to run by the others in the ring, because she already knew how it would be received. A part of her was considering speaking with Abby herself, asking about Peggy’s impending marriage to Arnold. The woman couldn’t be happy with him. How could she be? No woman could be happy with a man like Benedict Arnold, but that was just Abigail’s personal opinion. So she couldn’t help but entertain the idea that maybe, just maybe, she could get Peggy to turn against Arnold and convince Andre to join the rebel cause.

Even thinking the thought in its entirety, it was clearly a stretch, but the risk was worth contemplating. John Andre was a good man. He was just on the wrong side.

But was that how John felt about turning Arnold?

Abigail couldn’t wrap her head around that one.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Abigail said once they were sitting on the settee. “There’s been some vital information I’ve been holding for little over a week now, but no one has been responding to my requests for meetings or correspondence. I tried speaking with Townsend, but he refused to speak with me. That didn’t stop me from stuffing the note in that saddlebag of his, though I have no idea if
he read it. And this is so incredibly important. It’s dangerous. I’m nearly at my wits’ end.”

Anna leaned in, concern clear across her face. “Tell me.”

And so Abigail told her of the British’s discovery of Washington’s base in Middlebrook, how she had overheard General Clinton discuss an ambush with John on the night of the charity auction.

She was just about to tell her how they had acquired this information when Anna was quick to assure her that her efforts of reaching Culper Jr. had paid off. She told her that Townsend had traveled to Setauket and had gotten in contact with Abe and Caleb just in time for Washington to move their camp base from Middlebrook before the British arrived. In fact, Ben had countered back with a plan to hit the British back stronger and recommended a map of attack to Stoney Point, which Washington had approved. Abigail’s heart swelled with pride.

Anna shared with her that the rebels were able to take the British by surprise and claimed victory at Stoney Point, where an American flag now flew over proudly. “I did overhear Ben say to Washington,” she concluded her narration, “that he believed it was one of their own generals that gave away the location of the camp.”

“It was!” Abigail exclaimed, forgetting herself completely. She practically leapt to her feet and spun around to face her, startling the brunette at her abrupt movement. “God, Anna. It was a general. And I know exactly who and how. I just don’t know why.”

“Who? If you know who it is, say it,” Anna insisted.

“Arnold,” Abigail replied without missing a beat, her posture tense. “Benedict Arnold. He’s the one who gave away the camp location. And I’m sure he has much worse intentions up his sleeves.”

Anna gawked at her. “Arnold. Are you certain?”

The blonde threw her hands in the air with exasperation before letting them fall back to her side. “I heard every single word between John and Clinton.” She proceeded to tell her exactly the context of their conversation, as much as she could remember, which was actually quite a lot considering that meeting had been haunting her thoughts for the past week. When she finished, she nodded grimly at Anna’s shell-shocked expression. “I intended to give the note to Townsend, too, but I only manage to send the one.”

“Do you have it now?” Anna asked breathlessly.

Abigail nodded. “I have it upstairs. I’ll get it for you before you go, the note and my notes from the charity auction so you can hand them to Caleb as soon as you can.”

Chapter End Notes

Guys, thank you so much for all of your comments, kudos, subs, and bookmarks! Your guys’ support really means so much to me! Your feedback inspires me to keep on writing! Keep letting me know what you think! I love hearing back from you <3
This chapter takes place during 3x09

See the end of the chapter for more notes

York City

Two Weeks Ago

With some inspiration from a conversation with John fresh on her mind, Abigail arrived at the apothecary with a deal in mind. Having spent the majority of her time traveling to tend to her patients, the British major had suggested why not set up shop in the city, to have a place where people can come to see her, those who were physically able.

Of course, she could still travel to those who desperately needed medical treatment but unable to make the journey, he reasoned, but those cases would be fewer in number, were she to have an established place of her own.

So, naturally, a partnership with the city’s apothecary seemed only fitting.

Dismounting her chestnut gelding, the blonde tied her mount to the hitching post but not before offering him a sugar cube she had smuggled away from the breakfast table. The young gelding devoured eagerly. Her heart ached at the thought of Cantor, who would have nearly devoured her hand to get that sugar cube. She wondered how her horse fared back in camp. More than likely giving the other soldiers hell. Hopefully, either Ben or Caleb managed to rein him in.

A small bell above the door jangled cheerfully as she stepped inside the building. Though small and minimalist in design, the apothecary supplied everything she could possibly need and desire: fresh herbs, both medicinal and non, mortars and pestles, surgical instruments, dental instruments, and several medical tomes she would love to peruse.

Several bottles of crafted medications sat neatly on the shelves, some for pain, some for alleviating fevers, and others for settling an upset stomach. Unfortunately, all were overpriced, which was why most healers would make their own, if not cramped for time. And patience.

The store keep was deep in conversation with another customer when she first stepped in, and seeing as that there were other people inside the small shop, she had feeling she would be there for a while. She wasn’t the most patient person in the world, but she had no choice but to wait.

“I don’t believe I’ve ever been,” the store keep’s conversation drifted to her ears as she bent towards the low level shelf to examine some herbs.

“It’s really lovely in the fall,” the customer at the counter remarked, “even after the standoff with the rebels a few years’ back. Setauket really is a lovely place, though small.”

Setauket, eh? Abigail walked over towards an adjacent shelf of forceps, edging stealthily towards the pair to hear the rest of their conversation.
“Now what would a fine city man like yourself be doing down there, Frank?” the store keeper jested, his arms folded along the counter. “Can’t find any York City women to your satisfaction so you prefer a countrywoman to slum around with?”

Abigail reached for a mortar and weighed it in her hands, contemplating if it was heavy enough to knock some sense into the apothecary owner. Unfortunately, she had possible business to discuss with him.

“No, nothing quite like that, but that would have been much preferred.” The customer named Frank sighed heavily, suddenly looking solemn. “I was there for a funeral. I think you might’ve known him. A doctor who traveled to many a city, but his home was in Setauket, the town’s pride and joy of a physician. Quite a fine man, too.”

“What happened to him?”

“Heart attack,” Frank reported grimly. “Though he wasn’t in the best of health, so that much wasn’t a surprise. But in the past few years, he had been doing relatively well. It was just the, ah, tragedy, many say, that pushed him over the edge.”

When he failed to elaborate any further, the store keep prodded, “Which was?”

The other man’s grimace deepened. “His daughter’s brutal murder in Dublin. When he heard the news, poor Thomas was overwhelmed with grief and fell into a heavy depression. Between you and I, that’s what killed him right there.”

“Christ.” The store keep sighed and performed a quick sign of the cross. “The loss of a child can do any parent in. What was his name? You said I’ve met him before?”

“I’m certain you have,” Frank replied. “His name was Thomas Williams.”

“And his daughter? The one that was murdered?”

“Abigail Hawkins.”

The marble mortar slipped from Abigail’s slack fingers and shattered pieces along the stone floor.

Both Frank and the store keep’s heads jerked in her direction, the latter’s face quickly turning red in fury. “You! You break something, you pay for it.”

Pale and shaken, the blonde nodded jerkily and jammed her hands in her dress pockets. With trembling fingers, she tried to pull out the appropriate change from her coin purse but couldn’t for the life of her make sense of the coins, so she decided to just leave the coin purse on the counter and left the apothecary without a word.

She couldn’t remember the ride back to John’s manor, but thankfully, her mount seemed a trusty guide. She hardly felt the wind whipping at her hair nor did she feel the cool, crisp promise of autumn air at her skin. There wasn’t anything on her mind beyond the knowledge that her father had passed. Her father has passed away, and she, his only living daughter, hadn’t attended his funeral.

And she was the one responsible for his early grave.

Jesus, she hadn’t even considered how the news of Iris’s death would travel back home, having been too caught up in her own world to consider the ramifications of that singular moment in time, that poor girl who had died in her stead at the hands of Lieutenant Gamble.
She hadn’t stop to think if word had reached her father.

Perhaps a part of her had assumed that Abraham would have informed him, but no, that wasn’t right. She couldn’t expect anyone to take the blame or assume such a responsibility. The fault lied squarely on her shoulders. And she felt absolutely wretched.

Thomas Williams, a pillar of the community, a kind and talented physician, and the most patient, loving, protective father a girl could ever ask for, was gone from this world, and Abigail had no one to blame but herself.

The manor soon came into view or at least the outlines of one. Tears blurred her vision and threatened to overflow, but she rapidly blinked them back, the tears burning in her eyes and her chest threatening to cave in from her aching sorrow. She dismounted the gelding and passed him off to Cicero or whoever had been standing in the drive waiting for her. She didn’t stick around to find out.

Not caring that she had left some of her equipment in her saddlebag, the blonde let herself inside, her chest heaving with effort to keep herself composed. But as soon as the door was closed, the tears fell, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Just like your father’s death, a cruel innermost thought hissed at her. She pressed her face against the door, making a poor attempt to stifle her sobs.

“Well, I wasn’t expecting to see you so soon…” John’s voice appeared, though trailing off the moment she turned around. His confused smile instantly transformed into a frown of concern. “Elizabeth, are you okay?”

Abigail shook her head furiously, tears rolling down her cheeks.

John took another step forward, his concern growing. He had never seen her so hysterical since the night she had first shown up on his doorstep months ago, so naturally his alarm was justified. “What happened? What’s wrong?”

And so she told him, as much of the truth as she could. Of course, she couldn’t tell him everything. That much she was capable of remembering, but in the moment, she couldn’t think of a clever enough lie to explain… this.

Instead, she told him, between choked sobs and trembling breaths, a close family friend had found her in the city and had informed her of the news of her father’s passing. Or what little she could get out.

The world seemed to slow down around her when he took her by the hand to guide her into the parlor. She tripped over her feet, which felt heavy and clumsy yet disconnected from the rest of her body. Nothing seemed real to her. She hardly registered the warmth of his hand on hers, his steadying, confident presence or even the murmurs of comfort coming from his mouth.

She cried so long and so hard that her eyes were red and puffy, her throw raw and scratchy. The last time she had cried in front of this man hadn’t felt like quite like this. Of course, her distress and emotions had been genuine, but there had been a layer of untruth to it, though it had been necessary.

Now, however, everything felt all too real, though she was having a difficult time wrapping her mind around it.

Her father was gone, and it was entirely her fault.

Abigail didn’t hear Abby come in until she heard the quiet murmurs exchanged between the other
woman and her employer.

“… see to it that Elizabeth is comfortable,” John spoke quietly. “I have some letters that need sending out before the day is done.” He rose to his feet and gently loosened his hands from her grip, which she hadn’t realized had tightened at his announced departure.

John smiled sadly as he took in her mildly confused, dazed expression. “There are some important people I’m meeting with today, so I should inform them of that I won’t be able to attend. I won’t be gone long.” He pressed her hands to his lips before departing for his study.

Sitting beside her, Abby ducked her head down and gazed at her sadly. “What Major Andre just told me… is it true, Elizabeth?”

Was it true? Those very words plagued her the duration of her ride from the apothecary. Abby’s spoken words unintentionally triggered a fresh waterfall of tears.

Abigail slowly met the other woman’s gaze, her chin trembling, unable to speak. She didn’t have to.

Abby blinked back her own tears and wrapped her arms around the blonde, holding her close. She had known Thomas Williams well. He often tended and treated to the slaves owned by the Strongs and continued to do so after they were freed by the British. There weren’t many physicians that thought taking slaves or former slaves as patients was necessary, but her father was no such physician. A person’s skin color or social standing made no difference to Thomas Williams. Everyone bled the same.

And now, that man was gone.

Was it really true?

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York City

Present

The weeks that passed since learning of her father’s passing had been one of the most difficult period of Abigail’s life. The days following after her return from the apothecary had been spent bedridden, unable to find the energy to function. The ache in her heart gradually had grown into a numbness she was unable to shake, but she wondered if she really wanted to.

Apart from John, Abby, and Cicero, she had no contact with the outside world. She had no desire to see anyone nor did she have the energy of keeping up false pretenses. Even correspondence with Caleb ceased. For the past few years, Culper and the revolution had consumed her life and world; now she dealt with the repercussions.

Memories of her father came and went in waves. All happy and warm and so absolutely painful it hurt to breathe. Her father’s smiling, proudly amused face as she defeated Abe in a race on horseback across their field at the age of nine. The careful, loving, and comforting touch as he took care of her when she had fallen ill. His warm, steady arm around hers as he had walked her down the aisle for her wedding, though they both had known the walk should have been towards somebody else. All those and more floated through her mind, which made it difficult to focus on anything else.

And so she had mourned her loss of a father so wonderful, so caring as Thomas Williams.

Everyone had been patient with her over those two weeks. John surprised her most of all. When he wasn’t in meetings with other officers, he remained at the manor with her, seeing to her every need
though she never once asked a thing from him. More than once she couldn’t help but think how Peggy Shippen was a lucky woman, although she was now married to that horrible creature that was Benedict Turncoat Arnold, making her Mrs. Peggy Arnold.

Though Mrs. Peggy Andre sounded much better to the ear.

As tempting as it was, Abigail knew she couldn’t allow herself to grieve in the confinement of her bedroom for much longer. It was an Herculean effort, but somehow, she managed to pull herself out of bed and prepare for the day. However, each and every task was like going through the motions, but at least she was out of bed.

After that first day away from her room, she was once again surprised by John when he arrived back to the manor with a little bundle in his hands. At her curious look, he grinned briefly before settling the bundle into her lap where she had been sat in his parlor, reading a random book procured from his study. Whatever was inside was wrapped in a soft, ivory cloth.

Abigail startled when the little bundle began to move. After another violent bustle, a tiny furry grey head popped out from the cloth, its blue eyes gazing up at her inquisitively. The blonde’s lips parted in a tiny “o” of amazement.

“I know this couldn’t possibly replace your father,” the British major remarked gently, “but I thought perhaps he would’ve liked for you to have a little furry companion. You’ve said he loved animals.”

“He did,” Abigail murmured, her fingers slowly inching closer towards the kitten’s tiny head. “He loved all animals. Cats were one of his favorites. Growing up, he had an orange Tabby cat who followed him everywhere. Her name was Lizzie.” She smiled as the little kitten began to purr, shimmmying closer so she could scratch him behind the ear. “I think he named me after her.” Her middle name, anyway.

“Named after a cat,” John murmured. He smiled. “I suppose there are worse ways to be named.”

“Certainly,” she agreed. A giggle tumbled past her lips, startling her a bit, as the kitten bravely stepped out of its comfy cocoon to explore her lap. Its little paws kneaded her thigh, almost as if she were bread dough, before the furry creature nudged her hand for another scratch.

It wasn’t until John leaned forward to pet the tiny thing did she notice his attire. For once, he wasn’t in his British officer uniform. Instead, he was dressed in a dark wool looking jacket, buttoned up over an equally dark shirt and trouser, a hat in his hand.

“Are you going someplace?” she asked stupidly and felt some color rush back into her cheeks at the obviousness of her question.

“Ah,” he said, looking down at himself. “Yes, I am. I have business up river, and I’m running a bit late for my boat. I just wanted to make sure to get this little guy to before I left.”

“It’s a boy?”

“I’m not sure. I’m only hazarding a guess.”

Abigail smiled before frowning. “You’re leaving. To where?”

John’s smile faltered apologetically. “I’m not at liberty to say, but more than likely I’ll be back by tomorrow. You’ll hardly notice I’m gone.”

If he was traveling by ship, how could he possibly return by tomorrow that quickly, she found
herself wondering. What sort of military operation could provide such prompt service?

*A covert one*, she thought but said nothing more.

“I wish you safe travels, major,” she replied and rose to her feet but only after making sure the kitten was securely in her hands. The kitten nipped eagerly at the material of her dress neckline, but she didn’t mind. “Perhaps we’ll have this little fella named by the time of your return. I should ask Cicero. He’s a clever lad.”

They embraced but only briefly. The squirming kitten at her breast made it difficult for the hug to last longer than a heartbeat.

John pressed a kiss to the top of her head and wished her well before making his way towards the door. He made another promising he would see her soon and stepped out into the street, closing the door behind him.

Abigail watched him go from the window, with the little grey kitten snuggled in her arms. She accepted his words, but for some reason, she couldn’t help the feeling he wouldn’t be coming back.

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*West Point*

“Christ! There you are! What took you so long?” Caleb exclaimed, drawing Tobias’s attention towards the woods.

Anna Strong dismounted her steed, giving the young mare a gentle pat before leveling the whaler with an unimpressed look. “You try being a woman traveling alone at night. It would take you a while journeying back yourself.”

While Caleb’s connections had made it easy getting into the city, they certainly hadn’t been much help on her way out. Whenever she discovered lodging, she had rested there, making sure she hadn’t been followed before continuing her journey back to West Point. That and the fact she didn’t trust the roads at night any longer, which only made stopping at inns her smartest option.

But she wasn’t about to convince Caleb of that, not when she had vital intelligence burning a hole in her pocket.

“I need to speak with you privately.” She looked from Caleb to Tobias. “Both of you. Now.”

Once they relocated to a more remote location, Anna confided in them, “I spoke with both Abigails, and both of them confirmed the same thing. Benedict Arnold is a traitor.”

Both men stared at her in shock. Tobias was the first to speak. “And you have proof of this.”

Anna pulled out the note from the blonde and handed it to him. She knew he would recognize his ex-wife’s handwriting. “She wrote this the very night she overheard Andre and Clinton discussing Arnold’s terms.”

“Terms of what?”

“Of what he believes he’s owed,” she remarked disdainfully. She looked at Caleb and pointed to the note. “Abigail claims to have overheard Andre reading Arnold’s letter to him aloud, telling how Washington and the Continentals have mistreated him, including how he was court-martialed in Middle brook. Middle Brook. He gave away the camp’s location to the British! It was him!”
“And you’re absolutely certain?”

Anna’s eyes narrowed. “Are you doubting my word?”

“Absolutely not! We just need to be completely certain of this,” the man insisted. “Because accusing one of Washington’s top generals of being a traitor, without proof, can be dangerous.”

She pointed at the paper again. “This is our proof. That and our women in New York. One has overheard a conversation between their head of intelligence and their commander in chief. Plus, Cicero was able to fill in the blanks of how this was accomplished. Arnold is definitely a traitor.”

“That fucking weaselly snake!” Caleb cursed. He ignored Tobias’s look of mild admonishment. They were beyond such social niceties now. “We have to get this note to Ben. Now.”

“Is he with Washington?” she asked.

Caleb shrugged. “Beats me, but if he is, all the better. Kills two birds with one stone.” He grimaced. “Poor choice of words.”

“Probably,” Anna remarked dryly after giving him a look.

She prepared to follow Caleb when Tobias caught her gently by the arm. When she looked up at him, he inquired after a moment of hesitation, “Anna, I have to know. Is she… how did she look?”

The last time Tobias had seen Abigail she had been a bruised and battered mess. In spite of everything that had happened, of course he still cared for her, deeply. It was clear from the look in his eyes that he still loved her.

Anna smiled kindly. “Better than before. She almost looked like her old self.” Before the war went unsaid.

Tobias nodded, smiling softly. “Good. That’s… very good.” He took a step to follow Caleb, who was already mounting a borrowed horse but then asked, “Is she happy, Anna?”

The brunette’s heart went out to him. She wasn’t sure how to respond. But thankfully she didn’t have to.

“Come on, you Greek god looking bastard!” Caleb called out to him as he turned his horse around impatiently.

Anna quickly passed her horse to Tobias, who expertly mounted without a moment to lose. She barely had time to move out of his way before both men were off.

Chapter End Notes

Guys, words cannot express how much I appreciate all of your feedback! It means the world to me to know that you’re enjoying this fic. Again, thank you for all of your comments, kudos, bookmarks, and subs! <33333
This chapter takes place during 3x09. Some of the dialogue in the beginning comes from the episode itself, but it helps keep the story moving along.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

West Point

When the news reached him of the skinners’ capture, Ben immediately set off towards where their captive was currently being held, completely unaware of Caleb and Tobias tracking him down.

Dismounting his horse, he removed his major’s hat while nodding to a fellow soldier. “I’m looking for Colonel Jameson.”

The soldier pointed him in the direction of a cabin more than half a dozen steps beyond him. Ben nodded his thanks and handed the reins to him before heading in that very direction. One of men he presumed to be a Skinner asked if he had their money, but he continued walking, pointedly ignoring the crooked man’s greedy glare, though he did notice the boots the man sported. For a Skinner, he seemed to have expensive taste. And where could he have possibly afford such high quality boots?

He found a man awaiting him outside the cabin and greeted him. “Ah, is that the colonel’s morning report?”

The courier nodded with a smile, tucking the envelope inside his coat pocket. “Yes, sir. Bound for West Point.”

Ben murmured, “Right. Bit of a wasted trip.”

“Sir?”

He shook his head. “No, nothing. Carry on. I’ll speak to the man himself.”

The first thing Ben saw when he stepped inside the cabin was the towering form standing in front of the colonel’s desk, leaning over to make some sort of maneuver atop his desk. It took him half a second that the two men were playing a round of checkers, and Jameson’s visitor had just captured his king.

“Colonel Jameson?” Ben inquired, breaking the odd scene before him.

The colonel, sat at his desk, lifted his gaze as well as a questioning brow. “Yes?”

“I’m Major Benjamin Tallmadge, General Washington’s staff,” he introduced himself. Recognition sparked across Jameson’s face, and he was already rising to his feet as he continued, “His Excellency sent me to inquire about what happened here last night.”

The visitor stepped aside to grant Ben more room to enter, since the cabin was no more than one room and a quarter at best. The young major gave him a small nod of acknowledge, but the man just observed him quietly, curiously even. There was something about the way he was looking at him
that Ben couldn’t help but wonder…

“Oh, nothing much. Enemy ship got a little cocky. She turned tail after a few shots. It's all in my report.” Jameson appeared to be a man of thirty, perhaps less. Younger than most, he was eager to prove himself to be capable of his position, which Ben couldn’t hold against him. Then the young colonel turned his attention towards their visitor, and Ben couldn’t help but do the same. “Some Skinners brought this gentleman here a few hours ago. Said he was a spy, but he had a pass from General Arnold, which they couldn’t read.”

The visitor remarked modestly, “A misunderstanding.”

“Yes, of course,” Ben returned carefully, polite smile in place. He gave the man brief onceover, observing his state of dress – dark and plain, typical of any traveler he supposed. But what was atypical were the man’s missing shoes.

For some reason, he thought of the skinner he’d encountered on his arrival and his expensive boots. That’s when it all began to come together. “Colonel Jameson, might I have a word?”

The colonel acquired and followed him outside. Once a reasonable distance away from the colonel’s unofficial office, Ben turned and posed him compelling question. “You say that man was just brought in by these Skinners here with whom you’re acquainted?”

“Unfortunately,” the colonel nodded, the corners tipping into a small frown.

“And did he come in without any shoes?”

Jameson shook his head. “He didn’t have any, no.”

Dread growing in the pit of his stomach, Ben pressed further, “And you didn’t find that odd? Or perhaps more curious than one of our Skinners wearing a pair of royal officer's boots?” He could see that a light was coming on inside Jameson’s mind, a slow and dim one perhaps but a light nonetheless. Ben lifted his chin towards the cabin. “What’s his name in there?”

“Uh... Anderson. John Anderson,” Jameson remarked after brief startled pause. Then almost like a sudden spark of a match, he realized just where Ben was getting at. “I should add he had plans of West Point on his person.”

“What?” Ben demanded, eyes widening.

The colonel nodded urgently and procured the items from his coat and presented it to him. “Yes, but, see, they were in General Arnold's handwriting.

Ben’s dread only increased when he held the papers in his hands. These were legitimate plans, which were in fact Arnold’s own handwriting. “And you only thought to mention this now?”

Jameson drew himself upright, indignant at the implication of incompetence. “Of course not. It's all in my report to General Arnold.”

Before he could hear anything, he heard a loud familiar shout come from behind him, along with a thundering of horse hooves. Spinning around, he saw that both Caleb and Tobias were making a rapid approach, with Caleb frantically flagging him down as soon as he spotted him.

Quickly, Ben turned to Jameson and ordered him to keep a firm hold on the man inside that cabin, that there was some mischief afoot and more than certain treachery. “That man is not who he claims to be. Hold him. And if he runs, hunt him down and bring him back here.”
Before the colonel could stutter out his compliance, the young major turned on his heel and made a mad dash on foot to meet Caleb half way.

When he was within shouting distance, the whaler called, “Bloody bastard. You’re never where you say you are. Took us a good deal of time to find you. And we don’t have a bloody lot of it.”

“What is it?” Ben demanded, nearly out of breath by the time the three men met each other.

Tobias frowned deeply. “We’ve just received news from Williams in York City via Anna. News that Washington needs to hear, now.”

Before Tobias could finish, Caleb was quick to cut him off, “Arnold’s a bloody fucking traitor. And we have proof.”

Ben exhaled sharply, his suspicions finally been proven. “More proof than you can possibly know. There’s a man who has plans of West Point on him in Arnold’s hand…” He trailed off as a thought struck him. “And there’s been a soldier sent to deliver Arnold a message of it.”

“What?!” Caleb yelped and Tobias cursed.

“We need to cut him off before he escapes.” Taking back his mount, Ben led the charge through the woods and towards the river, kicking his mare into a furious gallop. Nothing else besides Arnold’s treasonous face was on his mind, and he was determined to bring this traitor to justice.

Soon enough the river came into view but more importantly was Arnold boarding into a boat. His fucking safety net, he swore inwardly and urged his mare on even faster.

Realizing they would never be able to reach the dock in time, he grabbed his revolver from his holster.

From somewhere behind him, Caleb must have seen what he was doing and knew what he intended to do. “Think you can reach him?” he heard him shout.

“I’m going to bloody well try!” Ben shouted back before bringing his mare up short, nearly at the water’s edge.

Cocking his revolver, he aimed for the standing figure inside the rowing boat, aiming for the man who he had once deeply admired and had nearly abandoned his post with Culper based on the other man’s opinion on the matter. All the admiration Ben felt for him left him the moment he had held Arnold’s West Point plans taken from the spy in his hands.

And really could he allow himself to put so much faith into the words of a traitor?

With a steady arm, Ben waited as the boat came within the perfect shot. For the briefest of moments, he could have sworn Arnold had seen him, but refused to allow himself to become distracted by the thought. But then suddenly the disgraced general turned inside the small boat and faced him, his shoulders slumped and tired. There was no pride left in him, at least from what he could observe from such a distance.

And when the boat finally was in range, Ben knew that he had him. Better yet, Arnold knew that he had him but did nothing to stop him. That was what disturbed the major the most, which caused him to hesitate, for longer than he should have dared.

When he finally fired, however, he knew he waited too long and missed him within an inch, maybe more. He cursed colorfully but lowered his weapon. He knew he could easily take another shot and...
strike him down, but a part of him knew that wasn’t the way. Arnold didn’t deserve a bullet on the water.

Arnold deserved a noose around his neck.  

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York City

A day had come and gone, yet John Andre had not returned. Abigail did her best not to worry. Someone in her position really should not have been worried. He was the enemy on whom she was sent to spy. What difference did his safety make? To her, it meant a great deal. Despite everything, the different sides of the war they both were on, she valued his friendship and worried for him all the same, just as she would for her other friends.

The kitten provided a great deal of comfort more than what she thought. She had yet to name him and left the task up to Cicero, who had been more than delighted to receive the honor. The boy continued to pour through the books he could read, searching for inspiration for a proper name. He didn’t really like the name Abigail had come up with. Apparently, Mr. Whiskers was a little too on the nose.

The furry little creature gave her a reason to leave her bed in the morning. She was responsible for a life other than her own, one that was so incredibly tiny that he could fit in one hand easily. The morning after John had left for his trip, she had awakened to a fuzzy nuzzling against her face. Opening her eyes, she then discovered the source of the nuzzling and found much to her amazement the kitten had somehow shimmied up the quilt and ended up in her bed, its little face peering at her expectantly. More than likely expecting food.

In a day and a half, little mister no name had eased her into a routine. Food, play, cuddle, food, cuddle, sleep. Abby and Cicero often took breaks from their duties to play with the kitten, who had quickly bonded with Cicero. Abigail even suggested that he carry the little thing in his pocket when he went upstairs to finish his tasks. Cicero’s smile was so large it nearly split his face.

The moments of solitude were few and far between. Abby and Cicero took turns approaching her, no matter the time or room she was in. Abby made polite inquiries about progress with her patients, while Cicero showed off the little kitten and bounce off ideas for names to her.

As sweet and kind as they were, Abigail knew exactly what they were doing. They were checking in on her, making sure she wasn’t a complete and utter wreck. Outwardly, she knew she looked rather composed, which made it all the easier to insist that she was fine. But she knew the truth, far too much to even consider lying to herself.

She was not all right. Not even in the same room as being all right.

It was true. In terms of coping with grief in the vaguest terms, she was doing better than she had been a few weeks ago. She was up and around, assisting in tasks which no one asked her to help with, but at the same time she hadn’t once set foot outside the manor. She groomed and dressed herself well enough, but it took much more effort and energy than she seemed capable of. But the death of her father still weighed heavily on her heart and mind. She wasn’t sure when she would ever return to herself. Or if she could.

There was too much guilt coupled with the grief. Just knowing that news of her death had advanced his ill health that led to his death, it was enough to break her. When she had first learned the news, it had, without a doubt. Yet somehow, as the days went by, she managed to make it through the day
without crying. Sometimes, she couldn’t do anything but.

She knew what her father would say. He would say people dealt with grief in their own way. There was no definitive way for a person to handle it; you have to let it be, run its course. Thomas Williams would have also gently absolve her of any and all guilt. And that, that was the one thought she could not get past. Because it wasn’t true. Not that he wouldn’t say it, but the fact it wasn’t her fault. Of course it was. That was the one thing she consistently believed.

In her moments of weakness, Abigail missed her friends desperately. She loved Abby and Cicero, but she missed Anna’s comfort, Caleb’s humor, Abe’s hugs, and Ben…

Christ, she missed Ben.

Even Tobias, although she hardly deserved to. In her heart, she knew she still loved him. She never would have married him if she hadn’t loved Tobias, but it was a far cry from what she felt for Ben. She had fallen for Tobias, but she had never unfallen for Ben, which had been the downfall of her marriage. That and she could no longer lie to him or herself.

Yet another reason to add to her guilt.

Wiping furiously at her cheek, Abigail abandoned a book she had tried to read and buried her face in her hands. Her emotions changed from day-to-day. One day she felt almost perfectly fine and the next, she wasn’t sure she could make it to the next day. Today was shaping up to be the latter.

A gentle tugging at her skirts vaguely caught her attention, but she couldn’t bring herself to check. It wasn’t until she heard a loud tear did the blonde lifted her face and pull at her skirts, where she discovered the kitten currently resided. The tiny fur ball was off the ground and buried in her skirts, his tiny claws caught in her skirts, which effectively rendered him stuck. He gazed up at her helplessly.

The sight was so pitiful Abigail choked on a light laugh and bent to untangle the little creature. She drew him into her lap.

“Are you checking on me now, too?” she murmured. She ran her fingers behind the kitten’s ears. He shut his eyes contentedly, purring softly. So that was a yes, then.

She nuzzled her little knight in furry armor close and took a long, painful breath. That was the only thing she could do. No thinking, no crying, no falling apart.

All she could do was breathe.

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West Point

Ben stormed into Washington’s tent without so much as waiting to hear Billy’s remarks, with Caleb and Tobias in tow. Billy stood there, all but gawking at their sudden presence. General Washington looked up sharply from his desk, rising quickly to his feet. He knew they were breaking protocol and normally they wouldn’t do this, but there was a sense of urgency in the air that the commander-in-chief immediately picked up on.

“Tell me,” Washington demanded.

And so the major did, starting with the man who they know held captive and how camp plans in Arnold’s handwriting had been found on him. Seeing the disbelief on the general’s face, Caleb was
quick to interject further damning evidence, citing Abigail’s message of overhearing John Andre and General Clinton discussion of Arnold, which apparently had been quite a prolonged period of correspondence from the sounds of it. Tobias then handed Abigail’s notes to Washington as proof.

The commander-in-chief took all of this in with a carefully concealed expression, but from just one look in his eyes, one could see a storm brewing within him. “This man, this spy has been captured, but what of Arnold?”

“Someone helped him escape just as we were riding to confront him, sir,” Tobias remarked. “By the time we arrived, it was too late. He was too far out of reach.”

Not quite out of shooting reach, however. Ben was more than a little surprised how quickly the other man had covered for him. With Washington’s gaze once more locked on Abigail’s letter, Ben risked a quick glance at Tobias, who subtly shook his head. Leave it be, was the clear message behind it.

“I want every available man to scour the woods for him,” Washington demanded after a prolonged, uncomfortable silence. The note in his hand crumpled as he drew a fist. “Every man who’s not in camp not assigned to a determinantal task I want out looking for him. I want him found and brought back. Preferably alive. Justice will be served, sirs.”

Washington stormed out of his tent without so much as a dismissal or any other kind of acknowledgment. More than likely he was going to consult with the other generals, to alert them of Arnold’s treachery. Ben quickly followed suit, assembling a group of as many men as he could and began pairing them for their patrol assignments, reminding them that no matter how tempted they were, they needed to bring the traitor back alive.

The majority of the men were tasked with hunting down Arnold and whoever helped him escape, but Ben had plans for handful of soldiers separate from these men. He wanted to make sure that none of these men hunting for Arnold were sympathetic to the traitor’s plight, but if they were, he would have eyes and ears among them to report back to Ben himself, preferably with the offender captured. And he knew just the man for the job.

Pulling Tobias aside, the major presented him with his plan and watched carefully of the other man’s reaction. Tobias’s expression was considering and open as he described his intentions, and once he was done, he nodded in approval. “I like it. It’s a smart plan. One that could easily sort out the weasels among the rest.”

Ben half expected a smart retort, a jibe at his own expense, but was amazed to realize there was none. He was quick to cover his surprise, almost wondering if that had been Tobias’s intention, to throw him off, but there was no time for suspicions now. He thanked him and told him to take only as many men as he could trust.

The other man listed roughly ten men he thought to be considering trustworthy, with roughly half being more worth of trust than the rest. He would than pair them one from each category, which should make their plan more likely to work. Whatever remained, he would patrol the exteriors himself, just in case they had any potential runners.

It was the first time the two men had actually spoken without nearly coming to blows, a sign Ben found merciful. However, he did not mistake this sign for progress. Thankfully, no matter how much animosity lied between them and how the years have only worsened it, Ben and Tobias had found a way to work together, to achieve a common goal.

He nodded gratefully towards him just as Tobias turned to seek out his ten men. Just for a moment, Ben could have sworn he caught a glimpse of the friend he used to know.
Tobias recruited his ten men with little resistance and soon found himself urging his mount into a fast-paced trot into the woods. Each pair went off to in the directions of different scouting groups, while himself and two other soldiers rode off to check the parameters.

They kept as close to the Hudson River as possible, knowing that was the route Arnold and his helper had taken. But was it possible they had mounts waiting for them at a certain point? Just how many men had Arnold influenced with his treachery? That would be impossible to know until they caught the bastard.

New York resided approximately sixty miles south of West Point, York City being one of the few Torey majority cities within a somewhat reasonable distance. It would only make sense for Arnold to go there. Better to go to a place where he knew he would have friends, rather than risk traveling anywhere else. It minimized the risk, but even Arnold couldn’t possibly know what he was getting himself into.

Having spent several years undercover in the British army, Tobias knew better than anyone how the British operated. Even if Arnold joined their ranks, they would never accept him. An informer was one thing but a turncoat was something different entirely. Turncoats were rarely welcomed and were most often considered traitors. That was the one thing that both the rebels and the British could agree on.

And just knowing that Arnold was riding straight into the very city where Abigail resided only pushed Tobias to urge his mount even faster.

One of the soldiers commented they were going against Ben’s orders – to observe the men and report back to him and nothing more – Tobias just ignored him and carried on. Whether he wanted to admit it or not, he respected Ben’s authority as a major, but if there was the slightest chance that Abigail could ever be in danger, he would ignore that authority gladly.

The group couldn’t have been more than twenty, perhaps twenty-five miles at most, away from West Point when dusk crept steadily upon them. Having spent near a good portion of the day nearly going around in circles around West Point, they had finally managed to head down south towards New York, pausing only to allow their panting horses a small reprieve.

However, that mistake would cost them.

No sooner had they dismounted did Tobias rustling of leaves behind them. Up until that moment, the woods had been relatively quiet, too quiet for his liking. And now he was hearing rustling leaves.

As if sensing his unease, of his companions remarked, “Could be a squirrel, most likely. Think we can grab the little bugger for stew to bring back to camp?”

Tobias was too tense to snort. He looked around them warily, surveying the trees and bushes as his hand rested on his pistol. Another rustling came from the trees, this time from the opposite end. “That was must be one huge fucking squirrel to make all that noise.”

The two soldiers began talking amongst themselves, about squirrel stew of all things, when Tobias could have sworn he heard something. Shushing them with a stern finger to his lips, he withdrew his weapon and held it out in front of him. Why the others hadn’t thought to do the same was beyond him. Perhaps he should have considered more than trustworthiness when making his choice of riders.

But before he could even bring his hand to the level of his eyes, flashes of green and grey and maybe
plaid descended upon them. Tobias jerked back with a start. Queen’s Rangers. Of bloody course it was! He hadn’t had the pleasure of associating with them back when he had been with the redcoats, but he wouldn’t put it past them to know who he was. Better to shoot first and ask questions later, which was promptly what he did.

He aimed for the one charging directly at him, shooting him right in the chest. The ranger stumbled back with a grunt, but appallingly, that didn’t appear to slow him down. Without a second thought, Tobias aimed lower and shot him in the kneecap, relieved when that finally brought him to the ground, if not for the moment.

Turning around sharply, he witnessed just in time as another Queen’s Ranger crept up behind of his other soldiers and shoved a blade into his neck. The soldier gasped sharply, struggling against his hold, but his fight was futile. As soon as the blade emerged from his neck, the soldier fell to the ground in a heap, his gasps wet and heavy amongst the chaos.

Tobias heard another gunshot but was unable to turn around, to see if it had been his other man that had been hit or one of theirs. He was preparing to shoot at another one when he felt strong, restricting arms wrapping around his stomach, pinning his arms to his side and forcing him to drop his pistol.

He struggled against his captor with the viciousness an angry wolf, doing everything he could possibly do under such restrictions. His captor squeezed him even harder, his grip turning viper, and at once he stopped, struggling for breath.

“Easy, Jones. Don’t want to suffocate the fucking traitor before we can talk.” said the one Tobias shot twice, pushing himself to his feet with a noticeable wince. That was satisfying at least. Nodding towards someone towards his left, he added, “On his knees.”

Suddenly the pressure from his middle was gone, only to be replaced by two viper-like grasps on each shoulder, slamming his knees down into the hard earth. Tobias grunted from the impact. “I think you know why this is happening. Don’t ya, mate?” the ranger asked, tilting his head with a less than cheerful smile. The very blade in his hand was stained with red, the one that had been used on one of Tobias. If only he could have remembered the poor man’s name.

“It’s gonna happen. Don’t you worry. I just have one important question for you before we get on to it.” Grunting with the effort, the stout ranger squatted down so he could maintain eye level, or perhaps make sure he was the last face Tobias ever saw before. “We heard about your little prison break several months back, how you helped a person of interest escape Lieutenant Gamble’s custody.” He pressed the blade against Tobias’s throat, his eyes glimmering with malice. “And how you and this person murdered Gamble and his associates in cold blood.”

Pinpricks of pain shot through Tobias’s arms from where the two unseen rangers were holding him down. He could only imagine how little effort it would be for them to snap his arms from his body. But the pain kept him steady, despite the rangers’ intentions.

“What I want to know, what I’m sure my friends would like to know,” the ranger with the knife began and leaned in close, “is where you’ve smuggled your little friend.”

Tobias pressed his lips together firmly. He refused to make a sound, even as the lead ranger pressed the blade further into his neck, drawing a thin trickle of blood.

Without glancing up from his work, the lead ranger asked one of his friends for confirmation, “Thomas Williams. Is that the name?”
“I believe so,” came a gruff reply from above. “Or at least an alias.”

Tobias felt as if he had been doused in cold water, his fear chilling him to the bone, but he did his best not to allow it to show. One small move, one little show of fear would give them more ammunition, even if they would never get a confession from him.

But there must have been something in his eyes, because the ranger before him suddenly looked intrigued by the idea. “An alias? Why, that’s interesting, but what’s more interesting, is what I just saw in your eyes.” A slow grin touched his bearded face. “I think he knows something, fellas.”

“And I think you’re just delusional,” Tobias spat out, desperate to end this once and for all and to keep them as far from Abigail as he possibly could. “You know I’m not going to talk, so you might as well get on with it.”

The lead ranger chuckled. “Brave, insolent boy you are, aren’t you? Ah, well. The job was never to interrogate you. The job was to kill you, which I will do. I am a man of my word after all.” Rocking himself on the back of his heels, the ranger pushed himself to his feet, slowly and not without effort. “Foolish of me to think a traitor would be accommodating.

Suddenly, Tobias’s head was jerked back, and he was met with a sharp, angular faced ranger, who couldn’t have been older than thirty-five. He grinned terribly down at him. “And don’t you worry. We’ll get your little friend. We’re very fucking good at our jobs, tracking and hits.”

“This is for Lieutenant Gamble and the others.”

Tobias glared defiantly. “Go fuck yours –”

But his throat was slit before he could finish his threat. Gasping wetly, he struggled against them, bucking against their grip until the lead Queen ranger sighed in annoyance and shoved his blade through his chest. He only withdrew once Tobias crumbled to the ground, unmoving and breathless.

“Now that’s a way to go,” the sharp faced one murmured, impressed.

The lead ranger gave him an incredulous look wiping his blade clean. “Getting your throat slashed? If you’ve suddenly taken a fancy, I can better acquaint you with mine.”

“Nah. Telling us to go fuck ourselves.” He grinned in amusement. “Now those are some good final words for a man.”

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun dun! What will happen next?!

Thank you guys so much for your continued support! It means so much to me that you all are still enjoying this story, so far down the line! I adore each and every one of you! Please keep letting me know what you think, even if you're mad at me! I can take it ;)
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 3x10

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

West Point

Not long after Ben had finished sending out men out in search of Arnold did Washington summon him back. With the incorporation of Colonel Alexander Hamilton’s presence, the commander-in-chief along with his two officers entered his tent, awaiting the arrival of their prisoner, British major and head of intelligence Major John André.

The questioning of André took a considerable amount of time, with each man posing questions to their prisoner as it pertained to Benedict Arnold’s treason. André answered each and every one of their questions patiently and honestly. He knew the likely outcome of his position and handled it with honor and dignity. Ben imagined not many men in his place would act similarly.

When André gave them all they needed to know and asked if they had any other questions, Ben couldn’t stop himself from answering, “Sir, regarding sources and contacts…”

Washington intercepted him with an imperceptible shake of his head. “Not today.”

After a moment, Major André asked respectfully, “Then may I trouble you for a request, sir?”

Washington nodded in kind. “Of course.”

“May my servant be cleared to visit from New York and bring with her a fresh uniform so that I may stand trial properly as a soldier?”

The commander-in-chief found the request reasonable and looked to the colonel across from him. “Colonel Hamilton will see to it.”

André’s smile was faint but appreciative. “Thank you, sir.” He took a brief pause, collecting himself before he continued, “I fully expect the tribunal to find me guilty and to recommend my execution. I beg of you to allow that sentence to be carried out by firing line, rather than the gallows. One is a fate befitting an officer, and the other is meant for a spy. I am an officer, dedicated to service and stained with no action that can give me cause for remorse. I wish the mode of my death to reflect this.”

The request wasn’t unreasonable, but the decision was ultimately Washington’s. Whether or not the tribunal found him guilty, which most likely they would, the mode of execution rested on his shoulders, not theirs. They could only recommend, not enforce. If he were in Washington’s shoes, Ben had no inclination of which way he would lean, but if he were ever in Major André’s, he would have liked to hope he could accept his fate with such dignity.

“I will consider it,” was Washington’s response after another brief silence.

The flicker of disappointment was quickly replaced with resignation as André nodded, realizing he would receive no better answer than that. “Thank you, sir.”
Once the questioning ceased, Hamilton led the guards to escort André back to his holding cell, which was actually a tent serving as a testament of André’s cooperation and officer rank.

Ben, however, remained behind. “General Washington, may I have a moment of your time?”

Washington agreed and motioned for him to take the seat across from him, which he did so gratefully.

“I have a proposal for you,” Ben began, his hands folded firmly in front of him. “It could prove a risk, but I very well can’t remain silent, not if it can benefit the Cause.” And not while a man’s life was at stake either.

That appeared to capture Washington’s attention. “Continue, please.”

“What if we made André an offer? One that he can’t possibly refuse, especially at this stage.” He leaned forward a little in his seat. “What if we offered André his life in exchange for everything he knows about Arnold?”

Washington’s face gave no indication of his thoughts, which proved incredibly frustrating. “Didn’t we just learn everything we needed to know?”

Having anticipating that very question, the major shook his head. “I don’t believe so, no. Of course, he answered all of the questions he asked, but what about all of the questions we didn’t ask? If we keep him alive, I believe he’ll prove useful to us. He knows Arnold’s pattern. He knows just what he’s capable of.”

Of course, Ben would also love to know more about the redcoats’ intelligence, but he knew that André was a man of honor. He would never betray his men. But Arnold was another beast altogether. Hopefully, André was wise enough to see that.

Besides, they had their own man who knew that ins and outs of the British ranks, although he hadn’t been with them for some months now. Tobias’s information, while perhaps unethically gained, proved invaluable thus far.

He explained as much when Washington continued to say nothing, mostly anxious chatter to fill in the silence. Not once did any indication of his thoughts show across his face, but this maddening talent of his was something Ben had grown used to. That didn’t mean he liked it any better.

Only when the major finished talking did Washington deliver his response, after a prolonged period of consideration, “I agree. This could work. I give you permission to make the offer to the British major.” He lifted a hand to punctuate his additional requirement, “If he agrees, he’ll live will but remain a prisoner among us until the end of the war. We can’t risk him returning to the enemy with knowledge of our base.”

“I concur,” Ben agreed. The relief of Washington’s agreement would have threatened to knock him off his feet if he hadn’t already been seated. “I’ll make the offer to him at once.”

He rose to his feet when the commander-in-chief stopped him.

“Actually, it would be best you wait after I inform the tribunal of our plans,” Washington remarked. “If André doesn’t agree, then the trial may continue as planned. I’ll have someone send for you with a message for you to meet with Major André.”

Ben nodded. He knew better than to ask what the message would be, sensing that the only response he would receive would be vague at best. He thanked Washington for his time and left his tent once
dismissed.

Soldiers slowly trickled back to camp as the hours wore on. Prior to their interrogation of Major André, Hamilton had informed Washington and himself that Arnold had managed to escape on the HMS Vulture, right before they had been interrupted by Peggy Arnold’s hysterics. With news of Arnold’s betrayal already running rampant among the whispering soldiers, Washington had demanded to keep André’s containment and Colonel Jameson’s and David Frank’s arrests as quiet as possible, lest they create even more chaos.

He was making his way back to his tent to wait for word from Washington when Caleb suddenly fell into step with him. He turned his head in his direction to greet him when he noted his friend’s grim expression.

“What is it?” Ben demanded, frowning.

The whaler shook his head, his expression growing only grimmer. “I think we’d better be alone for this.”

Ben wanted to stop him then and there to demand an explanation but instead ushered him quickly towards his tent, the rest of the trickling camp activity soon forgotten.

“What is it?” he asked once inside, turning to him no sooner than the flap had fallen shut.

“I… ah. Shite,” Caleb cursed, running a hand over his face. The shorter, scruffier man squeezed his eyes shut briefly before finally, after a time, meeting his eyes. Just the fact it took him that long to look him in the eyes didn’t sit well with him. “I… Thomas Williams is dead.”

Ben’s heart clenched. “What?” No, that couldn’t be true. He must have heard him incorrectly or perhaps his friend had simply misspoken. There was no way those words had just left his mouth.

But seeing Caleb’s absolutely miserable look on his face, he knew it was true. No.

Ever since the inception of the Culper Ring, Washington had made it well established to never speak an agent’s true name aloud, to only use their code names. Samuel Culper instead of Abraham Woodhull, Culper Jr. instead of Robert Townsend. Not once had the commander-in-chief used “trinity” for Abigail, always referring to her as Thomas Williams, her original alias.

No, no, no…

“…Ben? Did you hear anything I just… oh, fuck!”

Suddenly, the major felt a tightening grip on his arms, drawing his attention towards Caleb, though the edges of his vision became blurred. “Christ, no. Ben. It’s not Abigail. She’s alive.”

“What?”

“Alive, man. Abigail is alive.”

Ben was faintly aware of a whooshing sensation throughout his body, his limbs loose and not entirely in his control. He instinctively reached blindly behind him for a chair. Caleb, bless him, seemed to read his mind and helped lower him into it, which he didn’t realize he was doing until he felt the flat surface beneath him.

“I’m sorry, Tallboy. I didn’t… I didn’t think,” Caleb apologized, his face full of concern.
Shaking his head, Ben huffed out a laugh, devoid of any humor. “No, it’s… it isn’t your fault. I’ve
gotten so accustomed to that name being associated with her. So naturally I assumed…” He breathed
out harshly and brought a hand to cover his face. “But you said –”

“No, it’s… it isn’t your fault. I’ve

“Thomas Williams, her father,” Caleb confirmed sadly, his eyes downcast. “Abe told me about it last
time I met him in Setauket. I would’ve told you sooner, but considering everything that’s been
happening…” he gestured helplessly.

The relief quickly transitioned back to grief. Thomas Williams was a good man. Over the years, the
Williams had weekly dinners with his father and himself, both Williams and Tallmadge patriarchs as
close as brothers. Ben had considered the man as a second father and had always hoped he would
be, if he had managed to pluck up the courage to ask for his daughter’s hand.

Which had been the very first thing Ben would have done as soon as the war ended.

“Does she know?” he asked quietly. Dropping his hand, he caught the other man’s gaze. “Abigail.
Does she know?”

Caleb shook his head. “I don’t know. It’s doubtful, knowing where she is. I intended to tell her at our
next meeting, but –”

“I should tell her,” Ben insisted. “I should be the one who…”

“You can’t,” Caleb interrupted but not unkindly. “Washington will never give you leave the camp.
Not now.”

The major sighed. “I know. But it still should be me.”

Caleb lowered himself into the chair beside him, saying nothing more. Instead, he clasped him firmly
on the shoulder, squeezing in solidarity. There wasn’t anything left for him to say, for either of them
to say in fact. So the two men sat there in silence, both mulling over how much the ongoing war had
cost them, had cost them all.

And how much more there was to come.

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Dusk was rapidly approaching by the time Ben received Washington’s signal, and once received, the
major dared not linger long, setting off in the direction of where they were holding André.

There were several reasons why he hoped the British major would accept this deal, more than a few
more personal than others. Although he came from enemy lines, he couldn’t help but admire the
man. Perhaps there was an unspoken kinship amongst spies, no matter the side. But there was also
another layer of reasons he wished for the man to remain alive.

John André had welcomed Abigail in when she had stumbled across his doorstep. John André had
sheltered and protected her over her months in York City. John André had comforted and befriended
her when Abigail had needed it most, developing such a surprisingly close relationship, at least from
what Caleb had shared with him, that Ben couldn’t help but ball his fists in jealousy whenever he
thought of it. Envy aside, he couldn’t ignore the fact the man had been there for her when he hadn’t
been able to be. For that, he was grateful. He owed it to the man to offer him this chance.

“Major André,” he greeted him quietly as he parted the tent flap.

John André looked up from the book he had been reading, his expression unsurprised but still
cordial. Rising slowly to his feet, his pallor remained, though that was to be expected for a presumably condemned man. “Major Tallmadge. Has the tribunal already decided my fate?” His lips curled upwards with a touch of irony. The sight was more than a little disarming. “Shall my execution be carried out tonight before my servant arrives with my uniform?”

“No. I assure you nothing has been determined yet,” Ben assured him. “And nothing will be carried out until the arrival of your servant, I promise you. I’m here for another purpose.”

John nodded. “I supposed you might.” He returned to his seat when Ben gestured for him to sit but only when the young major had pulled up a seat to face him.

Sitting tall in his seat, he began, “You answered all of our questions admirably. No one is denying that, but I have a suspicion there is more that we can learn from you, when it comes to Benedict Arnold. You’ve come to know him better than any of us had thought to know of the man. The information is very valuable to Washington, so he sent me with an offer.”

And without further ado, Ben formally presented the offer to André, that he would be granted his life in exchange for any and all information based on his correspondence, knowledge, and everything pertaining to Benedict Arnold, down to the minute details. Whatever other information he wished to share about enemy intelligence was at André’s own discretion, though Ben suspected he wouldn’t compromise himself with the betrayal of his comrades. He made sure to emphasize the fact that if he were to take this deal, that he would remain in their custody until the end of the war.

A long, considering silence fell the moment Ben concluded his pitch. In that moment, he took care to observe the British head of intelligence carefully, watching out for any telltale signs of what could possibly be going on inside his mind. While he himself was becoming increasingly skilled in his observation, John André clearly had more experience in the matter – not only with observation but with the careful schooling of his features. His experience outweighed Ben’s by a number of years, if not a decade from what he had been told. Of course he wouldn’t allow anyone to observe what he was thinking unless he desired it.

“How long do I have to consider this offer?” Major André asked, his tone quiet and deceptively neutral.

“Until the morning of your servant’s arrival,” he answered. More than likely the following morning then. He couldn’t grant him more time than that, knowing that the tribunal would be chomping at the bit to find the man guilty and sentence him to death. “But preferably within the length of this conversation. Washington has only managed to delay your trial by half a day and possibly no more than that. He’s granted you until tomorrow morning to consider but would prefer if you gave your answer to me while we speak. I hope you understand.”

“I do,” Major André nodded. “A mercy in and of itself, one that is very risky. I’m not sure if General Clinton would allow such a chance. I thank you for this demonstration of kindness. It’s a rarity during such times of war.”

But…?

Ben was waiting for the other shoe to drop, and thankfully he didn’t have to wait long. “I have considered your offer and have your answer. Nothing would provide me with more pleasure than to assist you in taking Arnold down. However, I do have a condition of my own to add to this offer.”

The young major nodded. “Name it, sir.”

“I want a guarantee that no matter what happens, Peggy Shippen will not be harmed or implicated in
any way. I understand you obtained from a source of her role in Arnold’s choice of turning turncoat, but I can testify that while she may not be entirely innocent, she has already served enough time in punishment for becoming Benedict Arnold’s wife.”

Ben took a moment to consider. Washington had given him permission to accept any possible terms André could counter, within reason. This didn’t seem such an unreasonable request. He had only met the woman once, at the soiree in Pennsylvania. He hadn’t thought much of her as working for the British side, but as he had come to learn in recent days, looks were often deceiving. By rights, she should have faced a similar fate, as she, too, had committed an act of treason, but if he wanted the major’s allegiance, sparing Peggy Arnold seemed a small price to pay.

“Agreed. I’ll run it by Washington, but I have confidence that he will agree as well. Are there any more conditions you would like to add?”

“None that are more important to me than that one, sir.”

Ben nodded, understanding far too well. He wasn’t aware of the depth of Major André’s acquaintance with Peggy Arnold, nor did he want to be, but he suspected whatever was between them was compelling enough reason for him to save his life. He wanted to probe further into that but quickly deemed the thought inappropriate.

After promising to instruct the guards of the new terms of his imprisonment as soon as he discussed their terms with Washington, the two men rose from their seats when Ben clasped his hand firmly. He caught a glimpse of surprise in the older man’s eyes, but it quickly flickered away when Ben turned to leave. One small victory, at least.

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*New York*

“Elizabeth! You must hide!”

Abby’s sudden urgent voice ripped Abigail’s head away from her book towards the door. She met the servant’s terrified expression with one of alarm. “What is it? What’s going on?”

“General Clinton has arrived!” Abby hissed urgently. “They’re in the parlor room and plan on coming to the study. The general asked for you, but I told them you were tending to a patient.”

“Who’s they?”

Abby huffed, clearly stressed. “Clinton and Benedict Arnold! Now hide!”

Abigail sprang to her feet, her book dropping onto the desk with a quiet thud. She winced as she searched the room. There was no way she could leave the study without running into the two men, which was a meeting she wished to avoid, especially since Abby had lied to conceal her person.

There was the closet, but it was far too narrow to fit the skirts of her dress. If only she had worn trousers!

Faint murmurings of conversation soon became more coherent, which only increased her anxiety.

“…this is a lovely manor,” a baritone voice carried into the study.

“Isn’t it? Major André has always had great taste,” came General Clinton’s voice. “I’m sure he wouldn’t you mind taking up residence here. Temporarily of course.”
Abigail shared a horrified glance with Abby. Arnold was going to stay there, in this house, where she was currently residing? She couldn’t remember if he had ever seen her in camp, but did she really want to risk that?

Without another option, Abigail dropped to her knees and crawled underneath John’s desk, much to Abby’s choked dismay. The large oak desk was large enough to conceal her and even provided her with enough room to hide her skirts, if she tuck them underneath her and drew her legs towards her chest.

She spotted Abby’s skirts as she pushed the chair into the desk, just narrowly missing the blonde by half an inch. Drawing up her knees and skirts closer to her, she didn’t dare breathe when booted footsteps fell heavily into the room, with accompanying voices.

“May I interest you in some brandy, General Arnold?” Clinton asked politely. “I’m sure Abigail would be happy to serve you a glass.”

More like serve you right off a cliff, you traitorous leech, Abigail seethed silently. She pressed her mouth into her knees, smothering the urge to say just that.

“That would be lovely. Thank you, Abigail,” Arnold accepted the offer.

“I’ll go grab some glasses for you gentlemen.” Abby’s skirts disappeared from behind the desk, rustling lightly against the floor as she made her way out the room.

There was a brief period of relative silence. The two men made idle chatter, though there was an underlying tension beneath the cordial words exchanged. She didn’t even have to witness facial expressions or body language to observe that. It wasn’t until Abby returned with their glasses, poured their drinks, and left did one of them walk towards the study door and closed it with an audible click.

Approaching footsteps rounded the desk. Suddenly, she was met with an eyeful of royal officer boots. She held her breath, her chest clenching with anxiety as they lingered. Whoever was at the desk – Clinton presumably – opened the top drawer and procured a letter opener. A few agonizing minutes passed before the boots were gone.

Abigail’s grip tightened on her tense limbs, and she dared not to breathe a sigh of relief.

There was talk of a courier having had arrived with a dispatch from Washington nearly half an hour past. The news had come from Cicero, it must have, otherwise, she couldn’t make heads or tails of how either one of them would have known about the dispatch coming to John’s residence.

There was a light rustling of parchment before General Clinton spoke, “Washington says they planned on trying John André as a spy, not an officer. However, they made him an offer, one that would spare his life.”

“And what is this offer?” Arnold demanded, suspicion strong in his voice.

“That if he provides them with everything he has on you, he’ll remain alive but in their hands until the end of the war.”

Arnold inhaled sharply at that. “And what makes them so sure that he will help them?”

General Clinton remarked dryly, “Perhaps they find him more useful alive than dead? Or maybe they think he has enough reason to see you dead than himself?” Abigail wondered what kind of look was being exchanged between them, because Clinton’s tone sounded very knowing. Was he aware
of the rivalry between John and Arnold in regards to Peggy Shippen?

Then came a strange, strangled noise, soon followed by an insolent Arnold demanding, “And has he agreed to this?”

“I don’t know. Washington didn’t indicate his response.”

Arnold growled. “See with what I have endured? This cat and mouse game? I’ve never been told anything more than they believed I needed to know, yet I fought for them. I won battles for them. And this is the thanks I get?”

“To be fair, you did abandon your cause for the sake of the enemy,” Clinton remarked. To play devil’s advocate of course.”

“May the devil take Washington and his precious cause!” Arnold seethed. “It’s a lost one. When his men realized they are being screwed out of their money, of their worth, as I have been, they will walk away en masse. It will be impossible to hang all of those deserters. Your war will be won without even having to lift another bayonet.”

Clinton remarked thoughtfully, “I wasn’t aware that things were so dire for the rebels.”

Abigail wanted to snort. Of course, you did, your excellency, she thought sardonically, because of your correspondence with the turncoat in this very room. The British were more than aware of the Continentals’ state of financial affairs, otherwise why attempt a counterfeit scheme to break the Continental Congress?

Arnold chuckled darkly. “Believe me, your excellency, I am the face of many. Once word of my departure reaches the rest of the army, more will soon follow. You may accrue more men into your ranks than you’ll know what to do with.”

Clinton hummed thoughtfully, though she suspected he only did so to hold back another ironic retort.

“And what of this woman who stays here?” Arnold asked abruptly. Abigail’s back stiffened though she dared not sit up straight, lest to wanted to alert them to her presence. “What is her background? Can she be trusted? I’ve heard rumors about André’s history with prostitutes…”

“Enough!” came Clinton’s sharp reply. After a moment, he spoke again, his tone easing slightly though there was a hint of steel underneath, “Elizabeth Williams has been nothing but loyal for the Crown. She organized a charity event to raise money for our troops and has become a practiced healer within the city and a few neighboring villages. She’s not a problem and no concern of yours.”

For a moment, the blonde pondered her current situation – that she would now be sharing a house with Benedict Arnold himself. With all of her knowledge she’d gleaned from soldiers at the camp, she knew very well what kind of man he was. Easy to flatter as well as anger, strong and forceful on the field as well as in everyday life.

She pondered if she had anything to worry about now that she would be alone with him, without the tempering presence of his wife. Would he try to make a pass at her? Or if she said or did something to displease him, would he dare to strike her? Oddly enough, those possibilities didn’t bother her as much as it should have. Just being in his presence long enough for him to recognize her was far too dangerous.

Before the turncoat could respond, there was an insistent knock on the study door. As soon as Clinton permitted them to enter, Abigail strained to hear the sound of the door opening but didn’t
“A Queen’s Ranger,” Arnold observed, sounding skeptical.

“Very astute observation,” came the alleged Queen’s Ranger’s dry reply. “And who might you be?”

“Later,” came Clinton’s quick reply. Underneath the desk, the blonde grinned in amusement. There was nothing Arnold hated more than not being recognized, so naturally this ranger’s retort irritated him. She only wished she had the pleasure of witnessing the interaction with her own eyes. “Any news you wish to relay to Major André may be delivered to me.”

“Yes, sir,” the Queen’s Ranger remarked. “The mission we were tasked with was partially successful.”

There was a brief pause before Clinton remarked, “General Arnold, would you mind stepping out for a moment? We have much more to discuss. Perhaps over dinner at house of one of my officials. We can discuss it in finer detail once I speak with this gentleman.”

Abigail couldn’t hear Arnold’s response but only assumed the grumbling sound could only be him before the door opened and shut behind him.

“The mission to find the traitors?” Clinton inquired once the turncoat was gone.

“Yes, sir.”

“And you say it was only partially successful?”

“Unfortunately, yes. But I believe we can find the other one. The one we did find was the one who drove the dagger through Lieutenant Gamble’s heart. In time, I know that Gamble’s murder will be avenged.”

Clinton made an affirmative noise, while Abigail felt a growing sense of dread and a mild wave of nausea blooming. “We executed the Hawkins boy, slit his throat and stabbed him in the chest when he tried to fight back. Left his body near the Hudson for the rebels to find him. I’m sure they’ll get the message.”

“I’d like to believe your story, but I need some proof.”

“Oh, I’ve got your proof right here.”

Whatever the man handed Clinton must have been enough to convince him because soon enough Clinton gave him praise but only for a job half-completed. They left the study, discussion of the mission seemingly forgotten the moment the door had been opened.

Abigail remained under the desk in shocked silence. No, they couldn’t have been talking about… No, there had to be another Hawkins. The name was common enough.

But how many other “traitors” were there who murdered Lieutenant Gamble?

Lightheaded and dazed, she slowly crawled out from under the desk, pushing past the desk chair and turning so that she could get a better look at the door. But when she did, she came face-to-face with Clinton’s “proof” that the unthinkable deed had been done.

Right in front of her, on top of the desk, rested a neckerchief, cream colored linen minus with any
frilly lace, which made it more acceptable for a man to wear. It looked eerily similar to the one she had made for Tobias for their second anniversary, though truth be told it had begun initially as a shirt. After many foiled attempts, she had given up and settled on making a neckerchief, even going so far as to stitch his initials on one corner.

It looked very similar, except for the fact it was completely soaked through with blood. Only the certain edges remained white. With a trembling hand, she reached for the neckerchief and brought a hand up to her mouth in horror. The dark blue initials of T.H. were etched into the corner.

No. No.

Christ, no.

That was how Abby found her when she slipped back into the study, sitting on the floor and staring numbly at the bloodied neckerchief cradled between her hands, shocked into silence that he had still been wearing it, when he…

“Elizabeth?” Abby spoke softly, frowning as she placed an urgent hand on her shoulder. “We need to sneak you upstairs while the men are occupied. Once they’re gone, we’ll need to get you out of here.”

“I don’t care,” Abigail murmured, not moving an inch. Her gazed refused to break from what lied in her hands.

“What?” Abby asked, startled.

Sniffling, the blonde shook her head. “Let them find me. I’m tired of fighting, tired of hiding, tired… tired of losing people. I’m just so tired.” Her voice cracked, and the tears began to fall. She didn’t even try to stop them.

Despite her unwillingness to move, Abby managed to haul her to her feet and out of the study before she knew what was happening. She would have marveled at the other woman’s physical strength had she been able to focus on anything else but the neckerchief she clutched in her hands.

The longer she walked, the closer Abigail felt she was coming to the edge. It took everything she had not to fall apart at the seams.

But as soon as Abby opened the door to her room, something inside her broke. Chest heaving and tears falling, she flung herself towards her bed and grabbed the first pillow she could get her hands on. She buried her face into the pillow, pressing it even more firmly against her mouth before screaming into it with everything she had. All the pain, frustration, anger, heartbreak, guilt, and grief streamed from her in the long, muffled scream.

She screamed and screamed into the pillow until she was left completely and utterly exhausted before passing out, her body unable to deny her that small mercy.

First Christopher, then her father, and now Tobias. Three good men who were all gone now. She didn’t know how many more losses she could take.

But there was one common factor among them that she would later hone in her focus, something which would drive her perhaps to the brink of insanity.

The British had taken everything from her. Retribution would soon be hers. Their day of reckoning would soon be upon them.
West Point

“Did he give you his response to the offer?” Washington inquired once greetings were out of the way.

Ben nodded, though he was quick to hide his pleased smile. He had been worried about the British major outright refusing the offer, but in the end, he had surprised him. “Yes, sir, he had. He accepted our offer and agreed to her terms. Only he had one condition of his own, that Peggy Arnold maintain immunity from Arnold’s crimes. Since you gave approval to accept any conditions he may have add, within reason of course, I agreed.”

“Good,” Washington replied. He picked up his quill and dipped into an inkpot. “I’ll send word to the tribunal of the offer and Major Andre’s agreement to our terms.”

“They won’t be pleased, I take it.”

The commander-in-chief’s smile was imperceptible. Nearly. “Their pleasure isn’t my concern. They answer to me. If it comes down to it, I’ll deliver the message to them personally. Perhaps that will inspire their cooperation.”

In the next moment, a soldier stepped inside the tent closely accompanied by a pale-faced Caleb. The soldier with them looked equally pale, but the wound in his soldier drew Ben’s attention.

“What happened?” he demanded, vaguely aware of Washington rising from his seat behind him.

“We were overwhelmed by the Queen’s Rangers, three of us,” the soldier answered, his face drawn and exhausted. “We were attacked in the morning, but I was only able to just get away. We were thirty miles south of New York.”

“What were you doing that far from camp?” Washington inquired quietly.

The soldier’s white face became even paler under the gaze of the Grey Fox. “We were scoping out the parameter in search of Arnold as well as keeping an eye on the soldiers sent to search for him, under Major Tallmadge’s orders.” He nodded in Ben’s direction. “But Hawkins believed that Arnold could have been further along than West Point so we decided to travel further.

“Not long after were we attacked. They shot and killed George Smith on the spot. They shot me, but they didn’t check to see if I was dead. And Tobias...” He sighed grievously. “They grabbed him and forced him to his knees. It was clear he was the one they were after.”

“Go on,” Caleb urged quietly when the soldier fell silent again.

“I couldn’t really hear much, but I saw everything. Something about justice and gamble? A lieutenant maybe? But then before I could even put together what they were saying, they killed him, in cold blood.”

Ben’s eyes widened in dismay. He looked over at Caleb, and all it took was one look to know what the soldier said was true.

“Take us to the bodies,” Washington commanded grimly.

With the commander-in-chief’s presence as motivation, four horses were quickly and efficiently tacked and saddled. Seeing as how the soldier was injured, Caleb took it upon himself to carry one
of the lit torches while Ben accepted the other.

The night’s journey was dark and dreary, but that was an appropriate feeling, knowing what awaited for them. Once they arrived at the sight, the group dismounted and the soldier led them towards the bodies, neither of which had been moved since the attack.

Caleb walked over to George Smith’s body while Ben walked straight towards Tobias, squatting down to examine him. The man’s eyes remained opened, forever unblinking. A nasty slit cut across his throat, blood pooling dark around him. The young major squeezed his own eyes shut before bringing up a hand to the other man’s face, gently closing his eyes.

From somewhere above him, he heard a heavy sigh. “Return to camp and find a wagon and some strong men to help with the bodies. They deserve a proper burial. Did you get your wounds tended to?”

The soldier shook his head. “No, I came straight to you the moment I set foot back in West Point.”

Washington nodded. “As soon as you’re done, see that you pay a visit to Dr. Anderson. He’ll take care of you.”

The soldier agreed readily and remounted his horse, then made the journey back to camp to carry out Washington’s orders.

Caleb stood there, trying to make sense out of what the soldier had described to them previously. “So they said something about justice and gamble? What on earth could they have possibly been talking about?”

Washington’s posture suddenly tensed, realization dawning onto his face. “It appears that the British have discovered Tobias Hawkins’ role in the murder of Lieutenant Gamble and those officers.”

Caleb’s eyes grew wide as Ben slowly rose to his feet. “That must be it then.” He then threw a look at the major, his eyes widening even more in growing horror. “If they figured out Tobias had been a part of it, then they might be trying figure out who he had helped escape and why. Which means it’s only a matter of time…”

It would only be a matter of time before they looked in Abigail’s direction, Ben silently finished for him. The realization was a direct blow to the gut. Gamble had somehow discovered Abigail’s identity when he’d had her captured. Who was to say that information couldn’t be as easily obtained from another source?

And the very fact that Benedict Arnold now resided in New York didn’t sit well with him either. He needed to find a way to bring her back to the camp. That was the safest place for her now. To hell with his duties, he would go retrieve her himself. In that moment, he couldn’t bring himself to trust anyone with her safety other than himself.

“When the men arrive, I need you both to return to camp,” Washington remarked, breaking him out of his frenzied thoughts.

Ben began to protest, “Sir, we can’t just return to camp, I can’t not while –”

But Washington continued to talk over him as if he hadn’t objected, “I need you both to return to camp and don civilian attire. Keep your steeds mounted and ride hard towards the city. I need you to visit our woman in York City. And bring back Thomas Williams with you.”

The commander-in-chief met Ben’s surprised expression with a wry one of his own. “And that is an
I apologize for the long wait! Things have been super crazy work, and I didn't have much time to write! I appreciate you all for leaving lovely comments and subbing and bookmarking and leaving kudos! Thank you for sticking around with me for this crazy ride! I hope you continue to enjoy! <3
This chapter takes place after 3x10

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*York City*

Everything from that point forward served as a major setback, though not so much as one would expect. That night had been for many tears and little sleep, but when morning arrived, she was able to focus on one emotion to help get her through. And that emotion was anger.

Anger towards the British and how much they had taken from the people living in colonies that they claimed belonged to them. Anger towards the British from how much they had taken away from her. First there was Christopher, taken down by a bullet in battle. Then there was her father, though the circumstances were far less directly associated than the young soldier’s. And now Tobias, assassinated in cold blood at the hands of Queen’s rangers.

As for her, she had been shot and beaten and imprisoned and near assaulted at the hands of these redcoats. The bruises might have faded, but the scars remained, both physical and psychological. But losing those three men had wounded her more than any muskets or physical blows ever could.

Revenge woke her in the morning and continued to simmer in the underneath her skin as the blonde dressed herself. When Abby came to check on her moments later, she let the other woman brush her hair. The gentle strokes of the brush in her golden locks were soothing and provided her with a moment’s reprieve, but that didn’t stop her mind from producing several half-hatched plots that would inevitably fall flat, if carried out by herself.

Which was why she hoped to contact the Sons of Liberty.

As she continued to brush her hair, she and Abby quietly planned how they would sneak her get her out of the house and away from Arnold. Abby assured her she was almost finished preparing a bind for Abigail to wear underneath male civilian clothes that came from John’s closet, but they both knew that he would not be missing them, especially with his current place in Washington’s custody.

The bag with the clothes would be handed to Abigail on her way out of the manor to make her house calls, though in truth there were no house calls to be made. It was part of the plan in fooling Arnold once she came face-to-face with him. Of course, she would have to meet him at some point in the next hour, Abigail realized, and unfortunately, that would give him the opportunity of seeing her face. Hopefully, their plan would help reduce the amount of time between them as much as possible.

Once she escaped Arnold’s presence, Abigail would then leave the manor with her medical box and bag in hand, traveling on foot to a remote location where she could change her clothes before finding a way to sneak out of the city.

But what she had neglected to form Abby was that she had no intention of living the city, not as long as the British continued to hold it. Oh, no. If she had anything to say about it, she hoped to hit them back with a strong enough blow they couldn’t easily shake.
And that sort of plan required some outsider help, or perhaps insider help. That’s where the Sons of Liberty came in, at least some of the more radical ones anyway.

Knowing that her father’s pistol was tucked away safely inside the bag, along with her correspondence supplies, Abigail still felt oddly naked as she made her way downstairs, slowly and cautiously, knowing that she was now entering the snake pit. While at present there was only one snake, she knew better than to provoke one. Arnold’s day would come soon enough. There was only one way to kill a snake after all.

Any hope of walking out the door with her medical box and bag uninterrupted was dashed when the blonde spotted the turncoat himself stepping into the corridor as she paused on the step. He glanced up at her, startled, but not half as startled as her. Already he donned the red uniform coat of a British officer. John’s, she assumed, as she noted how tightly the material stretched across his broad shoulders, borrowed of course for the time being until his were ready for him.

_I wonder how John would feel that Arnold had not only taken his love but his clothes as well_, Abigail thought but had enough wits about her to keep the thought to herself.

Benedick Arnold was the first to break the awkward silence. “Good morning. You’re Elizabeth, I presume.”

Abigail nodded stiffly, forcing a faint smile. “You presume correctly, sir…?”

“Arnold. General Arnold.”

“Ah,” was all she could respond with. But then she couldn’t help but inquire, “Is J… is Major Andre expecting you?”

Feigning ignorance about the British major’s absence was for the best. She wasn’t certain what he was aware that she did or did not know, so she chose the safe route.

What appeared suspiciously similar to conflict flickered across his face, but in a blink it was gone. “No, I would imagine not. Will you be joining me for breakfast this morning? Perhaps we can become better acquainted.”

Just the thought of that turned Abigail’s stomach. “As delightful as that sounds, I’ve already made prior commitments. I’m off to visit my patients.” She lifted her medical box for emphasis. “And I should be off as soon as possible.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted Abby hovering at the stairs, ready to meet her but pausing when she observed her position with Arnold. Abigail quickly returned her gaze to his and offered him a tight smile. “Perhaps breakfast tomorrow morning? I often travel long hours and sometimes sup with the families of the patients I care for, so I may not return in time for dinner.”

_Or for any other time you wish to dine with me, turncoat_, she wished to say but held her tongue.

Benedick accepted her words, though there was a tiny, skeptical frown. “Of course. I understand you’re a healer.” God forbid he stumble over the word physician. A woman physician? Gods be good!

“I try to be,” Abigail remarked modestly. “I hope you enjoy your breakfast, General Arnold.” _And I hope you choke on it._

Benedick smiled politely, though the attempt seemed more simpering than anything else, before he disappeared into the dining room for his breakfast.
The moment he departed, Abby scurried down the steps and handed her bag. “I’ve prepared enough food to occupy his time, but you still need to hurry. Change and get as far from here as you possibly can.”

Abigail nodded along to her words as she stuffed her medical box inside. “Thank you for all that you have done for me. You’ve risked so much to help me, you and your son.” She embraced her fiercely, smiling sadly as Abby returned her embraced. “I hope we’ll meet again someday, under much better, and freer circumstances.”

Abby muffled her choked laughter while murmuring her assent. She pressed a kiss to her cheek and gave her a urgent push towards the door before slipping into the dining room to serve General Arnold.

With her bag in hand, Abigail slipped out the manor and headed down the drive, a route that had quickly become routine for several months now. Only this time, she knew she would not be returning, at least not as Elizabeth Williams.

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Within a few days’ time, a surprising level of progress had been reached. Back in men’s clothing, the blonde found herself staying at an inn, but not the one affiliated with Robert Townsend.

She hardly stayed in her rooms, however, instead choosing to roam the streets under her guise, posing questions about the whereabouts of the Sons of Liberty without directly mentioning them. It wasn’t until she managed to stumble across one of the young street urchins whom Cicero had mentioned previously when having delivered her message from Caleb. It had taken some persuasive words and coins to convince the boy, but she had found herself being led to a small crossroads inn just outside the city later that evening.

The street urchin had told her to order a specific bottle of wine once seated, so that the agent in question would be able to identify her. It wouldn’t have done well to simply wear an identifying marker, on the chance that a redcoat might catch them. The fear wasn’t unwarranted, considering how many of the tables surrounding where she sat held many redcoats gambling, whoring, and drinking well into their cups.

Ordering a bottle of Madeiran wine, Abigail knew she had little to fear from the redcoats, though she kept a careful gaze on them. Madeiran wine was not only a popular wine among the colonies for its taste. John Hancock had once been arrested by British soldiers for having boasted of evading British taxes through his smuggling, and when they had examined his ship Liberty, they had discovered a large shipment of Madeira wine, an act that had inspired much protest in Boston. With John Adams as his counsel, Hancock managed to free himself of all the charges.

It was only a few minutes that passed after the innkeeper had brought her the wine when someone lowered themselves into the seat across from her.

“Interesting choice of wine,” was the greeting she received. The man reached for the bottle and read the label. “Brandy-infused as well. Much better than that sugar red piss New Yorkers favor.” He signaled to the innkeeper for another glass before returning his gaze to hers. “You got a name?”

“Do you?” Abigail asked bluntly, which only made the man smile.

“Let’s ignore the pleasantries and get right down to it then,” he remarked, uncorking the bottle before pouring her a glass. He stopped just sigh of the rim before mimicking the same for himself. “I’ve been told you’ve been asking questions about us. Gav, the little urchin boy, said you had something
you wished to discuss.”

Abigail lifted the glass to her lips, drinking only enough so that the glass was no longer near overflowing before launching into her inquiry. It wasn’t a secret that there were radical members of the Sons of Liberty still lingering about the city, so it would not have been outside the realms of possibility for there to be talk of taking extreme lengths on dealing with the British. She asked to know if anything was currently in the works, because if there was something, she would like to be a part of it.

Of course, this agent wasn’t a fool. He asked her questions, assessing her, trying to determine where her loyalties lied. She answered them as honestly as she could, remaining as close to the truth as possible with some minor alterations to protect herself. Only the desire for vengeance in her eyes managed to convince him to offer her bread crumbs.

There was talk, he admitted carefully, of a group of important redcoat officers meeting within the city, at the local theater in fact. It was enough redcoats present that, if anything were to happen, it would inflict a serious blow to the British, a setback that they could not afford.

When she asked what they had in mind, the agent was a little slower to respond, mostly because he had already finished his glass of Madeiran and was already pouring himself another. After a few sips, he confided in her they thought it just if they carried out what Guy Fawkes and his collective had failed to do – to blow up all the important officers and any other redcoats in one place.

It was a stunning admission, one that she hadn’t anticipated, but in her hear, she knew she agreed. That would be a more than fitting end, and perhaps an ironic one, since the British performed a mockery of the failed Guy Fawkes gunpowder plot every year in that very theater.

“We already have the supplies,” the agent hiccupped into his glass, yet somehow he remained partially sober. “It’s only a matter of getting the stuff inside. Oh and finding a volunteer to light the wick of course.”

Abigail swirled her glass around carefully while doing a brief scan of the room. It was a true testament to the power and allure of alcohol that they were not being arrested. Such talk was treason, and openly discussing such an act was undoubtedly stupid, but the guests were so far gone in their cups, they could have discussed offing the king himself and no one would have batted an eye.

“If you can get your men to set up the gunpowder,” Abigail spoke quietly enough that the agent had to lean in forward to hear, “I’ll go down there and strike the match myself.”

“Truly?” he stared at her, as if trying to figure her out. “You’re either incredibly loyal to the cause, or absolutely fucking mad.”

The blonde smiled humorously. “Why can’t I be both? It’s not as if I have a wife or children to consider.” She took a sip from her glass. “Are you trying to talk me out of it? I believe you’re short on volunteers.”

It didn’t take much more convincing after that reminder. He asked for her information of where she currently resided, and she gave it to him, finally giving him her name as Thomas but nothing more. He informed he would be in touch, and soon enough their meeting came to an end, though he made sure to paid to pay her tab before he departed.

“An act of kindness for a dead man,” was his response to her gratitude, though not unkind.

By the time Abigail found herself back in her rooms, with the bottle of Madeiran wine tucked
carefully under her arm. More than half empty due to her drinking companion’s thirst, she uncorked
the bottle and drank the rest for herself, drinking until her limbs were light and loose, her head
swimming. Stumbling towards her bed, she mindlessly let the bottle fall the small distance from her
fingers towards the ground, vaguely aware of the sound of it rolling underneath the bed.

For the first time in many nights, she slept soundly through the night with no dreams. But in the
morning, she knew, things were going to change.

But that was another worry for another day.

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Infuriatingly, the journey to York City hadn’t been as immediate as Washington had intended. The
tribunal had been incensed at the offer presented to Major John André. It had taken Ben, Caleb, and
Washington himself to put an end to the beginnings of a quarrel. Throughout it all, the young major
had been irritable and restless. He had been physically in that room, but his mind was elsewhere,
rushing wild with the very thought that those men that had murdered Tobias could have very well
had been on their way after Abigail next, yet there he was, standing there among a group of
squabbling, red-faced men doing nothing.

As soon as he had Washington’s leave, Ben had changed into civilian clothes before setting off for
the horses, with Caleb hot at his heels. They’d had two horses tacked and ready to go at a moment’s
notice, one of them had been Cantor, Abigail’s Narragansett Pacer, a stubborn young gelding who
had only ever listened to his mistress. With a murmured promise that they were off to retrieve her,
Cantor had given him little to no trouble even after Ben had pulled himself into the saddle.

York City was sixty miles from West Point, a journey which could have been made in a full day if
they had urged their mounts at a constant gallop. As much as Ben had been inclined to do so, that
would not have been the wisest decision to keep their cover. That and he would have never heard the
end of it from Abigail from pushing her gelding to his limits. Whenever they stopped to give their
horses rest and get the lay of the land, the breaks were brief and few and far between, less than an
hour before the major demanded to return to their journey. Not once did Caleb object, and for that he
was grateful.

The two managed to find their way into the city near high noon the following day. The streets were
filled with carriages and people, merchants enticing potential customers with the potent scent of fresh
bread and other baked goods. Ben had to forcibly grab Caleb by the collar to divert his attention back
to the task at hand, promising him that he could get all the bread he wanted after they finished what
they had come there to do.

To be perfectly honest, Ben had no inkling of a plan of what to do next. He hadn’t really thought
much beyond getting Abigail back at that very instant. Every single nerve ending shouted this at him.
But he hadn’t really thought of how to accomplish this, which had been something that Caleb hadn’t
been afraid to bring up from time to time on the road either.

“I don’t suppose we can just mosey on over to Andre’s house and ask for her, can we?” Caleb
remarked casually. They had tied their mounts up to hitching posts outside some inn, deciding to
continue on foot. “I mean, that’s the best thing we can do. Since someone didn’t come up with a plan
beforehand.”

Ben didn’t even bother to dignify that with a response. His eyes and mind were too preoccupied
observing their busy surroundings, searching for any sign of her. Caleb had informed him of the
blonde’s recent exploits as a traveling healer within the city. Perhaps they would get lucky and find
her.
Yes, it was very much unlike him to go into a mission without a plan. He had always prided himself on being cautious, to never leaving any stone unturned. But this mission wasn’t something obscure or detached end result. This involved Abigail and her safety. And it was apparent that any and all logic he might have possessed disappeared when it came down to that, especially when her life was at stake.

They had been walking amongst the crowds for a time when Ben nearly missed it. A flash of a familiar face that gave him pause, that hovered near the edge of a street. With the people surrounding them, it was next to impossible to make out the rest of the form with that face, but the glimpse of familiar blue eyes was enough to ensnare his attention.

The person lifted their face more fully, and their eyes locked. Ben came to a stop, his breath caught in his throat. He knew precisely whose gaze found his. He would know these eyes anywhere, at any distance.

Adjusting the cap on her head, Abigail gave an imperceptible tilt of her nod towards her left and turned on her heel, as if she had never seen him.

Without so much as an explanation, the young major followed her at a wisely kept distance, with a mildly confused Caleb at his side. As the crowds faded, he could more easily make out her form, dressed in a dark coat and trousers that was too large for her. So many questions ran rampant inside his head, but all he could do was follow. The time for answers would come soon enough.

Abigail disappeared around the corner, which only had him quickening his steps until he rounded the corner. A door stood adjacent with a gap large enough for her to slip inside. He took that as a sign and pushed the door further open so that both he and Caleb could enter.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded as soon they stepped inside. Her face was pale and drawn, so unlike the last time Ben had seen her, face flushed and lips swollen from their stolen kisses the night he had taken Caleb’s place for their meeting in the theater.

“We’ve come to get you,” the whaler answered before he could even get the words out.

Abigail looked at him in mild confusion. “Get me?”

“Yes. Washington’s orders. Well, he said bring Thomas Williams back to camp to be more specific, but it looks like you’ve already one step ahead of us.”

The blonde huffed out a low, bitter laugh. “Yes, I suppose I am. Well, you can tell Washington thanks but no thanks.”

Ben’s brows furrowed. “Excuse me?”

Abigail met his bewildered stare with a tired but determined one of her own. “You heard me.”

He pressed his lips together for a moment before taking another step into the room. “You have no idea what kind of danger you’re in. So just let us…”

“Oh, I believe I do,” she cut him off. The hat dipped low on top her head, and she grabbed it in agitation before ripping it off her head. That was when Ben noticed the bloody kerchief around her wrist.

Frustration forgotten, Ben took another step towards her. “You’re hurt.”

Abigail blinked before looking down at her wrist. She smiled faintly. “No, I’m not hurt. This
blood… it’s not mine.” She gripped the one white spot of her kerchief between her fingers. “I made this neckerchief for Tobias not long after we were married. These are his initials in the corner. It’s what the Queen’s ranger brought to General Clinton to prove that the deed was done.”

Christ, she already knew about Tobias’s death. How on earth could that be possible?

But now was not the time to push for details. There was one more thing she needed to know, and the thought of giving her any more heartache was more than he could bear. But she had a right to know.

Sighing heavily, Ben took another step towards her, then hesitated for a moment. When it didn’t appear she would retreat, he walked over to where she stood. He tried to take her hand, but the moment he reached for her, she folded her arms across her chest, drawing her coat around her. The rejection stung, but he persevered, treading lightly. “There’s something else you should know. I…” he sighed again, squeezing his eyes shut briefly. “Abe informed Caleb that your father…”

“He’s dead. I know.”

It wasn’t her admission that shocked him but the tone that accompanied it. Detached, tired, and flat, not at all like the girl he used to know or the woman he knew now. Her expression was completely blank, which he suspected was a mask, albeit a carefully constructed one.

Of all the reactions he had thought they would receive, this had never been one he had anticipated.

Caleb seemed to note her odd demeanor, too, but did his best to skirt around the issue. He understood far too well of losing a relative so near and dear to his heart and at the hands of the enemy at that. Abigail had experienced a loss of each. “This might be a foolish question, but how are you holding up?” he asked gently.

It took a minute for his question to register with her, and she finally began to answer, it was clear she was struggling for the words. “I… it was difficult at first. Actually, it’s quite difficult still.” She swallowed down her grief and tightened her crossed armed posture. “But taking out some red coats should help take the edge off though.”

“Whoa, whoa,” Caleb interjected, raising his hands. “I’m afraid you’ve lost us.”

Abigail smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “At which point did I lose you?”

Ben answered for the both of them. “The part about killing redcoats.”

“Really? I thought you two of all people would understand that. Isn’t that what this whole bloody war is about?”

“Oh, now you’re beginning to scare me because now I’m starting to think you’re serious.”

Abigail’s smile turned into a frown. “Of course, I’m serious. Why don’t you seem to ever take me seriously?”

Mimicking her closed off stance, Ben zeroed in on her. “Then kindly enlighten us.”

And then she did. She explained how she had sought out an agent from the Sons of Liberty, a branch notoriously known for being radical but had been suspiciously silent for a number of years. She explained to them of these men’s intentions, of sneaking down barrels of what would be disguised as wine into the theater’s cellars, but these barrels were actually gunpowder. Word had reached them that a group of prominent royal officers would be congregating under that very roof to discuss important matters, and rumor had it that it was quite possible that Arnold would be in attendance.
Apart from that last nugget of information, this plan had been in the works for months. All that they really had been missing was someone willing to sneak down there when all the officers had arrived and strike a match.

And naturally, Abigail had volunteered for that job.

“You can’t be serious!” Ben blurted out the moment those words left her lips. He stared at her incredulously. “There’s no way you’ve thought this through.”

“Of course I have,” she remarked flatly. “I know that theater practically like the back of my hand. There are hidden passages leading out from the basement. If they haven’t been stuffed with the gunpowder, I can wiggle my way through them in time to avoid the worst of the blast. But if I can’t, at least there’s the chance of bringing down the crème de la crème of the British military might with me.”

Both men gazed at her in stunned horror. Ben’s throat was too constricted to speak, so Caleb spoke for him, “Christ, it looks like you have given this some thought.”

“I have.”

Those two words and the steel resolve in her voice was chilling, but not so chilling as the hardened, determined look in Ben’s eyes when he spoke to Caleb, not once removing his gaze from her, “Caleb, could you give us a moment?”

The whaler hesitated, looking torn.

“And keep an eye out for us if anyone’s approaching,” he added, almost as an afterthought, knowing that would be enough to convince him.

The moment the door shut behind Caleb did he finally speak, “Washington specifically ordered us to bring Thomas Williams back, not Abigail Williams, not Elizabeth Williams, but Thomas Williams. He wants you back in our ranks, but that can’t be done if you’re planning to go rogue.”

Abigail glared at him defiantly, uncrossing her arms suddenly. “And what are you going to do? Knock me out and take me with you?”

Ben’s jaw tightened. “No, but what I will do is bound and gag you if I have to. That is no threat. That’s a promise.”

She glared at him and went to move around him, but he quickly intercepted, cutting her off by stepping in front of her. Her glare darkened. “Get out of my way.”

“No.”

At that, she shoved him, shoved him as hard as he could. He nearly stumbled a step back but quickly regained his footing, but that brief step was all the opportunity she sought.

Before she could even make it a few steps around him, he was quick to grab her, his grip on her arm a viper’s grip. Angrily, she jerked around to slap him, but he saw that coming, too.
His hand clamped around her wrist before her hand could make contact with his face, though he did feel her fingers brush his cheek. She tried to her best to yank her arm from his grasp, which only made him pin her arm to his chest. With her other hand, she attempted to shove him again, but he only repeated the action from moments prior.

“This is what will happen to you if you do this,” Ben insisted against a struggling, furious Abigail. “These are men. They outweigh you in muscle and in strength. As good as a shot you are, you can’t physically outperform them. They will do this to you and much worse. Or have you forgotten about the prison?”

This time she managed to slap him, hard. “Fuck you! Have I forgotten about that? How DARE YOU!” She clawed and kicked and beat against him with renewed vigor, so much so that it nearly sent them tumbling to the floor.

Seizing this moment of imbalance, Ben shifted the both of them until he had her pinned to the nearest wall, not with the intention to cause her arm – he would bleed himself dry before even thinking of harming her – but to keep her from going off and getting herself killed. He need to make her see sense.

“How dare I? How dare you? This plan of yours, it’s fucking suicidal. As for those who are allowing you to do this, I will find them and personally deal with them, make no mistake about that. But this, this foolishness… You’re going to get yourself killed, and that I can’t…” His fury nearly choked him. “I will NOT allow it!”

He could still see the defiant glimmer in her gaze, the stubborn set in her jaw. A pained, frustrated noise tore itself from his throat, and before he knew what he was doing, he pressed an angry, hard kiss to her mouth.

The kiss was far too brief for his liking, but now wasn’t the time for that. He pulled back in time to see the stunned expression in her face, her eyes dark but no longer only with fury. Ignoring the stirrings of desire, Ben whispered, voice cracking, “You don’t think that you’re important, and I can’t begin to understand why. If you weren’t, then why did Washington order us to come find you and bring you back? I… why would you do this? Did you once ever think of me, at all?”

Soon enough Abigail’s stony, defiant façade began to crack, and once the first crack appeared, she fully came apart right before his eyes, the fight all but fading from her in one great wave. “I’ve been as strong as I could, for so long. But so much has happened. There’s so much loss. I and I don’t know how much more of it I can take.” Her thoughts came out near jumbled and incomplete. The tears in her eyes were brimming and threatening to overflow if she would let them. If she were stubborn enough, they would not fall, at least that’s what he knew enough about her to understand her thinking.

“When this war is over, these men, women… everyone will return home to their families, if it at, upon victory or defeat.” She sniffled. “But what will I have to go back to? I’ve lost everything. I’ve lost too many people. I – I don’t have anything left.”

“That’s not true,” Ben denied. “You have people that love and care for you. There’s Anna and Caleb and Abe.” Releasing her wrists, he reached up to cup her face and leaned forward to press his forehead against hers. Their eyes shut together at the contact. “You have me. You’ll always have me. Abigail, you are important. And just to everyone else, but to me.

“I… I cannot lose you. I’ve nearly lost you a number of times already that it’s nearly driven me to madness, but you’re still here.”
“Am I?” she asked, her voice trembling.

“Yes,” he replied firmly, holding her close. And not only for her comfort either, perhaps selfishly for his own sanity as well. “You have us. You have me.”

The young major drew back far enough so that he could see her face while tucking an errant curl behind her ear. Sensing the movement, Abigail’s eyes fluttered open, her lashes wet with unshed tears. “I’ll be your family. We all will.”

And those words appeared to be her undoing. Her face crumpled, and the tears fell without end. A sob threatened to overwhelm her, and she pressed her face against his shoulder. She sobbed that she was sorry, sorry for everything, and other things he knew that were well out of the realm of her control, but he didn’t say anything. Instead, he tugged her close and let her cry, allowing all her hurt, pain, and anger against his shoulder.

He blinked back his own tears and pressed his lips to the crown of her head, thinking of what could have happened if they hadn’t found her. If they had arrived any later…

A tear rolled down his cheek as he squeezed his eyes shut. No, there was no time for what ifs, or what could have beens. There was only now.

And if there was anything that could be learned from this war, it was that.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo what an emotional roller coaster, right?! Well, all I can say that the fun doesn't stop here! There's plenty more to come! And again, thank you to all of your comments, kudos, bookmarks, and subs! They truly mean the world to me <33333
Chapter 44

New Windsor, New York
Two weeks later

Benedict Arnold’s treachery reared its ugly head. Reports of British rounding up of rebel spies reached them through the most recent article in The Gazette. Forty men arrested by Arnold upon suspicion of espionage for the rebels, at least that was how the article phrased it. With the list clutched in his hands, Ben along with Alexander Hamilton met with Washington to review the list, much to Washington’s barely concealed dismay. It was very fortunate he had ordered them to retrieve Abigail from York City when he had. Ben was never more grateful for the Grey Fox than in that moment of realization.

Arnold’s interrogation of Hercules Mulligan did not sit well with any of the men present in that meeting, but Ben asserted that there was absolutely no concrete evidence that Arnold could use to hold him. Hamilton insisted they should lure the man out of the city and kill him for the traitor that he was, but Washington rejected the idea, not desiring to lower themselves to assassination. One assassination was quite enough. He shared a meaningful look with Ben before demanding that Arnold be captured alive and returned to camp, so that he might properly answer for his crimes. The very fact that forty men had been taken in under such charges only proved the very fact that Arnold was putting on a show, and Ben said as much. The turncoat needed to demonstrate that he was fully committed to the British. What better way to prove his loyalty than rounding up anyone suspected of providing Continental intelligence?

When he mentioned that Arnold had written him personally, Washington stared at him and waited for his explanation, the soberness of his silence demanding the knowledge of this letter’s contents for him. Of course, Ben disclosed what Arnold had asked of him, to turn his back on the cause and join him in desertion. Chief amongst his demands was asking Ben to divulge Culper’s contacts and its members. After an agonizing prolonged silence, Washington ordered him to submit a full report on how to capture Arnold before dismissing him. It was clear from the commander-in-chief’s tense posture that he was not pleased with him. Oddly enough, Ben was growing used to that feeling.

Within the past few weeks, Anna had established a trading post in the camp, where anyone from soldiers to camp followers could barter or pay for a particular service, though the brunette specifically ignored any sort of business that didn’t involve washing, sewing, or any other homemaking skills. Whatever other women got up to was strictly between them and their partners, paying or no.

The trading post was doing so well that she took on two employees to help keep it running, a Ms.
Hester and Mrs. Barnes. She found Mrs. Barnes trustworthy enough, but Hester was a more self-oriented person, doing whatever she could to take care of herself and only herself. She often kept a wary eye on her, which led to Hester’s increasing disgruntled attitude with each passing day.

“Don’t ruffle her feathers, Hest,” Mrs. Barnes remarked after a particularly tense standoff between the two, with Hester muttering curses at Anna’s retreating form as she made her way towards the camp. “It’s her cart, after all.”

“You ever wonder why that is?” Hester asked, eying Anna with suspicion. “She didn’t come to camp but five months ago, and she weren’t no peddler then.”

Both she and Mrs. Barnes observed her shrewdly as Anna made her way towards Major Tallmadge’s tent, prompting the latter’s response, “There’s your answer right there. Young Major Tallmadge.”

Hester tilted her head, curious. “You said she was yoked to some fat cull in Philadelphia.”

Mrs. Barnes continued with her sewing, her reply dry, “Says the scuttlebutt.”

Hester looked at her, ready to give her a good verbal lashing when the other woman continued, tone more than a little suggesting, “But she don’t act married, now does she?”

Not far from where the two women sat speculating, Abigail, dressed back in her soldier uniform, binds and all, had arrived with another soldier, dropping off a crate of supplies which helped keep the trading post running. She overheard the two women’s conversation right up until the very end of it.

Rumors of Anna and Ben’s closeness wasn’t news to her. In fact, it was something that she often heard repeatedly, starting off as whispered musings among two people until blossoming into fully blown gossip reaching half the camp. She never really paid any mind to it, but there was a part of her that was bothered by it, naturally. It wasn’t as if she could correct anyone, for obvious reasons, so she had no choice but to remain silent and let the rumors stir.

And it wasn’t as if she had any right to be bothered at all, considering her history. Usually, she found these rumors more than a little hilarious, but given recent weeks, she found little amusing these days.

When she saw Anna making her way towards the camp, the blonde set down a box of sewing material and rose to her feet, half tempted to follow her. She hadn’t so much as spoken to anyone unless spoken to in the past few weeks, let alone Anna, Ben, or Caleb. Perhaps she should attempt to rectify that.

But when she saw Anna make her way towards a tent and saw Ben stepped outside to invite her in, Abigail watched as they entered his tent before walking away.

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After reading the article, Anna looked up from a copy of The Gazette towards Ben. “You can’t be certain they are safe?”

“No, I’m not certain,” he remarked from his desk. He had been in the middle of drawing up the report at Washington’s request when Anna had called out to him from his tent. “But there’s nothing I can do that I haven’t already done.”

It was oddly timed that she had come to see him. He had been prepared to seek her out himself, having received letters from Selah Strong not even a day after the article had been printed. He
retrieved the letter from under his pile of paperwork and held it out towards her. “You’re not the only one who’s worried sick.”

Anna accepted the letter with a frown. “What’s this?”

“I received a few unexpected letters this week. That one is from Philadelphia, from Selah.”

She had been in the process of opening the letter when her husband’s name gave her pause. “You told him I’m here?”

“What? No, no. He still thinks you’re in Setauket serving as a signal, but with Arnold on a rampage rounding up spies, he’s fearing for your life. He’s demanding that I pull you out of there.”

He felt her almost accusing stare, but when he looked towards her, she closed her eyes. “I have to write him back. If he learns I’m in camp, he’ll send for me. Or come for me. And I won’t be able to help with the ring.”

Ben knew far too well where this conversation was going and was quick to snip it in the bud. “Selah’s my friend. I don’t want to have to lie to him.”

Anna leaned forward, her hand resting on his forearm preventing any further work to be done until she got her way. He knew the motive well but from an entirely different source. “If you write that I’m safe and don’t wish to risk more than that in a letter, it won’t be a lie.”

Ben met her stare before looking away with a sigh, conflicted. Anna paused for a moment before saying that it was ultimately his choice. She then folded the paper in her hands and rose to her feet. “I’m more worried about Abe than myself.”

“Anna, I told you that there’s –”

But she kept on going as if he had never spoken. “I know Washington wants him to stay where he is, and you have to follow orders, but Abe doesn’t.”

“Anna…”

“If a boat was to just show up –”

“Anna, I told you there’s nothing I can do –”

The brunette persisted, “No, but,” but Ben interrupted her, “… that I haven’t already done.”

When Anna continued to stare at him, he continued, “Caleb left for Setauket early this morning. In a boat with plenty of room. He should be with Abe as we speak.”

“Oh,” she breathed, her eyes alit with surprise which was quickly followed by relief. “Ben, I… thank you.” Tears began to well up in her eyes, but she stubbornly fought them back. “But aren’t you worried how this will affect Culper?”

Ben set his quill back into its inkpot carefully. “That can be all sorted out later. Abe’s safety comes first. I don’t wish for anyone’s life to be in greater risk than it has to be.”

Anna smiled, which faltered as a flicker of consideration crossed her face. She hesitated for a moment before asking gently, “Have you spoken with her? Does she know about this plan of yours and Caleb’s?”

He didn’t have to which her Anna was referring to. “I… no.” He let the papers slip through his
fingers and onto his desk. His hand felt empty, and it had nothing to do with the papers. “We haven’t
spoken since our return from New York.” He lifted his gaze to her. “Have you spoken to her?”

Anna frowned softly. “No, not since you three returned to camp at West Point.” She withdrew her
hand so that she was wringing them worriedly. “I fear she’s isolating herself. Whether it’s intentional
or not, I can’t say.”

Ben feared the very same but knew all too well that, more than likely than not, it was intentional but
not with the intention to be cruel. The blonde had never been known to cut herself off from others,
which only made it more difficult to determine a course of action. She was never afraid to hide what
she was feeling, whether someone wanted to hear the words or not, so if she felt it necessary to keep
her feelings to herself, the pain she was experiencing must have been unspeakable.

The memory of her pale, drawn face on the journey still haunted him. The way she had seemed to
retreat into herself, her sullen silence, had been understandable, considering what she had been
prepared to do when he and Caleb discovered her. He knew that she had been angry with him then,
but was she still angry with him now? Could she still be angry with him for not allowing her to
throw her life away over something so reckless, so foolish? That wasn’t something he was willing to
apologize for, and he wouldn’t. But what he did regret was not being there for her when she needed
someone.

And how could he do that when she won’t even see him?

During the day, the young major busied himself with tasks of official business, which wasn’t difficult
to accomplish with Arnold’s betrayal at the forefront on everyone’s minds. Meetings and camp dates
occupied much of his time. Nights, however, were a different story.

According to Caleb, she had taken to sleeping in the stables or even just close to the fields where the
horses grazed. One evening, he had walked over to the stables to see for himself and found her
curled up amongst the stacks of hay, which had been piled so high he had nearly missed her, her
arms wrapped around herself to bring her coat around her to keep herself warm. Not having the heart
to disturb her, he had covered her with a blanket brought from his tent and pressed his lips to the
crown of her head before slipping back out into the night. He hadn’t left the stables until the first light
of morning, though she never knew he’d been there.

“I don’t know what to do,” he said after a while. “How should I approach her? Do I go to her
directly and risk alienating her further? Or do I wait and watch as she continues to push everyone
away?”

Anna bit her lip, considering. “I think the best thing you can do is keep doing what you’re doing.”

His brows pinched together in frustration. “Nothing, you mean?”

She shook her head firmly. “No, not nothing. She knows you. She knows that you’re here for her.
She will come to you, when she’s ready.” She smiled sadly. “Grief comes to people differently.
She’ll come back to us when she’s ready. She’ll come back to you.”

That was the crux of it, wasn’t it? Her absence, when she was so easily in reach after months of
separation, stung with rejection. It wasn’t just that he wanted to comfort her, he wanted her close.
Needed her close, for more reasons than he could possibly count. He needed her beside him, not
only in sight but in touch, to feel her warm skin underneath his fingers to assure himself that she was
real and with him and safe. With the threat of the Queen’s Rangers over them, coupled with the
everyday danger within the ranks, that anxious feeling within him only furthered tied his insides in
knots.
He had thought her return to camp would help ease his worries, but with her avoidance, it only seemed to increase. Yes, he knew he was being selfish, but with her recent history of finding trouble, he felt more than justified.

How was it possible to have someone within reach, yet miss them all the same?

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Instead of returning with Abe has intended, Caleb found Ben to inform them of a plan, one that he and Abe had come up with. After assuring him that Arnold knew nothing about Culper, he then informed him that Wakefield was stockpiling hay to fuel the army through winter. Struck by a moment’s inspiration, Caleb had asked if they could somehow delay the shipment by a day or so, and Abe had promised him one better, that they would host a party to make sure the redcoats got so spectacularly drunk that they would be moving slowly the next morning.

When Ben asked him for further clarification for his plans, the whaler told him that this would be the perfect opportunity to damage their supplies, starting with burning of their hay. The major didn’t waste any time in weighing the benefits of this plan, knowing that any damage to enemy supplies would serve them well and immediately sought out Washington with Caleb in tow.

When they first requested permission from him, Washington initially questioned Ben’s methods, which Ben suspected stemmed from resentment of his not immediately divulging Arnold’s letter upon its delivery. Only when he convinced him he was fully committed to standing by him did Washington give his approval for the mission. With the weight of Washington’s disapproval off his shoulders – even if only for the moment – he and Caleb walked in the direction of his tent to discuss the plan on Wakefield’s garrison in greater detail.

Caleb suggested bringing in Anna since her input hadn’t failed them in the past. Once Ben agreed, he told him he would send her over to meet him. There was something he needed to tend to.

“Well, hurry up,” the major urged him. “We’ve got an ambush to plan.” Caleb grinned in response before setting off towards Anna’s trading post and wherever else he buggered off to.

Anna arrived only moments before Caleb did, but he wasn’t alone. Trailing behind him came Abigail, dressed in uniform but hardly kempt. Self-consciously, she adjusted her hat in an attempt to help hide her face, but he had already spotted the circles under her eyes, the pallor of her cheeks. He hadn’t seen her in weeks, yet there she was, trailing after Caleb, albeit at a slower pace. How did Caleb convince her to come?

Had Abigail felt better speaking with Caleb rather than himself? Something twisted inside Ben’s chest at the thought.

They locked eyes before she quickly looked away. He tried his best not to let his disappointment show when he closed the tent flap behind them.

“So, we land at Old Man’s and then we march inland?” Ben asked. The four of them examined the plans of Wakefield’s garrison, drawn on a long sheet of parchment and displayed on an easel making it easier to see. Caleb stood in the center with Anna and himself on either side of him, while Abigail remained slightly apart from them, eying the plans critically.

Caleb hummed affirmatively. “It’s the only place to hide that many boats.”

“Aye, but the field here, it’s too open for us to advance with any surprise. The closest we can get is here.” He pointed to a marked space towards the edge of the plans. “The tree line, right?”
“Right.”

“Then it’s up to you and your pioneers to cross the field and break the gate.” He emphasized his point with a light tap to the map. The whaler agreed.

Anna interjected, “You can get closer than that.”

Ben glanced at her with mildly furrowed brows. “What? Where?”

“Here.” She pointed closer towards the garrison, but he was quick to object, “Anna, there’s no cover there.”

“Yes, there is,” she insisted. “There’s brush along the shore and an incline to conceal you. Whoever drew this map didn’t know what they were drawing. A man most likely.”

Ben brushed the jab aside but happened to glance at Caleb, who was barely concealing his amusement. Annoyance sparked within him, but when he happened to glance in Abigail’s direction, he noted the faint, reluctant smile on her lips. His annoyance dampened, though briefly.

“No, there isn’t,” he insisted.

But Anna continued to push back. “Yes, there is.”

“I don’t remember that.”

The brunette gave him a pointed look. “Well, you didn’t live there, did you?”

Caleb grinned at the two of them squaring off, one with their arms firmly on her hips and the other with his arms folded across his chest. “Ooh, careful, you two. Keep fighting like that, folks will say you’re in love.”

“Caleb, enough,” Ben retorted. He chanced another glance at Abigail and observed that her smile had quickly faded.

“No, he’s right,” Anna cut in before he could say anything. “People are already talking. At least the doxies are.” She glanced apologetically over at the blonde, who kept her expression carefully neutral.

“She’s right,” she spoke, speaking up for the first time since she set foot inside the tent all evening. “I’ve heard them talking myself. But it’s not just them though, it’s all over camp. Whisperings mostly.”

“Wonderful,” Anna muttered under her breath while Ben flushed indignantly and Abigail looked away. That gave him pause.

She couldn’t possibly believe these rumors, could she?

“And who can blame them?” Anna continued. “I’m allowed further into camp than they are. And I’m in this tent long enough for… well, for women to talk.”

Just the thought of the gossip was uncomfortable enough and being the subject of it was even worse. Ben shifted uncomfortably, suddenly unable to meet anyone’s eyes, let alone Abigail’s. “Well, I’ll speak to them. I’ll put an end to that.”

Anna shook her head frantically, reaching out to place a hand on his arm. “Don’t, please. As long as they think I’m… that we are…” She flushed as uncomfortably as he did. “Then they won’t dig any deeper.”
Ben frowned. “You think there are spies among the camp followers?”

She hesitated. “More like I don’t trust them to keep secrets. I don’t want them to think I’m working for the ring, that we even have one.”

“So, what are you asking me to do?”

“Nothing. Just let them believe their gossip.”

Abigail continued to remain notably quiet throughout the exchange, with only the exception of supporting Anna’s claims about the gossip. She remained stock-still, her gaze fixated purposefully on the plans. Although he didn’t hold her gaze, it was clear she was listening carefully to everything being said, waiting to hear his response.

Taking a quiet, measured breath, Ben agreed. No sooner had the words escape him did Abigail rise abruptly from her seat. He took a step towards her, hand reaching, but she brushed him off as she made her way out of the tent, leaving him grasping at air.

An awkward silence settled among them before Caleb broke it with a low whistle. “Ah, I guess I shouldn’t have said that.” He grimaced. “I’ll sort this out. Don’t worry your pretty little heads about it.”

He made his way to follow her when Anna requested for him to not make anything worse, causing him to pause. The smile he gave her was half-assed at best. “How on earth can I possibly make it worse?”

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No sooner than did Ben, Caleb, and Abigail return to West Point did Washington decide on a camp relocation. Having little time to readjust to camp like, Abigail had gotten to work with the rest of the soldiers, packing up tents, weapons, and supplies. It was like picking up right where she had left off.

Surprisingly, it wasn’t difficult. The grunt work, the morning drills, the rigid hierarchical system, came easily to her as if she had never left. She didn’t return to Dr. Anderson’s services right away, but she intended to do just that, once she collected her bearings. She knew he would appreciate all of the herbs and supplies she had gotten in New York.

The familiarity of the tasks, the routine, provided her with distraction, something to hone in her focus, at least during the day.

At night, when everything was said and done, memories of York City plagued her – the Torey society people, swarming redcoats, news of her father’s death, news of Tobias’s death… She could hardly think of it all without struggling for breath. And she was never angrier with anyone but herself, especially when she had the opportunity to fight back and hit the British back forcefully. All she had to do was light a match, and she hadn’t even been able to accomplish that.

So was she still angry and bitter? Of course. However, the anger gradually began to fade into an unpleasant numbness inside her chest. Sleep rarely came, and when it did, not even her dreams provided her with relief from her daily unrest.

Every day since, she couldn’t bring herself to look anyone in the eye, because in the end, she knew that whatever happened next, the girl who she used to be as long gone. Whether or not she would return, she honestly did not know.

“Is this log taken?”
Looking up from her hands in her lap, Abigail spotted Caleb half a dozen steps away from her, his hat in his hands, and looking more than a little sheepish. She wanted to ask him how he managed to find her, when she had no idea where she had intended to go herself. When she had walked out of the tent, she kept on walking until the sights, smells, and sounds of camp faded into the background and from sight, her legs having brought her into a small clearing in the woods. Her legs really should’ve known better by now. She didn’t have the best history with woods after all.

“Only by Mother Nature,” she remarked dryly. The sight of his sudden grin prompted a faint one of her own.

“It’s good that you still have your sense of humor in there,” he said, crossing the short distance between them to sit beside her on old tree stump.

“It’s in there somewhere,” she conceded, “but truth be told, it’s difficult to find anything amusing lately.”

He nodded, understanding. “Aye. I’ve had those days myself.”

She smiled gently, seeing the thoughtful expression come across his face, and knew he was thinking about his uncle, murdered by Simcoe during the standoff in Setauket almost three years ago.

For a moment, he patted himself down, which prompted her to raise an inquisitive brow. One of his hands slipped his coat, searching around for something until he made a small victorious noise, procuring a small flask. He unscrewed the cap and offered it to her first. She accepted the flask with little hesitation, pausing only to sniff it lightly before taking a long sip. She coughed a little when she lowered it from her lips, eyes watering from the strength of it. Brandy, was it? Brandy or rum. It was difficult to say. Well, it was certainly better than water.

“Listen, I’m sorry for what I said back there,” he began hesitantly. “You know me. My mouth and brain aren’t always connected.”

Abigail shook her head. “Nah, you’re fine. I was just… being overly sensitive and perhaps a tad bit foolish. I know better than that, I… I don’t even know what I’m doing anymore.”

When Caleb had coerced her into joining their meeting to discuss their ambush on Wakefield’s garrison, Abigail had known he’d had an ulterior motive other than to include her. His stubbornness while, infuriating at times, was an endearing quality of his, and it was just easier to let him have his way rather than fight him.

While she had been keeping to herself, Caleb had been the only one who refused to keep his distance. In the beginning, he would check on her when he could, comfortable carrying the majority of the conversation whenever he did. At first, she ignored him but very quickly accepted his presence, her guilty conscious goading her into it. She didn’t deserve to have such a good friend.

She agreed that it made sense for Anna and Ben to work the gossip surrounding their meetings to their advantage and told Caleb as much. “And really, I should be the last person to judge. You know, seeing as how my indiscretions with my marriage gives me no ground to stand on.” She took another swig from the flask, a longer one this time, before passing it back to him. Bette to take it away from her now before she finished the whole thing and be useless in the morning.

Caleb frowned. “I think I know your mind is now, so I’m just going to tell this to you once. Well, maybe again in the morning if the drink hasn’t gotten to ya.” After taking a swig for himself, he screwed the cap back on and tucked it away back in his coat for safe keeping. “You’re going to stop beating yourself up about everything you believe you’ve done wrong. It’ll continue eating up at you
if you let it. We all have regrets, Lord knows, but it’s how we learn from them and move on that helps us.”

He reached over and caught a tear with a brush of his thumb along her cheek. She hadn’t even noticed it until she felt the wetness against her cheek. “Life’s too short for that, love. And you deserve more than a life of regret and what-could-have-beens. You’ve been through enough of that.”

For a moment, the numbness inside her chest lessened to a dull ache, and in those briefest of moments, she felt something other than that empty feeling that had possessed her ever since she stepped outside John Andre’s manor. The guilt and grief and anger still remained, but to a slightly lesser degree. Although she knew deep in her heart she couldn’t believe him, on some level his words registered. And just for a second, it gave her a chance to breathe.

Recognizing that flicker of change across her face, Caleb smiled and placed a hand on her shoulder. “C’mon. You should get some sleep. Early day tomorrow and all.” He rose to his feet and held out his hand. “I’ll escort you to the stables myself.”

Abigail snorted lightly, which only made his smile wider, but accepted his hand all the same and allowed him to pull her to her feet, catching her when she stumbled a little. The brandy or whatever the hell it was inside that flask was already working its magic and from only two sips no less.

She couldn’t recall just precisely how they made it to the stables, but she had been coherent enough to partake in conversation, however small her part might have been. The whaler informed her that she would be among the group of soldiers being gathered to storm the garrison on the morrow. It made sense. Better a moving target for a Queen’s Ranger than a sitting duck at camp.

Before she could thank him, Caleb pulled out his flask and took a sip, then asked if she wanted another sip. Abigail shook her head no but reached for the flask anyway, taking another healthy swig. She passed it back to him, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, grimacing a little.

“That should help you sleep through the night,” he joked lightly. “But you’ll be wishing you hadn’t come morning, most like.”

“I’ll just add it to the list,” she wanted to say but refrained. Instead, she went in to give him a hug, only to find herself toppling over with a surprised squeak.

Catching her, the whaler sighed dramatically before hoisting her into his arms bridal style, nudging the stable door open with his foot. “Don’t think I’m not going to use this against you later,” he warned.

“Promises, promises,” Abigail yawned, covering her mouth as an afterthought. Her grip tightened on his shoulders when he took a step inside.

Unbeknownst to the pair, there was an observer who witnessed the exchange from the moment they first approached the stables with a small frown, which only deepened when the whaler scooped the other up in his arms.

Ben’s feet remained rooted to the ground, long after the stable doors slid shut, staring long and hard at the structure until he lost focus. Only then did he turn around to return to his tent, with jealousy clawing sharply at his gut.

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Before sunrise could touch the earth, Ben had already rounded up a group of men for the garrison. He had already handed out assignments and was explaining the mission when Caleb had finally
arrived. Of course, he made light of his tardiness in typical Caleb Brewster fashion with a joke that made a few of the men chuckle, but Ben chose to ignore it, instead carrying on with where he had left off. He tried his best to ignore the confused look on his friend’s face.

Not once did he break from his official capacity as major while organizing the team, making sure each man was properly equipped and saddled for the journey. He did catch Abigail’s eye briefly, but before he could approach her, she turned towards another soldier who appeared to be struggling with his mount.

The hurt resulting from her dismissal of him – or at least what he had perceived to be a dismissal – only irritated him further, which made the journey to Wakefield’s garrison even more unpleasant. Any minor misstep he might have permitted was met with sharp, disapproving glances or worse yet a reprimand in a clipped tone. And that had been only half way in.

Eventually, it got to the point where Caleb had trotted up to meet him, jerking his head forward so that they could move further up ahead. When he stubbornly remained where he was, the whaler narrowed his eyes and gave another jerk forward before lightly urging his horse further ahead, as if to say “that wasn’t a request.” Ben only waited half a heartbeat before nudging his mount to follow him.

“What suddenly crawled up your arse?” Caleb asked, once they were a suitable distance ahead of the men.

Ben frowned at him. “What are you talking about?”

Caleb rolled his eyes. “I’m talking about the dark cloud that’s been over your head the entire morning. One slight mishap and you’re practically spitting nails. That’s not like you.”

“I’m not that bad.”

The whaler snorted. “Maybe not yet, but I figured I’d nip it in the bud before you got any worse. So what’s wrong?” When Ben refused to answer, Caleb sighed heavily. “Listen, Tallboy, I know things haven’t exactly been easy these past few weeks, but those men back there don’t deserve to feel the brunt of that. They have enough to worry about than having a temperamental officer giving them hell. No offence.”

The major pulled a face at that, but ultimately, he knew he was right. He remained silent for a few minutes, letting the steady pace of his walking mount to lull him. Then he remarked, “You’re right. It was never my intention of being…” he sighed. “I’m sorry.”

Thankfully, Caleb appeared to accept his apology, but he was still eying him somewhat warily.

“Glad to hear it, but that doesn’t explain what’s gotten your knickers in a twist.”

The look Ben gave him this time was anything but pleased, but as usual, Caleb ignored it and stared back.

Ben’s rank never really phased Caleb much, which he suspected was due to the fact that they had known each other for so long. It was something he often ignored and was clearly something he was doing now. It never really bothered Ben that much in the past, but now, he found it irksome.

But now he just couldn’t keep it inside any longer. “It’s just frustrating, being told not to act, to wait it out, let her come to you. And that’s exactly what she did, but it’s not me she’s come to.”

When he said it allowed, the admission sounded so petulant to his ears he felt the heat rising to his cheeks with embarrassment. Suddenly, he wasn’t a Continental major and the head of intelligence
but a young boy of fourteen again. No worse than that, twelve.

Caleb’s eyes widened in disbelief and then tossed his head back with an incredulous laugh, which only made Ben’s face redder. “Jesus Christ, you are…” he wheezed out between his laughter. “Are you seriously jealous, Ben? Bloody hell.”

“Would you keep it down?!”

“For the love of God, man!” Caleb shook his head in stunned incredulity, though hints of his amusement still infuriatingly remained. “You need to talk. Both of you, together, when and where doesn’t really matter. Fuck, I can’t believe it. Were you ever this bad before you finally kissed the woman?”

Ben glared at him warningly. “Caleb…”

Caleb shook his head after a brief period of consideration. “No. Actually, I think you’re worse.”

“I could force you to take up the rear,” Ben remarked, eyebrows raised pointedly.

“All right, all right.” Caleb raised his hands in mock surrender. He was just about to place the reins to his mount’s neck when he looked at him, all amused expression and witty pretenses dropped. “I really do believe talking will solve a lot of your problems.”

Ben nodded in silent agreement but couldn’t bring himself to linger on the subject any further. Instead, he turned the conversation back to the garrison to make sure they had everything squared away. Caleb accepted the change in topic without a fuss, but he knew better than to believe that he had managed to pull the wool over Caleb Brewster, the master at the art of bullshit.

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Thanks to Abe and Mr. Woodhull’s efforts of generously supplying Wakefield and his soldiers with alcohol, the garrison was left poorly defended, which had made it all the easier for Ben and his team to storm. Whatever they couldn’t take for themselves, they burned, starting with the hay.

Ben was surveying the work of his men when Caleb approached him with two bags of what could only be described as alcohol based on smell alone. The size of the bags matched the large grin plastered on the whaler’s face. Ben couldn’t suppress his amusement even if a gun were held to his head. “And what may I ask is that?” he asked dryly.

“What do you think?” Caleb gave the bags a light shake. “Do you know how much these are worth?”

Ben raised a brow, his lips twitching upwards in amusement. “Washington said whatever we can’t use we burn.”

“We can use these!” Caleb implored. When he realized Ben wasn’t going to stop him from taking them, he whirled around. “A… Williams, grab the rest of these, will you?”

Abigail looked in their direction, noticed the alcohol in Caleb’s hands and his eager face, and shook her head indulgently before setting off after Caleb towards the rest of the British stock, housed inside the tent where it was stored. That was until Ben reached out and lightly touched her wrist.

She looked up at him, startled yet unsurprised.

“We need to talk,” Ben murmured.
Abigail bit her lip before replying back quietly, “I don’t think this is the time or place for that.”

Naturally, he agreed with that, so of course he asked, “When would be the appropriate time and place?” He hadn’t intended for his words to be barbed, but seeing her eyes narrow, he apparently thought they were.

“I’ll let you know,” was her retort before she moved around him, but he fell into step with her.

Her clipped tone unintentionally ruffled his feathers. He then replied in kind, “Would you prefer to tell Caleb when you’re ready then?” Once the words were out, he instantly regretted them.

Abigail stopped and leveled him with an unimpressed stare. “Yes, I’ll do that. And you can send Anna to Caleb so that we can keep with the tradition of intermediaries.”

Ben pressed his lips together in frustration. This was getting them nowhere. “When we return to camp. The woods. Be there.”

“Fine,” she remarked, grabbing an unmanned torch to burn the hay. Ben watched her go sullenly, until he remembered where he was and what they were doing. Closing his eyes, he took a measured breath and grabbed a torch himself, hoping that when all was said and done they wouldn’t burn themselves.

Chapter End Notes

So yes. Both Abigail and Ben are being dumb, but don't worry, things will work themselves out. I have a feeling you guys are going to find the next chapter particularly interesting.

Thanks so much for all of the comments, kudos, subs, and bookmarks!! It means so much to me <33333
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place after 4x01

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Windsor, New York
Continental Base

Once the hay had been burned along with the rest of Wakefield’s supplies – the ones that hadn’t been appropriated by the Continents of course – Ben and Caleb had led the troops back to the New Windsor base. Most of the soldiers were high on the thrill of the chase and even more so glowing on the moment of victory. But there was one soldier who didn’t share in their barely suppressed revelry, choosing instead to keep on marching forward although her mind was miles away from where they marched.

The journey back to camp took little more than half the night. Not wanting to risk Wakefield’s men catching up with them, Ben hadn’t given them a chance for a moment’s rest, promising them they would get their well-earned rest once they set foot back to camp.

Those men did that and more upon their return to camp. Breaking out the smuggled wine, the movement spurred by Caleb Brewster himself, they acted as if they had won the war instead of a successful sabotage, though really who was Abigail to judge a man for such cause of celebration? Lord only knew that everyone needed every ounce of morale they could find.

When someone passed her a cup, she nearly had rejected it but reconsidered, holding the cup of wine or brandy or whatever the contents were in her mug between her hands. She took a quick survey of the land, noting that everyone was too preoccupied to notice her slipping off towards the woods, to the spot where she and Ben had previously agreed upon meeting.

She knew it would be a while for him to appear, knowing he had to meet with Washington to provide him with a report of the mission. Perhaps she should have brought a book with her to pass the time but then remembered the only books she had with her were the training manuals she had been given at the recruitment base once upon a time.

Cautiously, the blonde sniffed her cup before hesitantly bringing it to her lips. One sip all but had her gagging. Jesus Christ, the bloody stuff was stronger than Caleb’s rum! No wonder he was so adamant about taking it.

“Blech,” Abigail grimaced. She considered tossing the cup’s contents into the nearest bush, but just the thought of the whaler’s affronted face stopped her but barely.

“I take it you’ve received some of Caleb’s prize,” Ben greeted her.

Abigail lifted her gaze towards the trees and watched as he paused a few dozen feet from her, as if unsure whether it was safe to approach. “Not by choice, no,” she responded. “It’s abominable.”

His lips twitched in amusement. “From what I’ve heard, it is a bit strong.”
Abigail’s brows raised incredulously. “‘A bit’? That’s like saying King George is a bit mad.”

He had to press his lips together to suppress a laugh. The sight was enough to crack a smile from her, albeit a brief one. “But, hey, if you don’t believe me.” She held out the cup towards him.

Accepting the invitation, Ben closed the distance between them to take the cup from her and brought it up to his lips. To his credit, he didn’t spit it out, but judging from the look of horror on his face, it appeared he wish he had. “Christ, that’s not wine!”

Abigail grinned, momentarily triumphant. “Told you.”

Ben shook his head in dismay and proceeded to empty the cup onto the forest floor without a second thought.

“Caleb wouldn’t approve of that,” she remarked as he held the now empty cup in his hands.

He shrugged. “Yes, well, Caleb can sue me.”

“And Abe can represent you, now that he’s finished with his law studies.”

“Very true.”

The silence that followed gradually became awkward. While it was nice to fall back into the familiar, playful banter, there still remained an underlying current of tension that could no longer go unaddressed, something Abigail had been avoiding acknowledging until now.

“I miss this,” Ben spoke, his words disrupting the silence.

She smiled faintly. She didn’t have to ask what he meant by that. “It may not seem like it, but… I miss it, too,” she admitted. Having abandoned her hat long after stepping foot outside the camp, her hair was rebelling against the string that bound it in a knot. She knew she should take care of that, since it was now far past her shoulders, but at the moment, she could hardly care less about what she looked like, or rather who she looked like.

“These past few weeks I’ve…” she sighed harshly. “I know how it must seem, me pulling away from everyone, but I feel that I have to distance myself to come to grips with this new reality. As illogical as that may seem.”

“Abigail…”

She shook her head quickly, stopping him before he could get a chance to speak. “Please don’t say anything until I’m done. Otherwise, I don’t think I’ll be able to get through this, what needs to be said.”

Ben nodded gently. “Okay. I promise.”

She noticed that when he sat, he specifically chose to sit across from her and not beside her on the log, which had plenty of room. He was giving her the space she needed, and in that moment, she couldn’t have been more grateful, yet at the same time she still craved his closeness as much as she ever did.

For the first time in weeks, she opened herself to him again, although not all at once. She told him everything she was feeling, how some days she could hardly sit still and on others how she found it difficult to even breathe through her grief but how she couldn’t bring herself to confined in anyone. She felt as if she needed to suffer through it alone, because she deserved to. When she saw his brows
furrow and his deepening frown, she worried that he was going to argue, but he remained silent, waiting for her to say her piece.

She kept her hands firmly in her lap as she spoke, clutching at them tightly enough she hoped to ease the trembling in them. “Every day, it’s a different feeling, a slight variation from the day before, but the one feeling that has been my constant companion? That would have to be guilt, so much guilt I don’t even know where to begin.” She bite back a bitter laugh, the sound getting caught in her throat. “But what I do feel, what I do know, is how truly of a wretched person that I am.”

With a quietly pained, frustrated noise, Ben shook his head. “I’m sorry, but I can’t keep silent any longer. I can’t allow you to continue to tear yourself apart like this.” He leaned forward to cover his hands with hers, while trying determinedly to catch her gaze. “You are not a wretched person. You’re not horrible.”

Abigail huffed quietly. “That’s what Caleb said.”

“Well, Caleb’s right,” he replied. “You’re one of the kindest, bravest souls I’ve ever had the fortunate of knowing. Stubborn to a fault, yes, but never without reason. You’re loyal to your friends and family. You speak your truth and fight for what’s right. And how many people have you take care of while in New York? You’ve gone well and beyond your duty.” He squeezed her hands lightly. “Now tell me, how can a person such as that ever be wretched?”

“But how can that person you just describe could ever do the things I’ve done?” Abigail demanded softly. “Everything I’ve done to get here and everything I’ve done since. A horrible daughter and an even worse wife. Deceit, infidelity… And look… and look what’s come of it.”

And that was the heart of the issue, the crux of all of her pain in guilt. She had done what she had to do to protect her father, but in the end, she was the one who killed him, not directly but the news of her death had intensified Thomas Williams illness to the point of his death. That was something she could never forgive herself for, no matter how much time had passed. As for Tobias…

Tobias had always been good to her, had always loved her, and how did she repay him? By marrying him when she had been in love with someone else first. By starting something with the very same person she had loved for years and then leaving her husband for that person. And if she hadn’t gotten herself captured, he never would have had to rescue her, nor would he have been killed by that Queen’s ranger either.

There were so many elements, so many complications, that made her guilt even more complex, but it always came back to that.

It wasn’t until she heard Ben’s quiet intake of breath she realized she had shut her eyes. She opened them and immediately wished she hadn’t, seeing the pained, vulnerable expression on his face clawed at her insides. “Are you saying that you… that we made a mistake?” And she knew deep down he wasn’t only referring to their first few kisses either.

Abigail’s face drained of color. Was he really asking her that? How could he possibly think that… though she supposed it was a logical conclusion to come to, giving everything she had just confessed. She shook her head vigorously, so much so her hair fell over her shoulder. “No, I’m not,” she replied without hesitation. “I could never regret… that, or anything else that has happened between us. It’s…” she trailed off, voice cracking, “It’s not about you or us. I…”

Frustrated at her sudden lack of eloquence, Abigail slipped her hands from his reluctantly and forced herself to her feet. She needed to move, to think, but all she was accomplishing was making her thoughts even murkier. What was wrong with her?
She halted all movement and pressed her hands to her face, before running them through her hair in agitation. “Nothing of what I’m saying pertains to you, I hope you know that. And I know how that must sound, but I promise you, this has everything to do with me.” She paused, staring up at the trees, as if trying to find some inspiration for what she had to say next.

She could feel his gaze his her and felt a tiny, instinctive shiver run through her at the knowledge. In the end, she knew exactly what she needed to say, and for her to say it, she needed to turn around and look him in the eye, if could only find the courage to do so.

Suddenly wishing she had finished that damned cup, the blonde exhaled shakily before continuing, “And please don’t think you’re a part of this by extension because you’re not. That’s not with this is about. But... oh fuck it.”

Turning abruptly, she faced him, not even pausing to gauge the growing confusion mingled with lingering vulnerability on his face. “There’s something I’ve come to realize recently that – no, actually, it’s something I’ve known for quite some time. I’ve just never let myself admit it before, at least not out loud.

“And the guilt from that has been eating me alive,” she continued, her hands clenched into fists. Her nails dug into her palm to the point of pain, but she ignored it, instead allowing the pain to keep her grounded instead of running for the hills. “For many reasons. But mostly it’s because…”

She squeezed her eyes shut. The next few words came out in a rush. “Yes, I loved Tobias, in every way a wife should. And I know that’s the last thing you want to hear right now, but please, just let me say it.”

It wasn’t until she heard the major’s quiet “okay” did Abigail open her eyes again.

“I did love him, but I was never in love with him. Not in the way that I – not in the way that I loved you then, or now. I was never loved him in the way that… I love you.”

And there it was. Those three words that had always been on the tip of her tongue but had been stubbornly withheld were out there now. She couldn’t take them back, even if she wanted to.

The relief that followed her admission wasn’t something she’d expected nor were the ease in which she spoke them. Saying that she loved him was as natural and instinctive as breathing, yet she had been unwilling to utter the for far too long.

It was plain for anyone to see that she loved him, and she knew deep down at he knew it, too, but seeing the shift in his expression, the lighting of his eyes and the soft upward curve of his mouth, it was very clear that words held just as much power as action.

Struggling to maintain a hold on his emotions, Ben rose to his feet and took a step towards her, but Abigail took a step back, keeping the distance between them. His smile dimmed a little, a look of mild askance crossing his face. She shook her head lightly, but he still came forward, unable to help himself, until the hand she brought up to discourage him from coming any closer now rested against his chest. She could feel the strong steady beating of his heart underneath her palm.

“Please, don’t come any closer,” she begged softly.

Ben’s smile was now a confused frown. “Why not?”

“Because… because I’m not sure what I’ll do if you do.”

If he came any closer, she knew she would kiss him, that he would kiss her back, and that she would
get lost in him just like every time before. She couldn’t allow herself to have that just yet. She was too much of a mess, and a part of her felt that if she allowed herself any bit of happiness, she would be betraying her father’s and Tobias’s memory. And that hurt more than any words could express.

He blinked. “But you just said…”

“I know.” She swallowed, her gaze purposefully fixated on where her hand now rested against her chest. She was afraid if she looked at him that she would give in and kiss him, but she was more afraid that if he repeated those words back… “Please, don’t say it back. Not yet. I…I just need some time, to sort everything out, with me. I’m sorry.”

She sniffled quietly. Then she felt his finger brush against her cheek, prompting her to finally look up at him. She hadn’t even realize she had started crying until feeling his hand against her cheek.

“I promise. I promise I won’t say it back, not until you’re ready to hear it.” She could see the overwhelming urge to say it back in his face, in the tension of his body, yet he made the promise, one she knew he would keep. He caressed her cheek with his thumb. “As long as you promise to let us back in again. You shouldn’t have to go through this alone.”

That was a fair bargain to make. She nodded, smiling faintly. “I promise,” she murmured, letting herself become enveloped in his arms. The solidness and warmth of his chest against her cheek sending a warmth through her body she had long lacked. “I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter was a bit on the short side, but I thought this scene deserve its own chapter. Also, I apologize for my updates being significantly off lately. I’m working on getting back into the rhythm of a more consistent posting schedule! Thank you all for your continued interest/support in this fic! It really means the world to me. I wouldn’t have made it this far without your support <3333333
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

A lot of the dialogue comes from the show, but it's only used to keep the plot moving along. This chapter takes place during 4x02

Update: Correction on mix-up from Rhode Island to Long Island! Me and my writer tunnel vision! Argh! Thank you Chloe Fuller for letting me know!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I swear, I thought they were taking me out to shoot me, not trade me,” said Mr. Teddy Beddows, who stood before General Washington and Ben with nearly all the color drained from his face.

The latter of the two men couldn’t blame him for that, not with Washington staring him down with such intensity. From his tightened expression, it was perfectly clear he was not happy with the Betters, the brother of Caleb’s contact, and for once, Ben himself was not on the receiving end of that stare, of which he considered himself fortunate. However, what pity he might have had for this man was nowhere in sight, just as Caleb Brewster seemed to be.

“All this time I told myself I was doin’ my part, tending my fields and keeping an eye out for any gleanings I thought might help.”

Ben looked between the two men, noting Washington’s silence was only making the other man sweat, and then supplied, “Mr. Beddows was an agent of Robert Howe, another unfortunate casualty of Arnold’s defection.”

Expression immobile, Washington inquired, “Did General Arnold interrogate you personally?”

“No, sir,” came the fellow’s reply without hesitation, which suggested what he was telling them was true. “I suppose he thought me a little fish, only good for reeling in a bigger one.”

Not long after did Mr. Beddows request to enlist, and Washington told him that Colonel Hamilton would see to it before exiting the tent. Ben mouthed his thanks to the poor awkward fellow before following the commander-in-chief out.

As soon as he fell into step with him, Washington demanded to know why Caleb had been in Connecticut in the first place. Ben was quick in his reply, explaining that the whaler had sold goods on the London trade to provide a cover for his trips to Setauket and meetings with Abraham. He could only assume that Arnold arrested Caleb because he knew Caleb and himself were close associates, but he very much doubted Arnold knew anything related to Culper.

He shared his views with Washington, who looked to grow more displeased with every word coming out of his mouth. There was a brief flash of weariness in his gaze, but as soon as Ben blinked, it was gone, making him wonder if he had seen anything in the first place. “I want a full report on all remaining assets by the morning,” was his only remark. As soon as Ben agreed, Washington set off for his next matter of business for the day.

He knew Washington was well under a significant amount of pressure, as were they all. Whether
Arnold was aware of it or not, his betrayal continued to have negative residual effects long after the fact. And now with Caleb’s capture, Washington saw this as effectively cutting off a part of their strategy, a shot intended for Culper—though Ben was still convinced Arnold had no way of knowing this. And yes, while all of this might have been true, the major’s primary concern was getting his friend back safe and sound. The future of Culper was secondary.

With this in mind, Ben set off to conduct his research of Culper assets for Washington’s reports, and he knew precisely where to find her.

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After weeks of avoidance, Abigail finally managed to pluck up the courage to speak with Dr. Anderson, hoping to reobtain her apprenticeship. She had been worried he would refuse her, which was why she brought along her medicine box and all of her herbs and medications she had purchased and/or made during her stay in York City. Whether or not that could be considered a bribe was open to interpretation.

Much to her surprise, Anderson accepted her back with open arms and quite literally too. The man all but embraced her just as soon as she took one step inside the tent. However, the moment was fairly fleeting, with him stepping back immediately, his cheeks red with embarrassment.

When she asked about returning to her position, he agreed immediately, though he was quick to add, his cheeks still red from his uncharacteristic display of physical affection, “And let us not speak of this again.”

“Oh, that’s fine,” Abigail remarked while setting her medicine box on top his table, “though I think you may be tempted for another go once you see what I have.”

Once things were settled with Anderson and the infirmary tent, she went about reintegrating herself back into camp life. She wasn’t exactly sure what the explanation had been for her sudden disappearance and return would be, but fortunately enough, she had managed to blend into the background as she once did. Or usually did rather.

Whatever the story had been, Ben had made it clear that she was not to speak of it with anyone, and if anyone had a problem with that, they could take it up with him personally. It was the one thing he had been adamant about telling her when they had first arrived at the camp, just before she had begun distancing herself from everyone. Until recently, that is.

It wasn’t that she was actively avoiding Ben, at least, not as she was a few weeks prior, but she wasn’t eagerly seeking him out either. Something about confessing one’s feelings after years upon years of repression tended to have that effect.

It was strange, silly really, since she had never been one to mince words. She always spoke her mind and did so without any qualms about it. So course, saying those three words should have brought her relief. It did, mostly, but it also brought along a wave of vulnerability she wasn’t accustomed to. The fact she had urged him not to say anything back didn’t help matters either.

So when she saw Ben walking towards her, naturally her heart jumped in her throat. But any thoughts of making a run for it left her mind seeing the grimness of his expression. Realizing something was wrong from the look on his face and the fact he was wearing civilian clothes, she met him halfway.

“What’s wrong?” she asked the moment they came in reach for each other. After throwing a furtive glance around them, Ben murmured, “Caleb’s missing.”
Abigail’s eyes widened. “What?!”

He explained to her in the briefest of terms, recollecting how Teddy Beddow had confessed to the confusion, how he had believed to have been taken out to be shot instead of trading and the entire mess that resulted in Caleb’s capture. Knowing Arnold had called for his arrest didn’t make things any better. Abigail knew it was a dig at Ben, and when she said as much, he agreed with her.

She didn’t ask all of the questions she was dying to ask. Just from his restless demeanor, she already knew there was a plan in the works. “And you’re on your way to meet with someone to help you in your plan to get him back, but obviously, he can’t know the full details, so you’re more or less going to lure him under false pretenses, for a lack of a better phrase.”

The major’s brows raised a little in surprise. “How on earth did you know that?”

Torn between smiling or rolling her eyes, Abigail remarked, “I know you. And having grown up with you, I have the unfortunate knowledge of how your mind works, Tallmadge.”

Ah, there was the reluctant flicker of a smile. “Yes, I suppose you do.”

There was a moment. Even in the most dire of moments with the news of Caleb’s capture, there was still a moment, where he was just looking at her, in such a soft way, it took everything inside her not to run in the other direction. And Abigail Williams was not a runner.

“And whatever you’re planning,” she added, determined to push forward, “don’t even think for a moment that I’m not coming with you.”

She was very well-versed in his arguments by now: it was too dangerous for reasons x, y, and z; it would be too much of a risk, with the Queen’s rangers looking for her; anything could go wrong. Yes, while all of that might have been true, Caleb was a dear friend. No, more than that. He was family, and you never turned your back on family, no matter how much of a pest he might be.

She expected an argument, but what she hadn’t expected was for his unperturbed expression. Well, not exactly unperturbed. Perhaps resigned was the better way to describe it. Above all else, he wasn’t surprised by her insistence, that much was clear.

“I wouldn’t expect anything else,” Ben remarked. “Actually, I was going to come recruit you, but you didn’t give me the chance to ask.”

Now Abigail was surprised but did her best not to let it show. Or attempted to anyway. “Well… good.”

If he was pleased by her surprise, he didn’t let it show, which would have been more annoying if not for the fact his duties relied upon that particular ability.

“When are we leaving?” she asked, falling into step with him when he began to head past the

“Right now. We’re paying a visit to Setauket before we make our move.” He looked her over for a moment before adding, “You should probably change first.”

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Setauket, Long Island
White Hall Manor

The journey to Setauket took longer than either she or Ben would have liked. Not wanting to risk exposure by traveling by boat, the major had insisted on horseback and taking the longer route,
which meant more travel time and more time leaving Caleb in Arnold’s custody. With this in mind, Abigail suggested they ride fast and hard to the Long Island town, only taking brief breaks for the horses, which needed to be kept few and far between if they wished to keep time on their side. Ben had readily agreed.

Not once was there room for small talk, let alone a conversation of underlying tones between them. Determination to reach Setauket to bring them one step closer to saving Caleb didn’t leave much room for conversation, and Abigail had been grateful for it, though every now and then she had caught him throwing little furtive looks in her look direction when he thought she wasn’t looking. And the only reason she had noticed any of these looks because she had been sneaking those sorts of looks at him herself. She was woman enough to admit it.

Within a few days’ time of few breaks and riding at near breakneck speed, the pair reached Setauket, taking to the woodland trail to reach White Hall manor. When the house came into view, Abigail was hit with a wave of overwhelming emotion.

She hadn’t been to this house since she was a young girl, well before she had gotten married. Riding up to this house brought back memories of rustling skirts, carefree laughter, and silly games she had partaken in with Abe, Anna, Ben, and Caleb in their youth. And when they returned from whatever adventure they had stumbled into, Richard Woodhull would await them in the company of the rest of their parents, Reverend Tallmadge and her father among them. While Anna’s mother fussed over her appearance, Thomas Williams simply plucked out the leaves from her hair and inquired curiously about what she had been up to.

Abigail’s throat tightened and her eyes stung sharply as she fought back her tears while following Ben’s lead, urging Cantor towards a cluster of trees to hide them. Her foot caught in her stirrup as she attempted to dismount and soon found a warm hand pressing against her back, the other against her thigh as the stirrup slipped from her foot. She kicked her other foot loose, swinging it over Cantor’s side before Ben helped eased her off her mount’s back, his hands light but steady.

“Can… can you give me a minute?” she asked quietly once the horses were secure. “It’s just, this place…” She blinked rapidly. “You know?”

Realization dawned on Ben at her meaning. He squeezed his eyes shut in regret. “Christ, I’m so, so sorry. I didn’t even think before asking…”

Abigail shook her head. “No, no. Don’t do that. I volunteered. And even if you didn’t ask, I would’ve come anyway.” Tucking a loose strand behind her ear, she turned her head towards White Hall, her chest hollow at the sight of the proud, white gabled manor. “Just give me a few minutes, okay?”

Nodding in understanding, Ben pressed a kiss to her forehead and told her he would be inside and that when she was ready to just slip in the back. She nodded and watched him go before turning her attention back to the horses, unable to look at White Hall just yet, let alone approach it.

She wasn’t certain how much time had passed, as she stood there watching the horses graze leisurely, before she finally began to set off towards the manor. Her feet felt heavy and clumsy. More than once, she tripped over fallen branch or worse yet, just air, but she soon found herself at the servant’s entrance. And, after taking another few minutes to breathe, she slipped inside.

She maneuvered her way through the servants’ corridor with ease, having used them many a time when sneaking things and occasionally people in and out of White Hall – namely a young Anna to a young Abe during their early courting years. Pressing her hand against the wall, she rounded the corner until she came out into the foyer, where she heard the unmistakable brass voice of Richard
Woodhull, with more than a little touch of confusion in his voice.

“The Turtle, what Turtle? What does he mean?”

There was a pause before Abe remarked, “Aye, it's an - It's sort of a…”

“What?” Abigail smothered a smile at Abe’s father’s confounded tone.

“It's a submersible,” she heard Ben add. “It's a boat that goes under the water.” The sound of his voice spurred her forward until she stepped inside the parlor.

“It's all right, it's destroyed now.”

Seeing the men together talking about submersibles of all things caused Abigail to huff lightly. Men and their priorities. “We should just go now,” she remarked in lieu of announcing herself.

Her words drew each men’s gaze towards her, Ben’s gaze softening the instant he saw her. She felt the ache ease inside her chest. Abe’s brows raised in surprise while Richard squinted at her in confusion. “You look familiar…” he trailed off. When no one said anything, he continued to look at her, as if mentally reassessing where he had seen her before. If he removed the cap, saw her hair down… and put her in a dress… His eyes practically bulged out of his head. “Abigail?!” he spluttered.

Not knowing what else to do, the blonde gave him a tiny wave. “Morning, Mr. Woodhull.” She noted both Ben and Abe turning their heads to hide their grins while Richard Woodhull continued to splutter.

“I… you… you’re supposed to be in Ireland!”

“Apparently not.”

“I… you!” Richard turned an accusing finger at Ben. “The rebels are enlisting women now? Are things really that desperate?’”

Ben’s smile quickly turned into a frown. “Excuse me?” he asked incredulously just as Abigail let out an indignant, “Oi!”

Thankfully, Abe was quick to steer them back to the conversation at hand. “It's not getting in that's the problem, it's getting out.”

Shaking off his shock with a slow shake of his head, Abe’s father spoke, “If Brewster refuses to admit to spying, they can't hang him.”

Ben then asked, disbelief clear in his voice, “So, what, he rots in a cell until the end of the war? If you even lives that long.”

Silence descended upon the four of them, heavy and awkward. That was until Abe’s face light up. “No, we trade him.”


“Their pirates took one of ours. You have ours, take one of theirs. An upstanding Tory, loyal son of Setauket? Think about it.” Abigail could practically see the wheels turning inside Abe’s head as he explained himself. The more her insisted, the less she liked it. But then again, she understood that from another standpoint, it was a good idea A pretty damned good idea, especially since no other
options had presented themselves.

She watched as Ben looked off to the side, his face careful and considering. “No, I am. Well, it's not bad.”

Abe all but beamed. “It's not bad.”

“Kidnapping you is not bad?” Abigail asked. When Abe looked at her, she shrugged. “I'm sorry, but someone has to play devil's advocate here.”

“If we pull it off, we get Caleb back and we strengthen Abe's cover as well,” Ben remarked. Then he glanced over at Abigail, before adding, “And don’t think your role as playing devil’s advocate isn’t appreciated.”

He and Abigail shared a smile while Richard looked at his son carefully. “I know you hold yourself in high regard, Abraham, but you're just not important enough.” He turned and face Ben and Abigail, squaring his shoulders as if preparing for battle himself. “Now, the Magistrate of Setauket, that's a ransom that will not be questioned, and a ransom that Cooke will pay even if the price is a rebel smuggler.”

Ben nodded reluctantly. “He does have a point.”

Abe crossed his arms firmly across his chest. “Well, then the rebels will be offering two for one.” He shared a look with his father. “I'm not letting you do this alone.”

“This is pretty damned risky,” Abigail remarked, leaning against the doorframe. “Do you think you can pull this off?”

Abe’s posture was still tense, but it didn’t reflect in his reassuring smile. “Abigail, it's just a play. But it's one that we get to write. And I will see it through, personally.”

Abigail very much wanted to tell him that Julius Cesar was a play, too, and look how well that turned out. Instead, she kept her mouth shut and watched as the men hashed out the rest of their plans, only speaking up to throw in an opinion here or there. Overall, her singular thought was “Oy vey.” And she wasn’t even Jewish.

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New Windsor, New Jersey

The moment Ben and Abigail returned from Setauket Anna Strong came down upon them in a mild fury. Well, on Ben anyway, as he seemed to be the target of her temper. Abigail didn’t dare speak up, but she enjoyed Anna’s tirade against him quite immensely. She voiced her concerns about the treatment of the camp followers in the camp and how one mother and child were at risk for being expelled from the camp. Abigail’s heart filled with sympathy, but she was well aware there were multiple sides to every story. Besides, she knew when to keep her mouth shut and let others hash it out. Now was one of those times.

“This isn’t your problem, Anna,” Ben insisted, as the three of them walked side by side. She and Ben were still in their civilian clothing and knew they needed to be back in uniform, but she had wanted to discuss with him further about this plan of theirs. It was far too dangerous and too risky to carry out in her opinion and hoped to push him to think of another option. That was when Anna had found them. “And, frankly, we’ve got much bigger ones.”

“It’s not a possibility that a mother and child might be put out is of no concern to you?” Anna
demanded.

“And we both know, the real problem is there’s no pay for the men,” Ben remarked, dropping his voice on the chance of someone overhearing them. “And we all have to remember why we joined this fight.”

Irritated, Anna’s voice grew louder with her objections, “Maybe it’s harder for women to remember when they see injustice closer to home.”

She looked over at Abigail, raising her eyebrows in askance of support.

Ben looked sharply at Abigail to not get involved, but Abigail remarked anyway, “She does have a point.”

“Of course, you’d agree with her,” he mumbled.

Abigail’s eyes narrowed. “What?”

“Nothing,” he replied quickly.

He and Anna were having a staring match, one that Abigail observed with a mildly amused expression until a lieutenant approached the three of them, addressing the major, “Sir, Havens is here to see you.”


Abigail had long spotted the familiar face approaching them and decided it was best to make herself scarce for the time being. When Walter greeted Anna with a hug, she lightly nudged Ben’s foot with her own, silently communicating she was planning on doing just that. He nodded imperceptibly and returned his attention back to Walter. She turned around quickly and went off in search for where she had left her bags.

By the time she returned, the group had already gone their separate ways. Whatever information Havens had for Ben must have been delivered.

Abigail’s original plan had been to speak with Ben, but instead she found herself walking towards the camp trading post, Anna’s little corner of the camp world.

“Anna, may I speak with you for a moment?” Abigail asked once she was certain no one else was around.

Surprised, Anna nodded, and together they made their way towards the barn, neither of them feeling comfortable speaking in Ben’s tent without him being there.

She didn’t wish to cause any more gossip among Anna’s two trading post employees. She could only imagine of the gossip if they saw her approach the other woman, especially under her man’s guise. Something about Anna having two men.

The thought made her snort in amusement. When Anna gave her a questioning look, Abigail shared her thoughts, which forced Anna to press a fist to her mouth to stifle her laughter. She was sorely tempted to take her arm and walk her past the trading post just for that purpose but ultimately decided against it.

Once inside and the barn door safely shut, Abigail turned and faced her, biting her lip. “I’m so sorry Anna.”
Anna’s brows furrowed in confusion. “For what?”

“For…” the blonde sighed heavily. “For being so standoffish and so cold. That was never my intention. It’s just that... well, I mean I just -”

Before she could even get the semblance of a thought out, she found herself in Anna’s arms. She was so surprised by the gesture that her arms remained at her sides until, after the shock wore off, they finally found their way around the brunette.

“I’ve never blamed for you a moment,” Anna assured her. “None of us have. Just, please, don’t believe you need to go through all this alone. You have people that love you. And I’m pretty certain you know that.” Feeling her stiffen, Anna rushed to add, “Please don’t take that as intended to make you feel guilty. That’s not what I meant.”

“I know,” Abigail whispered, her voice muffled against the heavy cloth of the brunette’s cloak. “You usually save the guilt trip for the boys.”

Anna laughed quietly while Abigail smiled faintly against her shoulder. She squeezed her one more time before reluctantly pulling back from her embrace. “As for you and Ben... well, the way I reacted was just childish and sensitive. And more than a bit foolish.”

Anna smiled sympathetically. “It’s understandable, though, under the circumstances. I’m not sure I wouldn’t have acted any differently if it had been you and Abe.”

Just the thought of kissing Abe made Abigail pull a face. “You have nothing to worry about there. Abe’s like a brother to me.”

Anna grinned at her grimace. “And Ben’s a brother to me.”

The blonde shook her head lightly, smiling sheepishly. “All right. I see what you just did there.”

After a few minutes of silence, Abigail commented, “I think it’s a good idea. You know, the gossip about you and Ben. It’ll conceal your cover. Really.” At Anna’s doubtful look, Abigail pressed their hands together. “Seriously, it’s fine. Hell, I’ll give you tips if you need any.”

“Abigail!”

“It’s really not that hard to make him blush, you know.”

Feigning dismay, Anna shook her head. “You two, I swear to God…” Smiling warmly, she said then, “You’re good for him, Abigail. You always have been. And I think he’s just as good for you.” She squeezed her hand in between hers. “Just please don’t shut him out.”

Taking a calming breath, Abigail replied softly, “I promise.”

She was a woman who learned from her mistakes.

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Setauket, Long Island
Woodhull Farm

Abe’s kidnapping scheme, as it turned out, succeeded, though not in the way that no one could have ever anticipated.

Ben and his men had arrived at the Woodhull farm just as Abe and his father had just finished
preparing their wagon for a trip a few towns over, at least that had been Richard’s story when they had spotted the rebel soldiers.

Naturally, Abigail had been among the men to have joined them, though the major had made sure that her role would be kept to a minimum. When he had ordered his men to seize “the Torey bastards”, he had ordered her to take hold of the wagon, which she did without question, pulling herself into the driver’s seat and getting a secure grip on the reins.

“Benjamin Tallmadge! I’ve known you since you were a boy!” Richard shouted at Ben while struggling uselessly against a younger, more able-bodied soldier. “You wouldn’t shoot us out here in cold blood. That’s not the boy I know.”

Ben turned his attention to him coldly. “I have no intention of shooting you in cold blood, Mr. Woodhull. In fact, I’m pretty sure Wakefield would pay a hefty ransom upon you and your son’s return, along with the return of a close associate of ours.”

Abigail knew this was all for show. The only ones who knew of the plan were Ben, Abe and his father, and herself, as far as she was aware. The other men were there on Ben’s orders, and the less they knew of this, the better. Still, even though she knew this was all a rouse, she had trouble keeping a straight face. In her opinion, while they might have the others fooled, the careers of theater performers across the states would forever remain secure in the face of such acting.

Ben had already sent a note of Abe and Richard’s ransom to Major Cooke, prior to their abduction. Abigail had asked him if that was a wise decision, but he had assured her that this way they knew for sure their message would be received. Besides, he had already informed Abe of what he had done. She could only imagine what Richard Woodhull, magistrate of Setauket, thought of this.

Before they could get moving, just about the worst possible thing happened. Wakefield and his officers, returning to Setauket, approached them on horseback. Dressed in all civilian clothes, they had tried to conceal their true intentions, but when Wakefield and his men grew even more suspicious with each passing moment, Abigail knew that just the smallest hint of sight could set this powder keg charged moment off.

From where she sat, the blonde couldn’t tell who shot who first, but when it happened, she immediately dove for cover, pulling Abe and Richard down with her instinctively on her way to the ground.

The gunfire and chaos was mercifully short-lived. By the time, Abigail peered up from behind the wagon, with Abe in her grasp, Wakefield and his men were on the ground, fatally wounded. Somehow Richard had managed to crawl over towards the fallen British officer, pressing his hands against Wakefield’s wounds as if to try and stop the bleeding. He tried in vain to listen to Wakefield’s final, gasping breaths, but Ben hauled him to his feet roughly, resuming his role as the rebel kidnapper all the way Richard shouted and called them all murderers.

And, for the first time that morning, Abigail actually believed he meant it.

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After what felt like hours since the skirmish at the farm, the group had finally set off from the farm. Abigail had no inclination of where they were going, only to travel far enough to a previously agreed upon location to hear from messenger of Cooke, if anyone had been sent that was. She was in no mood for questioning Ben’s judgement, being far too drained to consider bothering.

Though what she was concerned about was the idea of Arnold being in the area. That was enough to
give keep her awake. That snake in the grass disturbed her in more ways than one, but her one and only concern was that she interacted with Arnold. He knew her face and the sound of her voice. He knew her as Abigail Williams, not as Thomas Williams, true, but it wouldn’t be hard to figure out. If the time it took Richard Woodhull to recognize her was anything to go by, she knew if she was ever alone with Arnold, she would be in serious trouble.

With this in mind, Abigail hopped down from her post at the wagon at the first chance she got when she noticed Ben was alone. With the other civilian dressed soldiers keeping guard on Abe and Richard, she knew she had some time to speak with him but not much.

When he saw her approach, Ben took half a step forward, his hand flexing out towards her instinctively, but when he remembered where they were, he lowered them to his side. Only when she was within range, he asked her if she was all right. She nodded jerkily, said she was fine, and turned the question back to him. He assured he was fine but was more concerned with their next move.

“Do you think Arnold’s there with Caleb, wherever they’re holding him?” Abigail asked quietly.

Ben ran a hand through his hair agitatedly. “It’s difficult to say. He could be, but for all we know, he half way cross the Delaware, and we wouldn’t know it. The man’s deviously clever.”

Great. That was the last thing she needed to hear. Wishing she had a flask of Caleb’s liquid courage, Abigail murmured, “Well, it’s probably for the best if Arnold doesn’t see me, if it comes down to confronting him then.”

Pausing in his pacing, Ben’s gaze snapped to her face. “What do you mean?”

Bearing the full brunt of his gaze, Abigail, much to her chagrin, found herself squirming under the scrutiny. She found herself recounting the events of hiding herself in John Andre’s study when she and Abby had heard footsteps approaching. Having concealed herself under the British major’s desk, she told him how she had overheard General Clinton explain to him how John’s residence would now be his temporary quarters, given the previous circumstances. Ben’s blank stare was almost enough for her not to finish, but she somehow managed it, telling him how she accidentally came in contact with Arnold personally before she made her escape that morning.

“That morning when you and Caleb found me,” she added, watching for any flicker of reaction.

Blinking, Ben opened his mouth, looking as if he were getting ready to shout but ultimately thought better of it. Instead, he grabbed her by the arm and guided her a few feet past a group of trees before turning on her and hissing, “And you’re just telling me now?! Why on earth would you wait so bloody long to tell me?”

Abigail threw up her hands in exasperation. “There wasn’t any time to tell you. Besides, I didn’t think it would be relevant.”

“You didn’t think it would be relevant?”

The blonde made a helpless gesture. “There’s been so much going on. I… didn’t want to worry you.”

“Worry me?” he parroted in dismay.

Abigail glared at him, hissing back, “Will you stop repeating every goddamned word I say?”

Ben glared right back. “I will if the occasion warrants it. Christ, I can’t believe you didn’t tell me. I wouldn’t have…” He looked over her shoulder, to the ground, anywhere but at here. She knew what
he was going to say, that he shouldn’t have allowed her to come. But he didn’t say that. They both knew it was far too late for that.

“Come on,” Ben muttered after a prolonged, tense silence. “We need to get back to the others, see if there’s been any word from Cooke.”

At first, she lingered back to see if he would stalk off without her, but when she felt the brief press of his hand against the small of her back, she knew he wasn’t angry with her, not really. Fear made people act irrationally, but she knew that in recent years, she had given plenty enough to be fearful, namely the constant threat to her safety.

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Once Cooke and Arnold left to deal with the rebel ransom of the Woodhulls, Simcoe was once again left alone to his own devices. Well, not truly alone. He did have his one companion, though according to those two his companion appeared not to be in the state of such a description. So what if he had roughed him up a little? The man was a suspected spy, a proven smuggler. How on earth did Arnold even think he would learn anything from Brewster, by wooing him like a fair maiden?

It had taken days and hours of torture to wring it out of him, but finally Simcoe had managed to break the once thought unbreakable Caleb Brewster. Beating him hadn’t gained him much, but it was amazing what a simple press of a hot poker could earn a man. Based on Cooke and Arnold’s reactions, he had treated Brewster appallingly, inhumanely. From his look of things, it seemed to him he had done his job, and he knew he had done it well.

Sighing, Simcoe approached the crumbled body of the notorious smuggler, the ever present thorn in his side, and murmured, “I’m afraid we must part company. Your friends have come for you at least it seems.” He reached out and touched the side of his face, smilingly pleasantly as Brewster flinched from his touch. “I’ll see to it that you’re bathed and dressed and decently fed before you’re on your way.

“But before you go, I must thank you, Caleb, for the names you gave me while in the twilight of pain.” Leaning in forward, he whispered directly into his ear just as Brewster shuddered in trauma and pain, “Woodhull will have plenty of company on the gallows.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys so much for all the love! It really means a lot to me. I’m glad you guys are enjoying the story so far. Things are gradually coming to a close, but that doesn’t mean there’s not more to come in these next few chapters ;)

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Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 4x03

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lyme, Connecticut

Abigail watched as the door slid shut behind them as Ben led out Walter Havens and his men to get the lay of the land, leaving her to “watch” their captured. And by watch their captured, she took at as loosening both Abe’s and his father’s bounds so they could more easily access the biscuits Richard had managed to smuggle out with him.

There were three of them, one he handed to Abe, the other he kept for himself. He offered the last one to Abigail, who accepted it gratefully. She hadn’t eaten anything since they had set out. The biscuit was a bit crumbly, but her stomach didn’t mind. She made sure to save the other half for Ben when this was all over. More than likely, he hadn’t eaten anything either.

They had arrived at the Lyme mill not long before the others had decided to scope out the property, for security purposes most likely. It was the closest place for both parties to conduct the hostage exchange. Also, she highly suspected she had been left behind to watch over both Woodhull men had something to do with the possibility of Arnold being with the redcoats who would arrive for the exchange, and Ben didn’t want to risk the change of her being with them. She couldn’t really argue with that logic.

As luck would have it, there was a bucket filled with water inside the mill. Apparently, there had been a heavy rain the night before, seeing as the bucket had been strategically placed to hold any rain water from a leak in the thatched roof.

Finding nothing remotely useful as a cup, she grasped the metal handle with both hands and hauled it over to where both men had been tied to a post, or at least they had been until she set them free, if only for the moment. Almost as soon as she set the bucket down between them, both Abe and Richard submerged their hands into the cool water eagerly before bringing their cupped hands to their mouths, drinking every last drop.

Abigail smiled apologetically. “I couldn’t find anything suitable for cups that wasn’t already rusted.”

“Oh, this will do well enough,” Richard assured her, brushing off the apology. “Thank you.”

“Yes, thank you,” Abe echoed after finishing off his second handful of water. A few droplets trickled down his chin and onto his chest, but he welcomed the coolness from it.

With their thirsts quenched, a small silence settled among them, that was until Richard decided to break it. “I know that he didn’t have a choice. Ben, I mean, for shooting Captain Wakefield.”

“He did what he had to do,” Abe murmured, absentmindedly rubbing at his wrists which were lightly chafed from the rope.

“I know, but…” Richard sighed heavily. “I don’t know how to deal with this. For so long I was a
Loyalist. Setauket magistrate and defender of the Crown. And Captain Wakefield has been nothing but kind to me, to us.” He turned his head to get a better look at his son. “He saved your neck from Simcoe’s noose. But he is, was rather, a redcoat - an ally that has now become an enemy. How am I supposed to deal with that?”

“It’s a difficult thing,” Abigail remarked, “trying to reconciling conflicting emotions, especially from a person of your position. Believe me, I’ve done things in these past few years that I’m not proud of either, but in the end, it can’t really be helped in the name of survival.” And there were other things she had done she wasn’t proud of either not in the name for survival, but she couldn’t bring herself to share that.

Richard looked at her curiously. “Yes, Abe mentioned briefly that you enlisted, when out of earshot of the others of course. How did that come to be?”

Abigail huffed out a light laugh. “Ah, that’s a long and somewhat complicated story.”

“Perhaps an abridgement then? Satisfy an old man’s curiosity.”

With a reluctant smile, she shared with them how she had come to enlist, briefly of course. She told them of how she had discovered her father’s letter of recruitment and, knowing how rare those letters were seeing as they were contraband to the redcoats, she had taken the letter with the decision in mind to enlist in his place.

Upon Richard’s question of how she knew she could accomplish this, she explained that her father had arranged to send her to live with her aunt in Dublin for a time, to keep her safe. So to keep him from growing suspicious, she had sent Iris, who had looked very similar to herself, in her place. Just the memory of the girl’s face and how Gamble had had her killed still made her sick.

Not once had she regretted her actions, since she had done it with her father’s welfare in mind, but now, knowing that her “death” had hastened her father’s declining health to the point of his death… there weren’t enough words to describe how much regret haunted her.

“I’m so sorry about your father,” Richard spoke softly, reaching over to press her hand between his. “He was a very good man, a very fine physician. No one can say anything negative about your father.”

Abigail nodded jerkily, all the while fighting back tears that were brimming in her eyes. “Thank you. I just… I just wish I could’ve been there.”

“Abs, there’s nothing you could’ve done,” Abe said gently, sensing where her thoughts would inevitably lead her. “If it hadn’t been news of… you know, it could have easily been something else. You can’t blame yourself.”

She wanted to nod and say that she knew that, that she believed him, but she never had been that good of a liar.

Instead, she gave man a hug. Knowing they didn’t have much time before Ben returned, the magistrate offered her his wrists as a reminder to tie them back up. She quickly set to work. “When this is all over, at least you’ll have Tobias. Well, I suppose with the divorce that will complicate things, but he’s always taken care of you.”

Abigail’s heart clenched with anxiety. She took a moment to breathe before admitting quietly, “He’s dead, too.”

“I… I can’t,” she murmured, shaking her head rapidly. She had moved on to Abe’s binds and was struggling enough with the rope as it was. “I’m sorry. I just can’t, talk about it.”

Abe took her trembling hands between his and squeezed them. “I know there isn’t anything I can say that can bring any comfort to you right now. Because nothing can bring them back. But, you’ll always have us. And Little Thomas, too.”

“You’re family,” Richard affirmed. “You and Caleb and Ben, even Anna. The whole bloody lot of you.”

Abe smiled as Abigail laughed quietly, the tears traitorously escaping down her cheeks. She wiped them away with the edge of her coat sleeve and finished tying Abe’s restraints just in time for Ben and the others’ return.

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All of the details of the hostage exchange were in place. The orders were given for a peaceful exchange between them and the rebels, but Simcoe wasn’t feeling particularly peaceful. In fact, he believed a peaceful exchange was far more generous than those rebels deserved, which was why he devised a plan of his own.

He ordered one of his Rangers to gather a dozen men, only those that Ranger felt were best fit to carry out his orders. Once the appropriate men were selected and gathered, they were to disguise themselves as bandits and linger on the outskirts of the parameter of the exchange site. At the moment the first hostage was passed along to the other side were the men to attack. They were to kill everyone they could get their hands on.

It didn’t matter whether they were rebels or British. In fact, if they did kill some British soldiers, that would be all the better. The bandit attack would hold more credibility than a poorly disguised ambush on rebel soldiers.

Satisfied, Simcoe dismissed the Ranger before getting himself ready for the battle ahead, smiling to himself. This would be the day the world would learn never to cross John Graves Simcoe.

He paused for a moment. Actually, he could use with a nice round of pool at Rivington’s. A perfect alibi for the perfect plan.

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*New Windsor, New Jersey*

*Continental Camp Base*

“Mrs. Strong, may I speak with you for a moment?”

Anna stepped out of her wagon to see a young looking soldier wearing an earnest expression. She hastened her footing to make it to the ground. “Of course. Is everything all right?”

The soldier grimaced. “I wish I could say it was so, but… things have been mighty tough recently.”

Anna smiled sympathetically, knowing far too well how badly the camp was in shape. Supplies were growing scarce and food supplies limited even more. The last she heard, many of the soldiers weren’t receiving their payments for their service. And if the soldiers weren’t being paid, then one could easily forget the women’s payment, which of course most people have, except for the women themselves. “They have been for sure. Everything’s certainly been limited.”
“You don’t know the half of it!” he exclaimed, albeit quietly. He caught himself and looked around so quickly it could hardly be considered circumspect. When he felt it was safe, he turned back towards her and leaned in over the table separating them. “You need to speak with Major Tallmadge.”

“I’m afraid the major isn’t presently in camp,” Anna responded, reaching for a kerchief to fold.

The soldier shifted impatiently from foot to foot. “Then you must write to him then, or at the very least speak to him the moment he returns. And not a minute to lose.”

Anna paused in her folding. “You think I have that much pull with him?”

“You must! Everyone knows about your, erm, relationship with him. If anyone’s gonna influence him, it’s gotta be you.”

“No, you would be thinking of Abigail,” she almost said but caught herself in the nick of time. Instead, she peered at him and demanded, “What is this about? What’s going on?”

The young soldier sighed heavily, almost hoping that whatever burden that lay upon him would escape him as easily as that breath. “There’s a lot of resentment and bitterness among the soldiers, about not getting their money. Lots of talk and none of it good.”

Anna had been afraid of that, which was why she had tried talking to Ben about it before, mostly in conjunction with her concern of women’s lack of payment, but with so much on his mind, her concerns had been shut out.

Leaning in anxiously, she dropped her voice and leaned in, conscious of the eyes and ears around them. “How bad is it?”

“Bad enough,” he remarked. She could see him wringing his hands anxiously before he shoved them deep in his coat pockets. “There’s talk of a possible uprising.”

Anna’s blood ran cold. “An uprising?”

The young soldier nodded grimly. “Yes. Which is why it’s imperative for you to speak with Major Tallmadge immediately. These men aren’t happy. Hell, it’s said even officers are talking about it with the soldiers. They’re all acting as if they’re wild animals who’ve been backed into a corner. And you know what happens to animals who feel trapped?”

Anna nodded worriedly. “They fight back.”

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*Lyme, Connecticut*

The sky was overcast and dreary when they stepped out of the mill at the first sighting of redcoats. With no sign of Arnold, Ben had given into Abigail’s “subtle” demands of joining them for the hostage exchange, but she would have to walk behind the rest, just in case something went awry. She had agreed but made no promises about staying out of the fight if there was one. This was Caleb they were talking about. And Ben had said nothing about staying in the back.

Semantics.

Only when Amos Parker and his men brought Caleb into view did Ben signal Havens to bring out Abe and Richard. Abigail hardly noticed though. She couldn’t remove her gaze from Caleb and the
state he was in.

*Jesus*, what on earth had they done to him?

Clearly, they had tried to clean him up before the exchange, but it wasn’t enough to conceal the damage they had caused him. His left eye was all but swollen shut. There were bruises of various stages scattered across his face, neck, and probably across his chest.

Disoriented, Caleb’s face was filled with nothing but pain. It took two of Parker’s men to bear the brunt of his weight, seeing as how he was too weak to hold himself up. Abigail’s fingers twitched instinctively to reach out and tend to his injuries, but she had to settle for balling them into fists, anger quickly spreading within her. So much for the British and their alleged honor in time of war. She could only imagine what was going through Ben’s mind when he saw him.

The two groups came to a stop on either side of a trench of some sort, most likely for the mill to manage flooding - that was her best guess, seeing as how she wasn’t exactly a mill expert. Each side assessed the other carefully, expecting the other to pull out their weapons at even the slightest hint of suspicion.

She could hear the disgust in Ben’s voice when he demanded, “What did you do to him?” When they gave no response, he repeated the question sharply.

“There were no terms for his constitution,” Parker spoke with such an air of indifference that Abigail wanted nothing more than to slam the butt of her musket into his skull. “Just that he was living.”

Havens stepped forward then, bringing a knife to Abe’s throat. Abigail sucked in a quiet breath. “Well, I’m sure we can find a way to even it out.”

Ben delivered Havens a warning glance. “No, no. There’ll be no blood for blood today.”

Parker turned his attention to Richard. “You Judge Woodhull?” When Abe’s father gave an imperceptible nod, he remarked, “Send him over.”

Ben knew better, however. “Send the money.”

“Brewster, for the one. The money for the other. You pick first trade.”

“Me,” Abe spoke right as Richard volunteered, “I’ll go.” Father and son shared a look while Abigail’s gaze focused on Ben, where the decision rested on his shoulders.

“The judge,” came his quiet but firm response.

Richard turned around so Havens could remove his binds, the cut of the rope against knife sounding deafening among the silence. Once he was turned around, Havens and Ben’s other man, Pit, slowly approached the trench, while watching closely as Parker and another man brought Caleb forward to meet them.

The whaler extended a hand towards Ben, who grabbed onto him with both hands as he and Haven pulled him over the trench and towards their side, while Richard was taken towards Parker’s side.

Seeing as how the exchange went smoothly, Parker said, “And now the son.”

As Abe turned around to have his bounds cut, Abigail got a better look at the dark skinned man beside Richard. She squinted a little, the sunlight getting in her eyes, but after a moment of adjustment, she got a better look at him. Wait a minute. That wasn’t… Jordan? No, Akinbode, she
mentally corrected herself, recalling her talks with Abby at John Andre’s manor. He had been one of Selah and Anna’s before the British had outlawed slavery in the colonies. A part of her had wondered whatever happened to him.

There was a bird call in the distance, an odd sounding one. Soon enough there was another that called back, which was highly unusual, given the time of day. Akinbode slipped his musket from his shoulder and brought it in front of him. “Something ain’t right,” he remarked suspiciously, drawing Parker’s attention to the man, almost for the first time.

Both parties looked around cautiously, Akinbode’s wariness rubbing off on all of them. Parker drew out his revolver, looking at Ben accusingly. “You have any more friends here?”

Abe immediately stepped in front of Ben just as Akinbode shook his head slowly, “It ain’t them.”

Suddenly, Richard tensed and lunged forward, crying out for Abe to get down. Only his plea was cut off by a bullet. Abigail stared in horror as the bullet went through the magistrate’s head, blood splattering across Abe’s face, and watched as Richard’s body fell into the trench. It all felt as if it were happening in slow motion, as if every single preceding action lasted longer than the few seconds that death had taken to descend upon them.

Abigail’s ears were ringing as bullets whirled upon them, taking out men from both sides. She barely processed what was happening, but she managed to find her wits about her to grab onto Abe and yank him towards her away from the flying bullets.

Looking around wildly, she stopped for a moment when a glimmering in the woods caught her eye, the sign of sunlight glaring off metal. Suddenly, she knew. Grabbing onto Abe, she searched wildly around for Ben and shouted, “It’s coming from the woods!”

Injured from a bullet, Havens still was able to carry Caleb back inside the mill. Ben, Abe, and Abigail were hot on their heels, with the other two men, Pitt and Spelling, rushing inside as well.

Just as she was shoving a stunned Abe inside the mill, she felt, more than heard, a bullet buzzing within centimeters. Within seconds, she felt a burning sensation on her upper arm, but she gritted her teeth and bore it, knowing there was nothing she could do about it until she was inside.

With the mill door shut and securely, everyone was seeking cover as bullets continued to ricocheting off the mill walls.

On her hands and knees, Abigail found her way over to Pit and Spelling, asking if they had been hit. Spelling shrugged helplessly, too filled with adrenaline to give her a proper answer, understandable given the circumstances.

She looked Spelling over and spotted a wound to his shoulder. Upon closer examination, it appeared as if the bullet had gone straight through his shoulder. She found the exit wound near his shoulder blade and did her best to stop the bleeding with a pathetic excuse of a tourniquet, a very small cloth that barely tied around his shoulder and was coated who knew what that she really didn’t want to think about just then.

Pitt, on the other hand, was far worse off than the other man. She tried her best to stop the bleeding, but in the end, there was nothing she could do for him except silently pray for him. Sitting next to him, she held his hand and murmured comforting words to the men as he quietly bled to death. Abe sat right next to them, watching them without seeing. His expression was glazed over, shock taking hold of him. She wanted to reach out and check on him, but with Pitt dying by her side, her attention remained divided.
Ultimately she knew there was nothing she could say. Abigail understood far too well how he was feeling, how to lose a parent, a father, so unexpectantly. No amount of words in the world could offer him comfort now.

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Within the hour, Pitt’s breath evened out, his eyes slowly fluttering shut, never to open again. Gently, she slipped her hand from his and rested his hand against his still chest. She murmured a quiet prayer, her chest feeling hollow. It was an eerie feeling, losing a patient. In the years she had chosen to dedicate herself to the healing practice, she had yet to experience it for herself. She wished she would have known to ask her father how he coped, handled it.

Instead of dwelling on those thoughts, she turned her gaze to Abe, who still appeared far too dazed for her liking. She grabbed the bucket of water from before and hauled it over, ignoring the burning sensation in her arm. She crouched in front of him and told him to drink. When he didn’t, out of either refusal or simply not hearing her, she sighed quietly. Shock could just as easily kill a man like a bullet.

Flinching a little at the poorly worded analogy, she dipped her hand in the water and flicked a few cold droplets of water on his face, relieved when he flinched and focused on her in confusion and mild indignation. She smiled apologetically and told him to drink, this time not accepting no for an answer.

During this exchange, she was vaguely aware of talk behind her. Ben was wondering why the men were grabbing the ransom money instead of leaving. That was when Caleb answered they were sent to kill them all. He wasn’t sure who came up with the plan, but he asked if anyone was willing to wager that it was Simcoe.

Once Abe was drinking and currently back with them, Abigail began to rise to her feet before thinking better of it and crouching low so that she could make her way towards Caleb to tend to him, ignoring Ben’s disapproving stare. He didn’t want her risking exposure, and while she appreciated that, those who were injured came first.

“This is probably silly to ask,” Abigail murmured once she was beside Caleb, “but how are you feeling?”

“Never been better,” Caleb remarked with forced cheer, though when he shifted he grimaced.

Abigail gave him a look before moving closer to get a better look at him. A jagged laceration peeked out from underneath his shirt, coupled with other discolorations and God only knew what else. Just by looking at him, Parker’s men had done their best to clean him up. Any visible bleeding or cuts had been tended to. What concerned her most, however, was whatever lied underneath his clothes, but she knew it would be impossible to treat him now.

As if reading her mind, the whaler looked at her and said, “If we make it through this, you can have me all to yourself. I’m sure Tallboy will love that.”

She didn’t have to turn around to know what Ben thought of that remark. Instead, she reached over to touch the side of his neck, checking for any sign of a possible concussion. “I suppose you’re right,” she murmured carefully. “Just wanted to make sure you were all right, at least for the moment.”

He smiled a little, the smile not reaching his eyes, and was about to say something else when his gaze went down a little to the side. His smile turned into a frown. “Looks like you need some tending to
yourself, doc. You’ve been hit.”

Abigail frowned in confusion before following his gaze to her upper arm, where she was in fact bleeding. Huh. She turned her arm to the side to get a better look, realizing it was only a graze, only it looked worse than it actually was. “Oh, that. Well…”

Before she could get the words out, Ben hissed anxiously, “You’ve been hit?”

Abigail looked up to see the major’s worried expression and knew that he would have immediately rushed to her side if it hadn’t been for Havens and Spellman’s presence in the mill. “It’s only a graze. I’m fine.”

He looked as though he wished to argue to the contrary but wisely kept his mouth shut. Abigail was suddenly grateful for the other two men among them.

Staggering to his feet, Havens pushed himself forward. “We have to figure something out. We can’t just remain in here.”

Ben turned around, prepared to ask him exactly what it was he intended to do when he realized that Havens was standing right in front of an open window. “For God’s sake, get down -”

A bullet whizzed through the window half a moment or so Havens had risen, striking its intended target right through the chest. Havens crumpled to the ground, and after agonizing minutes of wet breathing, Abigail knew he was dead.

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The silence stretched on for what felt like hours after that. No one dared to speak, not when two of their own men were lying dead before them. But that didn’t prevent Ben from keeping watch, switching shifts with Abe to look for any feasible exit they could use to escape without falling into the line of fire. So far, there wasn’t anything he could find.

Ben returned to his post when he spotted a group of men approaching the mill, a few of them rubbing sticks together in the hopes of coaxing a flame. Others were stationed within several yards of the door, muskets drawn and ready to shoot.

“They mean to burn us out,” Ben cursed, backing away from his vantage point and towards the main area of the mill.

“There’s got to be another way out of here,” Abe mumbled, casting his gaze all around in the same desperate manner as Ben.

Abigail was redressing Spellman’s wound when suddenly the major stumbled over the edge of a carpet. He nearly cursed when he found something curious underneath. Signaling to Abe, both men rolled back the carpet and found a hidden door underneath. “What’s this?”

“Beats me,” Abe remarked. “Hopefully a way out of here.” Running his hands over the wood, he searched for a crevice, anything that would allow his fingers to slip through and move it. Apparently, God was smiling down upon them because sure enough he found it.

Making a small noise of victory, Abe lifted the edge of the door with his fingers until he got a good grasp on it. Ben moved over to help him, and together they lifted the door and set it aside.

Ben was the first to his head underneath cautiously. “This might be a tunnel leading to the outside. There was some light a little further down. One of us could sneak outside and create a flank to draw
them away from the mill so the rest can get out.”

“I’ll do it,” Abe volunteered without hesitation, stepping forward. He adjusted the pistol at his side, one that he must’ve picked up from either Havens or Pitt, or maybe even one of the fallen men near the trench.

Ben shook his head. “Abe, no. That’s not necessary.”

Abe persisted, “I can do this, Ben. I’ll be quick. I’m one of the few of us not injured, and, better yet, I know how to use a gun.”

“I can’t let you do this, especially by on your own.”

“He won’t be,” Abigail remarked, rising to her feet once she took care of Spellman. She approached the two men to join them at the tunnel’s entrance. She nodded to Abe. “I have your back.”

Abe smiled. “Brilliant.”

Ben was less than thrilled. “No, absolutely not.”

“What’s the problem?” Spellman asked, wincing as he adjusted his newly dressed shoulder. “Two’s better than one, right? Besides, it’s your plan, and you’ve got your volunteers. And we can figure something out in here while they’re out there.”

The major pressed his lips together, smothering the urge to argue further, knowing that really he couldn’t justify any more protests. “All right,” he remarked begrudgingly. “But don’t take unnecessary risks.”

Abigail knew those words applied to both herself and Abe, but she had a feeling they were directed more towards her. She and Abe promised they would be careful before they made their descent through the hidden door, with Abe going first and Abigail following closely after.

The tunnel was dark, cold, and damp, but thankfully, there was the light at the end of the tunnel just as Ben had said. Abe handed her one of the pistols the closer they neared the end. Having left the musket back in the mill, Abigail accepted the pistol and followed him into the light.

A few steps led them up and out of the tunnel and behind a stone wall. They only made it half a dozen steps or so until Abe put out his arm to stop her. She didn’t ask him what was wrong; she didn’t have to. There was so much tension radiating from him, she knew there was trouble.

Anxiously, she poked her head around him and instantly realized what had forced him to a halt. One of the men who had started the ambush was now hovering over Richard Woodhull’s prone body. His musket lied next to him as he dug through Richard’s pockets, taking what he could get from the dead magistrate’s coat pockets. The sight was sickening.

“Abe,” she murmured but received no response. “Abraham.” She tried again yet there was still no response. She took a step forward just as he raised his pistol, aiming directly at the looter, his body radiating with silent range.

Her eyes widened. If Abe shot him, their cover was blown. There would be no chance of seeing their plan through. Ben, Caleb, and Spellman were depending on them.

“Abe, no,” Abigail whispered, practically close to begging. “Don’t do this. You can’t…” She took a moment to collect herself before allowing herself to continue. “I understand where you’re coming from. Believe me, I’ve been in your shoes. I was ready to do something just as… explosive as what
you’re considering, but if you do this, you’re risking us all.”

She hated to phrase it like that, but it was true. And on some level, she recognized the very same argument had applied to her, when she had been ready to walk into that building filled with redcoats and set fire to the gunpowder. Yes, in the moment, it would have hurt the British significantly, but who knew what kind of damaging ramifications it could have had for the Continentals. At the time, she had been furious with Ben for stopping her. Actually, she had been furious with him for quite some time since. But now that she was in the same situation from another perspective, she understood how difficult of a position she had put Ben in.

Abe’s arm trembled ever so slightly as he cocked the pistol and took aim…

“Coffer!” someone shouted across the distance, prompting the looter to jerk his head up. Grumbling to himself, he dropped what he was doing, dusted off his trousers, and stalked off towards whoever had called him.

At the sound of the shout, he had pulled back, lowering the pistol slowly to his side. He was still shaking, whether from anger or adrenaline or a combination of both she could only guess.

Gently, she placed a hand on his forearm, prompting him to turn his face towards her. It felt as if they were having an entire conversation in that one look, a conversation of understanding, of loss, of heartbreak. In that moment, they understood the other far too well, more than they wished to, but only because of the causes of that understanding.

“Let’s go,” Abe murmured, quietly resigned.

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While the others were rigging together their decoy plan inside the mill, Abe and Abigail found themselves standing outside it. The ambushers had now made their way closer towards the mill. It was up to them to make up the flank, to take the ambushers out from behind. All they had to do was wait for Ben’s signal. They were supposed to be giving a sharp eye for it, but neither of them could bring themselves to do it quite yet, not with Richard Woodhull’s body lying in the trench.

Abigail kept a few paces behind as Abe slowly approached his father, easing his way over towards his body before lowering himself into a crouch, leaning against the stoned wall behind him. In the shade, his father’s face looked completely grey, his eyes staring upwards without seeing. The dark red blood to his temple stood in stark contrast with the grey pallor of his skin.

For a while, he just sat there staring down at the man who had once been his father before slowly reaching out with his fingers to close his eyes shut. May Richard Woodhull enter his eternal rest peacefully.

Abigail and Abe pulled themselves out of the trench and back onto solid ground, pistols in hand. They crept closer, watching as the ambushers began charging toward the mill, torches in hand. She had no idea what the signal was or what they needed to look for. She said as much in an anxious hiss, but Abe quietly assured her they would know the moment they saw it.

Suddenly, the mill doors flew upon, and the ambushers quickly opened fire on the figures inside. Abigail barely smothered a gasp of horror when Abe gave her wrist a reassuring squeeze. “It’s not them. Look!” he whispered.

Through the smoke and the haze even from a distance, there were only two forms in the doorway, neither of which appeared to be either Ben or Caleb, or even Spellman for that matter. She realized
they must have used Havens and Pitt as decoys. It wouldn’t take long for the ambushers to realize the trick, if they had been able to.

“That’s our signal,” Abe remarked. Without another word, he rushed at the group from behind, with Abigail hot on his heels.

They began shooting at the ambushers from behind, dividing their attention between them and the mill, giving the others the opportunity charge out of the mill and open fire. Once more, the mill erupted into a scene of chaos. Men were falling left and right, thankfully none of them their own.

There was so much smoke and so many bullets flying, it was difficult enough to keep track of who shooting whom. Abigail had lost track of Abe amidst the chaos while fighting off the ambushers while simultaneously trying to keep out of the line of fire.

Stumbling back away from a near shot, she clutched her pistol to her chest and took off up the hill towards the perimeter, realizing she would have a much better chance of shooting without getting shot from there.

However, by the time she made it towards the perimeter and checked her weapon, she realized she had only but one bullet left. Cursing under her breath, she was forced to stand and watch, aiming carefully for the perfect shot. That last shot needed to count.

Fortunately, she didn’t have to wait for much longer.

The ambushers, realizing their numbers had dwindled, began to retreat. Relief flooded through her, nearly knocking her off her feet from the rush of lightness she felt, even more so when she spotted Caleb and Spellman rising from their places of cover and Ben among them.

It took her some time for her to find Abe, but when she did, it was right at the very last second. The moment her eyes landed on him, he shot off like a horse out of hell in the direction of the trees. She scanned frantically for what prompted him running when she spotted the man he was chasing, one of the ambushers no doubt who was carrying what appeared to be the ransom money. Then it suddenly registered.

Coffer, the man who had tried to loot from his father’s body.

“Abe, no!” Abigail cried out, although it was no use. He couldn’t hear her, but that wasn’t going to prevent her from stopping him.

She rushed down the hill as fast as her legs could take her, nearly tumbling quite a few times but somehow managing to stay on her feet.

Heart pounding nearly in her throat, the blonde made a mad dash down the path Coffer and Abe. The cold wind nipped at her skin and filled her ears. She willed herself to keep moving, urging herself to go as fast as she was physically able, not wanting Abe to do something he would regret, for wanting him to keep on breathing, existing. She had to try to get to him, needed to get to him in time.

No. She would get to him in time.

The only things slowing her down were some frustratingly thorny bushes that tugged at her clothes. More than once she felt a stinging sensation across her skin and knew there were more than half a dozen cuts from the thorns. Still, she pushed herself forward, gritting her teeth in aggravation, until she found herself several yards away from the shoreline.
By the time she caught up with them, she watched as Abe pummeled Coffer over the head with the blunt end of his pistol. Coffer fell over onto the ground with a grunt. He barely had time to roll over onto his side before Abe was on him, hitting him again and again, appearing to have the upper hand.

That was until Coffer managed to cuff him and knock him sideways until Abe was on his back and him on top. Soon enough Coffer’s hands snaked around Abe’s throat, and that was all the motivation Abigail needed to move faster.

Once she was within half a dozen steps of them, she crept up behind him, trying her best not to make a sound while trying to get to them as quickly as she could. She met Abe’s gaze from over Coffer’s shoulder. His face was rapidly approaching purple, so she quickly slammed the blunt end of the pistol against Coffer’s head.

The other man fell over to the side with a groan, and Abe gasped for air. But before Coffer could collect his bearings, Abigail aimed the pistol right at him and shot him in the head. He made no attempt of movement after that.

Trembling from adrenaline, she backed away from Coffer and knelt down by Abe, touching the side of his face gently. He blinked once, then twice, before going completely limp against her.

That was how she was found when they came out searching for them, Abigail protectively holding onto Abe’s unconscious form, her pistol poised strategically over him. It was of little use to her with no bullets, but no one needed to know that but her.

At Ben’s concerned look, she remarked, “He’s passed out.”

A few minutes later, Abe came to. Once they were certain he could stand on his own two feet, she, Caleb, Ben, and Abe headed back towards the wagon they had first brought to the mill. When Abigail inquired by Spellman’s absence, Ben informed her that one of the ambushers they thought they had killed had taken him out with a shot.

With the wagon reunited with the horse, Abigail stayed behind with Caleb to make sure he was situated inside the wagon while Ben and Abe went to retrieve Richard Woodhull’s body. They intended to bring him back to the camp and have a proper burial for him there.

Hopping into the driver’s seat, Abigail urged the horse gently onwards, guiding him towards the trench so as to ease the distance. It took several minutes before Ben and Abe to carry him out and load him into the wagon, but it was all done without any complaint.

She made some room as Ben pulled himself up into the driver’s seat beside her. With a brief glance over her shoulder, she saw Abe climbing into the wagon and lying down next to his father, reaching for his hand.

Her throat tightened, her eyes stinging with tears. Quickly, she turned back around, staring at the stretches of land ahead.

Then she felt a press against her thigh. Looking down, she realized it was Ben, pressing his thigh against hers. It was the only way he could express his share of comfort, and without a moment’s thought, she mirrored the gesture, leaning into his side, reassuring them both they were still there for each other.

Chapter End Notes
Hi, guys! Sorry for the delay in posting! I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Thank you all for continued support in this fic. It means the world to me <3
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place after 4x03 but before 4x04. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

White Hall Manor
Setauket, Long Island

By all accounts, the original plan had been to travel straight to New Windsor, but recognizing that his son was now all alone, Abe insisted they stop at White Hall and bring him with them. It wasn’t an argument Ben willingly made against the idea, but time was not on their side. With three men down and even more so for the British, the mill would soon enough be swarmed with redcoats before being hot on their heels. They couldn’t afford to stop.

Yes, he knew all of this, yet he said nothing, instead finding himself inclined to agree with him. There was no way in hell he’d allow that little boy to fall into British hands, having learned about Major Hewlett’s and formerly Mary Woodhull’s nuptials from Abe himself. The sooner they collected the boy before word of Richard’s death reached Mary’s ears, the better off they would be.

Young Thomas had come to the care of Richard Woodhull during the rather tumultuous divorce proceedings between Abe and Mary the previous year, when the Mrs. Woodhull had fallen in love with Major Hewlett during the British major’s residence at White Hall where he had been quartered. Abe visited their son every chance he was able, which often nearly hindered his duties to Culper, but his son came first. The same couldn’t very well be said about Mary, but that information wasn’t something no one but Abe himself was privy to.

So the group made the detour to White Hall, where the magnificently crafted manor still stood, somehow unfazed by the morning’s events. The sun was setting low in the distance, casting the land in an almost iridescent orange glow.

When she removed her hat, Ben caught hints of shadows across Abigail’s face. Readjusting the reins in one hand, he gently slipped his hand over hers. Warmth spread inside his chest as she laced their fingers together without hesitation. He squeezed her hand and eased the horses in the direction of the stables where they would dismount.

Before anyone could move a muscle, Abe climbed out of the wagon and headed directly towards the house after telling them he would explain their arrival to one of the servants but only after he saw his son. No one felt inclined to argue with him. The desperate need for a father to see his son after such an ordeal wasn’t a difficult thing to understand.

“Perhaps he’ll want to bury his father here,” Abigail murmured, after having clambered down from the driver’s seat to stretch out her legs while the major having done the same. Caleb remained in the wagon with Richard’s body, in a light doze, his injuries and torment having brought him to the point of exhaustion. “Seems only fitting, since this is... was his home.”

“Perhaps,” he acknowledged quietly. He leaned against the side of the wagon, arms folded loosely across his chest. “It’s best if we let Abe make that choice for himself, though we can present him the
Abigail agreed and joined him at the wagon, her hip resting against one of the wheels. She suspected she knew what Abe’s decision would be if they asked him. She would have done the same, had she the opportunity, if not for the fact she knew exactly where Thomas Williams had wished to be buried, in the family burial plot right beside her mother.

Her face must have betrayed her thoughts. She felt his gaze on hers, and just like the moon with the tide, she looked up at him. He found her hand again and began rubbing slow, soothing circles against her inner wrist. She relaxed against his side, not bothering with the pretense of resistance.

“Penny for your thoughts?” he asked.

Abigail smiled mirthlessly. “I’m afraid my thoughts aren’t worth that much.”

“They are to me,” he said, “though I’d be willing to pay a larger sum.”

She leaned forward to press her face against his shoulder, seemingly to try to hide her smile from him, but they both knew it was a moot point; he just saw it.

He encircled his arms around her, and she stepped into them without a second thought, uncaring for the possibility of the wrong eyes falling upon them. She pressed her face against the side of his neck. The lingering scents of smoke, sweat, and blood touched her nose, a small reminder of what the morning had brought. Sighing quietly, she pressed herself closer, wrapping her arms around his middle, and allowed herself to just be.

The sound of a door shutting caused them to reluctantly part. Both Ben and Abigail watched as Abe approach their wagon with one of White Hall’s servants accompanying him. She didn’t recognize the man who was with Abe, so he must have come into Richard’s employment within the past few years or so. In Abe’s arms with little Thomas Woodhull. She couldn’t stop staring. The last time she had seen him he had still been in swaddling clothes, and now he was very much the spitting image of his father, except for his flaxen hair, which he clearly inherited from his mother.

With Thomas in his protective grasp, Abe paused about a yard or so away from the wagon, his face pale. He stared at the wagon for several moments before acknowledging them. “I explained to him about… what’s happened. Harold’s agreed to help us, with the burial. It’s only fitting, since White Hall was his home.” He nodded towards the other man, who easily was double Abe’s size.

“And before I could stop him, this wee rascal followed us out. I… he should say goodbye to his grandfather but…” Abe blinked fiercely as his breath caught in his throat. “But not like, not like this.”

“I’ll take him,” Abigail offered, coming around the wagon. She stopped for a moment, watching Thomas watch her with a such cautious curiosity it made her smile. With Harold and Ben discussing quietly at the wagon, she turned her full attention to Thomas, drawing his attention away from the other men. “Only if he’ll take me though.”

Abe smiled gratefully. “This is Thomas. It’s been a while since you’ve seen him, aye?”

Abigail raised her brows. “Quite a while. The last time I saw you was when you were a wee leanbh.”

Thomas’s little face scrunched up in confusion. “What?”

Abigail giggled softly while Abe chuckled. “A baby. It’s an Irish word.” For a moment, she
wondered if she had to explain to him she wasn’t a leprechaun, but she was spared that talk, at least for the moment.

She made an impulsive decision and untied her hair, shaking it loose around her shoulders. While he continued to stare, she held out her hand with a smile. “I’m Abigail. Nice to meet you again, Thomas.”

Thomas blinked. “Are you a lady?”

Abigail smiled. “That I am.”

“Why are you dressed like a boy?”

“That’s… quite a long story, one I’ll be happy to tell you when you’re older. But for now, it can be our little secret.” She held out her pinky towards him. “Pinky swear?”

Thomas hesitated but only briefly. He wrapped his much smaller pinky around hers. “Okay.”

“Good man. How about if we go see if we can find any treats in the kitchen left out by Mrs. McCurdy?” The question was for Thomas, but she looked over at Abe, asking silently if that was still their cook.

Abe mouthed yes as his son’s face brightened considerably. He reached out towards her, forgetting his shyness for the promise of treats. He could hardly be blamed for that. “I’ll take it from here, papa.”

“Thank you,” Abe murmured, pressing her hand. She told him that Caleb was asleep in the wagon and asked if they could bring him inside so that she could look at him. Abe agreed and went to join the other men.

Abigail turned around so that Thomas was looking back at the house, instead of in the direction of his father’s steps. “I’m sure she’s whipped up something really nice.” She leaned in conspiringly. “I really hope it’s sweets.”

Grinning, little Thomas whispered back in confession, “I love sweets.”

She smiled. “Well, we’re just going to get along splendidly, won’t we?”

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Richard’s burial, while nontraditional in its service, was small and dignified. Everyone was able to say their goodbyes to the Setauket magistrate. Abigail watched, broken hearted, as a young confused Thomas bid farewell to his departed grandfather, not truly understanding what was happening. Silent tears streamed down her face as she watched Abe comforting his son, his shoulders stubbornly rigid, save for the occasional tremble. At any moment, he would break, a feeling she knew all too well.

Not once had Ben left her side or released her hand. His strong, solid presence at her side steadied her. The calluses on his hand contrasted with the smoothness of her own, though they were hardly as smooth as when the war had first begun. Somehow, for some reason, the knowledge comforted her in a strange way, and she wasn’t about to let go.

It wasn’t until she noticed Caleb swaying on his feet did she have to break from his company. Summoning Harold over, she turned to Ben and promised she would be back for Thomas once she saw to Caleb before she slipped an arm around Caleb while Harold slipped one of his arms around his shoulders and led him inside.
There wasn’t much stock for herbs in White Hall’s kitchen, but she did manage to find some garlic at least. Although mainly used for coughs and colds, garlic could also be used to help fight off infection, and not knowing yet the full extent of Caleb’s wounds, Abigail would take all the precautions she could get.

She placed a kettle over the stove after filling it with water before setting to work on peeling some garlic gloves. Allowing the peeled gloves to steep for a time, she divided her time between searching the cabinets for honey and lemons and tending to Caleb’s partial state of alertness.

“I’m making you some tea,” she explained to him as she rummaged about a cupboard. She made a quite noise of victory when she discovered a lemon. Now all she needed was honey. “And I’ll need you to drink every last drop.”

“But I don’t want any tea,” Caleb grumbled under his breath, leaning heavily against the counter where he was sat on a stool.

“If you drink the tea, you’ll get rum,” Abigail promised.

“… bring on the bloody tea!”

She crushed two medium sized garlic cloves and placed them in a teacup. The kettle was near whistling with boiling water, which she poured over the crushed garlic. After mixing in the honey and lemon juice, she handed him the teacup and watched him carefully as he drank the tea, slowly at first due to the heat but gradually consumed the teacup’s contents.

Satisfied, Abigail fetched a bottle of rum but kept it out of reach when he went to make a grab for it. “Bed first. Then rum.”

Caleb frowned. “You gonna make me climb up all those steps?”

Abigail shook her head. “Harold has kindly offered his own accommodations in the servants’ quarters. Downstairs.”

He sighed with relief. “God bless bloody Harold.”

Thankfully, the distance was short enough that she could assist Caleb to Harold’s room herself. The servant had returned outdoors to check on things out doors.

Once she got Caleb situated in the bed, she reached for a cup and poured him some rum, coming generously close to the brim. She handed it to him, and he accepted gratefully.

“Thank you, lass,” he murmured and all but swallowed it in one gulp, an impressive feat. That stuff was strong and could easily knock down a man who was looking to be taken down a peg. Wiping at his mouth, Caleb smacked his lips and breathed out sharply. She poured him another cup.

She had to admit, that her motives for providing him with drink weren’t completely altruistic. Yes, she wanted him to sleep soundly, to escape any nightmares that might haunt him, but there was another reason: to get an unobscured view of the extent of Caleb’s wounds sustained by his captures, so she could know what she was dealing with.

On his fourth cup of rum, Caleb’s eyes began to droop. He swayed a little in his upright position before finally deciding to lie down and “rest his eyes”, but the moment his head hit the pillow, he went out like a candle.

She called out his name a few times to see if he would wake, and when he didn’t, she reached for the
buttons of his shirt. The bruises and discoloration she had anticipated, but the true extent of the
damage when she finally allowed the material of his shirt to fall open.

Lacerations ranging in various depths marred his chest from collarbone to navel. The beginnings of
what appeared to be sores stretched from his forearms down. All of that was bad enough, but neither
of them had captured her attention as much as the burn marks to his flesh.

Angry, red puncture wounds marked his flesh, a result from what she could only assume was a
branding or fire iron. Some of his shirt clung to the burns, which helped her determine they were
relatively fresh, quite possibly from earlier that morning or even the night before. A good many of
them appeared to already be inflamed. It wouldn’t be surprising if half of them were infected either.

She could only imagine the state of his back.

Just by looking at them, they were easily second-degree burns and some possibly third-degree. She
applied lukewarm compresses where she could before loosely covering them with sterile bandaging,
which in this instance was clean cloth. Unfortunately, there wasn’t much else she could do for him
until they reached New Windsor to Anderson at the infirmary tent.

Deciding to let him rest, Abigail slipped from the small bedroom and continued down the servants’
corridors until she found herself on the small porch, looking directly out to where they had buried
Abe’s father. She went to join them, but as soon as his eyes found her, Ben met her half way.

“How’s Abe?” Abigail asked, even though she knew the answer to that question.

Ben’s gaze lingered on Abe’s rigid back as he stared at the grave, a simple wooden cross adorning
the grave as marker. Thomas stood next to his father, his tiny hand in his.

“He’s been strong for Thomas,” he spoke quietly, “but I think he needs some time for himself.”

Abigail sensed his meaning. “I can take Thomas back to the house. Maybe Harold could start
packing a bag for Thomas?”

The major nodded in agreement. “That’ll be good. That way in the morning we can grab it and go.”

“In the morning?”

Realizing she hadn’t been present when discussing plans with Abe, he smiled in apology and
explained, “We talked it over and agreed to leave before first light in the morning. Abe’s convinced
the British will be too busy in pursuit to stop here.”

Abigail bit her lip, considering. “And what do you think?”

“It’s a risk,” he admitted carefully, “but we’ve remained here this long. We’ll just have to be careful.”

“And you’re certain Harold or the other servants won’t alert anyone to our presence?”

“No. Abe said they’re good people, loyal. They won’t breathe a word.”

“Okay,” she murmured. If there was anyone’s judgement she trusted the most, it was Ben’s.

“Caleb?” he asked, almost hesitantly. She must have pulled a face since he grimaced. “That bad?”

“I’ve cleaned and dressed as much as I could,” she told him. “There isn’t much more I can do until
we get him to Anderson and his herbs.” She then confessed to having essentially bribed Caleb with
the promise of rum if he drank some herbal tea to help fight off infection and how he’d drunk himself
to the point of lulling himself into a dreamless sleep, which she had secretly hoped. “So, yes, I think it’s best if we stay put for the evening.”

A few moments later, Abigail walked over to Abe, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder and asking if he would like for her to take Thomas back to the house, so that he could rest for the early morning. Abe smiled faintly, nodding his approval as he gently encouraged Thomas to go with her by telling him that very reason, but she knew very well Abe was aware of her underlying intention.

With little Thomas on her hip, she turned and headed back towards White Hall, with Harold a few dozen steps ahead of her, set on his task. She shared a look with Ben and knew he would stay with Abe, at least until he knew he was all right.

Holding the young boy more securely on her hip, the blonde reentered the house, and almost as suddenly, the silence, the utter lack of activity, seemed to hit her all at once. She took a measured breath before forcing a smile. “What say we do a bit of reading before bed, yes?”

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Unable to find a book of nursery rhymes, Abigail settled on Dr. Isaac Watts’ *Divine Songs for Children*. She wasn’t often fond of poetry, but upon a quick skim read, she thought that Thomas would enjoy the playful, rhyming words. Too bad the book lacked pictures for him to look at while she read to him.

Settling down in front of the fire Harold had made for them, she crossed her legs in front of her, leaning back comfortably against the cushions of the settee. She was pleasantly surprised when Thomas climbed into her lap, making himself comfortable for his bedtime story. A soft smile never strayed from her lips for the rest of the evening.

Each of Watts’ poems were creative and imaginative but always ended with a message of morality. It was never overbearing or intimidating as children’s stories of times passed often could be, but the messages were sweet, offering the world a bit of kindness that it sorely lacked.

Transitioning to song sixteen, “Against Quarreling and Fighting”, she read aloud softly but energetically, allowing her Irish accent to heavily accentuate certain words.

> “Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
> For God hath made them so:
> Let bears and lions growl and fight,
> For ‘tis their nature, too.”

She interrupted herself to ask Thomas how dogs barked. The boy gave a good impression of a puppy yelp, which caused her to grin with approval. When she barked back, Thomas giggled with glee. When she got to the line about bears and lions growling, she asked for his best growl. He delivered with young gusto, and she chuckled, “Very good!”

> “But, children, you should never let
> Such angry passions rise:
> Your little hands were never made
> To tear each other's eyes.”

The gentle sounds of crackling fire filled the parlor. Her voice felt like a low rumble to her own ears, almost as if detached from herself. She continued to read as the child nestled further into her lap.

> “Let love through all your actions run,
And all your words be mild:
Live like the blessed Virgin's Son,
That sweet and lovely child."

The steady flow of words tumbled from her lips. Thomas yawned audibly, then brought up his hand
to his mouth almost an afterthought. Abigail smiled and lightly rested her chin atop his blonde little
head, turning the page.

"His soul was gentle as a lamb;
And as his stature grew,
He grew in favor both with man,
And God his Father too."

Instinctively, she began to stroke his hair gently in time with his quiet breathing. Any moment now
he would fall asleep there in her lap while she was on the floor, but she didn’t mind. In fact, she was
more than content with sitting there all night. Still, she finished off the poem even as Thomas’s eyes
drooped shut.

"Now, Lord of all, he reigns above;
And from his heavenly throne
He sees what children dwell in love,
And marks them for his own."

“Thomas?” She shifted a little to get a better look at his face and saw that he was in fact asleep.
Smiling gently at his peaceful face, she quietly closed the book and set it aside before carefully
adjusting him in her lap to make him more comfortable.

She wasn’t sure what prompted her to look up, but when she did, it was only to discover Ben staring
down at them with an almost unreadable expression across his face.

Surprised, she asked, “How long have you been standing there?”

It took awhile for him to find his voice, but finally the major answered softly, “Not long.” His
relaxed stance – folded arms across his chest and leaning against the doorframe of the parlor –
suggested otherwise. Eyes fixated on the picture in front of him, he smiled. “I thought you weren’t
fond of poetry?”

Abigail smiled back. “I’m not particularly, but it was the only book that I could find that didn’t
pertain to English common law.”

Ben grinned, expression soft with fondness as he continued to observe the peaceful scene. She found
herself wanting to walk over to him, but the sleeping child in her lap made that impossible, though
really that wasn’t such a terrible thing.

“I only meant to read to him for a time before bringing him to bed.” She brushed an errant curl away
from his face, heart swelling when he wrinkled his nose cutely in his sleep. “But as you can see, we
never made it that far.”

He nodded gravely, the corners of his mouth twitching. “So you’ve been compromised?”

Abigail laughed quietly. “I’m afraid I have been.”

“Well, let’s see what we can do about that.”
With a quiet grace she deeply admired, Ben moved slowly into the parlor until he was right in front of them. Crouching low, he scooped up the sleeping boy into his arms, careful as to not to disturb him.

Abigail’s breath hitched quietly. He was so very close to her, so much so she could nearly count his eyelashes. As if sensing her thoughts, Ben paused in his movement, his eyes finding hers, and holding her gaze for what felt like an eternity. All she had to do was lean in a few inches to close the distance between their lips but instead dropped her gaze. Only when she broke their gaze did he gently scoop up the sleeping child in his arms and rise to his feet.

As they traveled up the stairs towards Thomas’s room, she inquired about Abe. Ben assured her that he had been fine when he had left him, which had only been a handful of minutes ago when he had come across her and Thomas in the parlor. Instead of announcing himself, he had decided to just watch them, not wanting to interrupt.

Once Thomas was comfortably tucked away in bed, the two exited his room and made their way back towards the parlor.

“You were very good with him,” Ben observed, a warm smile lighting his face.

Abigail returned his smile. “I could say the same of you, but that’s hardly surprising. You’ve always been good with children.” Before he had left for Yale, he had shared with her he hoped to one day become a schoolmaster, but then tensions with the British had worsened and then the war had come, leading many onto very different paths than they had originally planned.

When she looked up at him as they entered the parlor, she noted a curious expression on his face. It was one she knew all too well. “You’ve got that look again.”

A little startled, Ben asked, “What look?”

“The look you get when you want to ask me something, but you’re not certain whether you should,” the blonde remarked. The fire continued to crackle quietly in the hearth, but far less so from when Harold had first put the fire together. “So whatever you want to ask, just ask.”

“I’m not sure that I like that you can read me so easily,” the major commented. “That doesn’t reflect well on my position.”

She observed as he tended to the fire while lowering herself onto the settee, suddenly exhausted. Her limbs felt detached from the rest of her. There was nothing she desired more than to follow Thomas’s lead into sleep, though that might not have been altogether true. There was something she desired more.

Ben added another log to the fire and stood, rubbing the dirt off his palms onto his trousers. He turned towards her then, hesitating for a moment before finally asking softly, “Did… had you and Tobias ever discussed having children of your own?”

The question, no matter how hesitantly phrased, surprised her. There had been no mention of her former husband’s name in weeks, if not months, so naturally the mere mention of his name conjured an ache in her heart. She saw the regret in his face before she could even reply. “I’m sorry. It’s none of my business.”

Shaking her head, she murmured, “No, it’s all right.” She took a quiet breathe and then released it carefully. Now she wished she had saved some of that rum she had given Caleb.

“Actually, we had talked about it,” she continued. “Once. There were several general references here
and there, of course, but only once did we have a serious conversation about it. Looking back now, I could see that he had never really wanted children.”

She had always known that, on some level, even back then, that Tobias had never truly wanted children. That wasn’t to say he hated them. Quite the opposite in fact, but there had always been that disconnect whenever he interacted with them. He had never really known how to act around them, and oftentimes, it had come across in his interactions with them. It had been one of her father’s concerns when Tobias had asked permission for her hand in marriage, knowing how important having children had been for her.

Smiling faintly, Abigail looked down at her hands folded in her lap. “I suspect he only agreed to have them with me was to make me happy.” And all she had ever wanted was for Tobias to want them as much as she had, but that was the problem with trying to change a person. You couldn’t.

She hadn’t heard him move, but the unexpected light pressure on her shoulder prompted her to look up and meet his kind, unwavering gaze.

Swallowing hard, she shifted on the settee to make room for him. The moment he sat, she drew up her legs onto the seat and curled up against him, unable to hold control herself any longer.

Ben wrapped his arms around her and brought her closer against him, holding her in a gentle, protective embrace. She felt his lips at the crown of her head, then her forehead, so light she nearly missed the recognition of his touch. The guilt and pain and heartbreak was muted, and for the first time, in a long time, Abigail felt as if she were home, right in Ben’s arms.

She wasn’t sure how or when the thought entered her mind, but once it did, the realization took hold of her. Staying at White Hall to bury Richard Woodhull hadn’t just been for Abe, nor had they only said goodbye to the Woodhull patriarch. In a way, the small service had been for herself as well, as a way to say goodbye to her own father, although she hadn’t realized it at the time. She wouldn’t be able to visit his gravesite, and Ben had known that.

Blinking back tears, Abigail pressed her face against his chest, her lips resting right over where his heart beat strong and steady inside his chest. She rested against him, and they seemed to almost breathe together as one.

Maybe, just maybe, time could heal wounds, no matter how deeply they ran.

Chapter End Notes

Dr. Isaac Watts' song 16 "Against Quarreling and Fighting" is part of a collection of children's poems called Divine Songs for Children. I had to dig around for some children's literature during the colonial period and stumbled across this interesting little gem.

Thank you guys so much for your support! I love you all! :)
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

This chapter is set during 4x04. A bit of the dialogue comes from the episode, but it's to help keep the story moving.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Windsor, New Jersey

The discontent among the men in camp was palpable, providing even more credence to Anna’s warning. With a severe shortage of supplies and low funding from the Continental Congress, tensions were at an all-time high while morale remained an at all-time low. Just last week Ben and a few others had to break up and court martial not one, not two, but five fights among the soldiers, and two and of the five fights involved low ranking officers.

In an attempt to ease the animosity and to help conserve resources, Washington ordered for soldiers who were not currently injured to bunk with another soldier, which included officers. Clearly, no one was entirely happy with the situation, especially many of the officers, but for now, it was the only solution that could help, at least so many thought.

It didn’t help that while among the men Abigail knew very well which of the men were prone for plotting a mutiny. There were the usual suspects, Bartholomew, Jasper, and Decory, the asshole soldier trio she had the pleasure of avoiding for nearly two years now. They had always possessed a rather domineering bordering on cruel behavior that made one wonder how their lives would have turned out if they hadn’t enlisted into the war.

Not only had she had trouble with them personally when they had all first enlisted at the recruitment base along with Christopher Morgan – God rest his soul – but they had picked and prodded at every man deemed weaker than themselves. That was until they first reached the official camp base. One wrong word to one wrongly perceived target had put an end to their reign of terror, at least a temporary hold. The battles appeared to have appeased their bloodthirst, but given the situation of the camp, she worried that sparks of it would come back in the form of a truly horrific outcome.

She had her suspicions and fears, but she had no proof, just as she had with Arnold. That alone should have been enough to convince her to warn Ben, but in the end, she held her tongue, choosing to continue to observe quietly until the trio’s treachery became apparent.

However, Washington’s orders had disrupted her own personal mission. Almost as soon as word had caught on, Ben had approached her to inform him that she would be staying with him. Better for her to stay with someone who knew her and her secret than with another soldier, especially a disgruntled, bitter one with the potential of turning volatile. She couldn’t argue with that logic, even if it did prevent her from doing what she had set out to do. It was something she could work around.

Bringing what little of her belongings she had, Abigail headed towards his tent. She had managed to convince Ben that it would be best if they weren’t seen walking back to his tent together, citing the possibility of her being singled out as his favorite. She didn’t tell him about the half-whispered snide remarks behind her back she caught every now and then over the years while enlisted, and none of them were good. Christopher had been kind enough to stand up for her and tell them something
back, but now that he was gone, the murmured comments continued like fluttering leaves in the wind.

Ben wasn’t there when she slipped inside. He had a meeting with Washington and a few other officers earlier that day, so she got herself settled in.

Apart from the additional cots, nothing inside the tent had changed. For some reason, the sight of the two cots caused her to cheeks to warm. There was a respectable amount of distance between them, but the problem was, it made it all the more apparent it was going to be a snug fit, practically bordering on cozy. For a moment, she allowed her mind wander before she shook her head, cheeks burning even more. “Stop being ridiculous,” she murmured to herself as she shoved her rucksack underneath her cot with more vigor than actually required.

By the time Ben returned, it was well past dark. Apart from those stationed to keep watch, the majority of the camp dwellers had more than likely taken their rest, but Abigail had remained awake, waiting for him. Having “borrowed” one of his books from his desk, she was causally thumbing through it when she caught sight of his shadow at the tent flap, thanks to the few candles she had lit.

They didn’t talk much, seeing as how the young major was practically dead on his feet with exhaustion, but when she saw him reaching for something at his desk, she asked, “What are you doing?”

“Searching for some parchment,” he replied, mostly to himself as he went through his desk. “There’s a letter that needs to be sent off as well as a report Washington asked me to write up.”

“And did he say it had to be done tonight?” she eyed him with concern and then squinted at his slight pause. Ah ha.

“Not… necessarily, but I’d feel better if I got it done tonight,” he said.

“I’d feel better if you slept now and did it in the morning.” He ignored her and continued his search, which only prompted her to put his book aside and push herself off the cot. She slipped herself between him and the desk to get a hold of his edges of his coat, which she promptly began shoving aside.

“What – what on earth are you doing?” Ben demanded, baffled.

“Removing your coat, of course,” Abigail remarked. “You can’t possibly sleep comfortably in your coat. Then again those cots are anything but comfortable. At least this way, you will be, somewhat.”

“I have things to do,” he muttered, yet he did not fight her. When she pushed the material off his shoulders, he followed her lead and slipped his arms free from each sleeve, but the task was a slow one. For the briefest of moments, his head lowered dangerously close to her shoulder, and they were already far too close as it was. Abigail’s heart pounded inside her chest.

“What – what on earth are you doing?” she insisted once she rediscovered control over her tongue. “Would you like to finish the rest yourself, or shall I continue undressing you?”

Ben stared, more than a bit flustered. The last time, which was actually the first time, she had undressed him was back in a small cabin in the middle of Franklin Township, as they had later learned its name. It had also been the last, and first, time he had undressed her. Judging by the rising color in his cheeks, he realized that as well. “I…” He cleared his throat. “That won’t be nec-
necessary.”

*Thank Christ, Abigail prevented herself from saying. She stepped back and around him to return to*
her cot, keeping her back carefully to him as he did whatever he had to, only to realize that most likely it wouldn’t be the traditional form of sleepwear. With a quick foolish glance over her shoulder, she caught a glimpse of him still in his shirt decided to turn around to remove her boots.

With the candles extinguished, each turned into their respective cots. It was quite awkward and not just because the cots were uncomfortable. For years since enlisting, she had never been able to sleep well, and yes, that even included the very fine, luxurious bedding in John Andre’s manner. To be perfectly honest, the last time she had slept more than half way decently had been back at that cabin. She hadn’t slept better since.

Biting her lip, the blonde’s gaze remained fixated on the fabric ceiling, contemplating before she murmured a quiet “oh fuck it” before rising to her feet.

From behind her, she heard Ben shift on his cot, his voice quiet but clear, devoid of sleep, “What’re you doing?”

She looked up sharply and caught him watching her. Even in the dark, she could make the outlines of his face, though she couldn’t begin to guess to know what expression he wore. Her hands were braced on the cot, ready to move when his voice prompted her to a stop. “Isn’t it obvious?” she asked lightly before lowering her voice to a soft pitch. “… if it’s okay with you, that is.”

“C’mere,” Ben murmured. Abigail didn’t have to be told twice.

She pushed the cot as close as she could to his, and with his help, she managed to get the two cots as close as they could get. When he opened his arms, she lowered herself towards him, heart caught in her throat as she curled towards him, resting her head on his shoulder, her arm across his middle.

She felt his arms wrap around her immediately and tried her best not to sigh at the strong, protective hold, though for a moment she thought she heard the very sound come from him as he affectionately nuzzled against her hair. Unable to fight back her smile, she nuzzled him back before finally drifting off into sleep.

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When she woke, it was with an incredible reluctance. A comfortable warmth consumed her, and she was very much disinclined to abandon the sensation. So at the first hint of light that touched her eyelids made her scrunch up her nose distastefully and conceal her face into the solid form she was snuggled up against.

Unfortunately, consciousness returned to her all the same, slowly but surely, in fact cruelly. Her blue eyes opened to meet with a face full of solid chest underneath a white materialled shirt. She blinked in confusion before suddenly the memories of last night returned to her in rapid succession.

All around them, sounds of camp life began to rise around them. Quiet footsteps and a faint whistling along with the sounds of metal, possibly iron, clanking together. Breakfast perhaps? That was a rarity these days. If it was, it would be a surprise.

But what was most surprising was the fact that Ben was still lying beside her. Ordinarily, he rose just before dawn, as was typical of an officer in his position, if not the ordinary soldier, so for him to still be lying there with her after dawn and long since broken was most peculiar.

She chanced a glance upwards to only discover not only was Ben awake but also finding that him turning his head to meet her gaze, as if sensing the movement before she deciding on making the move.
He smiled gently down at her. There was a serenity in his gaze she hadn’t quite glimpsed before. A part of her wanted to reach up and touch his lips with her fingers, as if the touch could somehow be committed to memory. The softness in his expression was almost too much for her to bear. She felt absolutely ridiculous feelings just from that look alone.

Abigail murmured, “Stop looking at me like that.”

Ben’s brows furrowed slightly, though it hardly took away from that look on his face. “Like what?”

“Like I’m the only thing in the world worth looking at,” she said, still having not quite given in to the urge to touch his face.

“Well, you are.” Then the traitor had the audacity to smile even wider.

Groaning, Abigail proceeded to grab the blankets upwards in an attempt to hide her face, but the major wasn’t having any of that. It took little struggle before he finally yanked the blanket away from her face, laughing lightly all the while. That didn’t stop her from covering her face with her hands in stubborn rebellion.

The sound of his laughter pleased her. She hadn’t heard it in such a long time, so when he coaxed her hands away from her face, it wasn’t such a terrible burden to bear.

“I’ve missed this,” she murmured, smiling a little as she gently touched the easing laugh lines in his face.

His expression sobered, though not entirely, as he found her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “I’ve missed you.”

Eventually, begrudgingly, they had to rise and prepare for the day ahead. Ben had promised to meet with Abe pertaining to his current status in the camp, which was nonexistent as far as the others in camp were concerned apart from the obvious parties involved.

As for Abigail’s plans, she thought it best to keep them to herself for now, but in the weeks to come, she would wonder if that had been a wise decision. History with this particular decision was not on her side.

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While Ben went to meet with Abe at the barn – and subsequently with Washington once Abe informs him he no longer wanted to be associated with Culper – Abigail decided to check in on Caleb, whom she had last seen to be in Dr. Anderson’s care.

She was more than half a dozen steps away from the infirmary tent when she saw a group beginning to gather near the center of the camp. Before she could escape, she met the eye of the officer standing in front of the gathering men, raising an expectant brow for her to join them. Sighing inwardly, she turned away from the infirmary tent and towards the growing crowd. Unfortunately, checking on Caleb would have to wait.

The officer in question began handing out assignments for the morning patrol, something she hadn’t done since Trenton, thanks to Ben and his influence. She could hardly blame him for that, considering how she and Christopher had gotten caught in the middle of a standoff with redcoats while on patrol and hadn’t returned to camp until early the next morning. They wouldn’t have returned at all if it hadn’t been for…

No, she couldn’t think about Tobias right then, especially since patrol required as much focus and
energy as one could muster. But the memory of her former husband continued to linger in the back of her mind, no matter how much she tried focusing on the task at hand.

She walked side by side with a few other soldiers, one of whom had allowed her to borrow his pistol since she hadn’t been given time to go retrieve her musket when the assignments had started being delivered. Apart from the occasional bird call and crunching of leaves underneath booted feet, the woods was quiet and still, which she no longer trusted.

Suddenly, a thundering of hooves came down upon them, causing everyone in the group to jump apart and ready their weapons. Abigail was the first to notice the person on horseback wasn’t a redcoat and was barely in an upright position. The rider’s clothes lacked either side’s affiliation, which either meant whoever it was a civilian or a spy. Seeing as how close they were to camp, it wasn’t difficult to determine which of those options was more likely.

The closer the horse and rider came, the more she was able to take in the man’s features. Her eyes widened at realization and shouted for the men to lower their weapons, just in time for the slumping figure on leaned forward and to the left before falling to the ground in with a loud thud.

She ran over to his side, abandoning the pistol, and turned him over with the help of one or two of the soldiers that were with her while another, Matthew Harrison, attempted to search for the horse. Kneeling down on the ground, she checked his vitals before sighing with relief when she was certain he was breathing.

“Someone grab Major Tallmadge and bring him quickly,” she requested, shifting her weight on her haunches to help ease the unconscious form of Caleb Brewster into a sitting position against the closest tree trunk. “I’ll stay with Ca– Brewster until he comes to.”

After brief deliberation, it was decided two of the soldiers would return to camp, just in case they were to encounter any trouble along the way. With the other soldier having went after the horse, this left Abigail on her own to protect Caleb, which really she didn’t mind. However, there was a pattern she was beginning to notice, a role she hadn’t really thought about whenever she found herself in these situations. First, Abe at the mill and now Caleb. She didn’t resent it, but a part of her wondered how she ended up in these situations in the first place.

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When Ben arrived in the clearing, he was alone. She could only assume he had turned down their offer to accompany him, an order that they probably were more than happy to follow, knowing the usual tediousness routine of patrol – though Abigail was hardly the one make that comment, given her previous misadventures.

“What do you think he was doing out here?” she asked as he knelt down to get a better look at him.

Frowning, Ben shook his head. “I haven’t a clue, but I will the moment he’s awake.” Then as if the thought had just occurred to him, he looked up towards her. “Did they leave you here by yourself?”

Under his disapproving major gaze, Abigail shifted, half nervous, half guilty underneath that particular look. “I told them to go. It’s safer for two to travel than one.”

“That’s a sound argument. Did you not think to include yourself in that?”

“I’m not by myself. I…” she trailed off when Caleb’s horse came into view, his reins held securely by in Matthew’s grasp. She smiled, mildly triumphant at his perfect timing. “Private Harrison went to retrieve Caleb’s mount. Here he is now.”
With the whaler still unconscious, they had no choice but to ease him up onto the horse face down in order to bring him back to camp. The very moment they returned to camp Abigail and Ben brought Caleb back to the infirmary tent. Anderson, at the sound of the tent flap opening, turned and observed the pair returning Caleb to his care. He made a quiet noise of disapproval, knowing full well that the whaler had attempted to do something against his recommendations, and helped make room for him onto one of the spare beds for him.

A few minutes after the camp doctor stepped out to check on supplies, Caleb finally woke up with a quiet gasp, eyes snapping open. He tried to lurch himself off the bed, but Ben and Abigail were quick to ease him back down, not forcefully but not quite gently either. She shared a look with Ben over just over his shoulder. They were going to have to tie him down as soon as he fell asleep to keep him from setting out again.

“It’s okay, you’re okay,” she soothed him, brushing back the hair that had fallen across his face. Dammit, she wished she would have thought to have made something for his nightmares, but there hadn’t been any time.

His chest was still marred and ghastly red. Instinctively, her fingers twitched with a physician’s need to tend to their patient, but with Caleb’s dazed expression, she believed he wouldn’t take too kindly to her attempting anything.

Slowly, Ben sat down on the little space that remained on the bed. His voice was quiet, filled with concern, when he spoke next, “What in God’s name were you thinking, trying to ride out in this condition?

“I’m fine,” came Caleb’s mumbled reply, though he appeared anything but. Aside from his physical condition, there was an undercurrent of something deeper within him that was injured. Whatever terror Simcoe wished to wreak upon him… well, the redcoat captain – Queen’s Ranger major, whatever he was – could rest assured that he obtained his goal, Abigail thought with disgust. “I just wanted to get some food.”

The major waited to see if he had anything else to add to that, if he would admit to the lie he had told. When Caleb said nothing more, Ben nodded slowly, “Right, well, maybe you just need a bit more rest.” He went to rise to his feet when suddenly Caleb took hold of his hand, drawing his attention back to him.

Caleb’s expression became pained, so much so Abigail nearly asked if he was in any pain, but he spoke before she could even get the words out, speaking as if he were in confession. “Ben, I need to tell you something.” His gaze focused on him, then her, and back to him again, with such a look of guilt and anguish neither she nor Ben knew how to respond.

He added, shame coloring his voice, “I can’t tell you here.”

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When the trio arrived at the barn, Anna and Abe were sitting together quite closely, seemingly too absorbed in the other’s sphere to remember the world around them. Abigail wondered what moment they had interrupted but knew that it mattered very little now. Then again Abe was a bachelor once again, even if a bachelor with a young son, although Anna still remained married… But really who was Abigail to judge?

However, the moment Abe and Anna spotted them, the brunette moved away from him as quickly as if she had been burned, though her concerned eyes were only for Caleb. “Why is he up and about?”
“Because this can’t wait,” came Caleb’s response, his tone not quite approaching brusque.

Abe joined the rest of them, his brows furrowed. “You all right?”

“Simcoe knows you’re Culper,” Caleb blurted out, the words unable to be suppressed any longer.

Abe stared in shock. “How?”

Caleb kept his gaze, looking every bit ashamed. “I told him.”

Ben shook his head. “No, you didn’t.”

“If I didn’t say it aloud, Ben, he got it from my silence.”

Abe looked incredibly confused but growing increasingly pale as Ben turned to him. “Simcoe tortured him, tried to get him to sign a confession, which he didn’t.”

Caleb remained persistent, stubbornly refusing to believe the major’s words. “It doesn’t matter. He knows. When word came through that I was to be traded and he heard who for, that’s when he knew. And that’s when he decided to do something about it.”

Abe reached out to steady Caleb, who was suddenly refused to meet his gaze. “Wait, what are you talking about?

With a heavy sigh, Caleb answered him. “Those bandits at Lyme, the ones who ambushed us -”

Abigail knew he was relieving that horrific day in his mind – the sound of gunshots, the sight of Richard Woodhull falling into the trench, his grey pallor, lifeless eyes. Abe blinked slowly. “No.”

“They were Rangers, Abe.”

Looking away, Abe muttered, “No, no, no.” He was in denial – how could he not. And he looked so, very, lost, and distressed. Abigail met Anna’s horrified expression and watched as she struggled to control the urge to walk over to him, to hug him, or even simply hold his hand. Instead, they simply stood there and watched as Caleb told him, “It was Simcoe.”

Swallowing hard, Abe turned away from them and walked to the far side of the barn, trying to think. If what Caleb said was true, there was more danger coming than anyone could have predicted.

“How on earth could Simcoe be working with the Queen’s Rangers?” Anna demanded. Although her tone was soft, her words were deafening in the wake of Abe’s silence.

“Robert Rogers was once in command of them, but his command was taken away from him by John Andre. Andre then replace him with Simcoe,” Ben answered for her, his eyes briefly meeting Abigail’s at the mention of John’s name. She didn’t say anything. She knew this was well before her time in York City. In her mind, the John Andre he spoke was a completely different man than the one she had gotten to know, which made it no surprise why it didn’t make any sense to her.

After several minutes of silence, Caleb turned to Abigail, shame deepening on his face. “There’s something you should know as well.”

The blonde shook her head gently. “What I should know, and do know, is that you need some rest. You shouldn’t even be on your feet right now.”

The whaler shook his head and then shook away the hand that Ben had placed on his shoulder to comfort him. “No. There’ll be enough time to rest when I’m dead. There’s… ah shite.” He ran his
hands over his face in distress. “When I was in that bloody cell, Simcoe did do a number on me, yes. The... the pain was unbearable, I can hardly stand to think about it, let alone talk about it. It was... it was enough that any man would confess to any crime even if he were innocent, just to make it stop.

“I know I didn’t give away anything important for us, of that I’m certain of, any sort of plans or strategies or... what have you,” he continued worriedly. “But there was a moment, just before I blacked out, I do remember mumbling something. A name, I think.” He stared off for a moment before shaking his head. “No. I don’t think. I know. I just don’t remember whose. Could’ve been Townsend’s... or yours.”

She felt goosebumps rising along her flesh at the thought, but she did her best to ignore them. Instead, she walked over to him, slowly as if approaching a spooked horse. “Caleb, I’m sure you didn’t. And even if you had,” she was quick to interject just as he opened his mouth in protest, “even if you had, you were tortured, just as Ben said. There was nothing more you could’ve done, nor is there anything you can do now.”

“Oh, there’s something that can be done,” came Abe’s dark reply. Everyone turned to see the other man take a step back towards them. “Simcoe planned the massacre out of pure vengeance, having all but succeeded. I’m going to kill the bastard with my own hands.”

Abigail saw the fire in his eyes and the pain burning within them. She knew the feeling all too well. “Abe...”

Before she could finish, the barn door slid open with a sudden bang, jolting all of their attention towards the door. Standing in the doorway were two frazzled looking soldiers, who sounded to be out of breath. “Major Tallmadge, we need you and as many men we can muster. There’s mutiny in the camp.”

“Christ,” Ben cursed. “Has Washington been notified?”

The other soldier nodded gravely. “Aye, he knows. He’s asking for every able bodied men to confront the dissenters.”

Ben nodded jerkily before turning back to the group. “Anna, you and Abe remain here. A.. Williams, look after Caleb and the others and remain here until I say otherwise.”

Abigail opened to mouth to protest, but the hardened look he gave her was enough to have her close it. She nodded in silent agreement, watching worriedly as Ben followed the two soldiers out.

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Fortunately, the fire of the mutiny was quickly extinguished before it could spread much further, thanks to the presence of the unpersuaded soldiers, generals, and other officers, Ben among them.

From what he described, there had been a good deal of them ready to abandon camp and march in Philadelphia at the Congress for their earned wages they never received, at least was the common reason provided to the rider that General Wayne had dispatched to negotiate with the mutineers. Ben wasn’t precisely certain of the terms they had agreed to. All that he was aware of that the majority of the mutineers would be discharged while the ten leaders who had organized the uprising would be punished.

Gradually, the discussion shifted to plans of Arnold in York City. While negotiations with the mutineers had taken place, Caleb had told Abe as Anna and Abigail listened that Washington was in the midst of developing a plan of capturing Arnold. With John Andre in custody as part of their
agreement to spare his life, the discussions were going well enough, except for the one issue of intelligence gathering.

The only time Abigail had spoken was when she asked where they were holding the British major, passing it off as a matter of curiosity to avoid being suspicious. Caleb had mentioned that on most days he spent in the cellar in the manor, provided with a cot, chamber pot, and other relatively creature comforts of an officer of his position while at the same time being held as a prisoner. She was glad she had asked him before Ben had rejoined them back in the barn.

“I have a plan that can help with obtaining intelligence on Arnold’s movements in the city,” Abe spoke. With a quick glance at Caleb, he continued, “I can enlist in Arnold’s army and spy for the ring there.”

Anna frowned. “That’s far too risky.”

“I’m willing to risk it,” he insisted. He looked at Ben. “It would be the perfect opportunity. Plus, it’s the only thing that makes sense. Who knows if Townsend is even still working for us anymore?”

Ben looked conflicted, but more appallingly, his expression was growing more thoughtful. “That’s… certainly true. But Anna is right. That’s far too risky, especially with Simcoe knowing about you.”

Abe persisted, “But you can’t be certain that Simcoe would even be in the city. He has his own Ranger command as well. I can do this.”

While Anna, Abe, and Ben were hashing things out, Caleb’s gaze lingered on Abigail, who had grown startlingly pale. She didn’t even realize she started trembling until she felt the whaler’s hand brush along the back of her hand in askance. She refused to meet his gaze.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” the blonde demanded hoarsely. That definitely grabbed the other’s attention, each expression ranging with different levels of surprise and sudden realization.

Abe remarked gently, “If you just think about it, this is the only choice we have.”

“This is a dangerous goddamn game you’re willing to play, Fievel,” she retorted, blue eyes glimmering dangerously. “One that could very well cost you your life.”

Abe stiffened. “If it comes to it, I’m willing to pay it.”

That felt like a punch to the gut. Abigail’s eyes narrowed at him. “Need I remind you of the last person who volunteered to spy from the inside? What did that get him?” The trembling spread throughout her body. She balled her hands into fists, her nails digging deeply into her palms. Her voice cracked when she added, “His throat slashed and body discarded in the woods like disposed animal carcass.”

Ben began walking towards her, expression pained, “Abigail, just listen for a moment.”

Blinking back tears, she shook her head. All she could see was the blood stained kerchief and Tobias’s name she had sewn into the cream colored material, the kerchief she had tucked away in her rucksack. “No, you know what?” She sniffed quietly. “Fuck it. You really don’t need me around to plan this. Just do whatever you bloody well like. I’m out of this.”

Without so much as another word, Abigail stalked out of the barn, the urge to slam the barn door shut behind her barely reigned in.

There was something she needed to do, something she had intended to do for a long time. And now
was the opportunity to do it. Consequences be damned.

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Acting on impulse wasn’t exactly foreign territory for Abigail, though she hardly chose to think of it that. She preferred to think of it as making an executive decision within a limited time frame. Okay, so maybe that was the same thing. Whatever one would call it, she did acknowledge of hosting a whole slew of impulsive decisions in her past, not all of which ended successfully, but dammit all if she wasn’t committed to seeing them through, which was what just the very reason she would visit that bloody cellar that evening.

After returning to the tent for a quick change into civilian clothing – male, of course – along with a few other items, she headed towards the manor by cutting through the woods so that she came up at the rear. Seeing that there were no guards at the cellar door, she considered unbolting it herself and slipping inside that way but knew instantly that would be a mistake. What if the guards were to return before she was finished, seeing the bolt had been removed?

No, no. She would have to go inside the house directly to reach the cellar that way. Risky but ultimately her only option. Of course, she would take the servants’ entrance. She wasn’t foolish enough to walk through the front doors. Whenever in doubt, always used the servant corridors.

There was a crack in one of the doors. Unable to help herself, she pushed it open slightly to get a better look. It was a door to the kitchen where the hearth was crackling quietly with rekindled fire. A large pot of something resided in the hearth – probably laundry, considering the lack of aroma would suggest food. A few servants were scuttling about, cleaning up the kitchen for the night and doing some prep work for the morning. One misstep and she would be caught.

She was just about to fall back when she noticed a pitcher of water on a table right next to her, just sitting there idly. Biting her lip, she quickly reached for it before slipping quickly back into the corridor and making her way towards the cellar before she could change her mind.

For months, Abigail had planned to visit John, but she had never been sure how to go about it. She couldn’t very well ask Ben, knowing how much he would disapprove, but once she had learned of his location, she had always intended to speak with him about it first before she actually went.

The only light provided in the halls were the small flickering candles set on the walls. She was very grateful for them. The last thing she needed was to trip over herself and shatter the pitcher on her way down. That would be a difficult situation to explain, wouldn’t it, especially after the defeated mutiny.

Uncertain if there was any additional light in the cellar, she unlatched the door and reached for the nearest candle before making her descent. She knew she’d have to leave the door shut but unlatched, but that was a far lesser risk than using the cellar doors outside.

She rounded the corner of shelves to see he did in fact have light, his own torch in fact. More than that, John was sitting on a stool, a bowl with very little water in front of him. He had a blade to his throat, but upon closer inspection, it was only a shaving blade. His concentration fixated on the mirror in front of him, but to call it a mirror would be a mockery, given it was actually nothing more than a medium sized shard of broken glass.

“It’s dangerous to walk up on a man while he’s shaving,” John remarked dryly, not once removing his gaze from his work. “Fortunately for you and me both, I was just finishing up.”

Only when the blade was away from his face did Abigail took a step forward. “Fortunate indeed,
but it looks like you’ve nicked yourself without my interference.”

The shaving blade clattered to the floor. John’s body jerked towards the sound of her voice, barely preventing the bowl of his cleaning water from falling to the floor with the blade.

“Elizabeth?” he asked in disbelief. Not once had she ever seen Major John Andre in a state of bafflement, but there he was, staring at her and blinking as if his eyes were deceiving him. “What… what on earth are you doing here?”

Abigail took a measured breath. “That, ah… I can’t really give you an explanation for that, but what I can give you is this.” She lifted the pitcher of water. “It looks like you could use it.”

Staring at her in shock, he nodded mutely, never once removing his eyes from her as she slowly approached him, setting down the candle at the small table and poured some water into the very small mug that had been provided for him.

“This isn’t some sort of trick, is it?” he asked somewhat suspiciously.

Without another word, Abigail reached for the mug and downed its contents in a single swallow before setting it back onto the table. “Satisfied?”

John’s lips twitched into a reluctant smile. “I suppose I am.” He gave a permissive gesture to pour again. “So if I can’t know what you’re doing here, than may I ask about the kitten at least?”

The thought of little fur ball drew out a small smile from her. He wouldn’t be so little anymore now. It had been months since she had left York City. “The last I saw of the little fellow, he was doing very well. Cicero fell in love with him immediately, so I left him in his care. I believe he named the kitten Andre, in honor of his employer.”

A touch of warmth brought out some color in John’s pallid complexion, accompanied with a more genuine smile, which seemed with concern. “Abigail?”

Abigail pinched herself not to react, reminding herself he was inquiring of his servant. “She’s doing well. Very pleased to have her son with her, which is only natural, even if she has to work for Arnold… Oh.” Seeing the look in his face, she explained, “General Clinton… has allowed Arnold to take up residence in your home until more ‘suitable’ accommodations can be made for him. But that was months ago.”

She realized that perhaps she could offer him a piece of the truth, even if she couldn’t tell him everything – the very same way she had when she had first come to him on her first night in the city, distressed, fearful, and heartbroken. “He was actually the reason why I left,” she admitted softly. “I couldn’t remain in that house with him, on my own.”

John leaned forward, forgetting their surroundings and respective situations almost entirely, and reached for her hand. “Has he… did he try anything with you?” he asked, which sounded more of a command.

Abigail shook her head. “No. He just – his presence just made me very uncomfortable. Abigail helped me to escape.”

John inhaled sharply and exhaled slowly in an attempt to compose himself. “Arnold will be dealt with,” he spoke slowly. “That much I promise you.”

The desire to ask him about his meetings with Washington and Washington’s plans to capture Arnold was overwhelming, but she knew that even hinting to her knowledge of this would only
heighten his suspicions – John Andre was not a stupid man.

Slowly, she withdrew her hand from his grasp to fold her hands carefully in front of her. “There’s something I need to ask you, and I’m not quite sure how to ask it.” The quiet laugh that came from her held a touch of bitterness. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to hear the answer either, but in her heart, she knew she needed to hear it, whatever his answer might be.

John patiently waited as she mentally sorted out her thoughts, which were just about all over the place. Several minutes of silence passed before she finally made a decision. “Say you had a man in your ranks that was found to be a traitor. As a major, what is the way you would handle that?”

If he was surprised by her question, it didn’t show in his expression. He tilted his head, considering. “It depends on whether or not the man in question was rumored to be a traitor or had damning evidence against him.” He raised his eyebrows a little in question.

Abigail swallowed hard. “Say there was, evidence against him. What would you do?”

“Well,” he began slowly, considering, “if there was evidence against him, I would have him brought to me and interrogate himself. Then, depending on his rank, he would be court martialed where they would deliver the sentence themselves.”

“So you wouldn’t have him killed on the spot?”

John smiled with little humor. “Depends on what kind of man he is. But generally, no I would not. Let him have the chance to defend himself against the charges placed on him. It’s only fair.” He peered at her curiously. “Was that your question? Or should I say, questions.”

She squeezed her hands together when she felt the telltale signs of trembling in her palms. “No, that was just the ground work.”

Lifting her gaze to meet his, she managed to find the voice to speak. “Tobias Hawkins, I believe, was among your ranks. If not, then some other major or commander, what have you. He was suspected of being a traitor and was murdered in cold blood at the hands of Queen’s Rangers. My question is did you order the hit, John?”

John was far too astonished to conceal his surprise at her pointblank question and stare. “How on earth did you find out about any of this?”

“He – he was my husband,” Abigail answered, voice cracking over the word “husband.” “Answer me. Did you have him killed?” While his explanations to her previous questions should have placated her, that didn’t necessarily mean he hadn’t had played a role in Tobias’s murder. She hated to think it, to even consider it, but the question needed to be asked. She needed answers.

John’s hard gaze softened as he read the pain and desperation that must have been etched into her face. “No. No, my dear, I did not,” he answered softly.

He went to reach for her hands once again, but this time Abigail drew her hands into her lap. “I had no knowledge of any of this. Whatever had happened to your husband must have been a part of something that only a select few were privy to. Rangers, you said?”

She nodded, and he sighed heavily. He brought up a hand to rub the back of his neck in mild agitation. “It was an inside job, that much I can ascertain, but there’s only so much I can do from here. I hope you understand that.”

“I do,” she murmured, blinking back her tears. “Thank you, for being honest with me. I’m more
grateful than you could ever know.” She might not have known him all her life, but in the time that she had gotten to know John, she knew that he was telling her the truth. She felt the weight of his words in her heart, her soul. She trusted his word. Maybe that made her a fool, but she believed John Andre to be an honorable man, despite their being on opposite sides of this war.

“I have to go,” she murmured, rising to her feet. He rose as well, out of habit as a gentleman would for a lady. She almost smiled. “But before I do, there’s something else. Something that belongs to you.”

Unbuttoning her coat, she slipped a hand inside to pull out a packet of carefully folded parchment bound tightly with a string of twine. After a moment of staring at them, Abigail turned around to face him. “Peggy passed this along to me the day you departed on the boat. She asked me to make sure these got into your hands upon your return.” She held them out to him. “I apologize for the delay, but they’re in proper hands now.”

John stared at the bound letters in her hand, as if wondering if they were mirage. Finally, he accepted them from her and held them as if they were the most precious treasure in this world. Written words from his love, she thought. Of course that would be worth more than all the money in the world could buy.

His hands shook slightly as he held them, the first crack she had ever seen in the carefully crafted mask of Major John Andre. He tried to speak, but whatever he attempted to say came out choked and mangled, a second crack. It took a few moments for him to speak. “If... if I had answered differently,” he finally spoke, lifting his now shimmering gaze to hers, “would you have still given me these?”

“I wasn’t intentionally withholding them from you,” she remarked quietly. “There was something I needed from you, and there was something you needed from me, even if you didn’t know it. I haven’t read them, any of them, nor did I tell anyone about Peggy. It’s none of my business, nor anyone else’s.”

Abigail reached for the candle and turned to head up the stairs when she heard John speak, so quietly that she almost didn’t hear him. “Thank you, Elizabeth.”

She turned her head towards him, nodding with a pained smile before walking up those rickety steps.

Chapter End Notes

And there you guys have it! Poor Abigail and all of her emotions. While yes, it might sound stupid for her to go visiting John like she did, she needed to know if the man she had come to trust, even though they’re on opposite sides, had a part in Tobias’s death. Hopefully, this can provide her with some closure now. She’s had some closure for her father and now hopefully she’ll have some for Tobias, and she can finally let herself begin to heal.

Thank you guys so much for supporting this fic! Kisses and hugs for you all!!! <3
“Headache?” Abigail asked sympathetically.

Ben lifted his gaze from his work and gave her a weary smile. “Only a small one,” he answered wryly.

She had found him at his desk, his face between his hands as his fingers pressed against his temples. Hardly a difficult conclusion to come to.

She couldn’t fault him for it, considering the amount of trouble that had come from the mutiny. Earlier that morning, Washington had ordered the execution of the ten leaders of the mutiny by firing squad, as carried out by others who had participated under their direction. The decision was to serve as a lesson to not only those men but also as a deterrent to prevent others from creating another insurgency.

Fortunately for her, the blonde had been assisting Anderson when the executions had been carried out, though she knew Ben had been present. He had no choice.

Seeing as she didn’t have any herbs on her person to help alleviate the headache, she had to settle for the next best thing. She crossed the short distance between them to stand behind him. One had settled on his shoulder as the other brushed wayward strands away from his face, her fingers brushing against his temple. “May I?”

He made a permissive noise before her fingers pressed gently against his temples. “Though you know you don’t have to ask,” he reminded her.

“I know,” she said, pressing her fingers a tad more firmly against his temples. “Just thought I’d ask anyway.” Slowly, she began rubbing her fingers in soothing circles, alternating between gentle and firmer pressures. “I’m sorry I couldn’t be there for you, during… you know.”

“I’m grateful you weren’t, actually,” he murmured, instinctively leaning into her touch. “That’s the last thing I ever want you to witness. Again.”

Abigail hummed in kind. The body of the condemned man still lingered in her dreams, hanging on the makeshift gallows. Years had passed since then, but it was an image one could not easily forget. “This morning should put a halt to any talks of uprisings, at least for a while.”

The sound the major made was somewhere between a snort and a huff. Clearly, he didn’t believe her words any more than she did, but he appreciated the effort nonetheless.

“For the moment, surely, but there’s still resentment brimming just under the surface,” he said, sighing as her hands eased down the sides of his neck.

Abigail frowned. That much was certainly true, but she didn’t want to add to any more of his worry.
She could feel his tension underneath her fingertips.

“Well, you know you have an insider on the goings on in camp,” she remarked, smiling a little as he tilted his head back towards her, his eyelids falling shut. “Someone who has eyes and ears among the men. Someone men can trust to speak in front of and has a forgettable face.”

Ben managed to hold back a snort but barely. “You have many wonderful attributes, but a forgettable face surely isn’t one of them.” He opened his eyes and gave her a pointed look, which didn’t have quite the same effect upside down. “But above all else, please be careful.”

Abigail smiled, her hands pausing in their ministrations. “You know me.”

“Oh, I do,” he said, tone mildly flat as he continued to look at her. To distract him, she pressed her fingers into a particularly hard knot, drawing out a quiet grunt from him. “Christ. Do that again please.”

Suppressing a grin, Abigail repeated the action, massaging his neck and muscles through his shirt. She began pressing more firmly into his muscles, the increase in pressure prompting another grunt of approval.

“So Abe should be on his way to York City?” she asked, as a means to temporarily take his mind away from potential defectors and mutinies.

The previous night she had apologized for her reaction to Abe’s plan. It was the thought of someone else she cared about traveling down the road that her former husband had traveled on she just hadn’t been able to take. In that moment, Ben had reached for her hand, telling her there was no reason for her apology, that her reaction had been understandable given the circumstances. He had understood her so completely then, as he always seemed to be able to do. It was just another reminder of why she loved him.

“Aye,” he said. “He’ll meet with Townsend first, to let him now of the mission. Then he’ll wait for a message from one of our side who will use the phrase ‘I miss the summer of ’73.’”

“And who will this messenger be?”

“I’m still working on that.” With a sigh, he leaned forward to rest his arms, his chin all but resting against his chest, and stretched out his neck to give her better access, his body growing gradually pliant under her touch. He chuckled softly then. “If you’re trying to coax me to sleep, love, you’re succeeding.”

“I can see why you’re head of intelligence,” she remarked, her lips twitching. “Always uncovering my carefully laid out plans.” She felt the vibrations of his chuckles under her hands and fought the urge to press a kiss to his neck. “Though don’t fall asleep just yet. There’s something I need to discuss with you.”

She caught a small frown forming on his face. “What’s wrong?”

“I… nothing really, but it’s something I should tell you myself, instead of someone else.” Now that didn’t make it sound any better, but that was all she could think of, though she seriously doubted John would inform him of her visit to him. However, it was quite possible, despite the lengths she had gone to conceal herself, that someone else could have seen her. It was best that she tell him now, while she had him all to herself.

“Why doesn’t that sound reassuring?” he asked. Slowly, as if reluctant to break from her grasp, he sat up straighter in his chair, turning to face her. She couldn’t quite determine the expression on his
It wasn’t quite a demand, but she felt compelled to follow it as one. “All right. I will but only as long as you promise not to speak a word until I’m done. Okay?”

“All right,” Ben promised, albeit cautiously.

Sitting herself down on her cot across from his desk, Abigail took a breath and released it slowly. “I visited John last night. John Andre.”

His eyes widened, and his mouth opened in outrage but quickly shut it, though his jaw remained clenched. When it was certain he wouldn’t go back on his word, she continued, “I had to see him for myself, to speak with him. After I left the barn, I headed directly to the cellar where he’s being held. If it helps, I hadn’t intended to see him that night, but with Abe volunteering to enlist with the redcoats, well… it brought back everything, every feeling, every memory, back to the surface. I just had to do it then. I needed to know.”

“What did you need to know?” he asked gently, only after she didn’t respond for some time.

“I had to know if he ordered Tobias’s death,” she spoke with no tremors lingering in her voice. “Or had any part in it or any knowledge at all.”

“And did he?”

“No. On all accounts. He told me so when I asked him.”

Abigail told him about everything that night, beginning with how she chosen to sneak into the cellar and ending with her leaving the very same way she had arrived. She left out giving John Peggy’s letters, believing that the only business the belonged to was theirs, John’s and Peggy’s.

By the time she finished, Ben looked just as tense and stressed as he had been when she had first entered the tent. She had been watching him carefully as she spoke. It must have taken a vast amount of self-control for him not to voice his disapproval or his anger, both of which she knew weren’t entirely directed at her. He shut his eyes briefly before finally looking at her.

“And do you believe him?” he asked. “Do you trust him, I mean.”

Abigail met his gaze steadily. “Yes, I think I do. He’s a man of honor and… he’s always been kind to me. You’ve spoken with him yourself. What was your impression of him?”

Ben had in fact spoken with John Andre privately on two occasions. Perhaps that was not enough time to properly a judge a man’s character, but from those encounters, the major couldn’t deny that the man had honor, redcoat or not. That much he could admire, though a part of him did wonder just how close the man had gotten to Abigail. Just the mere hint of the thought was nearly enough for his jaw to clench and his teeth to grind, but as quickly as the half thought would come, he would dismiss it, feeling ridiculous for even considering it.

Before he could formulate a response, she continued, “I wished to speak with you before, but then everything happened and… you know.”

Ben leaned forward in his chair, elbows resting on his knees. “I wished you would’ve as well, but it’s done now. All I want to know now, is why.”

Abigail didn’t have to think too long on her reasons for doing what she did, having been aware of them all along. “I needed to know if John, a man who I had come to know as honorable and kind,
was capable of such a thing. Whatever his answer would be, I knew deep down, whether I wanted to
acknowledge it or not, I would find some closure. Perhaps not entirely, but it would be a start. At
least, that much I’d hoped.”

“And did you find it?” he asked, his words all but a mere whisper.

The smile that touched her lips was soft, yet somewhat hesitant, but it was the first time in quite some
time, he observed with growing warmth, that a smile reached her eyes. “I think so,” she admitted.
“It’s… certainly a start.”

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Several mornings later, just as the first light of the rising sun settled across the earth, Abigail rose
from her cot and dressed quickly. Now that she was back on patrol duty, her days were certainly
busier. Between that and her work with Anderson, she was as busy as ever. She wouldn’t have seen
Ben at all if not for the fact she shared his tent with him.

Not to her surprise, Ben was already gone, more than likely meeting with other officers or
Washington. She had long lost track of his whereabouts when it came to the camp.

After making sure her bindings were tightly secure with a quiet grunt of discomfort - one of the few
reasons she missed York City, not having to wear that bloody binding - she slipped out the tent and
headed in the direction of where the soldiers awaited to learn of their assignments, at least those
assigned to patrol duty.

She considered swiping a biscuit on her way but decided against it. Captain Pitman, the officer in
charge of patrol assignments, possessed a strict adherence to protocol, so even eating the smallest
morsel would be considered grounds for reprimand. Nor did he appreciate tardiness.

“Look who has decided to grace us with his presence,” came an all too familiar sardonic voice.
“Pretty boy Williams.”

Abigail’s back stiffened but gave no other indication to have heard Jasper’s retort. She had grown
accustomed to those little comments from him, but it didn’t mean she had grown to like them any
better.

“What, are ya too good to talk to us lowly folk?” Jasper Harlow continued to patronize from his seat
near a stack of crates, where he and the others, Decory Matthews and Bartholomew Lewis observed
the interaction – or one-sided interaction – with great amusement but said nothing.

Jasper had always been the more outspoken one of the trio with Bartholomew having assumed the
role as the muscle, even though each man was equally strong in their own right, physically anyway.
Decory had become the unofficial leader among them and could have easily influenced their
behavior into something good for the cause. Instead, he craved cunningly crafted chaos, which was
precisely what the three wrought on others weaker than themselves.

The blonde had often referred to them as the asshole soldiers in her mind or, as of late, the merry
band of idiots who weren’t exactly merry. Her experiences with them had been nothing short of
abominable. Years ago, back at the recruitment base, she had made the mistake of not holding her
tongue when Jasper had made one of his usual obnoxious comments.

The moment she had, they had determined to make her life a living hell – taking her baskets of
laundry still brimming with soap and water and dumping them onto the ground for her to clean up
and start over again had been a daily occurrence, only one of the many tricks they had devised
against her and anyone else who had gotten in the way of her fun, though there had been those men they had never touched, namely Harrison.

That man, she sighed inwardly, missing his strong paternal presence. He had been the one to help teach her and a handful of others who to handle a musket. For whatever reason, of course she which she was grateful, the older man had taken a liking to her and looked after her as if she had been one of his own.

He had been with her when she had come across yet another ploy by the trio. One of them, or perhaps all three, had decided to take a piss in her drinking cup – thankfully, she hadn’t drunk it, the aroma of the urine had been too strong not to notice. She had scrunched up her face in disgust and set it down. Seeing this, Harrison had taken the cup from her, scowled when he realized what it was, and tossed it out. He had asked her if she had known who was behind it, and reluctantly, she had given him their names. After that, she hadn’t had a problem with them since.

Though perhaps in hindsight, Harrison’s interference had only made it worse.

Ever since the flying camp, Abigail had done her best to avoid them, which she had managed to do with surprising success. Between Culper and her work with Anderson, her days had been blissfully busy to keep her away from that troublesome trio. And no, she hadn’t confided in Ben about their behavior. She feared that any action on his part would be perceived as special treatment on her behalf, and she already had some problems with more than a few soldiers regarding their friendship, as amplified by Bartholomew’s next remark, “Forget it, mate. Pretty boy over there has airs of graces. He doesn’t want to associate with the likes of us.”

That last statement couldn’t be any truer, she wanted to remark but smartly kept her mouth firmly shut, which was an incredible struggle. Instead, she firmly planted herself onto a log far away from them and focused on cleaning her musket, trying to ignore any and all jibes directed at her. Breathe, woman, just breathe, she reminded herself, quietly releasing an annoyed breath.

Captain Pitman arrived not long after, prompting all soldiers present to rise immediately and form a line. It was difficult to assess from his expression, but the captain was pleased by their immediate attention. Soon enough, he organized every four men together in a group, seemingly with no specific order. Somehow, Abigail had found herself grouped with the last three men she ever wanted to associate with, Decory, Jasper, and Bartholomew. Wonderful. Hopefully, this wouldn’t be their official patrol assigned group.

One group at a time was summoned to Pitman’s tent to receive their assignments. There were only five groups, and by the time the breakfast rations were being served, their group was the only one left, with the fourth group.

“Looks like we’re grouped up with Tallmadge’s bitch,” she heard Jasper mutter to the others.

Temper flaring, Abigail turned around and, against her better judgement, demanded, “I’m sorry. What did you just say?” Her hands felt empty without her musket, which she had left at her seat. Instinctively, she balled her hands into fists at her side, thumbs safely pressed on the outside of her fists.

“You heard me,” Jasper remarked, eyes glittering with cruel amusement. “And it ain’t like it isn’t true. Either you’re always with him, or he’s always looking for you. Though someone should really tell Washington that he has a buggerer for a major.”

Abigail’s fist collided with his face before he could finish that particular thought. Granted, it wasn’t enough to knock him off balance - he was double her size, if not triple - but just enough to have him
stumble back a step or two into Bartholomew’s chest.

Leaning forward, she hissed, “Say what you will about me, fine, but Benjamin Tallmadge has more honor and integrity than the three of you put together. I doubt you could even spell either word.”

She realized the moment of her mistake when Jasper was suddenly looming over her with such a speed she hadn’t thought him capable of, Bartholomew at his shoulder. Decory lingered back, observing the scene before him with amused interest. Heart in her throat, she glared up at him defiantly, though really it was a cold fear that took over her. She didn’t have the chance to take a step back before Jasper got his hands on her and shoved her to the ground, where she landed with a painful thud. The fall was hard enough that her teeth rattled.

“Matthews, Lewis, Williams, Harlow, you’re… what on earth is going on out here?” came the bewildered, suspicious voice of Captain Pitman.


At this prompt and a look from Decory, Jasper seized her by the arm and hauled her to her feet, none too gently either. She wanted to jerk her arm from his grasp but not underneath the captain’s gaze.

“I see that the four of you are acquainted then,” Pitman remarked. “That’s good. You’ll have the night shift this evening, the four of you.”

Abigail froze. Fuck.

After going over a few more details, the captain dismissed them. As soon as he was gone, Jasper’s grip tightened on her arm. He got so close that she could count nearly every freckle on his face. His breath was hot on her face, and the smell of it was even worse. “You better watch your fucking back,” he warned before releasing her and stalking off towards breakfast, following behind Decory and the other one.

The blonde remained rooted to the spot, desperately trying to regain her composure, but she couldn’t deny that she was shaken. With a quick glance at the sky, she hazarded a guess it was still relatively early in the morning, which meant that patrol was hours away yet. The thought, however, didn’t provide her with any comfort.

Double fuck.

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It was gradually approaching dusk. Abigail had no desire to step out of the tent, and it surprisingly had little to do with her recent trouble of the day, at least in that moment.

With a quiet sigh, she nuzzled her face against Ben’s chest. She could tell his shirt had been freshly laundered from the faintly woodsy scent from the lye soap. They hadn’t pushed their cots together as she had done the previous evening, knowing that at any moment either one of them could be summoned for something. Instead, she had decided join him in his, which resulted in her practically lying on top of him, but from the looks of it, the major had no qualms about the arrangement.

They talked about their morning thus far, or rather Ben did while Abigail listened, the latter of which had no true desire to recount the events of her morning. Selah Strong had apparently arrived at the camp upon Ben’s request. This certainly caught Abigail’s interest, though perhaps not for the reasons that it should have. He had shared with Selah about the plight of the soldiers and worried they might stage a mutiny, a stronger one than the last attempt.
“Has Anna seen him yet?” she asked, resting her chin on his chest to get a better look at his face.

Ben appeared thoughtful. “I’m not sure, but he did ask about her though. I did tell him that she is integral to our work with Culper, but it is understandable if Selah wants her to join him in Philadelphia.”

“But ultimately it’s her choice, isn’t it?” she remarked.

He turned his face towards her, a small frown faintly settling across his mouth. “Of course, but he is her husband after all.”

She pressed her lips together, suppressing the urge to argue the matter further. It was hardly her business. Instead she asked, “Any news of Abe yet?”

“No,” he sighed heavily. “He’s yet to make contact with Townsend.”

Abigail frowned, thinking. “He’s probably still adjusting to the new role. It might just be taking him a while to acclimate.”

He nodded, seeing her point but was obviously still concerned. “I tried talking with Caleb about it, but I don’t think it did either one of us any good.” A hint of frustration entered his face. “I don’t even think he heard a word I said.”

She pressed a hand to his chest. “Cut him a little slack, Ben. He’s been through a lot.”

“I understand that, I do, but it’s been nearly over a month now. I… just wish I knew what I could do to help him.”

“That kind of trauma doesn’t fade away so easily,” Abigail spoke gently. “It will take some time, but he’ll come back to us. Just be patient with him, as much as you’re able. That’s all I ask.”

Ben reached for her hand and drew it up to mouth, his lips brushing lightly against her knuckles. “You’re right,” he acquiesced. “I should have more patience with him.”

She saw the guilt flicker in his eyes and gently withdrew her hand to touch his face. “It’s understandable not to. You’re under so much pressure. You have a lot weighing on your shoulders. As for your patience, well, you’re only human after all.”

The way he was looking at her with such devoted, undivided attention made her heart race. She bit her lip, contemplating as she observed his gaze drop to her mouth yet made no move to come closer, respecting her boundaries. Filled with so much love for him, so much yearning, she couldn’t stop herself from pressing her lips to his.

His mouth was warm and pliant against hers. There was no hesitation or surprise on his part when she first kissed him, having been patiently waiting for her to make the first move. The moment she pressed her mouth to his, he kissed her back, reacquainting himself with the taste of her lips, soft as blossoming rose petals and a few shades shy of the flower in question.

With a quiet noise at the back of her throat, Abigail’s hand trailed down from his face towards his chest, where her fingers latched onto the material of his shirt right above his heart, the increasing rhythm underneath her hand and the strong, solidness of him had her own heart racing impossibly faster.

A rising need was making its presence plainly known, which came through in their kiss, to which he
responded in kind, tangling a hand in her hair to draw her closer. The last time they had kissed, properly kissed, had been several months ago, so far too long ago, and the last time they had been together, in that way… was much longer than that.

Abigail shivered with pleasure as she slipped her tongue inside his mouth. She tasted the faintest hint of coffee and was determined to find every last taste of it. Ben’s responding groan inspired another shiver down her spine, more so as he pulled her closer to him.

Before, she had already been all but on top of him anyway, but now she found herself straddling his thigh, her knee tucked snuggly between his legs. He tugged at her hair lightly, and feeding off his playfulness, she nipped his lower lip, relishing in his pleased grunt.

Then she shifted ever so slightly, her thigh brushing against his growing arousal. Ben gasped into her mouth, which she drank in greedily.

It wasn’t until they parted for breath did they remember where they were. “What – what time is it?” she asked breathlessly.

With considerable effort to convince his body to move even an inch from the cot, the major reached for his coat and fished out his pocket watch. He swore under his breath. Abigail held back a giggle. “It’s a quarter to six. I’m supposed to meet up with Selah again.” Placing the watch back inside his coat, he gave her a look of disapproval, though his smile ruined the rouse. “I blame you entirely, you minx.”

Abigail smiled innocently. “Completely unintentional.” Of course it was. They both knew that, but it had been far too long since they had shared anything close to this.

“I shouldn’t be long,” he assured her. He took in her mussed hair and swollen lips, his breath catching in his throat. “Though I’d very much rather stay here with you, the future of the causes depends on Selah and the Congress now.”

“I understand,” she said but then her smile faded. “Though I may not be here when you get back. Patrol duty tonight. We were group assigned this morning.”

Ben frowned, but they both knew there was nothing he could do about it now, nothing that wouldn’t end well for her. “Do you know the men you’re going to be with?”

Abigail stopped herself short from pulling a face and gave him each man’s name she would be with, providing a physical description upon his request. By the time she was done, he pulled a face.

“What?” she asked, curious by his reaction.

Frown still firmly in place, he answered, “It’s only rumors I’ve heard, but from what I’ve gleaned about those three is there nothing but trouble.” His face was full of concern. “Are there any others in your group? You should keep your distance from them as much as you can.”

_Ah, no. Just little old me_, she thought bitterly but knew the words would do anything but soothe him. This would have been the perfect opportunity to tell him of her encounter with them this morning and her history with them, but the look of concern on her face killed any words that had been on the tip of her tongue. Instead, she said, “Yeah, I think so. Some stragglers arrived right after our meeting with Pitman. The last I heard he was reprimanding them for being late. They should be with us.”

Now that wasn’t a complete lie. There had been a few stragglers who had stumbled in late. What she hadn’t mentioned was that Pitman had chewed them out before sending them off to be flogged four times each. After that, she highly doubted they would be in any shape for patrol that night or even
the next day.

Still, Ben remained unhappy about the situation but looked appeased enough by that meager reassurance. “Just promise me,” he implored, “that you’ll be careful.”

Abigail touched his face and smiled faintly. “I promise I’ll try.”

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After taking measures to make herself more presentable, Abigail had set off towards the woods’ edge where the group was to meet, before setting off to retrieve their mounts from the stables. Pitman wanted for ground to be covered, so naturally horses would provide them with ability to cover my ground. Somehow the thought of being even further away from camp with Decory, Jasper, and Bartholomew with only Cantor on her side did not calm her nerves.

She was passing a cluster of tents when she stumbled across a whispered conversation. Ordinarily, she wouldn’t have paid it any attention if not for the mention of a certain name that never ceased to make her skin crawl.

“…Arnold had it right. He took off and switched sides the moment he realized he was being fucked over,” came the voice that undeniably belonged to Jasper.

“Those idiots shoulda never negotiated with Wayne and the others,” Bartholomew hissed. “The mutiny would have thrived if not for those spineless fucks.”

“And what are you suggesting?” Decory asked dryly. “Try to spark another uprising?”

Bartholomew answered lowly, “What I suggest is that the moment we shake off Pretty Boy, we should make a break for it and meet up with Arnold in New York, see if he’d be willing to take us. He’d be impressed with us and would probably welcome us with open arms.”

Decory sighed. “You’re forgetting a minor detail, friend. There are several Continentals patrolling the woods, not just us. How long would it take for us to get spotted and reported back to Pitman? Worse yet, what if we’re caught? We’d be strung up as deserters, and you know it.”

“No if we’re quick about it,” Bartholomew muttered bitterly. One of the others snorted, Decory most likely.

But Jasper refused to let it go. “What if we did initiate another uprising, like Decory said? Tensions are still simmering, and not just among us lowly soldier folk. And not just between soldiers and officers as well. The officers are just as miffed as well. It wouldn’t be difficult to stir up some trouble.”

There was a long moment of silence. Abigail held her breath, her hands clenching into fists. What she had just overheard, the things they were discussing, was treasonous alone, but as far as she knew, it was only talk. She would only have her word to go on if she did report this.

But then Decory made the final decision, saying, “We start our work at dawn, when we return to the camp.”

Shit. She needed to find Ben, to warn him, but if she did now, she wouldn’t know the rest of their plans. For several moments, she contemplated what to do, but in the end, she decided just knowing they were planning another mutiny was dangerous enough. Ben would take her word for it, she knew he would.
Just as she was turning to make her way back to the camp, Abigail nearly smacked right into Captain Pitman himself. His brows furrowed a little until he recognized her. “Ah, Williams. Good.” Always having a loud and commanding presence, it was hardly surprising he had a voice that carried. She wanted nothing more than to turn and run, but underneath the captain’s expectant gaze, she had no choice but to follow him. “Good evening, gentlemen.”

The moment they stepped into their line of view, the three men’s eyes immediately went to her, each of their stares so penetrating and cold Abigail felt goosebumps rising along her flesh.

She had difficulty paying attention to the captain’s instructions with the feeling of their stares on the back of her neck. What she did take away from Pitman, she understood they would be taking a very remote route on horseback, circle the area, and return just before dawn. But in the back of her mind, she knew not all of them would be returning to camp, and in that moment, she suspecting that person would be her.

Chapter End Notes

I'm glad you guys are enjoying this fic!!! All of your feedback really makes my day, I'm not even kidding!

So you may have noticed I changed the chapter count... There should be quite a few chapters left for you to enjoy ;)
Pitman advised their group to split off into pairs to cover more ground. Either way Abigail looked at it, her situation was precarious paired with any of the men.

Bartholomew, while seemingly slow on the uptake for most things, possessed a strength that could easily take down three men. On the other hand, Jasper was quick to anger, and when he held a grudge, it was a dangerous combination. Decory was much more aloof and that much more difficult to read. Out of the three, he was the most quiet yet maintained an air of authority about him that naturally afforded him as the trio’s unofficial leader. One would think that he would have been her preference in partner.

Of course when they had been paired, Abigail was instinctively wary of him and rightly so. There was an undercurrent to his calmness, a chilliness that disconcerted her. The way he looked at her, his dark eyes glittering in cool malice, spoke a lot more than any words he could ever speak. He knew she had overheard their talk, that she had heard their developing plot. The moment they were alone he would have her head or any other manner in which he deemed worthy of killing her.

She had to think of an exit strategy and think quickly. While the woods were heavily patrolled, allegedly, where they were going was far more remote. If the opportunity arose where she found herself on her own, she would immediately turn Cantor back to camp, towards safety, towards Ben.

The only comfort she found along the trail was in Cantor, who remained keenly alert throughout the ride, ears twitching and nostrils flaring every so often. He sensed the danger as easily as she could, but she tried her best not to let him feel her nerves. That would only agitate him further. He whickered softly to the horse beside him, only to be rewarded with a sullen silence for his efforts. She rubbed his neck comfortingly. Like mount, like rider apparently.

With Jasper and Bartholomew having ridden further head, it was up to her and Decory to take up the rear for any signs of threats. They couldn’t have been riding for less than half an hour yet when there was a rustling sound a half dozen yards from them. The woods had been unusually quiet up to that point.

Decory drew up the reins and held up a hand for her to stop. Reluctantly, she obeyed, bringing Cantor to a steady halt. He shifted uneasily underneath her. She could hardly blame him.

“Something’s up ahead,” he murmured, squinting slightly into the night.

Giving her horse another reassuring pat, even though she felt anything but reassured, Abigail asked, “You think it’s a redcoat?”

He shrugged, a sign that could have been taken for indifference if not for the rigid set of the rest of
him. “Could be. Only one way to find out. You wait here.”

*Like hell, I will,* she thought. The moment he was out of sight, she planned to turn Cantor’s arse around and gallop her way back to camp at breakneck speed. If Pitman decided to flog her for ignoring his orders, well, he could take up the matter with Ben.

Decory clicked lowly for his mount to resume his pace before kicking him into a trot. Abigail watched as his form became increasingly smaller in the distance, her heart hammering inside his chest. Only when she could no longer see him would she make a break for it.

Realizing she only had precious seconds to spare, the blonde waited until he was out of her range of sight, and after a silent count to five, she turned Cantor around.

“Don’t worry, boy,” she murmured, bracing him for the run of their lives. “We’re getting the hell out of here.”

Cantor only managed three steps forward before two large figures from the dark descended upon them. The horse gave a whinnying shriek and desperately began backing up, but the figures weren’t making it easy for him. Panicked, Abigail seized his reins while grappling for her revolver, only to have Jasper jerk it from her hand.

The scene that unfolded was absolute chaos. Abigail clung to her horse’s mane, her thighs clamping tightly around Cantor as large, aggressive hands grabbed at her and attempted to pull her from the saddle. Fighting them was futile, that she knew, but she refused to go down without a fight.

Jasper cursed colorfully and pulled with all her strength, until the saddle became lopsided on one side. She struggled against him, clinging to the saddle until Bartholomew had to pry her hands off. The three of them tumbled into a sea of struggling limbs.

Breaking free long enough to reach for her stolen revolver, Jasper rolled until his stomach and cocked his weapon at her horse, who was pounding the ground fearfully with his hooves. “Now one more thing to take care of.”

Filled with a blinding protective rage, Abigail dove for him right before he pulled the trigger. The bullet shot through the trees and far away from Cantor, who shrieked with such terror it tore at her heart.

“Cantor, run!” Abigail screamed.

Her gelding didn’t need to be told twice. Rising onto his haunches, he kicked the air with another whinny before taking off in the opposite direction, the direction from which they came. She could only hope he would make it safely back to came. At least one of them should.

She didn’t get to linger in relief for too long. Feeling heavy hands on her waist, she tried crawling away, her fingernails digging into the earth, but it was no use. Soon enough she was flipped over and found Jasper in the process of straddling her.

“Christ, you scream just like a woman,” he chortled. He shoved her hard to the ground when she attempted to sit up. He snorted. “Fight like one, too.”

Gritting her teeth, she began desperately searching for something, anything, for her to grab. She grabbed onto the first thing she could find, something cold and heavy and just about double the size of her hand, and latched onto it in a death grip. “Oh, yeah? Try this then,” she hissed, slamming whatever she had into Jasper’s temple, resulting in a resounding crack.
Jasper fell to the side with a groan, blood pouring down the side of his face. She looked at her hand to find a large jagged rock in her hand. That rock was her new best friend.

She scrambled from underneath him and brought the rock above her head to strike him again when a ferociously strong hand wrapped around her wrist, squeezing so painfully tight she was forced to drop the rock, which happened to land right on her captor’s toe, judging from his cursing. She struggled against Bartholomew with all of her might, but compared to his strength, she might as well have been a kitten in the clutches of a hawk.

Pinning her arm against her back, the much larger man brought his other arm around her throat. Black spots danced in the corners of her vision as his hold tightened. She dug her nails into his skin, scratching as hard and deep as she could, but nothing seemed to deter him. His lack of comment would have concerned her more if she could get air into her lungs.

“Hold him steady there, Bar,” Decory commanded softly. Her head jerked towards the sound. Where on earth had he come from? Far enough to pretend he had ridden off, that was plain enough. He had nothing on him with the exception of his musket in hand. He wouldn’t dare use it. It would draw much attention, surely, but then again, so could Jasper’s misfire.

Taking one look at said man on the ground, the leader glanced over at Bartholomew, eyebrows raised. “What’s this now?”

“Clobbered him over the head with a rock, he did,” her captor remarked gruffly. “What do you suppose this one’s punishment should be?”

“Besides killing him, you mean?” Decory asked dryly, his eyes assessing her situation with a thin lipped smile. He took a step towards her, his smile turning into a disapproving frown. “You attacked our friend. That wasn’t very kind of you.”

“He… attacked me… first,” Abigail managed to choke out and wheezed when Bartholomew’s grip tightened on her throat.

Decory lifted a hand to the other man. “Easy, Bar. Don’t want to choke him to death. He hardly deserves that.”

The pressure on her neck disappeared suddenly. Abigail sucked in a breath of air greedily just as it was knocked right out of her again when Decory’s fist slammed into her stomach. Wheezing breathlessly, she collapsed to the ground, clutching her stomach.

Hands on the ground, she pushed herself to her knees only to have a heavy booted foot kick her in the mid-section. She fell to the ground, her face pressing into the mud. Exhaustion from the blows consumed her, which made it next to impossible to fight them as she was suddenly jerked around so that she was staring into their cold faces.

“I think once we’re through with him,” Decory remarked ponderously, “we should tie him up and let the wolves have what’s left of him.”

With the stage set, there was little talk after that. With Bartholomew pinning her arms down above her, Decory took his precious time delivering blows to her body, his desire for blood clouding over everything else. He alternated between using his feet and fists, finding creatively horrific ways to inflict pain.

Only once did he offer her a moment of reprieve. Chest heaving with exertion, he lowered himself to his knees beside her. “I’m sure you understand why we’re doing this.”
Abigail was unable to speak, her mouth having begun to fill with blood. She would have glared at him, but she lacked the energy. The only thing she thought of to do as a response, with the little bit of strength she had left, was arch her shoulders and neck upwards as high as she could and spit into his face.

Blood splashed across Decory’s, little specks trickling down his jaw. The darkness shrouded much of his face, but the contrast of the color of blood against his pale face was certainly stark. The usual cool, detached assessing look gave way to a wild look, so primal and downright terrifying there weren’t enough words to describe.

Then without a moment’s hesitation, he raised a fist and slammed it into her face. She felt more than heard the sickening crunch at the blow and didn’t have enough time to recover before he hit her again, and again, and again until her skin was raw and warm with blood, a gradual swelling rising up underneath her skin. She couldn’t fight him, even if she tried. All she could do was wait for it to be over, her struggling all but ceased as darkness began to settle upon her.

For a moment, she could have sworn she spotted a faint light in the distance, when one of Decory’s powerful blows forced her head to the side. She tried to blink, but one of her eyes was already swollen shut. She gasped wetly, taking a breath when his movements slowed, a hesitation. Grateful, she closed her one good eye and allowed herself to slip into the darkness.

The last thing she heard before drifting off was the sound of thundering hooves, horses, possibly serval of them, but that hardly made sense.

She didn’t have time to wonder what that meant before the darkness washed over her.

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The first thing that greeted her upon her revival back to consciousness was a state of complete and utter soreness. She felt as if she had been trampled by a thousand horses, and just not any horses, large draft horses with hooves the size of boulders.

She attempted to open her eyes only to discover that one of them refused to cooperate. Wincing, she slowly brought up a hand to the side of her face, assessing the damage with a careful probing of her fingers. Ah, yes. There was significant swelling there. Given enough time, it would eventually go down.

She should have noticed the change in her surroundings sooner, but the pain in her body had taken precedence in obtaining her attention. No longer was she sprawled out on the ground in the woods being beaten to a near bloody pulp in the middle of the night. Instead, she now resided inside a tent, and it was approaching mid-day, if the light filtering through the tent material was any indication. Had… had she gotten back to camp? If so, then how…?

Hesitantly, she touched her nose, hissing quietly as her fingers pressed down. She couldn’t see for herself, but from touch, she suspected it was broken but not out of alignment, which was certainly a relief.

The sound of her hiss drew Ben to her side immediately. She wanted to sit up, but her body betrayed her, refusing to grant her that much. His gentle, careful touch felt pleasantly cool against her skin, making her wonder if she had a fever though the thought was fleeting. Any thoughts that might have entered her mind vanished at the sight of him.

Not once in her life had she ever seen him as disheveled as he was now. Ben’s face was drawn and pale. His hair, always perfectly plaited right down to the strand, was in a disarray, as if he’d
repeatedly run his hands through it. At some point, he must have abandoned his uniform coat, leaving him only in boots, trousers, and his shirt, which was untucked. There was a wild look in his eyes, mingled with intense worry and just the slightest hints of anger, the latest of which was barely restrained. Just by looking at him, she knew he hadn’t slept a wink for God only knew how long.

When she tried to speak, she began to cough, a little at first until it transitioned into a full blown fit. Quickly, he carefully assisted her into a sitting position and passed her a kerchief. It registered only a few seconds into the coughing the taste of iron in her mouth. She accepted the cloth from him and coughed it out, leaving a splatter of blood on the white cloth. Unfortunately, she wasn’t quick enough crumpling the material in her hand for Ben not to see it. If it were possible, he appeared to grow even paler.

“I’ll have Caleb fetch Anderson,” he said, preparing to rise when she slowly shook her head.

“What day is it?” she croaked.

“Thursday,” he answered softly. “You’ve been unconscious for a full day and night.”

Seeing his worried frown, Abigail observed, “You look like hell.”

Ben huffed out a bitter laugh, his frown turning into a pained smile. “I believe I’ve fared far better than you, but to say I’ve experienced another version of hell sounds like an apt description.”

“What happened?” she inquired. Despite the pounding in her head, she was determined to focus.

Ben’s brows furrowed worriedly. “You don’t remember?”

Disoriented, Abigail shut her eyes – eye, to be more precise – and let herself think. “I remember everything up to the moment where they tried to bash my fucking skull in.” She reopened them and took in his rigid posture, his clenched jaw. “I’m sorry,” she mumbled.

Shaking his head lightly, he took a moment to recollect himself before asking, “So you have no memory of returning to camp then?”

“No.” She licked her dry lips parched. He must have caught on to the purpose of her wandering gaze because he was up in a flash to return a moment later with a cup of water.

Slipping a careful hand behind her head, he brought the cup to her lips. She drank gratefully and a little too quickly. “Easy, love,” he murmured, stroking her hair soothingly. She didn’t stop until she drank every last drop. Afterwards, Ben set the cup aside and helped settle back down onto the cot.

As he pulled back, Abigail caught sight of his hand wrapped up from knuckles to wrist. The cloth was stained blood and dirt. Underneath, there was a little bit of discoloration, suggesting the possibility of bruising. “What happened to your hand?” she demanded. She attempted to sit up again, but this time he wouldn’t let her.

Ben glanced at his hand, almost as if noticing it for the first time the state it was in, but quickly returned his attention to her. “You need to stay put,” he insisted firmly. “And you need your rest.” He plucked up a small vial from his desk. “Anderson gave this to me after he tended to you here, when you were first brought back. He said to give you this if you’re in any pain. Laudanum, I believe. Are you in any pain?”

Oh, her body was screaming in agony, and her head was pounding like a war drum, but she wasn’t about to tell him that. Laudanum would take care of the pain all right, but it would quickly put her to sleep, which would be a hindrance to getting any answers.
However, not telling Ben the truth was how she had gotten to this position in the first place. Shifting slightly with a wince, she decided for honesty. “Quite a bit actually, but I would prefer not to take it until we talk about everything.”

If he was surprised by her choice to speak honestly, he didn’t show it. Instead, he took her hand in his, the unbandaged one, and brought it to his lips, then to rest against his face. He nuzzled the soft skin at her wrist, reassuring himself that she was actually there with him. “All right,” he murmured. “I’ll accept those terms. You go first.”

Abigail told him everything, and not just from the day’s events that had led to the attack. She started from the very beginning, during the early days at the recruitment base, describing how much trouble she had encountered with Decory, Jasper, and Bartholomew over the years. It wasn’t just her, she reminded him numerous times during her narration, noting the hardening in his gaze and the brief protective tightening of his grip on her hand. All the rumors he had heard about them she confirmed, and it was more than hearsay. There were men who had witnessed their petty thievery, for example, first hand, but had been bullied into silence by the terrible three.

“I couldn’t tell you about them,” she continued once she read the question in his face, “because I feared what would happen as a result of it. There were already whisperings of me being in your favor. I’ve dealt with that fine. But if you were to do something, it could have made things a lot worse, for both of us, so I decided to keep quiet about it.”

Then she finally told him about the day everything had basically gone to shit – starting with their confrontation while waiting for patrol assignments. When she got to part of Jasper putting his hands on her, Ben interrupted her, eyes blazing, “You should have come to me right then and there.”

“What could you have done?” Abigail asked. She rubbed her thumb along his knuckles in slow circles.

“He put his hands on you! He threatened you!”

“And what could you have done?” she repeated.

Ben glowered, but she could see he realized she was right, though he didn’t wish to acknowledge it. “Punched him, shot him. Makes little difference to me.”

Abigail laughed and groaned as her chest ached in protest. Worriedly, he leaned closer to scan her for any damage, but she squeezed his hand gently. “Ah, dammit. Don’t make me laugh again. Let me finish.”

She told him about the woods, and everything that transpired. With every description, she felt him tense, his jaw clenching and unclenching so frequently she worried for his jaw. By the time she was finished, his whole body was trembling with suppressed anger. It took multiple attempts for him to find his voice.

He told her that he had been concerned about her going off on patrol with those three men ever since she had informed him of her assignment. Unable to shake off his worry, he had decided to wait for her around the area where soldiers returning from patrol often ventured and would come up with a plausible excuse when the time came for it. He hadn’t been waiting long when Caleb had stumbled across him, by accident of which Ben had been certain.

They had begun talking briefly when they had heard the gunshot in the distance. Anxious, he had decided the next best course of action was to approach Captain Pitman and demand to know the whereabouts of Abigail’s assignment, the gunshot not resting well with him at all. The captain had
been understandably peeved, but given that he was outranked, he had acquiesced and told him the route they had taken. Pitman had decided to accompany them as they made their way towards the horses, although it was clear he thought Ben’s questions were ridiculous and unnecessary, though he kept these thoughts to himself.

Just as they had gotten to the paddock, Caleb grabbed Ben’s arms and pointed in the direction of the woods. Reaching for his spyglass, the major lifted it to his eye and watched as Cantor stampeded towards the camp at, reins flapping at his sides. His rider was nowhere inside. Filled with fear, Ben and the others chased the horse down until he was able to calm him down. Fear clawing at his insides, he had seized Cantor’s reins and ordered Pitman to recruit a handful of his best men and for Caleb to go with him. Something had gone terribly wrong. Pitman agreed and quickly set off while the whaler insisted that he would go with Ben. Jumping onto Cantor’s back, Ben only waited long enough for Caleb to mount a borrowed horse before setting off towards the woods.

With Pitman and four of his soldiers not far behind them, Ben and Caleb had raced down the path Abigail had the three men had taken. It hadn’t taken them long to come across them. In the distance, he caught a glimpse of two of the men, one appearing to be holding someone down while the other repeatedly used his fists. Anger surged through him, encouraging him to urge Cantor faster until they descended upon them, with Pitman hot on their heels.

Realizing they had been caught, both men had risen to their feet. Ben ordered for them to remain exactly where they were and to keep their hands where he could see them. He then ordered for the men to be arrested and taken into custody, including the prone body of who he could only assume to be Jasper Harlow.

Taking in the scene before him, he noticed the third man sprawled out on the ground before his eyes gradually made their way towards Abigail’s prone form between Decory’s booted feet.

A dark, primal seething rage built inside him, one that he had never felt before. Ordering Caleb to keep his gun trained on Bartholomew, the major hopped down from his horse and slowly approached Decory. He was about to ask him what happened, though he suspected he already knew, he caught sight of his hand covered in blood, blood that clearly wasn’t his own. Ben took one look at him, expression calm, eyes glittering, before slamming his fist into Decory’s throat.

Decory wheezed sharply, the breath knocked out of him, and doubled over, falling forward onto the ground. Ben didn’t allow him the privilege of catching his breath. Jerking back the other man’s head, he punched him in the face again and again until Decory had no choice but to fall back with the major landing directly on top of him. A red hot fury consumed him as Ben took to beating him to a bloody pulp.

Ben told Abigail none of this, only that he had punched Decory once, which explained his bruised hand. He didn’t tell her it had taken three of the four soldiers to pull him off Decory, nor had he informed her he was expected to speak with his superiors about the incident later on that day. All he could see was Abigail sprawled out on the ground before him in his mind. He remembered the intense gnawing fear when she hadn’t immediately gotten to her feet, to assure him that she was all right.

What he did tell her was the three men were being held, separately, until she woke up again and was able to recount what had happened. That was the moment when he asked her if anything else had happened that led to the attack.

The memory of the trio’s whispered conversation returned with a vengeance. Grabbing his arm urgently, Abigail spoke urgently, “They want to incite another insurrection. At first, there was talk about making a break for it to join Arnold in York City, but Decory quickly shot that down. Instead,
they had decided to return to camp after patrol and start planting more seeds.”

Ben leaned forward, brows raised anxiously. “You’re certain of this?”

“Absolutely,” she replied without hesitation. “Otherwise, they wouldn’t have tried…” She trailed off, knowing that finishing the rest of that thought was unnecessary.

Flexing the fingers of his good hand, Ben rose to his feet. “This needs to be reported to Washington immediately. I’ll go find Anna or Caleb to stay with you.”

“No, I’m coming with you.” She began pushing herself up into a sitting position, ignoring the aches and pains her body used against her. He immediately returned to her side, gently placing his hands on her.

She gave him her best determined look – more like best stubborn look, he mentally corrected – and given the circumstances, it was surprisingly accurate. “Weren’t you the one who said Washington wants verified sources? This is a firsthand account. You can’t get any better than that.”

Ben took a breath and looked heavenward. God, give me patience. “Abigail, I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but the best thing you can do is get your rest.”

Abigail opened her mouth to utter another protest when the flap of the tent was pushed back and Caleb stepped inside. “Tallboy, how’s…” he trailed off when his eyes landed on Abigail. His expression hardened briefly at the state of her face but quickly softened into one of concern. “She’s awake. How are you, lass?”

The blonde’s smile resembled more of a grimace. “I’m here.”

Caleb nodded slowly, understanding far too well of her meaning. Hesitantly, he glanced over at Ben before saying, “Washington wishes to speak with her when she’s able.”

The major looked unhappy. “Can’t you put him for a little longer? She needs her rest.”

Caleb sighed. “Ben, I’ve put him off for as long as I could. You know how the man is.”

While Ben cursed under his breath, Abigail shifted into a more upright position, aches and pains be damned. “That settles it then. It’s better this way. Maybe I’ll remember something with Washington that Decory tried to knock loose.”

Ben’s eyes narrowed. “That’s not even remotely funny.”

She grunted a little as she inched a leg closer to the edge of the cot. “I wasn’t trying to be. Now help me up, soldier.”

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With assistance from both Caleb and Ben - once he made himself look more presentable of course - Abigail managed to find her way to Washington’s tent. In the past, the trek was relatively brief, but under these new circumstances, it felt like an eternity. If she showed any sign of fatigue, Ben insisted that they stop and let her rest before continuing any further. Gratefully, she appreciated his protective nature.

Washington rose from his seat to greet them but froze midway when Abigail stumbled her way in. Ben grasped her forearm securely, murmuring quietly, “Easy now.”
The blonde looked from Ben to the commander-in-chief, her cheeks heating with embarrassment from the intensity of his stare. “Your excellency,” she greeted quietly.

“Sit, please.” Washington waited as the instruction was carried out before rounding his desk to approach her.

With a gentleness she hadn’t anticipated, he crooked a finger under her chin, coaxing her face upwards so that he could get a better look. Out of the corner of her eye, she thought she saw Ben’s hands clench. She had yet to see her reflection, but judging from each of the men’s reactions to her face, it had to be an unsettling sight.

After a prolonged silence, Washington finally spoke, his voice as hard as iron, “Tell me how this happened.”

And so she did. She told Washington everything of the day’s events that led up to her assault, all too aware of Ben’s presence behind her. Being that this was now the second time in the row of recounting these events, there was a gradual numbness spreading inside her. It was almost as if she were now detached from what had happened, if that made any sense. Like it was something that had happened to someone else and not herself. The second time around, she remembered more details as well, details she hadn’t intended to ever mention to Ben, but underneath Washington’s penetrating stare, she wouldn’t dare tell a lie, let alone leave anything out.

When she finished, Washington walked back to his desk, his shoulders rigid with tension. “Another uprising,” he murmered after her sat, a faraway look in his eyes. “The smoke from the rifles had barely settled from the execution of the leaders of the last mutiny and now this?”

“We have the three men in custody,” Ben assured him. “As far as we’re aware, the plans stop there.”

“‘As far as we’re aware’,?” Washington echoed as he looked eyes with the major. Yet his tone was non mocking, Ben still felt admonished. “How am I to handle this? Another execution of would be defectors could encourage the fears and resentment among the men. Needless to say, how would this look to our ally?”

Abigail knew he referred to France.

Ben remarked, “Apparently, these men have a history of petty thievery, not to mention their bullying nature.” His gaze found Abigail’s, who nodded lightly. “It shouldn’t be difficult to uncover if they had committed any recent forms of theft.”

“It’s true,” she supplied, once again the object of Washington’s full attention. “You wouldn’t be hard pressed to find a soldier that hasn’t had any poor experiences with them. I’ve heard from a reliable source they keep a stash of their stolen bounty in the stalls housing hay and other miscellaneous property. When we move, they retrieve it and bring it along to the next camp.”

Washington removed his quill and wrote this down. “And what is the name of this source of yours?”

“Christopher Morgan.” She swallowed before looking down at her lap. “He was a very good friend of mine. He’s dead now.”

Sighing quietly, Washington placed the quill back in its inkpot. “So we have no verified source of this particular bounty.”

“We could still have a look, sir,” Caleb remarked. “Unofficially speaking, of course. If the stolen property is there, that’s the proof we need. And the punishment for crime is the same as for defectors.”
Washington’s expression turned thoughtful, having picked up on the whaler’s meaning. “I’ll need some time to think on this, of course,” he remarked slowly after another considerable silence. “Mr. Brewster, see to it that both you and Williams get some rest.” A clear dismissal. He then turned his attention to Ben. “Major Tallmadge, I have further need of you. We still have some matters we need to discuss.”

Ben replied with a diplomatic nod, “Yes, sir,” though he sent a worried gaze in her direction.

Catching the look, Caleb assured him, “Don’t worry. I’ll see to it she returns safely.”

Nodding gratefully, he watched as Caleb gently took her by the elbow and guided her out but not before Abigail turned and looked at him. He gave her an encouraging smile to go on ahead, but the smile didn’t reach his eyes.

“What’s going on?” she demanded the moment the tent flap fell shut.

“I’ll tell you once you’re flat on your back and get some laudanum in ya, I promise,” Caleb promised, slowly guiding her back towards Ben’s tent.

As promised, he helped her lie back down her cot once they arrived, and after another cup of water, he presented her the tiny flask of laudanum, of which she only drank half. She understood the effects of the drug all too well. Drinking the whole thing on an empty stomach was asking for trouble, but drinking only half was more tolerable.

“Oh, tell me before I start slurring my words,” she said several minutes later. The laudanum was taking effect, dulling the pulsating pain to almost white noise.

Pulling up a chair, he set by her bedside, removing his hat from his head. “I was with Ben when we found you,” he started off quietly. “He did tell you about the right?”

When she confirmed it, Caleb continued, “When he saw you on the ground, unconscious, he all but lost his mind. You weren’t moving. We couldn’t tell if you were even breathing. Christ, I thought you were dead, and for a moment, I think Ben may have thought it, too.” Running a hand through his dark hair, he sighed quietly. “Then he saw the blood on Decory’s hands, your blood. And he just… lost it. He tackled the man to the ground before anyone knew what was happening. He all but beat the man to a bloody pulp. Easily would have killed him, too, if he hadn’t been pulled off of him. It took three soldiers to physically restrain him.”

Processing all of this, Abigail shut her one good eye and breathed. She was glad she had taken the laudanum, grateful for its calming effect. She opened them again before asking softly, “And that’s why Washington wanted to speak with him?”

Caleb nodded slowly. Abigail’s heart clenched. “Will he get in trouble?”

“I doubt it,” he remarked, “now that Washington knows everything, I doubt he’ll even get a reprimand.” Seeing the fear and worry brimming in her blue eyes, he placed his hand on top of hers, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “He’ll be all right, lass. You have nothing to worry about. Just get some rest now.”

There was so much more she wanted to say, but drowsiness was rapidly taking over. She blinked once slowly, then twice, before slowly falling back under sleep’s soothing spell.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you guys so much for your feedback! It means a lot to me that you're enjoying this fic! Come say hi to me on my tumblr here [here](#)! I've met a bunch of wonderful people from here over there :)
Christopher Morgan’s knowledge of Decory, Bartholomew, and Jasper’s stolen treasures had been proven true. With an indirect order from Washington, Colonel Alexander Hamilton, in the company of two able bodied young soldiers, uncovered the trio’s stash just where Abigail had relayed to Washington, only the stash was much more than anyone could have participated – several portions of rationed food, a few small boxes of ammunition, trinkets from the camp followers ranging in different degrees of significant value, and other stolen property.

It hadn’t been hard to guess what their plan had been – to take everything with them and make a run for it, whatever they couldn’t use they would hock the rest in exchange for petty cash. However, this contradicted the conversation that Abigail had discovered moments before the attack in the woods, which could only lead one to assume the men had been hedging their bets. If the second attempt of mutiny failed, the three would take their loot and run as far as they could, at least that was what Abigail concluded once word reached her.

With this evidence, official charges had been made against them. Once word spread, a few men had come forward and provided verbal testimony of the trio’s deeds and behavior. Each of the soldiers who had come forward had good reputations and were found to be credible sources, which only solidified to Decory, Jasper, and Bartholomew’s fate. In addition to charges of theft and plundering, the unlawful discharge of a weapon along with assault of a fellow soldier with the intent to kill were added as well. Charges of plotting mutiny or desertion were discussed.

The accumulation of these events led up towards the trio’s execution three days later, death by hanging.

As was the case with all executions or public punishments, each and every soldier was expected to attend and watch as an act of deterrence of any future behavior. In her condition, Abigail had been unable to attend, but through Caleb, she had learned that Washington had preferred to not be in attendance, which she was more than grateful for. She had witnessed one hanging too many for a lifetime.

Just as Caleb had predicted, Ben didn’t get in trouble, not much anyway. Washington temporarily “relieved” him of his official duties for two weeks for acting out of turn, which was just long enough for the major’s hand to heal. While grounded, he continued to carry out his tasks as head of intelligence, though he began consulting more with Hamilton at Washington’s suggestion, so really the punishment wasn’t truly a punishment. In fact, Abigail would have gone so far as to say Washington had done him a favor, but naturally, she kept this thought to herself.
Within the first few days after the attack, the swelling of her face had gone down considerably, thanks to warm compresses and Anderson’s herbs. The very fact she regained the ability to open both her eyes had been enough to lift her spirits. Of course, the bruising gradually replaced the swelling, and just in a week, her face had started to resemble various stages of a fucking eggplant, in her humble opinion.

She peered into a hand mirror with a small frown. The bruising was still particularly spectacular, especially underneath her eyes. Somehow, she had gone from an eggplant to a raccoon at the drop of a hat. Only she would manage that. Still, it was a hell of a lot better than it had been a week ago. It took at least two weeks for bruises to fade, determined by the severity of the trauma. She hazarded a guess it would take a few days beyond two weeks until they completely faded away.

“Ah. Fuck me,” she murmured. She set the mirror aside and reached for another vial of Anderson’s concoctions of which she had shamefully forgotten its contents, though with her head pounding like a war drum, she granted herself some clemency. Something for headaches was all she remembered. Uncorking the vial, she took a small sip, sighing appreciatively at the strong taste of peppermint.

Suddenly, she remembered she still had a number of herbs tucked away in her rucksack, ones she had forgotten to give to Anderson and pushed herself into a sitting position, though her ribs throbbed in protest at the movement. She was trying to figure out how to bend over and retrieve her bag from underneath her cot without falling flat on her face when the tent flap was suddenly pulled back. The high morning light caused her to blink rapidly and squint.

“What on earth are you doing?” Anna demanded.

After her eyes adjusted, Abigail watched as the brunette hurry over to her side, her expression every bit as reproachful as a mother hen. “You’re supposed to be resting.”

“I am resting. Well, I was, but then I grew restless.” Seeing as how this argument would get her nowhere, Abigail pointed to her rucksack. “I was trying to reach for that. There are some herbs in there that can help me. I can’t remember which ones I have in there. They’ve been extracted and ground properly for tea, that I do know.” She hesitated a moment before asking sheepishly, “Could you grab it for me?”

Anna smiled gently. “All you had to do was ask.” She bent down to retrieve the bag and set it on the cot next to Abigail, who proceeded to pull out every bottle she had, examining the labels critically. She was torn between the chamomile and the willow bark but ultimately decided to go with the later since it leaned towards helping with headaches and muscle pain.

Thankfully, she had a tea strainer in her bag but no kettle. As if reading her mind, Anna volunteered to fetch a tea kettle for her. By the time she returned, Abigail managed to pull out two mugs, and yes, it had taken her that long to grab them. Christ, she never felt more like an old woman than at that moment.

“Don’t think I don’t know why you’re really here,” the blonde remarked, her lips quirking upwards in a teasing smile. “You’re here because of Ben, aren’t you?”

“No! No, of course not,” Anna denied the accusation, even if it were in jest. “Ben absolutely had nothing to do with…” She trailed off when she noticed Abigail’s raised eyebrows. She smiled a bit sheepishly. “Okay, fine. He did rather insist, but I would have come on my own anyway, and you know it. You’re family to me.”

Abigail’s heart warmed. “And you to me.”
Anna poured two steaming cups of water carefully. Abigail then spooned a teaspoon of willow bark in her cup and a teaspoon of chamomile into Anna’s. From the looks of the other woman, she looked like a twig fit to snap. Unconsciously it seemed, the brunette was worrying her lower lip, her brows pinched together ever so slightly. It couldn’t have been worry solely for Abigail’s sake. There must have been something else going on inside that head of hers.

Leaning back into her pillow, she remarked, “Ten minutes for the willow bark to steep and somewhere between five to seven minutes for the chamomile, though the longer the chamomile steeps, the more powerful the calming effects.” She smiled a little in Anna’s direction. “The chamomile’s yours by the way.”

Anna huffed lightly in amusement. “Am I that transparent?”

Abigail’s smile turned gentle. “Not really. It’s only that I recognized a look in your face. Conflict with a smidge of worry and an extra splash of guilt. Trust me, I know that combination all too well.”

Tucking a stray curl underneath her bonnet, Anna remained quiet for a moment, before admitting quietly, “Selah came to visit a week or so ago.” Her hands fell into her lap, her fingers curling into the materials of her skirts. “He’s a Congressman now. Ben wrote to him and invited him down to the camp to see the state we’re in, to explain the dire conditions of the soldiers.”

Ah. So that was it. Abigail should have guessed it. “I remember mentioning something about that. How are you handling it?”

Anna gave a tiny shrug, though her eyes remained troubled. “I’m not entirely certain how I feel. I never expected him to see him in camp, if I ever saw him again at all. It was… overwhelming to see him again, after… everything. At first when he came to me, my first thought was that he would try and force me to join him in Philadelphia, but I realize how foolish the thought was. He offered me a choice: either to remain in camp or to join him. He says it’s my decision.”

“He’s right,” Abigail agreed quietly. “It is your decision.”

Remembering their tea, Anna busied herself by checking on the results of the steeped herbs. At Abigail’s approval, she passed along her cup before taking her own chamomile tea in her hands, welcoming the warmth from the mug between her palms. “Aye, it is. I told him I wished to remain here, to help do what I can for the men, for the camp. I didn’t dare mention Culper to him, but somehow I think he knows.”

There was a brief pause as both women took their first sips at their teas. The willow bark was earthy and strong and unfortunately extraordinarily bitter. Abigail wrinkled her nose a little but dutifully drank it. It would’ve been much better with honey mixed it, but that was a luxury she had no access to.

She waited for Anna to take another healthy swallow before asking sympathetically, “Was it difficult, seeing him again, after everything… with Abe?”

“Yes,” Anna sighed. “There was no small amount of guilt I felt as we spoke, but then again, it didn’t come as a surprise. I was young when I married him. I had thought, given with time, that my feelings would change. That I would devote my life to him and forsake all others. That’s what the vows say, right?” Her hands gripped the cup more firmly. There was slight tremors in them.

“I might have physically married Selah, but my heart still belonged to Abe. It… still does,” she admitted quietly. Her brown eyes met Abigail’s blue ones, and they were so incredibly sad. “And I don’t know what to do.”
Abigail smiled sadly. “I am the last person on this earth who would ever judge you, nor would I ever. I too married young, to a man who I thought could make me forget my feelings for Ben, to help me move on. And for a time, though briefly, it worked. I fell in love with him, though it was a different kind of love. At the time, I believed Ben never felt anything more for me than friendship, and that my feelings would forever be unrequited.

“Your situation differs from mine, of course, but only slightly,” she continued. “You were engaged to Abe when his brother was killed. And out of a sense of duty, he agreed to marry Mary. I never really saw much of them, with Tobias and I having just moved into our home a little ways outside of Setauket, but whenever I did see them again… he didn’t have that look in his eye.”

Anna asked, frowning slightly, “What look?”

“The look a man gets about him that he has found the one thing in his world that he can’t imagine ever living without.” Abigail paused, looking at her meaningfully. “I’ve never seen him look at any other woman like that, besides you.”

The brunette’s eyes brightened with unshed tears, and Abigail immediately felt wretched. “I didn’t intend to upset you. I’m so sorry.”

Anna shook her head vigorously. “No, it wasn’t that. It’s only… Abe and I have been through so much together. And after everything with Culper, this war, and him focusing on his vengeance and becoming blind to all else… I love him.” She swallowed harshly before releasing a watery laugh and a sniff. “Damn it, Abigail, I still love him. I’ve never stopped. And I don’t know what to do.”

Finishing off her willow bark tea, the blonde pushed herself into a sitting position, ignoring Anna’s concerned protests so that she could rise to her feet and walk over to hug her. The brunette didn’t weep – she was far too stubborn to let herself go – but she clutch onto Abigail like a lifeline, momentarily forgetting of her injuries. Abigail didn’t complain nor did she care. Her main priority was Anna and her welfare.

“He offered me a divorce if I wanted,” she heard Anna murmur against her chest. Abigail’s eyes widened in surprise. Ben definitely hadn’t told her that. “I didn’t know what to say. He left before I could give him a proper answer.”

Abigail stroked the dark curls at the nape of her neck gently. “At least you have some time to think about it. Some time to sort out your feelings before making a decision.”

She didn’t feel it necessary to point out the obvious, that Mary had divorced Abe so she could marry Major Hewlett and start a new life with him, that he was no longer married, but that wasn’t any of her business.

She had always been in support of Anna and Abe’s relationship from the beginning. Many times she had helped sneak Anna to meet with Abe against her parents’ wishes when they were younger. They had even practiced kissing right before Anna had gone to meet with Abe to kiss him for the very first time. Coincidentally, that had been Abigail’s first kiss as well, not with Tobias as many might have believed but with Anna. Never once had their lessons been brought up between them. It was their own business after all, no one else’s.

“Now,” Abigail began after another period of silence. “Enough about men. They’re frustrating creatures and are hardly worth our time and talk of them.” She smiled a little in victory when she heard Anna’s responding laugh, a reluctant one but a laugh no less. Dropping a kiss to the crown of her head, Abigail then withdrew and returned to the cot, lowering herself onto it carefully. “How has the trading post been faring?”
Anna finished off her now cooled tea and set it on the desk behind her. “Business has been fairly slow when it comes to payment. We’ve mostly been bartering, a good for a good, that sort of thing.” She paused, her eyes suddenly glimmering in growing excitement though the rest of her posture remained casual. “I’ve been working on something between my breaks but mostly at night when I don’t have anyone looking over my shoulder.”

Interested, Abigail asked, leaning in a bit, “And what is this project?”

Anna’s smile turned a bit coy, perhaps a bit too clever. “A code book.”

Abigail’s eyes widened with even more interest. “Oh, you better tell me everything about this. I need details.”

Anna’s responding grin was well worth the change in conversation, although the topic of conversation was very interesting by itself certainly.

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“Let me see your hand.”

The request came out of Abigail’s mouth the moment she saw Ben enter the tent. She didn’t even register the plate in his hands or consider the intent of it. She only had eyes for his wrapped hand.

“You need to eat something first,” he countered, setting the plate on the crate next to her cot. The small metal plate consisted of bread, slices of beef, and peas still encased in their pods. The portions were a great deal smaller than they had been in ration’s past, but she was grateful for what she could get. Her stomach was certainly in agreement.

She hadn’t eaten much during those few first days after her return to camp, but at both Ben and Anderson’s insistence, she had managed to consume a few bowls of broth a day, though nothing else. Even as her stomach rumbled quietly with the promise of proper nourishment, she couldn’t help but be wary. The last time she had attempted bread hadn’t gone over so well.

“How about we negotiate?” Abigail asked hopefully.

Ben barely held back a snort. “I make no promises to agree, but I’m willing to hear your terms.”

“All right.” She patted the space on the cot beside her, and once he sat down beside her, the side of his body pressed against her thigh, she felt significantly better. “If you let me see to your hand, I’ll eat the peas.”

Ben squinted. When she refused to break his gaze, he replied, “You can start off with the peas and finish everything that’s on that plate.”

Abigail stared at him in disbelief. “There’s no way I can eat all of that.”

For once, he remained unmoved by her protest, though that didn’t mean he had no sympathy for her. “I don’t care if it takes you all bloody night to finish it, but you will. You look about as weak as a kitten.”

As much as she wanted to protest, Abigail found she had neither the will nor the energy to attempt it, so she agreed. Then she asked him to grab the peppermint ointment that Anderson had given him for his hand.

Unwrapping the cloth, she held his injured hand gingerly as she proceeded to examine it. Gently, she
pressed her fingers along the areas which had previously been plagued with swelling and a great deal of bruising. Thankfully, it appeared to be healing along quite nicely.

“Have you any tenderness or soreness?” she asked without looking away from her work.

Knowing better than to lie to her, he answered honestly, “A little soreness from time to time, but it’s much less than it had been in the beginning.”

“That’s good,” she murmured. Very good in fact. Though it was always better to be safe than sorry. She unscrewed the tiny jar and applied a bit of the peppermint ointment along the fading bruising area and began to gently rub it into his skin. “This should help take care of that for a while. Apply this twice a day as needed.”

“Thank you, doctor,” Ben remarked fondly.

Abigail caught his gaze and smiled such a slow, sweet smile that it nearly stopped his heart. Bruised and battered she might have been, Ben had never seen a woman more beautiful. And just the memory of someone, some man, putting their hands on her, hurting her, made his blood boil all over again.

Sensing his shift in mood, she asked gently, “What is it?” She had rubbed the ointment well into his skin but continued pressing her thumbs into his hand in gentle, soothing circles. Any soreness he might have felt faded as the peppermint did its work, his skin tingling from the herb, but he didn’t want her to stop.

He sighed. “We really should discuss your self-preservation skills. Or lack thereof.” The last thing he wanted to do was fight, and seeing how tired she was, it seemed as if she was of the same mind. Still, the conversation needed to happen whether she liked it or not.

“I’m alive aren’t I?” she asked, though there was no intention to provoke him. Reaching for the cloth, she slowly began to rewrap his mind.

“Barely,” he muttered. Once she was finished tending to his hand, he added, “Trouble always has a way of finding you, and I don’t like it. Not one bit.”

“Well, I’m glad you’ve come around on the idea that I actively seek it out.” Unable to help herself, she kissed his hand before letting him go. She wiped her hands clean from the ointment and reached for one of the pea pods. She held it up for him to see before popping it inside her mouth. “A bargain’s a bargain.”

“Thank you,” the major said emphatically.

With the hint of a smile, Abigail reached for another. “Would you prefer it if I never left your cot?” Again, she wasn’t intending to provoke him, but she genuinely wished to know, though really she believed she already knew the answer.

Ben’s eyes flashed a little at the question and the implication behind it. “Actually, yes. That’s exactly where I would prefer you to be. Ideally speaking. At least that way I knew you would be safe.” He ran his good hand through his hair in mild agitation. “Most days, I wish I could carry you around in my pocket to keep you with me. Just to know what you were safe.”

Abigail pressed her lips together to smother her amusement. “In your pocket? How small do you think I am?”

“Compared to these men? You’re a delicate flower.” He lifted a hand to gently touch her face. “An
Irish rose.”

She smiled a little at that, but it dimmed when she said, “Trust me, I’ve learned that lesson several times over.” This rose had been trampled on and stomped on far too much to be even considered anything resembling a flower, yet somehow he always continued to look at her as if she were the only thing in the world worth admiring.

Ben’s faint smile turned into a deep frown. “Several times too many.”

“Oh, but you’re forgetting something,” Abigail said. She beckoned him closer with a crook of her finger. He leaned forward a little, but she shook her head, insisting he come closer. Only once he was all but within a few inches of her face, she pushed herself upwards so that she could close the gap, only to whisper into his ear, “We roses have thorns.”

She delighted in the vibration of his rumbling chuckle against her. “Aye, that you do.”

Smiling, the blonde turned her face towards his and found her lips ensnared by his. This was one capture, however, she didn’t wish to escape. She didn’t even try.
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 4x07. A bit of the dialogue comes from the episodes itself so that it keeps the story flowing nicely.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Over a month had passed since the night of her assault. In that time, Abigail’s recovery felt excruciatingly and frustratingly slow, at least from her perspective. She hadn’t realized just how much she preferred being busy until the moment she wasn’t allowed to be. Given the amount of times she had found herself in this position, one would think she would have realized this sooner.

Any and all swelling went away within the first few days. The bruising faded gradually, having left her with aching muscles and a soreness so deep it had been difficult to find the motivation to rise with the morning sun. By the grace of God, she had managed to escape Decory’s wrath with only bruised ribs and no broken bones, which helped the healing process significantly.

Slowly but surely she began her reintegration back into camp life, though Ben hardly made it easy for her, almost always hovering in her periphery especially during the first couple of days. When it was clear she wasn’t going to fall over and hurt herself, only then did Ben back off, although she realized not long after that he had asked Anna and Caleb to keep an eye on her when they were able. As long as the tasks weren’t labor intensive, Abigail found herself progressing relatively smoothly.

Most importantly, she could snuggle up against Ben again with their cots pushed together. It was one of the many things she had missed. Well, that among other things, but those sorts of things she hadn’t let herself consider for a long time. She wouldn’t allow herself to think of it, but her body had no qualms of remembering for her. The feeling of his strong, solid form against her, holding her close, brought up memories of their time in that small cabin in Franklin Township. Every brush of his fingers, whether accidental or intentional, warmed her blood, and every kiss had her heart pounding and threatening to burst.

One morning, right before sunrise, she found herself waking to slow, insistent kisses along the nape of her neck, very much reminiscent of the dreams that had left her aching and wanting. Apparently, as she would later learn, she had been wriggling against Ben in her sleep and had unintentionally woken him up. More specifically, she had woken a part of him up, as evidence by the pressing issue against her. She smiled sleepily and instinctively arched her hips towards him, stifling a giggle when she heard him mutter a curse.

“How are you feeling?” he asked, dropping another kiss to her neck.

It was a question he asked her every morning, always concerned for her welfare. Sighing quietly, she tilted her neck to give him better access. “Better. A little sore in some places, but other than that…” She shivered as his teeth scraped the sensitive skin along the back of her neck. Oh, he was getting much better at that.

Nuzzling her jaw, he murmured, “How sore?”

Abigail’s breath hitched as his hand settled low on her hip. She waited to see if it move any lower
before responding, but ever the patient soldier, he refused to show his hand. Instead, she shifted a little on the cot and pressed against him. “Not as sore as you, I think.”

His chuckle turned into a groan when she gave another intentional roll of her hips, slow and sensual to drive any man wild. “I don’t think we should be doing this.”

She hummed in affirmation and carefully rolled over to face him, snuggling as close as she physically could. “Perhaps not, but I want to. Don’t you?”

All it took was her biting her lower lip before the major leaned forward to capture that lip for himself. She couldn’t quite make out what he murmured against her lips, but it appeared to be a sign pointing to yes.

“Any sign of discomfort,” Ben remarked, pulling back only far enough to meet her gaze, his voice wrecked and breathless, “no matter how big or small, we’ll stop.” He brushed his thumb along her cheek. “Promise me.”

“I promise.” The blonde took it one step further and sealed the promise with a kiss.

Mindful of their precarious positioning, Ben rolled Abigail onto her back, his mouth pressed hungrily to hers. She returned his kiss with a desperation she never thought herself capable of, her desire for him so intense that it wasn’t merely a want but a need.

She wrapped her arms around him to draw him closer when he attempted to keep his weight off her. “No,” she murmured against his lips. “I want you on top of me. It’s been far too long since the last time you were.”

He swore under his breath, his eyelids falling shut as she nipped at his jaw. “Keep doing that, love, and I won’t be able to control myself for much longer.” He was like a powder keg, and she held the match. Seeing the naked desire in his eyes, she had every intention of striking it.

“Then don’t.” She shifted underneath him so that she could press herself against him. Her body was already trembling with anticipation. It had been far too long, and in that moment, she couldn’t remember why. “Benjamin, please.”

“Christ,” he managed to choke out before reclaiming her mouth with a searing kiss. The heat from it shot straight from her mouth down to her core, warming her from the inside out. His full weight was on her now, which she welcomed greedily, her fingers digging into his shoulders and holding onto dear life, as if afraid that he would slip through her fingers the moment she released him.

He kissed her like a man possessed, his mouth hot and eager against hers. His hands ran up and down her sides, almost indecisive of where they wanted to explore and caress first. Every single press of his hands burned through the material of her shirt. All she wanted was for the blasted thing to disappear so that his hands were on her skin, with no further barriers.

Parting from her mouth, Ben’s mouth traveled down her throat, his breath coming out in hot, ragged panting against her skin. He savored every inch of her with his mouth, licking, nipping, and chasing every inch of flesh he exposed as he went to task on her shirt. Abigail arched eagerly against his mouth, her lips parting in immeasurable pleasure. For the life of her, she was convinced he was going to devour her whole. They hadn’t done this since… holy hell, not since Middlebrook. Well over a year ago, at least. The reminder alone was distressing.

She was just about to encourage him to hurry when she gasped, his mouth having found her breast. Thank Christ she’d removed her binding. When the material of her shirt obstructed his path, he gave
a small irritated grunt before quickly rectifying the situation, pushing the material back so that he could take the rose colored peak into his mouth.

Abigail longed for him to continue with his ministrations, but she knew that their time was limited. She opened her eyes and noticed the rising light outside the tent. Entangling her fingers into his hair, she gave him an insistent tug until he was hovering over her mouth. “Now. Please,” she urged him. She didn’t bother with any explanations; she didn’t have to.

Their mouths refused to part as he helped her out of her trousers, encouraging her to lift her hips so he could slide them down. His hands shook slightly as he reached down to unlace his trousers. He cursed quietly at his fumbling, but she was quick to come to his aid, loosening the ties enough so that she could push them down his hips, bunching downwards along his thighs.

The moment he positioned himself at her entrance she shuddered with anticipation. She heard his breath catch and swallowed his groan in a kiss when he entered her fully in one, swift stroke.

Much like the last time, their coupling was hot, desperate, and frantic. There were a few minor mishaps in the beginning, most of which involved them becoming reacquainted with the other’s body, but it didn’t take long to refamiliarize with each other, to recognize the signs of the other’s pleasure through certain sounds, certain looks, and manners of touch.

To say they successfully remained quiet throughout would have been… an overestimation. Not once did their lips part from each other, and if they did, it was barely a hairbreadth between them, the intimate sharing of breath from one to another.

Abigail plunged over the edge first with a half-stifled cry she attempted to smother by burying her face against his neck. His thrusts had slowed as she reached her crescendo, shuddering violently underneath him until a sense of weightlessness claimed her. After a moment of seeing stars, she pressed a tender kiss to his neck to urge him forward, lifting her hips in encouragement. He didn’t need it though. In less than half a dozen thrusts, he followed her over with a muffled gasp.

Catching himself just in time to keep from crushing her with his weight, Ben rolled them both over so that he was on his back, with her curled snugly against him. With his trousers caught on his thighs, he muttered something intelligibly and kicked them off with a mildly disgruntled expression, even though he would only have to put them back on in a few minutes. They should have already been dressing for the day as it was.

She nestled her face against his chest before sighing softly. There definitely wasn’t anything to complain about. She definitely enjoyed herself, as he did as well or at least she hoped. It was only… it wasn’t quite as satisfying as she would have liked, and on some level, she knew he must have felt the same. In other words, they wanted more but time constraints and their surroundings severely hindered them from any further exploration.

“I suppose I should get dressed first and sneak out the back,” Abigail remarked the moment she regained control over her breathing.

“Why would you need to do that?” he asked, confused.

She tilted her face upwards to get a better look at him, her chin resting on his chest. “Getting dressed or sneaking out the back?”

“The latter. Or, well, both really.”

She suppressed a smile. “Keeping up appearances naturally.” Without any preamble, she pushed
herself up and away from him, doing her best to ignore his attempts to lure her back into his arms. “Oh and on my way out, I can go find Anna. Mustn’t let those rumors die down after all.”

Ben groaned in exasperation. “You see, even with a little information, you’re dangerous.”

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Once they found a way to get dressed, both Ben and Abigail set out for the day ahead, with the blonde naturally slipping out the back as she had originally intended, much to the major’s exasperated bafflement. She knew of his intentions of seeking out Caleb to travel to York City, knowing it had something to do with his plan to capture Arnold.

Recently, she came to the acknowledge the truth in that honesty and trust were at the heart of any good relationship - yes, a simple and obvious conclusion to come to but nevertheless true. It wasn’t that she was never honest with Ben, only that she either neglected to tell him something for what she believed was for his own good or what she believed she could handle herself – all right, perhaps those could be considered lies, depending on the beholder. With that being said, she wasn’t certain on how to exactly convey her thoughts about the Arnold capture plot.

It had been a little over a week since John Champe had defected to the British, taking with him a book of Continental intelligence with. Of course, the book was false. It had been the one Anna had informed her that she had been working on, and Champe had known it as well, since he served as a vital role in Ben’s plan to capture Arnold. Once successfully infiltrated among the enemy, Champe would hopefully be transferred to Arnold’s group, and when he was there, he was to approach their agent by using the phrase, “I miss the summer of ’73.” And that agent was none other than Abraham Woodhull, Fievel himself.

When she first heard of it, it had sounded like a good plan, and she told Ben as much. What she hadn’t done was voice her concerns for the possible holes in his plan, at least not as much as she would have liked. For instance, how would Champe and Abe even orchestrate a plan that would lead to Arnold’s capture? Unless there were details Ben was withholding from her for confidentiality’s sake, she couldn’t foresee this plan carrying out the way everyone hoped it would. Call it cynicism or whatever you liked, but she had learned to never put her faith into anything in which Benedict Arnold was concerned.

All she could say was she truly hoped John Andre had a second plan up his sleeve if her concerns turned out to be true.

Since having regained her strength, Anderson had allowed her to return into his service, with the one condition that he would start her off small before working her way back up into surgical procedures. She knew he was only doing so for her sake instead of the poorly disguised grumpy excuse for not wanting her to muck anything up.

Over the years in his service, coupled with her time in York City, she had gained knowledge and experience she never otherwise would have gleaned back home. She knew she was good and capable at her work, and Anderson knew it, too. So instead of arguing, she gathered herbs at his request, distributed and sorted them into small pouches and bottles, and created poultices, elixirs, whatever he needed for any given treatment.

It was nice to have something to keep her mind and hands busy, something productive and helpful that didn’t pertain to maintenance of musket. No one could describe Abigail Williams as a pacifist, of that much she was confident of. She felt a disconnect between herself and war, which had nothing to do with her sex. She could take care of herself, of that her father had made sure to instill as he brought her up on his own.
She knew things most women of her age didn’t know: how to clean and load a weapon in a minute or less, forest tracking for animals but most importantly other soldiers, traveling several miles of land in a day and mostly on foot – several times, the army had been short on horses, which meant more often than not one of the officers would try their hand at handling Cantor, which never ended well so Ben almost always had to claim him for the sake of saving her horse’s hide – and countless other experiences she knew she would never forget.

But she possessed a healer’s heart, a healer’s mind. The blonde took no pleasure in breaking others; she preferred mending them. While she was able to defend herself when the time called for it, she knew her talents lied in the infirmary tent and perhaps beyond them as well. It was more than a matter of desired profession. Healing was her calling. She often wondered what her father would think of her, if he could see her now. As the thunderstorm of grief and guilt gradually cleared, she realized deep down that Thomas Williams would have been proud of her. No. He was proud of her still.

Looking back, that was the moment she had begun to heal, or rather the moment she allowed herself to begin to heal, which had nothing to do with the infamous trio’s attack in the woods either. Maybe, just maybe there was a chance she could forgive herself for her father’s death, knowing that he never would have blamed her for it, not in his lifetime or several more lifetimes to come. Some things in life were simply out of one’s control. She was coming to grips with that reality, albeit slowly.

As for Tobias…

Flinching a little, Abigail corked the finished bottle of rosemary and carefully placed it in Anderson’s medical box with a slight tremor in her hands. That was something she wasn’t quite ready to forgive herself for, which made her feel even worse about her and Ben’s early morning tryst.

How was it possible to her to readily forgive others, but she couldn’t manage to do the same for herself?

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One of the first things Ben did that morning was find Caleb. Oddly enough, his friend was exactly where he thought he would be, at least as of late, parked next to one of the barrels of alcohol and helping himself. Trying his best to look it over, he ordered the other man to pick up Arnold in York City. The plan to take down Arnold was coming to a head, and he would be damned if he allowed any matter left unattended.

The whaler assured him he would set out as soon as he enlisted the help of Teddy Beddows to be his second rower. Ben agreed then watched as Caleb proceeded to fill his flask with what he could only assume to be ale.

Unable to prevent himself, he suggested that perhaps he should hold off on the ale until after they returned from the mission, only to have Caleb give him an unfazed look before remarking, “Don’t you worry, Tallboy. I’ll be fit as a fiddle to row.” He then hopped down from his seat, taking his replenished flask with him. “Besides, my drinking’s my own business. Maybe you should mind your own.”

And the day had gone all but downhill from there.

Ben hoped to catch Abigail to speak with her privately, but given the way the day had turned out thus far, that was a near impossibility. He worried that he might have pushed too far too soon with her, despite her clear willingness to continue. For a moment, he had considered pulling back, but then her hot, eager mouth had pressed against his and he had gotten lost in her. And Christ, he hadn’t
known how badly he had needed her touch, her slender, lithe form underneath his, to join with her…

“Shite,” he muttered, splashing some much needed cool water on his face to rinse off the remnants soap from shaving. Good thing he hadn’t been thinking of that while he had the razor in hand.

Ben was making his way back to his tent with half a dozen things preoccupying his mind. He went to set his shaving supplies at his desk to put away later when he spotted Abigail on her cot. Her back was towards him, her golden curls long and flowing past her shoulder blades, in the process of brushing her hair. He stopped what he was doing and stared as she reached a ribbon to tie it back, looping hair once so that it might appear shorter than it was.

She was dressed in men’s civilian clothes. Her jacket rested next to her on the cot, so he had a nearly unobstructed view of her bare neck, with only the collar of her shirt that was too large for her person from seeing any further. She had such a lovely neck, too, slender and soft and oh so feminine. He knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life kissing that neck, savoring the sound of her sigh as she leaned back against him.

Finished, the blonde turned around and nearly jumped out of her skin when she saw him standing there. Laughing a little, she said, “Oh, you startled me.”

He smiled sheepishly. “Sorry. I should’ve announced myself.”

Abigail shook her head, a smile still lingering on the corners of her mouth. “No need. It’s your tent after all.”

Before he could reply, Anna arrived at the tent looking nothing short of frazzled, her brown curls a complete disarray yet still managing to remain within the confines of her pinned up hair.

Rising to her feet, Abigail asked her what was wrong, concern clear in her face.

As if just realizing the state she was in, Anna ran a hand through her hair self-consciously, giving her time to catch her breath. Then her attention focused on Abigail. “Do you remember Mrs. Bates? One of the women I’ve employed at the trading post.”

Brows furrowed a little, Abigail nodded.

Anna continued, “I’ve come to learn that her name, her real name, is Mrs. Barnes.” She looked to Ben. “She knows you’re the head of intelligence.” She glanced outside as the sounds of camp life reached them. “Perhaps this conversation would be better suited for a more remote location.”

Ben asked for Anna to wait at the barn until he arrived a few minutes later. After waiting another five minutes, Abigail would join them. And so they did.

“Who does she report for?” Ben asked the moment Abigail slid the barn door shut.

Anna shook her head. “I’m not sure, only that she’s hoping that I can get what information that I can from you and report back to her.”

Confused, he asked, “And why would she possibly think you would do that?”

Anna bit her lip. At first, Abigail thought she appeared on the verge of tears, but when she really looked at her, she was actually just shaking with barely suppressed laughter. “Because she’s inclined to believe in the old adage ‘hell hath no fury like a woman’s scorn.’”

At Ben’s further befuddlement, the brunette explained, “Like everyone else, Mrs. Bates believes
we’re lovers, but somehow she’s convinced you might have another woman on the side.” She tossed a sly glance in Abigail’s direction. “She mentioned passing by your tent earlier this morning with a load of laundry. She heard certain… noises and decided to linger for a while, only staying there long enough to come to that conclusion and rush back to me with that information.”

Abigail couldn’t help but ask, “Why didn’t she assume he was with you?”

Anna answered, “Because I was with her doing the laundry. I’m a proficient and diligent worker, but I’m not that fast.”

Ben’s face turned bright red, and Anna’s grin widened. Abigail had to forcibly press her lips together to keep from laughing. “So naturally, she assumed by offering her allegiance would help vindicate me and my honor.”

Muttering under his breath, the major forced himself to return to the subject at hand. “Do you know who she reports to?”

Anna’s amusement faded as she shook her head. “I don’t know.”

“You can’t arrest her,” Abigail interjected before the idea could be presented. “Not if you want to learn more about her, what she knows, and who she’s working for.”

Ben sighed. “You’re right. That would only serve to spook her. The only advantage we have is that we know she’s a spy, and she doesn’t know that. If the British are targeting us, it’s best we learn all that we can about her first.” He caught Anna’s eye. “You need to find out if she has any associates in camp and who she reports to.”

Anna agreed, though she worried she might not be successful.

Abigail walked over and gave her a reassuring one-armed hug. “You’re going to be fine. Mrs. Bates gave you the perfect cover. Just play the jilted lover, and everything will be fine. Unless Ben objects.”

Ben’s eyes narrowed slightly. “You are not helping.”

“Actually,” Anna protested as she returned the hug, “I think she is.” The two women shared a grin while he muttered something about “troublesome women” under his breath.

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Surprisingly, it hadn’t taken Anna that long to discover all they need to know about Mrs. Barnes. Taking Abigail’s advice, the brunette had played the card she had been dealt and commiserated with Mrs. Bates about her woes and voiced her desire for revenge. But then she had voiced her concerns about being caught and hanged as a spy, though Mrs. Bates had assured her not to worry about it, that she sounded just like her husband. When Anna inquired about her husband, the older woman informed her that her husband was in Clinton’s army, meaning General Clinton, commander-in-chief of the entire bloody British army.

Anna had yet to determine if the woman had any associates within the camp, but given enough time, she was bound to find out.

Ben pressed her hand in thanks and asked her to keep doing what she must before setting out to make sure the proper accommodations had been set for Arnold’s capture.

But as fate would have it, Abigail followed him, jogging lightly to catch up with him. He didn’t even
bother to discourage her, knowing that she was going to do what she liked anyway. That and the fact he hadn’t the heart to tell her no.

“Major!”

The pair turned around almost in unison to see Teddy Beddows jogging towards them. Stunned, Ben met him half way. “What the hell are you still doing here? You should’ve left hours ago.”

Mr. Beddows nodded gravely. “I know, sir. It’s… major, it’s Caleb.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Abigail begin to approach them, mouth opening to voice her concern, but he gave her a subtle shake of his head before returning his attention back to Beddows, who continued, “I met him when he said to, but he’s not ready to go. I tried to get him to, but I don’t even think he can.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “He’s, uh, out of sorts.”

Brows furrowed, Ben demanded, “‘Out of sorts’? What do you –”

“Drunk and wild,” the other man clarified.

Shutting his eyes briefly, Ben sighed, “Oh, God.” With a split second decision made, he looked between Beddows and Abigail, before gesturing for the other man to lead them to the river. “All right, come on. Come on.”

It didn’t take long for them to find Caleb, who was sitting against the bark of an old gnarled tree, though it looked more that he had been propped up instead of sitting. If what Beddows had said was true, then the whaler was completely and utterly pissed. Ben understood better than anyone right now, though for completely different reasons.

As soon as he spotted him, Caleb crowed heartily, “Benny boy! Do you know how handsome you are in that uniform? We need to get you a lady before the war is ends. And one who isn't Anna, because she is taken!”

While carrying out his drunken soliloquy, the major had quickened his pace to reach him, so much so that Beddows and Abigail had to all but run to stay within a few feet of him. His hands balled into his fists, his teeth grinding with insurmountable frustration. He hoped to reach him in time before his friend blurted anything else out.

He had gotten within half a dozen steps from him when Caleb added thoughtfully, “Oh, yeah. There is Abi after all, but who knows how that'll play out, with you two dancing around each other for years…”

Caleb didn’t get to finish his drunken rant before Ben seized him by the collar and shoved him none too gently against the tree. Abigail called out his name in warning, but for once, Ben refused to look back.

All Caleb did was chuckle, which only made Ben’s frown tighten. “You think this is funny, do you? Yeah? Shirking your responsibilities.” He released him only for Caleb to fall gracelessly back to the ground, his legs unable to support him. “Get off your sorry arse and face me! You’re derelict of duty and you're lucky if I don't choose to have you court martialed.”

When he didn’t move, Ben made a move to reach for him to help him up himself, only for Caleb to complain, “Get off!”

“What? What? What have you got to say for yourself?” Ben demanded, over Abigail’s shouts, which were much closer now. He hadn’t realized how close until she wriggled his way in between them
and shoved his hands away from the other man. He gave her a look of disbelief, but she wasn’t fazed by the look. “And what do you think you’re doing?”

“Saving you from a world of regret,” Abigail replied evenly. She turned and knelt by Caleb. At first, she tried to gently roll him back into a sitting position, but seeing as how he was all but dead weight, she was forced to draw up all her strength and accept Ben’s help to haul him back into a sitting position, only this time she sat by his side to make sure he wouldn’t fall over again.

With considerable effort, Caleb admitted through a groan, “I did this to save the mission, all right?”

“What are you talking about?” Abigail asked gently.

“You're better off without me. You all are,” Caleb insisted, eyes brightening dangerously.

Concern for his friend quickly took precedence over anger for a soldier disobeying orders. Squatting down so that they were at eye level, the major adopted Abigail’s careful tone, though with much more incredulity intermixed. “What are you even talking about? Can you hear yourself?”

“No, I can't hear myself!” Caleb exclaimed, so loudly that birds nesting in the branches above scattered away in a flurry of wings and squawks. His entire body wracked with hysterical tremors, his voice cracking. “All I hear is Simcoe! He's in there! He won! I can't stop seeing that bastard's face when he thanked me for giving up my friends!”

Dismayed, Ben grabbed him by the shoulders, hoping to return some sense to him. “Caleb. Caleb, listen to me. That never happened.”

But it seemed that nothing he said or did was getting through to him. Once the words were said aloud, it seemed that the dam to everything Caleb had been fighting to keep buried completely and thoroughly burst. He broke down sobbing, which had Ben and Abigail exchanging looks of alarmed concern. Without a second thought, he drew the whaler into his arms and held him as he sobbed, allowing him a rare moment for him to let it all out, which he clearly needed.

Not for the first time, Ben wondered why Caleb hadn’t told him any of this from the start?

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Only when Caleb’s sobs had rendered himself completely exhausted did Ben decide to revise their plan to go after Arnold. He decided he would row to the slip himself in Caleb’s place while Beddows and Abigail remained behind to look after Caleb.

Naturally, Abigail volunteered to go with him, citing that with the possibility of trouble that two rowers were better than one. And to top it all off, Beddows agreed with her, leaving Ben no choice but to agree.

The new arrangement required less identifiable attire. Even though they were behind schedule by several hours, he knew he couldn’t risk making the journey in his uniform. While Beddows prepared to take Caleb back to camp, Ben made a quick trip to his tent to change his clothes, reluctantly leaving Abigail at the boat so they could leave the moment he returned.

Unfortunately, by the time he stepped out of his tent he came in contact with a soldier, who had a messenger that he insisted much reach Washington at that very instant. The younger man claimed to have received reports from multiple sources that Clinton had ordered Arnold to ship out to Virginia. That meant they could be leaving any day now. With growing dread, Ben realized that even if he and Abigail had sailed out to York City, the likelihood that they might have missed them was a strong one.
Not only had Ben intended to take down Arnold, but he had hoped to rescue Abe as well before he had gotten himself too deeply entrenched with the British. Thinking of Tobias’s fate grimly, Ben would try his damnedest to make sure history did not repeat itself.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter, more drama haha. Thank you guys so much for sticking around this massive beast of a fic. I still have some surprises in store, don't you worry!

Speaking of which, would any of you be interested in a sequel? I've been playing around with several ideas that I can't see going into this story, but it could end up as its own separate thing? It won't be as long as this, I promise lol I'm curious to know what you guys think. Let me know in the comments if you would be interested in a sequel, or you can find me at my tumblr (annawoodhull.tumblr.com) to let me know!
Immediately after receiving the message of Arnold’s impending deployment, Ben set out to find Washington and inform him of the latest development, after briefly filling in Abigail on their abrupt halt in the mission. Running on pure adrenaline and urgency, he cut his way through camp, marching his way directly to commander-in-chief’s tent. With a brief nod of acknowledgement to Billy, who attempted to hold him off, saying Washington was in a very important meeting with Colonel Alexander Hamilton.

“I’m afraid I have news that cannot wait,” Ben remarked, barely pausing to give the other man enough time to step aside.

He took in the room and observed that both the colonel and Washington were standing, appearing to have just approach a conclusion to their meeting when he walked in. Now both sets of eyes were on him, putting him underneath an intense level of scrutiny.

“Major Tallmadge,” Washington acknowledged his presence with a brief nod.

Ben returned the gesture in kind to each of the men. “General Washington, Colonel Hamilton.” After the later nodded dutifully, he continued, “I apologize for the intrusion.”

“Nothing to apologize for, major,” Hamilton assured him. “We had just concluded our meeting.”

Feeling a little more than relieved, Ben turned to Washington, and like that, the feeling was suddenly gone. “I just received word from a messenger, pertaining to Arnold. As of this moment, he and his regiment are to be shipped out to Virginia. They could be leaving at any time. By the time our man would reach the slip, they could be well on their way or have already gone.”

He watched as Washington’s jaw clenched in anger, the never ending tension in his form set in his shoulders. Then as if making a decision, the anger was gone and quickly replaced by a deep rooted determination. “Then we must adapt. We have no choice. There is still time to rectify this. Arnold is within our grasp.” He returned to his seat, bringing a hand to rub at his jaw. “Only this time he appears to have moved just out of reach once more.”

With some maneuvering, the desk was cleared so that maps depicting the coastline of New York to Virginia were spread out before them. For what felt like hours, discussions of routes Arnold would take, areas that held potential to have someone intercept him, and the feasibility of those interceptions. Time and again, the officers arrived at a standstill, unable to chart a course of action.

That was until Hamilton’s expression turned thoughtful. “Gentleman, I believe there might be another way to solve our problems. One that won’t require sending off a regiment of men we cannot afford to lose, at least not without a concrete plan.”

“By all means, colonel,” Washington remarked, gesturing for him to continue.
Placing his hands on the table, Hamilton leaned across the table towards them. “What if word were to reach Arnold that a certain redcoat prisoner escaped from our camp? This escaped prisoner would most likely contact him, desiring a meeting. Naturally, Arnold would be skeptical, as anyone would be, but if word reached him that this particular redcoat did escape, he might be inclined to accept the meeting.”

Ben inquired, “And just which redcoat prisoner are you proposing to allegedly escape?”

Hamilton smiled a little. “John Andre.” Gaging their reactions, he pushed further, “It would be perfect. Andre was the one who initiated contact with Arnold, so there’s a connection there, an established history. And the man is willing to help take down Arnold, as was the agreement to keep him alive.”

Unwilling to completely denounce the plan, Ben couldn’t help but interject, “While your plan carries merit, there’s a significant amount of risk involved.”

Hamilton nodded understandingly. “Yes, the risk is high, but I can’t think of a better way than to ensnare Arnold once and for all.” His gaze shifted to Washington. “It’s a risk I’m willing to take. We can’t throw away our shot at this.”

The major saw the interest in Washington’s eyes and knew immediately he was in the minority of being against this plan. Biting back a sigh, he suggested, “Then someone would have to go with Andre to keep an eye on him.”

Satisfied with his appearing to be on board, Hamilton agreed wholeheartedly, only with one “minor” caveat. “Only a regular soldier going with him wouldn’t work. Even dressed in civilian clothing, the presence of another man Arnold has never met before might draw suspicion.” He glanced down at the map thoughtfully. “If only Andre’s companion were someone familiar to Arnold, vaguely at best, that would be our best bet. What are the odds of finding someone like that?”

Ben watched with growing dread as a spark of recognition brightened Washington’s gaze. Having remained silent for the majority of their discussion, the commander-in-chief finally spoke, “I believe I might have someone for the job.” Oh no.

The grey fox’s eyes found Ben’s. “Major Tallmadge, bring Williams in to meet with me.”

It took everything inside him not to clench his jaw. “Yes, sir.”

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He found her coming out of the infirmary tent, right where he thought she would be. She was always there these days whenever she wasn’t assigned to other tasks at the direction of other officers.

The moment she saw him, Abigail instantly perked up, which never ceased in making Ben feel like the sole focal point in the world. She met him half way while adjusting her cap, one he couldn’t recall ever seeing her with before. It was supposed to help her blend in with the other man, but in his eyes, the effect of the cap all but swallowing the top of her head and a few loose golden tendrils coming loose made her look cute, precious even. He didn’t dare voice the observation aloud.

“I visited Caleb before Anderson,” she said before he could ask. “He’s sleeping it off. I made sure there was enough water next to his cot for him to drink. He’s desperately going to need it.”

“Good,” he replied, nodding almost to himself.

When he didn’t say anything else, she asked, “Is that why you came to find me?”
“I… no.” Shifting his weight on his feet, he sighed heavily. “Washington wants to meet with you.”

And oh, how much he wanted to hate her face brightening at his words; hell, a part of him did, but only because he knew what the result would come of the meeting. “Really?” she asked, eyes widening but lips curved upwards in a pleasantly surprised way.

He scowled faintly. “You shouldn’t be so eager, not before you know what you’ll be walking into.”

As they walked, he filled her in on his meeting with Washington and Hamilton, beginning with his message about Arnold’s regiment being ordered to Virginia and concluding with Hamilton’s proposed plan of action.

All the while Abigail remained quiet, listening intently as he described the afternoon’s events, biting her lower lip in thoughtful concentration. Once he was finished, she was still quiet, which only had him wanting to know what she was thinking even more. Resignedly, he kept hold of his patience until she was ready.

After a few moments, she asked, “Does John know anything about this yet?” Realizing her use of familiarity, she corrected herself. “John Andre, I mean.”

“Not as of yet,” Ben replied. “Though I suspect Washington wishes to speak with you first before going to Andre. To have his ducks in a row more or less before proposing the plan.”

“And I’m one of those ducks,” Abigail commented, looking a little more pleased with the thought than he felt was necessary, though really he was certainly biased.

Ben glanced towards her before returning his attention straight ahead. “In a manner of speaking, yes, but again, I wouldn’t be eagerly chomping at the bit to gain Washington’s approval.”

The blonde tossed him a knowing glance. “Really? You wouldn’t?”

“I…” he trailed off, realizing he had just set himself up for that one. Huffing a little, he shook his head. “Let’s just keep going.” He did his best to ignore her little victorious smile.

By the time they reached Washington’s tent, Hamilton himself was stepping out and turning just in time to spot them.

Knowing there was no way of avoiding it, Ben introduced the colonel and Abigail. Under different circumstances, he suspected Hamilton would bring her hand to his mouth and wax poetic, but thankfully, the current circumstances didn’t encourage this. Besides, his recent marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler of New York provided another guarantee that he had nothing to be worried about.

“It’s nice to make your acquaintance, sir,” Abigail remarked, despite the fact she really should have kept her mouth shut. She had to wonder if Washington had informed Hamilton of her true identity. If not, then her voice could have possibly done that for her.

Hamilton smiled warmly, giving no indication of whether he suspected her or not. “For me as well. I trust if all goes well, you and I will be seeing more of each other soon enough.” He nodded to Ben. “Major,” he bid farewell before setting off to carry out whatever tasks that had been assigned to him.

Once he was out of earshot, Ben leaned in closer and asked, “What do you make of him?”

Abigail hummed before quickly glancing up at him. “Alexander Hamilton, you mean?”

“Aye.”
She remarked, “I like him well enough.” She paused for a moment. “Though he looks like the type of man who wants to be in the room where it happens.”

Puzzled, Ben asked, “In what room where what happens?”

Abigail shrugged noncommittally, “I don’t know, but he has the look.”

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“I’m sure Major Tallmadge has informed you for the purpose of this meeting,” Washington remarked.

Uncertain of whether there was a presence of a hint of disapproval in his tone, Abigail decided to play it safe. “He only told me what was necessary for me to come,” she responded, “though I suspect there are quite a few things he neglected to tell me due to the importance of the mission.”

She wanted to protect Ben as much as she was able, even if there wasn’t a hell of a lot that she could do. A faint smile touched Washington’s lips, making her realize two things simultaneously: first, there had been no disapproval, and second, he recognized the purpose behind her carefully crafted statement.

The two were alone for the moment. The commander-in-chief had sent the major outside so that he could discuss certain things in private, which he had assured her would not take long. Ever reluctant to leave her side, Ben had begrudgingly left her, of course not displaying any of his this in front of Washington, whom she began to suspect was aware of more than what any of them gave him credit for.

He informed her of the plan, going into much further detail than Ben had when bringing her to meet with him, for the reason she realized he did not wish to overwhelm her. It was easily understandable why, given what her role would be. Being John’s escort wasn’t her concern. She trusted the man with her life; there were no qualms she held against him, even though he was on the side of the enemy. She knew in her heart John Andre would never bring her any harm. It was only what would happen when it came to Arnold that worried her.

She silently thanked Abby, Cicero, and her lucky stars for having escaped York City when she had, seeing as how that vile man had taken up temporary residence in John’s home. Who knew what would have happened then if she hadn’t?

Folding his hands carefully across the table, Washington mused, “We have John Andre in our custody, and he’s willing to work with us to take down Arnold as per our agreement. I believe he would be willing to write the letter and see this plan though. The problem is how she would be able to go with John as yourself.”

Feeling her cheeks heat, Abigail bit her lip briefly before admitted hesitantly, “Um… he knows I’m here?”

Washington raised a questioning eyebrow, which was amazingly effective in making her feel even worse for it. She quickly added, “I assure you he only knows me as Elizabeth Williams, and he won’t say a word. He doesn’t know anything else about me. He wouldn’t even know how I got here or why.” But he could probably hazard a guess as to why, a part of her remarked. John wasn’t a foolish man.

He lifted his hand. For a moment, she thought he was going to pinch the bridge of his nose in irritation, but with considerable restraint, he refrained from doing so. Almost pretending he didn’t
hear about her implied illegal visitation of a prisoner of war, he nodded to himself before moving on to the next topic at hand. For this, he summoned Billy to bring Ben back into the tent.

Once the major returned, Washington resumed his stance on the matter, his gaze on her. “I believe Ms. Williams is the best person to go with Major Andre. She knows him, and he knows her. At your word, you say you trust this man, yes?” When she nodded, he continued, satisfied with her confirmation, “Secondly, Arnold has already met her, as Elizabeth Williams, similar to Major Andre. Seeing a familiar face would put Arnold more at ease and lessen the likelihood for him to bolt.

“As to why she’s with Andre after his escape,” he continued ponderingly, “is another matter to be determined, one that must be thought thoroughly before either of you sets foot out of camp. I’m not willing to take risk another botched mission because we did not take the time to plan this carefully, to anticipate every angle.”

Looking to Ben, Washington remarked, “I want you to bring John Andre to me, discreetly. Though the sooner the better, I’d prefer to continue to keep the matters of our meeting confined to those only in the know.” But that went without saying.

Ben nodded. “He’ll already be in civilian clothes, which should help take away from attention from him. It’ll be best to bring him around dusk and take the path around the center of camp since the majority of the men will be at supper.”

Nodding in approval, Washington dismissed them.

There was still a considerable amount of sunlight remaining in the late afternoon, which afforded them more time for Ben to justify leading her towards the barn. She wondered if he would try and talk her out of committing to the plan, but both she and he knew very well when General George Washington wanted you to do something, you do it without question.

Not for the first time upon John’s capture, the major asked her how much she believed she could trust the man. Ordinarily, the repeated question would have annoyed her, but she knew in her heart he only asked out of concern for her welfare, not to be an untrusting nag.

So with a swallow of her pride, Abigail assured him patiently, “I do trust him. I’ve told you this. He has been very kind to me in York City. Plus, you’ve met the man yourself. You told me that he was a man of honor, even though he bore enemy allegiances.”

Ben nodded, though he still hardly looked happy with the developing situation. “I did say that,” he acknowledged, “but -”

Abigail couldn’t help but interject, “And doesn’t it count that there has been no mention to anyone of my visit to him a few months back?”

His gaze suddenly narrowed. “Why are you defending him so passionately?”

A little taken aback, she remarked slowly, “It’s not in passion in which I’m defending him; it’s with knowledge and experience.” She looked at him tiredly. “Please don’t tell me you’re jealous of him.”

“I’m not,” he insisted quickly, too quickly. When she raised her eyebrows, he relented. “All right. Maybe I am a little. I can admit that much. He was there for you for months where I couldn’t be. You developed a close friendship with the man, that much is plain. And I know,” he put up a hand when she began to interject, “you’ve told me that nothing has ever happened between the two of you, that he has no feelings for you nor you for him other than friendship, and I believe you. It’s just… God forgive me, but I want you all to myself.”
Abigail smiled gently and crossed the distance between herself and the major, so that she could slip her hands up his chest and around the back of his neck. The heat from his body against her never ceased in comforting her. “There’s nothing to forgive. Well with the exception of you being a foolish man of course.” She grinned at his little huff of indignation, though his smile ruined the attempt at the pretense. “Besides, you already have me all to yourself. No one can take me away from you, not if I have anything to say or do about that.”

His hands instinctively settled on her hips, drawing her towards him. “I’m sure you would have plenty to say.”

Abigail nodded sagely, eyes twinkling. “Plenty. And not one word of it being appropriate for polite dinner conversation either.” Tightening her arms around him, she added sincerely, “I love you, Benjamin Tallmadge, and there’s nothing in this world that’s ever going to change that.”

That was all he needed to hear and dipped his head down to press his mouth to hers. She returned the kiss contentedly, all sorts of feelings stirring up inside her. Her heart fluttered inside her chest. She knew how he felt about her; she knew it in the way he looked at her, touched her, just by being with her. When she had first told him she loved him, she had asked, no more like begged, for him not to repeat the words, knowing at the time she hadn’t been ready to hear them because she had felt she hadn’t deserved to hear them, let along by the recipient of them.

She had caught glimpses of him when he thought she hadn’t been looking, where it appeared the words were on the tip of his tongue but were always swallowed back because he promised her.

In that moment, being in his arms, she knew she was finally ready to hear those words. Maybe she wasn’t entirely out of the woods of believing she was undeserving, but she was ready.

She was finally ready to live her life again.

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Just after dusk, Ben retrieved John Andre from his cellar cell. With only a brief word that Washington wished to speak with him, the major said little else as he waited for the British major to make himself presentable, having provided him with a fresh change of clothing – civilian naturally – along with a razor and soap, of which the other was supervised closely while he used it.

Having already gone over the specifics with Hamilton, the colonel’s presence in their meeting was not necessary, which gave him the opportunity to prepare for the journey ahead. Meanwhile, it would only leave Washington, Andre, and himself to go over the plan. Abigail had returned to camp to await further instruction.

Washington presented the plot to Andre thus: Andre would allegedly escape from his holdings in New Windsor and head directly for York City. He would write a letter, requesting to meet with Arnold in a remote location to “reconnect” as it were, promising to share all of the knowledge he had learned about Washington desiring to capture Arnold in the hopes that would capture the turncoat’s attention. Of course, the letter would have to be composed and sent out at the same time as John made his escape, in the hopes the letter would reach Arnold in time, of which they had precious little. Only when Washington concluded and asked for his input, Andre remarked, “It is a risky plan,” echoing Ben’s earlier concerns, “but often the greater the risk, the greater the rewards.” Shifting in his seat, his expression turned curious. “My question is, however, how can you trust that I will do as you say? Of course, you have my word, on my honor, but even I would doubt a man’s word during times such as these.”
Washington smiled faintly. “We have taken the necessary measures to ensure that you have a travel companion with you for the duration of your journey and during your meeting with Arnold himself. Someone who you know well, and also someone with whom Arnold is familiar with, which will lessen the chances of him bolting the moment he sees you.”

“I’m incredibly curious now.”

“Does the name Elizabeth Williams mean anything to you?”

Ben observed shrewdly every flicker of emotion that passed along the British major’s face. Even with his experience in intelligence gathering and training, the mention of that particular name did seem to have an effect on him. His expression was carefully schooled, but there had been a flicker of recognition, of concern, in his eyes. Blink and one would miss it. But it had been there.

“The name sounds familiar,” Andre remarked slowly, his expression suddenly guarded. After a few minutes of silence, he leaned forward, his hands remaining at his sides Ben was certain to observe.

“How was it that she came to be here exactly? I realize you’ll most likely won’t tell me, but I must to know if she’s here against her will, that she remains unmolested. The latter of which is my main concern.”

With his calm demeanor never breaking, Washington replied, “I assure you, major, that Elizabeth Williams has suffered no harm from my current regiment of men. She comes and goes from the women’s camp as she pleases, within reason. Rumors of her being a healer reached me, and I thought it best to have her working under our camp physician to put her skills to use.”

It was impressive, really, how Washington’s narrative easily sounded to be true. Essentially it was, only there were quite significant details that were left out and rightly so. However, he didn’t assure Andre that she wasn’t her against her will either, Ben noted, which he believed was to help her cover as well, both involving Culper and herself.

Andre wasn’t exactly pleased but was mollified enough for the tension in his posture to ease. “If I am to write this letter, I should fail to mention that she would accompany me. Arnold is a very suspicious and paranoid man. Even the mere mention of a third party would spook him. When we arrive and see that she’s with me – though I have no knowledge of her having met the man, and if she has, I deeply regret so on her behalf – I’ll just say that she came across me in the wilderness days or so after my escape, noticed my wounds, and helped patch me up. Naturally, she would insist on traveling with me to make sure my wounds were tended to.”

Washington looked from Andre to Ben, who nodded slowly. “That is something she would do.” It was actually something she has done, but that went without saying. “But my concern lies in it wouldn’t make sense for a seasoned major to risk bringing a civilian with him and a woman at that. Whether or not she’s dressed in men’s clothing makes no difference.”

“Not if there’s a plausible explanation for it,” Andre responded, his arm propped up on the arm of his chair, his fingers rubbing at his chin in a thoughtful manner.

Warily, Ben asked, “Such as?”

“If I were to tell Arnold we were lovers, Elizabeth and I,” the British major remarked. “That would put an end to any questions. I will personally see to that.”

Ben’s fingers flexed underneath the table, but apart from that, he kept his body language unreadable, though he felt Washington’s penetrating gaze burning a hole through him.
While he detested the very thought, it made perfectly good sense for him to declare Abigail as his significant other. Not only would it ebb Arnold’s suspicions, but it would also provide her with protection. Judging from Washington’s expression, he appeared to share his line of thinking and agreed the cover would work well.

After another hour or so of finalizing details, Hamilton announced himself before entering the tent and letting Washington know that the horses were ready.

Blinking, Ben looked between the colonel and Washington, too at a lost to attempt to school his features. “The horses… whose horses are ready?”

“Major Andre’s and his traveling companion of course.” Hamilton fished out his pocket watch to determine the time. “As soon as the letter is written and enveloped, the sooner they leave, the better. He needs to be out of here before the letter reaches Arnold’s hands, to coordinate with the story of his escape.”

A sudden coldness hit the major right at the core. Tonight. Washington wanted Andre and Abigail to leave tonight. There would be absolutely no time to prepare her for this. Hell, there wasn’t enough time to prepare himself for yet another separation. But in times such as these, everyone had to do what they must.

Washington turned his attention to him. “Major Tallmadge, inform Williams of the evening’s arrangements. And do it quickly.”

With a stiffness he felt deep in his bones, Ben acknowledged the order with a quiet “yes, sir” before exiting the tent. As soon as the cool night air touched his skin, he made a direct beeline towards camp, to where he knew Abigail would be waiting for him.

Yes, everyone needed to do what they must, but that didn’t mean he had to like it. Or stomach it.

Chapter End Notes

All right, yes, I made a few Hamilton puns. I couldn't help myself haha. As always, thank you guys so much for your continued support for this fic! You all mean the world to me <333333
This chapter takes place between 4x07 and 4x08

Once Ben had informed her she and John would be leaving right now, Abigail was more surprised than she should have been. Knowing she wouldn’t have time to change into “proper women’s attire” - which wouldn’t have made much sense anyway, given the nature of their traveling. Besides, it would make sense for John not wanting to draw any attention to his significant other, under the circumstances.

When he mentioned John’s explanation for her presence to Arnold, she hadn’t thought much of it, at least not until she had seen the look of displeasure on Ben’s face. Holding back a chuckle, she had promised him that the only major she was interested in was him and kissed him. After that, they had no problems, at least at the forefront.

Her first priority had been medical supplies, at least the portable ones, and medicinal herbs that were already blended. Anderson had been gracious enough in allowing her to take what she would need, but she had only taken the bare minimum so as not to deprive the man of his own inventory. With vials of medical concoctions – ointments drinkable liquids, what have you – a small supply of cloth for bandaging, other surgical supplies he had been willing to loan her, she tucked them away in a small satchel that she kept securely on her person. Only that and her father’s revolver that Ben had slipped to her right as she mounted Cantor were the only belongings she had taken with her.

In a brief stolen moment prior to her mounting, Ben had wished her safe travels but hadn’t immediately released her when all was said and done. She hadn’t needed to ask him what was the matter, because she knew him too well. The apprehension, the uncomfortable feeling over yet another separation before them. She felt deeply unsettled by this, too, deep in her bones, but they both knew there were no choices, not when they were just shy of snagging Arnold for good.

“You won’t be far behind me,” Abigail had reminded him. “No more than a day at the most. Told me so yourself.” Tomorrow morning, if not earlier, Ben and a select group of men from his dragoon were to follow them, under the guise that they were in pursuit of John Andre, the escaped prisoner of war.

Of course, the men would learn later of their intentions of their true intended capture, but not before word of John’s disappearance spread through camp and eventually beyond the camp border. By the time Ben and his men departed, the news would of the escape and attempt of apprehension would make it to York City and hopefully to Arnold’s ears, if he had not yet set off for Virginia.

“Using my own words against me,” he had murmured, lips reluctantly twitching upwards. “How typical of you.” Sighing quietly, he had tucked a curl behind her ear, brushing his thumb along her cheek tenderly. “My mind’s telling me we have our duties, and we must carry out our roles, but my heart is saying something else entirely. That we’re far better together than apart.”

Better together than apart. Those words remained with her even hours after she and John had left the camp. Initially, they had set off at a trot, taking the ways around patrol routes so as to not draw any attention. Once she determined they were well out of range, they urged their mounts into a gallop,
going as far and as fast as their horses could manage.

After an hour or so of hard riding, John eased his mount into gradually slower gaits until the horse came to a slow walk, with the her following suit. While both geldings were suitably trained for war and for traveling such distances, riding hard for any prolonged period of time could wear a horse out. Soon they would have to take a break to allow their horses to cool down and regroup. Afterwards, trotting for the rest of the journey was their best option, seeing as how it would allow them to cover more ground while conserving their horses’ energy.

Unfortunately, neither could afford to completely remove their saddles and bags to provide a proper cool down, but what they could manage was to ease the load, removing unnecessary parcels and loosening the saddle girth strap so each gelding could breath a little easier. All this was done when a stream came into view, which they took as a sign to dismount and walk their horses around for a bit before finally allowing them to quench their thirst. It wasn’t a good idea to let a horse drink before cooling down. One of the many lessons Thomas Williams had instilled in his daughter while bringing her up.

The thought of her father brought a sad smile to her lips.

“You’ve quite the horsemanship,” John complimented as they brought their mounts to the stream, lowering the reins over his horse’s head to provide him with more access to the stream. Abigail did the same. He smiled wryly then. “Or I should say horsewomanship.”

The flicker of sadness in her smile disappeared as she peered up at John, her nose crinkling a little as she huffed out a laugh. “Thank you. My father taught me how to ride. That was how we always got around, before he was able to afford enough to build a wagon of his own, for his traveling physician practice.”

“Ah. So your story wasn’t a complete fabrication then.”

There was no harshness in his tone, no accusation; just a simple observation. Still, Abigail couldn’t help but wince. A few minutes passed before she remarked, “I understand you might have… half a dozen questions or more for me at the moment. Believe me, I wish that I could afford to tell you everything and be honest, but I can’t. But what I can tell you is that night when I arrived at your door,” she set down the reins to let Cantor get his fill of stream water and turned to face the British major, “I had been assaulted by a group of soldiers, only they weren’t rebel soldiers.” She hesitated and only continued when she realized his patience wasn’t wearing thin. “They were British soldiers. Brows furrowing, John demanded bewilderingly, “Why didn’t you tell me from the start?”

Abigail shrugged helplessly and the removed her cap. “I feared you wouldn’t let me in, when I was in desperate need of shelter. And even if I had, I wasn’t sure if anything would have been done against them. I’ve seen this song and dance a hundred times over, with the results always the same. The British soldier getting off with a slap on the wrist and the victims essentially a slap in the face.

“And I suppose while I’m being honest here,” she continued, “or as honest as I can be under the circumstances, you ought to know, as my traveling companion, that there’s a price on my head. By the Queen’s Rangers. For this, we should probably sit.”

She sat with a very confused John on a fallen log near the stream and explained the events of that horrific night in the woods, where after her mount having left her stranded, a group of British officers stumbled across her, assumed her to be a spy, roughed her up, and brought her into the custody. Describing her imprisonment in the briefest descriptions possible, she finished with her escape. Try as she might, there was no way to leave out Tobias’s involvement in her escape, so with a heavy
heart, she explained this as well. She didn’t have to explain to John that this was the reason for his death. From the look of dawning understanding on his face, he already guessed it.

“I know I probably told you much more than I should have, but I felt you had the right to know, at least as much as I can tell you.” Those last few words escaped from her in a rush of breath it left her with a lightheaded feeling.

She hadn’t realized just how much until she felt a steadying hand on her forearm. Not once had she looked at him for the duration of her explanation, but now that she did, there was no judgement in his expression, no hint of disgust or hate or even suspicion, as one would assume that someone from the enemy side of war would hold. Instead, she was met with the gaze of a concerned friend, something she really could not have anticipated.

“I’ll do whatever I can to keep you safe,” John promised her. He squeezed her arm in reassurance.

Abigail blinked. “I… really?” she asked, huffing a little laugh in disbelief. “Just like that?”

With the faintest indication of a rueful smile, the British major remarked, “Just like that.”

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Once their mounts were properly cooled and their thirsts quenched, John and Abigail adjusted their saddles and packs before carrying on with their journey throughout the night. They couldn’t afford any more stops, so they kept pace at a brisk trot, sometimes alternating between that and a gallop, pushing the horses as far as they dared.

Maneuvering their way around fallen logs, tree stumps, and bushes, the earth became a dark blur around them. Abigail could hardly make out John’s form in front of her, but she trusted Cantor’s night vision better than her own. Horses were remarkable creatures like that.

They rode and rode for countless hours until tiny specks of color painted the sky. With dawn gradually approaching, Abigail signaled to John that perhaps they should stop for another rest, if only for a few hours, and he agreed.

By the time they dismounted, every muscle in Abigail’s body ached. She hadn’t ridden at such a pace and long distance in quite some time. They brought their horses to an area where they could graze, turning them loose under close scrutiny. Well, at least John was. Abigail could barely keep her eyelids open.

Sensing her exhaustion, John murmured, “Why don’t you get some rest? I can keep an eye out.”

She shook her head. “No, it’s okay. You might need a second pair of eyes. Besides, I haven’t just sat back and watched the sunrise in a terribly long time.”

However, by the time the sun peeked over the horizon, Abigail lost the ongoing battle with her sleep lids and promptly tuckered out against a nearby tree.

When she awakened, the earth was completely bathed in light, so much she was forced to rub at her eyes and squint. Realizing she had fallen asleep, she pushed herself into a sitting position upon realizing she had ended up curled on the ground like a sleeping wolf pup. As she shifted, something moved off her. She picked it up and realized it was John’s jacket. He must have covered her when realizing she had fallen asleep.

“Some lookout partner you are,” John remarked, drawing her attention behind her. He smiled in amusement while cleaning his pistol, the one weapon he had permitted to take with him for the
Abigail huffed self-deprecatingly. “I’m sorry. I guess I was more tired than I thought.”

He brushed off her apology with a reassuring smile. Then he looked around, observing the terrain. “We should head out, ride out the day, and find a place to rest for the night at dusk. Most creatures, particularly rabbits, are more active around dawn and dusk, which will give us more opportunity to ensure our supper.”

What he referenced was the very small, nearly nonexistent portions of rations they had been provided with prior to the journey starting out, and without Ben’s help, they probably wouldn’t have been able to receive more than that. Since they hadn’t been able to take much food with them for the journey because of the camp shortage, what little they had needed to make last until York City, which meant hunting for anything substantial.

Rising to her feet, Abigail brushed off tiny clumps of dry dirt from his coat before handing it back to him. “Shouldn’t you get some rest as well?”

John shook his head, though not unkindly. “I should do just fine until we stop for the night. Believe me, I’ve gone far longer than this without sleep.” As they prepared to tack up their mounts – which she could only assume had been removed while she had slept – he turned to her with a grin, adding, “You can take the night’s watch if you feel so inclined.”

Abigail mirrored his grin. “I think I can manage that.”

“How good are you with a gun?”

Glancing down at her father’s revolver on her hip and briefly looking back on all her previous experiences with it, she shrugged casually, giving Cantor a comforting pat. “I can fairly hold my own.”

The moment they finished tending to the horses, the pair were back in the saddle again for a full day’s ride ahead.

Under normal circumstances, they could have easily made it to the city’s borders within a day or two’s time, with only a stop for brief breaks here and there. But the stops they took now were carefully calculated ones, knowing the news of his escape and the letter needed to reach Arnold before their arrival while at the same time making sure they were within distance upon the time he made his decision of whether or not he would agree to the meeting.

Abigail hadn’t asked about any of the details in the little, nor had John volunteered any information. Plausible deniability in the event if Arnold were to inquire of her knowledge about the letter, knowing very well how much paranoia the man possessed. And she understood all too well how strongly paranoia could affect a man. She had the all too vivid memories of the blood and bruises to show for it.

The messenger carrying John’s letter had left half past the hour before their own departure, having been instructed to ride without stopping until the letter found its way into the appropriate hands. By what was meant by “appropriate hands” she assumed could only be a civilian with Continental sympathies who was willing to take the risk, that or an enemy of Arnold that wanted to see the bastard brought to justice. Perhaps even both.

When daylight gradually faded into dusk, they set up camp on the edge of a clearing and open trail, providing them with a decent vantage point of any travelers that might pass through. After they tended to the horses, John decided to scope the layout of the surrounding land in search for any
game. She wondered how on earth he could accomplish that with no sleep but decided against voicing that opinion aloud.

He told her it would be best if he went alone and for her to stay with the horses. What any other person in her position should have done was to insist in going with him, but any other person in her position didn’t know the man as she did. Sure, she had only known the man for four, maybe five months at the most, but when you lived with someone, the ability to really get to know someone increased exponentially.

“Okay,” Abigail agreed, unlooping her satchel of medical supplies to take inventory. It was only when she didn’t hear the telltale signs of leaves crunching underfoot did she look up to find him still standing there. “What?”

John looked a little surprised at her willingness to trust him. “You’ll trust me, just like that?” he asked, echoing her words with an upwards twitch of his lips.

Abigail smiled back. “Just like that. I trust you, John. Maybe that makes me foolish, but I do.” And then because she couldn’t help herself, “And if you feel inclined to make your long journey on foot into the city, perhaps you can find us some coffee. It’ll keep us warm and awake.”

He chuckled and adjusted his cap. “I can’t make any promises, but if I bring anything back, it’ll be tea. Tea keeps us civilized.”

The blonde tilted her head innocently. “So is that what it’s doing at the bottom of the Boston harbor? Keeping the waters civilized?”

The British major stared at her in amazement. “I’m going to pretend I did not just hear that.” Then he turned around to begin his survey of the land before she had the chance to see whether or not he found her remark humorous.

Grinning to herself, she wondered what Ben would have made of the quip. Certainly, if he had been drinking, he would’ve choked on it to keep from laughing, then after carefully schooling his features to conceal any and all amusement, he would have taken her off to the side to give her a good talking to, mostly for saying any sort of inflammatory remark that could’ve landed her in a world of trouble, and then when he was through, a whispered “well done.”

Clearly, she needed to work on her brain to mouth filter. It almost always got her into trouble. On the rare occasion, it got her out of trouble, but those moments, unfortunately, were few and far between.

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“After a somewhat thorough comb through the area,” John announced upon his returned, “squirrels or hares are our only dining options for the time being.” He rolled his shoulders, flexing his fingers at his side. “We should avoid using guns of course. Those little buggers are awfully quick, and it would draw too much unwanted attention. Do you happen to have any string in that satchel of yours? Or some sort of…”

“You mean like this?” Abigail asked, lifting her completed rabbit snare for him to inspect. He stepped closer and inspected her handiwork, surprise once again coloring his face. “It’s meant to be a hanging snare,” she clarified. “We’ll need to find a low hanging branch, or maybe we can just construct something ourselves, but I think that should do the trick.”

Pleasantly surprised, he asked while turning over the looped string in his hand, “Where did you learn about this? From your father?”
“No, actually,” Abigail answered, though really she probably should have just said yes. Where she really learned about making rabbit snares were from a couple of soldiers at the camp base. Patiently, the two soldiers had demonstrated every step of the way, how to make a snare, how to set it up, and what to do with the rabbit once caught. Thankfully, neither had forced her to kill the hare in question, having done it themselves, though she did have to learn how to skin one and how to properly cook it on a spit. “I think that needs to be added to the list of things I can tell you after all this is over.”

She and John set up the snare and returned to their site to set up a fire and spit before the light faded. Once that was done, they made sure the horses were properly fed and tied up before setting out to see if they had caught any rabbits in their trap.

As they drew closer, a series of high pitched cries and squeals amongst a furious rustling of leaves filled the air. Picking up their pace, the pair arrived to see they had in fact caught a rabbit, though Abigail would hardly call the tiny thing a full grown rabbit.

The captured creature was tiny and skinny, covered in a dappling of light brown fur and punctuated with a furry white cottontail. Its large eyes were wide and frantic, nose twitching violently as he flailed against the string, which had the little thing dangling upside down with barely an inch from the ground. Only one of its feet, which were far disproportionate to the rest of its size, was caught in the snare, making the other one thumping helplessly against the other to try and free itself. The poor thing clearly wasn’t a full grown adult, given stark contrast between its feet and the rest of it. She wanted to cry.

It must have showed in her face because John sighed as he walked over to their bunny-rabbit capture and squatted down beside it to fully inspect it. The bunny-rabbit squealed loudly and gave a violent jerk of its free foot, nearly succeeding in kicking him in the face, which hardly would have done any damage. “This little guy is much too little to eat. We can eat some of what we have and try for fishing in the morning. There’s a small creek not far from here.”

Sniffing quietly, she asked, “How do you know it’s a he?”

“Lets just say I got a good look at him,” he remarked wryly. Undoing the string from the branch, he was quick to grab the hare before it attempted to escape so he could undo the knot from his foot. He set him to the ground, and they both watched as the hare attempted to hop away, favoring its previously trapped foot. He winced sympathetically. “Looks like the little fella hurt himself.”

Knowing what that would mean in the wild, Abigail joined him and squatted down beside the hare. “I think I might something to help with that.” She extended a hand towards the hare, who eyed her warily for the longest time. Hesitantly, he extended his head to give her a good whiff. Taking this as an encouraging sign, she scooped up the tiny hare into her arms, cradling him to her chest. At John’s mildly disapproving look, she assured him, “I need to look him over. If he’s not well by the time we leave in the morning, I’ll release him the moment we arrive at the outskirts of the city. I promise.”

“All right,” he allowed, though really he knew she probably would have kept the hare with them as long as she could anyway. “Just… try not to get too attached to him. He belongs in the woods, you know.”

“Of course,” she remarked as they rose to their feet. She cuddled the hare more securely against her. “Thumper and I are going to get along fine.”

“And she’s already named him,” she heard John murmur, the comment sounding so similarly to Ben it was eerie. Then in a volume she was intended to hear, he added, “Then you have someone to keep you company during the first watch.”
John started a small fire as she tended to the hare’s leg, which wasn’t broken thankfully, only mildly sprained. She gave Thumper a tiny piece of peppermint, the herb itself, so that he could chew on it to ease the pain, unsure of what else she could try on him.

While she and John began to eat some of their smuggled rations, Thumper remained curled up in her lap the entire time. In between bites, she offered him blades of grass, which he munched on happily.

With their hungers momentarily sated, Abigail took up the first night’s watch as the British major prepared himself for sleep after having made her promise to wake him for his turn. She agreed with one hand behind her back, fingers crossed. She had no intention of waking him, at least not until morning. It was only fair since he had let her sleep. How could she not return the favor?

“I wish I could take you back to camp with me,” Abigail murmured to Thumper once she was certain John was asleep. She scratched the hare behind the ears, smiling warmly as his large ears tucked backwards, his eyes shutting contently at her touch. “I’m afraid the others would try to make stew out of you otherwise, so count your many blessings, little one.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys so much for all the love! I seriously appreciate each and every one of you! <3

Hit me up on tumblr @ annawoodhull.tumblr.com if you want to say hi! :)

Outskirts of York City

A few days later brought both Abigail and John towards the edge of York City. Unfortunately, she had already returned little Thumper to his natural habitat before they had set out again for their journey. Before they could head towards the location for their meeting with Arnold, they needed to reach the drop off point. They were supposed to meet a man by the name of Charles Davis, one of Hamilton’s men most likely, though the name felt generic enough that it couldn’t have been his true name.

Arriving at the drop off point within walking distance to the Hudson River on foot, they lingered among the trees, which provided them with enough cover to conceal them. With no sight of the man in sight, the horses were tied securely to a low hanging branch. Given that they had already gone through their meager rations for the journey, the pair split a the remains of a cooked fish John had caught and roasted on a spit earlier that morning, just before the first light of dawn. It wasn’t exactly a three course meal, but under the circumstances, it tasted just as wonderful as one.

With the greyness of early morning fading into midday, the sound of approaching horse hooves caused both Abigail and John to tense, the latter rising into a protective stance, his hand reaching for his weapon. In a matter of moments, the horse and its rider revealed themselves, with the man dismounting carefully and raising his hands to show that he was unarmed.

The man introduced himself as Charles Davis, which eased Abigail’s nerves, though not entirely her wariness of the stranger. She eyed him carefully over John’s shoulder as he assumed the lead and approached him.

They discovered he was the man that Hamilton had arranged for them to meet, though the man obviously different refer to him as Hamilton. When he used the man’s code name, Abigail knew very well that wasn’t Hamilton’s code name from the codebook Ben had taught her from all those years ago, periodically reintroducing their lessons when the appropriate updates were made.

Davis then informed them to stay at a nearby tavern, which wasn’t too far from where they stood, and that he would come find them once he received news of Arnold. He told them that news of John’s escape from the Continental camp had reached York City, and the news and rumors were circulating so wildly it almost sounded like the beginnings of a folk legend.

“So you’re saying that the news has reached Arnold, if he’s even in the city?” Abigail interjected when she could finally get a word in edgewise between the two men.

Davis nodded, his eyes bright with eagerness. “If it hasn’t reached him by now, then by tonight it should. And yes, Arnold still remains in the city.”
John and Abigail shared a brief look, doing their best not to allow their relief to show in front of this man. Arnold was still within their grasp. Hopefully the discovery of this news would delay him long enough for John’s letter to reach him.

As if reading her thoughts, their new friend remarked, after doing another careful survey of their surroundings, “I help distribute the post in the city, separating official business from personal letters, you know the sort. When I found an unaddressed letter with the exception of the recipient’s name, I snuck the letter to one of the little street urchins to make sure it got where it needed to go. It should be on his desk by now.” He huffed indignantly. “It should better be. I paid the little bugger enough for it.”

John’s gaze sharpened. “And when was this?”

“And when was this?”

Davis assured them he would find them at the tavern with any news of Arnold and his response to John’s letter, if there was one. Nevertheless, he promised to continue his visits with them at the tavern until he received word of the man’s response. He gave them a pouch filled with clinking coins, courtesy of Hamilton, to help cover their expenses for their stay at the tavern.

Once their meeting concluded, the group went on their separate ways, with Davis returning to the city while she and John followed his directions towards the tavern. Just the thought of a room with a proper bed was nearly enough to make her weep with joy, that and food that didn’t need to be rationed or caught, cleaned, and cooked by their own hands. Oh God, and a bath if they could spare it. That would be heavenly. But truly, if the tavern offered them shelter and food for their horses, that was more than enough.

“Do you think anyone will recognize you?” Abigail asked an hour later when the tavern came into view.

John rubbed at his jaw, which had grown significantly scruffier over the days of travel. She wasn’t accustomed to seeing him so unkempt, having only ever been around him clean-shaven. Dark growing stubble lined his jaw and a little down his throat. As if picking up on her thoughts, he remarked, “I don’t imagine so. Under different circumstances, I would be in uniform and less…”

“Scruffy?” she supplied helpfully, smiling cheekily when he looked at her with dismay.

“Did you just call me ‘scruffy’?” he demanded, eyebrows raised.

The blonde nodded, still smiling. “Yes, I did, but I suppose that’s too strong a word since it’s mostly stubble.” Her expression turned thoughtful. “No, that’s not quite right. It’s nearly too long to be stubble.” She examined him more closely as their mounts continued straight ahead, squinting for show. “What do you men call your facial hair in the in between stage?”

John chuckled quietly. “Are you always this pestering with Major Tallmadge?”

Yes.

And it was quite fun, too, even years later. “Naturally, but since he’s not here, I’ll settle for pestering you. You’ll do just fine.”

Fortunately for them, no one official currently resided at the tavern by the time they dismounted. Grabbing their few possessions from their saddles, they passed along their mounts to a young stable hand before heading inside.

The only other tavern Abigail had set foot in was Selah’s place in Setauket, so she hadn’t been certain what to expect. Surprisingly, it was relatively quiet. Several tables remained empty with the
occasional patron occupying a seat nursing a pint of ale or some sort of alcohol. A barmaid was wiping down one of the tables when they stepped inside and drew herself upright when she locked eyes on John, her face growing crimson in feminine admiration. Abigail bit her lip to stifle an amused snort.

A few moments later the tavern owner approached them at the desk to attend to them. After a brief considering look in her direction, John requested two rooms, though admitting he wasn’t certain how long they would stay. He must have noted the look of disapproval on the man’s face as her took in her appearance, evidently figuring out she was a woman – she neglected to put on her binding that morning and had removed her coat the moment they set foot in the warmly kept tavern.

The tavern keep accepted the money, informed them dinner would be served in an hour, before gesturing for the barmaid to show them to their rooms. Abigail could feel the older man’s disgruntled gaze burning through her shirt all the way up the steps.

“Do you think it’s wise to get two rooms?” Abigail asked once they were only. Their rooms were adjoining at least, but she could only imagine how much that would cost, not knowing just how much Hamilton had left them with.

“No one knows who we are, so it’s perfectly safe,” he assured her. Then he frowned. “Besides, the tavern keep didn’t appear to fond of the idea of us sharing a room. The way he was looking at you… no. Better to protect your honor than subject yourself to that.”

Abigail smiled amusedly. Honestly, she didn’t give a damn about her honor or reputation for that matter. Circumstances didn’t allow it, although she appreciated his intentions.

With everything settled, Abigail settled into a lovely cushioned chair while John chose to sit at the writing desk. Her true heart’s desire was to sit on the bed, but she knew if she did, she would curl up and sleep while beyond dinner.

Discussion of the ongoing mission could no longer be postponed. She finally learned of their meeting location John had indicated in the letter, Richmond Hill, more specifically Mortier House – the site that had also been at one time Washington’s headquarters in New York at before the British had forced the Continentals to retreat April 12, 1776.

That particular detail would certainly lure out Arnold, of that Abigail was certain, though she couldn’t help but inquire how Washington had taken the suggestion. He surprised her by admitting the idea belonged to the Grey Fox himself.

“We should come up with a signal,” John remarked, “for whenever you spot Major Tallmadge’s signal. That way we’ll be better prepared to handle Arnold until they make their entrance.”

“Actually, I have been thinking of one,” she mused, her arms resting comfortably on the arms of the chair. “I’ll go to the window, see the signal, and say something about an oncoming storm. Or do you think that’s a little too on the nose?”

He grinned with approval. “Perhaps but not if we intend to ply him with liquor, per your suggestion.”

After going over a few more details, the British major slipped away to his own room when a knock came on her door. It was a servant girl, a Scottish one at that judging by the accent, asking if she required anything for her stay, like a bath. Abigail jumped at the chance even though she was bone tired, and the bed was practically whispering her name. The girl offered to wash her garments, but she politely declined since these were the only clothes she had with her.
A relatively small tub was already situated in the room. After a few trips of carrying buckets of water, the servant girl filled the tub with warm water. Some soap, washcloth, and towel were set on the desk.

Before she left, the servant girl placed carefully folded clothes right next to them, men’s clothes as it turned out. She explained they belonged to her younger brother, who was growing like a weed, so he would hardly miss them. Abigail smiled gratefully and promised herself to make sure she left the girl a very generous tip from the coin purse for her kindness.

Stripping off her grimy clothes, the blonde grabbed the soap, washcloth, and towel. She pulled up a chair and set them on it close to the tub before finally, slowly submerging herself into the water. Sighing contently, she settled into the tub. It was a tight fit. She had to draw her knees partially towards her chest. Sure, there were no perfumes, bath salts, or other floral scents as she had luxuriated in the last time she was in York City, but she was determined to savor every moment of a warm bath.

The last time she had the luxury of a nice, long soak had been during her time in York City, a fact that had multiple ironies in that many of the same players during her time then were involved now. Over a year now or had it been two? It was difficult keeping track of time lately.

Abigail lathered her limbs with the soap and scrubbed at her skin until it was nice and rosy, determined to get as much dirt and grim from her nails, skin, and every inch of her as she possibly could. Once satisfied, she then rubbed the soap in her hands and scrubbed ran them through her hair, scrubbing and lathering until it was clean. Giving into the childish whim, she slowly submerged herself under the water, careful not to spill any onto the floor. Not having to worry about being surrounded by men while bathing, let alone having to resort to wash with a bowl of water and washcloth to avoid suspicion was absolutely divine.

Eventually, Abigail did manage to draw herself out of the bath but only once the water cooled. Grabbing the towel, she rubbed herself dry and towel dried her hair with a half-minded efficiency, her gaze straying to the bed with every passing glance. She dressed herself in her new clothes, retrieving her belt from her own pile to help keep the trousers at her waist. Once again, she decided to forgo her binds and left them in her bag along with her medical supplies.

Sufficiently dressed, she lowered herself onto the bed to slip on her socks, only to find herself horizontal, curling up on top the quilted covers, her eyelids drooping shut. The only thing better than this would have been a certain rebel major in the bed with her, to snuggle up against it, among other things.

She couldn’t have had her eyes closed for more than five minutes when she heard a gentle knock on her door, accompanied by the familiar sound of the servant girl’s sweet voice, “Supper’s being served downstairs, miss.”

With incredible reluctance, Abigail pushed herself into a sitting position, despite the facts that her limbs were deadened with unwillingness to move, shoved her feet into her boots, and poked her head into John’s room to see if he had received word for dinner. Whatever it was had to beat what they’ve already had on their journey.

As they made their way downstairs, Abigail’s stomach definitely took notice of the wonderful smells that reached her nose. Her heart, on the other hand, remained upstairs in bed.

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Supper had seemed more like a feast, at least in her eyes. Herb roasted chicken paired with boiled
parsnips and carrots, and sweet brown bread adorned their dinner plates. The tantalizing aromas made her mouth water, her hunger replacing all desire for sleep in that moment. When the barmaid asked if they would like some ale, both she and John declined, choosing water instead. Neither of them knew just when they would need to leave, so taking a step back from alcohol of any kind worked best in their favor.

They had just finished off their plates and were sipping their second round of water when the tavern door opened to lure in a steady stream of people. Among them was Charles Davis, who looked around the room unobtrusively until his gaze fell upon them.

In less than half a dozen steps, he was at their table, pulling out a chair without an invitation. Excitement underlined his posture even though he exuded an air of nonchalance for those around him. Picking up on this, John leaned forward in his seat, eyebrows raising expectantly.

He didn’t have to do more than that before Davis murmured, “As I’ve said before, news of the escape has been all around the city. That’s all anyone has ever been able to talk about that – well, that and the current state of affairs of the British faring in the war…” He trailed off at John’s narrowed look before shaking his head to continue. “Anyway, word has definitely reached Arnold’s ears. He’s delayed his deployment to Virginia until further information can be gathered.”

That was good news. Excellent even. At least they knew now Arnold remained in the city.

John asked quietly, “Has he received the letter?” He had asked the question just as a group of men cheered noisily from a few tables beside them, but the other man had managed to make out what he asked.

“No only that. He’s written a response to your letter,” Davis murmured, eyes dancing with delight. “It took me a few hours, but it found it’s way into my network.” He glanced towards Abigail and must have read the question in her face. “It’s for the best you don’t ask how it operates.” Indignance swelled inside her chest at the implication that a woman couldn’t possibly understand but then quickly realized that they were in the presence of a British officer. It didn’t matter that he was helping them and that he was her friend. In Davis’s eyes, all redcoats were the same. She could hardly fault him for erring on the side of caution.

He slipped a hand inside his coat and covertly slipped the letter towards her, since he had chosen a seat right next to her, which made the move much less apparent. Abigail quickly accepted the letter and tucked it inside her coat pocket to be examined later. “In it, he says he wishes to meet you and confirms the location. And he wants to do it tonight.”

“Tonight?” she echoed, a little shocked.

Davis nodded and looked towards John. “Aye, tonight. Around midnight. That’s the only time he can manage to get away undetected, or so he claims anyway.”

Midnight. That was hours away from now. At least they had a little time to prepare. Mortimer House wasn’t far from the tavern, of that much Davis assured them, which lessened their concerns about being present for Arnold’s arrival. What concerned Abigail most, however, was the swiftness of events, so swift in fact she worried if Ben and his men would arrive in time to see their plan to fruition. They had received no word from Ben or anyone else as per agreement, but even if they had, this situation easily could have happened as well and then what?

Abigail looked from Davis to John, who met her gaze steadily. The time had come, far more quickly than they had anticipated, but the sooner Arnold was dealt with, the better.
Chapter End Notes

So originally I was going to have everything go down with Arnold in this chapter, but then I thought... why not split it up? Yeah, I know I suck haha

Again, thank you guys so much for your support! All of your feedback means so much to me *tackle hugs each and every one of you*
This chapter takes place between 4x07 and 4x08

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mortier House
Richmond Hill

An hour before midnight with their final preparations made, Abigail and John saddled their mounts and headed towards Mortier House. It was only a thirty minute ride from the tavern to Richmond Hill, which granted them enough time to prepare for Arnold.

Abigail wasn’t too familiar with the house beyond the information that John had shared with her, that it had once served as Washington’s headquarters until the British forced the Continentals out. She wondered about the house’s current occupants - Would they be present while they were meeting with Arnold? If so, were they sympathetic to the Crown or the Continentals?

When she had brought up her concerns to John about Mortier House’s residences, he had been quick to assure her that the house hadn’t been settled in since the war began, and despite the fact there were talks of some British officer or another taking up residence on the hill, there had yet to be any true takers. No civilians would interrupt them.

The house was surprisingly well-stocked for a supposedly abandoned house. She could only guess that the occasional uninvited guest took up residence in the house, since the several bottles of alcohol ranging from wines to brandy lined the parlor’s liquor cabinet. Sure, there was little to no food, but at least the wine came in good supply. The better to ply Arnold with certainly.

Finding some candles tucked away in a drawer, Abigail lit only enough so that the parlor remained visible, along with the short corridor which extended towards the kitchen. Upon further inspection, she took notice of the large oak door in the kitchen that led straight outside and made a mental note of it before returning to the parlor to examine the liquor cabinet stock.

“Should we try to fool him into thinking you’re drinking along with him?” Abigail asked, pulling out a bottle of gin. “Serve him a glass of gin while you drink water, or would that be a little too on the nose?”

“Perhaps we’ll go that route after he’s had a few drinks of brandy,” John remarked, coming to her side to view the bottle. He had shaved before they left. Now he resembled the man she used to know, minus the redcoat uniform. “The drunker the man, the easier to fool.”

“But what if the man is already a fool?”

John’s grin sharpened. “Then all the better to fool him.”

With the appropriate preparations in place, the scene was set; all that they needed now was the last lead player.

The sound of an approaching horse drew their attention towards the door. John gestured for her to
remain where she was and set off towards the door. Conducting a quick survey of the room, Abigail made sure everything was secure, every window covered, with the exception of the small, single paneled window tucked away in a small alcove. It was the only way she could look for Ben’s signal. With strategic seating arrangements, Arnold would be none the wiser.

John disappeared into the foyer. A few moments later came a brief knock. Abigail held her breath as the door was opened. She could hear quiet murmuring from the foyer but was too far away to pick up on anything specific. On the outside, she might have appeared calm, but inwardly, her heart was pounding like a warm drum. She hadn’t thought to ask Abigail, Anna’s and now John’s former servant, what excuse she had given Arnold for her abrupt departure. She hadn’t even considered it to be an issue until that very moment.

When the two men finally entered the parlor, it took everything inside the blonde not to recoil. Mentally, she had prepared herself to come face-to-face with the turncoat, but what she hadn’t anticipated her body’s physical reaction of revulsion to this man. Tall, broad, physically dominant as ever, Benedict Arnold sucked the air out the room wherever he waltzed into. Tonight was no exception.

Arnold eyed her with some skepticism, but after a passing glance towards John, the feeling faded from his gaze.

“Elizabeth,” he acknowledged her with a brief nod. “I wasn’t expecting you this evening, especially from your abrupt departure last year.” His gaze briefly skimmed her appearance nonchalantly, but it made her want to cover herself despite the fact she was dressed head to toe - in men’s garments but still. “I’ve often wondered about you, but given what I’ve just learned, you mustn’t have suffered any terrible hardships.”

Abigail knew very well what he was alluding to. She recalled Ben rather unhappily divulging to her that her cover of being John’s lover to help ease Arnold’s suspicions. At the same time, however, his very words triggered the spark of a potentially volatile fire in her. She hadn’t suffered any hardships? Insolent fucker.

She mentally counted to herself, forcing herself to remain calm, civil. She forced a smile and remarked, “No, nothing quite so terrible.” Noting slight bulge beneath Arnold’s coat, she thought quickly on her feet. “Well, gentlemen, I believe it would do us a world of good if everyone unarmed themselves and placed their weapons on the writing desk.” As a sign of good faith, she slipped out her father’s revolver from underneath her coat and set it down carefully onto the desk near the unlit fireplace.

Arnold’s expression colored with surprise. As if sensing what his next words would be, John quickly intervened. “I suppose we should do as the lady says,” he remarked calmly. Then a wry smile briefly touched his lips. “She has remarkable aim.”

Abigail smiled demurely, almost daring Arnold if he would fancy a demonstration, but one quick look from John, she allowed the thought to disappear. When all weapons were placed on the writing desk, John gestured for them to retire to the seating area, with Arnold selecting the armchair facing the kitchen while John seated himself on the small settee.

“You must excuse my behavior at the door,” Arnold remarked once comfortably seated. “I could hardly believe it when the news of your escape reached my ears. Of course, I thought it only resorted to gossip. One mustn’t put too much stock in hearsay. Even when your letter reached my desk, I wouldn’t dare believe it, hence the brevity of my reply. Until the moment you opened the door, I suspected a trap.”

Arnold nodded gratefully, but his posture remained stiff, tense. Abigail could imagine why. What she believed earned top billing was the fact Arnold was married to the one woman John Andre couldn’t live without.

Catching her movement out of the corner of his eye, John reached for her hand and drew her closer to where he sat. “Elizabeth,” he murmured affectionately, “please be a dear and retrieve that bottle of brandy from the cupboard. If our friend has no objections.”

Arnold didn’t voice any, settling for merely observing the two. His scrutiny was so unsettling Abigail felt her skin crawl. As if sensing her unease, John turned over her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm. She felt her face warm and immediately set off for the bottle of brandy and some glasses.

“So it is true then,” she overheard Arnold remark as she searched for the glasses, having procured the bottle with relative ease. “You’ve found love at long last. I’m pleased for you.” She was making her way back towards them when he headed, “Peggy will be pleased for your happiness as well, since she has always been fond of you.”

Abigail set the glasses on the elongated table behind the settee and immediately placed a restraining hand on John’s shoulder, squeezing in reminder though she used the gesture as a cover for affection. “I’ve found the brandy,” she intercepted, eager to diffuse the tension. “I nearly confused it with the whiskey. They look so similar. Silly me.”

The remark was ridiculous, but she counted on Arnold’s dismissal of women to overlook it. Any Irish person worth their salt knew their liquor well. The drunk Irishman wasn’t an old adage for no reason.

Smiling indulgently, John gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. He released her to pour and distribute the brandy. “That’s all right, darling. I wouldn’t have minded the whiskey if you had brought it. I took a look at the label, and it appears to have been aged for quite some time. The stronger the whiskey, the better in my opinion. Most days, I prefer it, though I know that not many men possess the constitution to handle its contents.”

Abigail suppressed a smile. Now if that wasn’t an apparent challenge.

Arnold downed his glass of brandy, which she had been almost overly generous in pouring, and placed the glass on the table between them. Without as much wiping the liquor from his lips, he suggested, “Why don’t you bring over that whiskey?”

The blonde’s eyebrows raised in feigned concern. “Are you sure? Just one whiff of it nearly knocked me over.”

The other man’s smile turned patronizing, yet tight lipped. “I’m quite sure. Major Andre has sparked my interest by all this whiskey talk. I have to see if bears any merit.”

*Your funeral, asshole*, she thought brightly, though she was quick to conceal her satisfaction by returning to the cupboard. Come to think of it, those words held more meaning than the one, if everything came together as it should.

She was half tempted to make Arnold’s cocktail a deadly one but kept reminding herself that Washington wanted the man brought back alive. Resigned to that reminder, she stood on her toes to reach for the whiskey bottle and returned to the seating area to pour Arnold a glass, pouring what was a socially acceptable amount of whiskey into his glass.
When he voiced his indignation that was not enough, she poured even more, so much so the glass nearly overflowed. She took in his expression, knowing very good and well he couldn’t back out now, not if he wanted to save face. The turncoat took his first sip with a hesitant wince but stubbornly finished off half his glass. His cheeks were already rosy from his first glass. John had yet to touch his own brandy, though Arnold hardly noticed.

Abigail didn’t pay too much attention to what they men talked about, her growing concern for Ben prominently occupying the forefront of her mind. She should have been keeping abreast of their conversation, but she was torn between keeping vigil towards the one window that remained uncurtained.

In the meantime, she continued to ply Arnold with drink. To be perfectly honest, she didn’t have to try very hard. Once he finished off his glass, he demanded another, which she happily accommodated. As time passed, he had nearly finished half the bottle of whiskey when he abruptly switched back to brandy, deciding her needed to cut back. She suspected it was a little too late for that. Just by looking at him, one wouldn’t be able to tell apart from the flushness in his cheeks, but as soon as he opened his mouth, it was apparent from the slurring of his speech.

John had only finished his first glass of brandy when she went to pour him another, only for show of course. She poured him enough to barely fill the bottom, stopping at his imperceptible nod, and passed it to him before returning to her post at the window.

The quiet murmuring of conversation behind her nearly lulled her into sleep, which had nothing to do with a drink considering she had yet to consume a drop of it. She gazed out into the night, wishing she could be standing out there now, with the crisp night wind nipping at her skin. Folding her arms across her chest, she gave into the urge, closing her eyes for the moment and just let herself be, recalling a summer night she had spent counting stars with her father and tracing out drawings with their pointed fingers in the night sky.

When Abigail opened her eyes again, she caught a flicker of light in the distance. Squinting, she leaned forward to peer out the window, all the while trying not to look too suspicious. Had she just been imagining things, or did she just see something? She was reluctant to chalk it up to wishful thinking, instead stubbornly fixating her gaze on the dark landscape.

No sooner had she made her decision there came another flicker, only this time it lasted far longer than the first had. Her heart skipped a beat as the light lingered before going out. It was much closer than it had been before.

When she saw it again, Abigail reached for the curtain and drew it shut before turning back to the two men, determined to not show any of the excitement on her face.

The moment a brief lull in conversation arrived, she remarked carefully, “There was talk of weather at the tavern earlier.” Glancing towards the writing desk where the weapons were, she began to slowly inch towards them, lest things became wary.

John raised his eyebrows, conveying mild interest. “Was there?”

She hummed affirmatively. “Aye. There was. Something about an oncoming storm.”

Arnold was a little too preoccupied in his cups to pay too much attention to their conversation. Still, John tossed him a brief glance before returning his attention to her. “Was there any mention of when the storm will arrive?”

“Sometime within the late hours of the evening, which given the time,” she made a show of glancing
over at the wall clock, “could be any moment now.”

Like the trained spy that he was, John gave no indication of the news. Instead, he remarked, “It’s a good thing we led the horses to the stables then.”

She Arnold demanded that she bring over the bottle of brandy. Grabbing the bottle, she approached him and began to pour him a glass when his hand snaked around her wrist. Bewildered, she looked down at him and noted the drunk yet unreadable expression on his face.

When he had yet to release her, John’s voice was thinly veiled steel. “Arnold, I would very much appreciate it if you released your hold on Elizabeth.”

Before Arnold could formulate a response, the front door flew open with such force it slammed into the adjacent wall. Arnold’s head jerked towards the sound while John rose to his feet abruptly yet remained where he was.

Removing his cap, Benjamin Tallmadge walked into the foyer and withdrew his pistol, aiming it squarely at Arnold. “Well, now. While on your trial, Major Andre, I expected many things. What I hadn’t anticipated was recapturing two for the price of one.”

He hadn’t spared her a glance, but she knew he was all too well aware of her presence.

With his experience on the stage, John played his part to a perfect T. “What would you have me do, sir? Remain stowed away in your cell while you fight against my brothers?”

Ben scoffed, briefly turning his aim onto him. “I would be very careful if I were you, major, seeing as how I’m the only one holding a weapon.” His gaze locked with hers for a moment in askance, and when she confirmed his observation with a small nod, he refocused his attention on Arnold, who was in the process of stumbling to his feet. “Remain where you are, Arnold, or I’ll shoot you where you sit.”

But Arnold didn’t listen, too intoxicated to heed his warning. “What is this?” he demanded, his words slurred but voice filled with mounting anger. “How dare you attempt to accost me?”

Ben refused to cow to the drunken fool, instead keeping his pistol aimed at him with the keenness of a sharp eyed hawk. “Remain where you are, sir, and no one has to be hurt. I’m under orders to bring you in, alive, so your cooperation would be appreciated.”

Appreciated but not expected was the implication, and they all heard it. She wasn’t sure if Arnold had, who laughed indignantly. “You think you can take me back alive, don’t you? All on your own? You’re nothing but a boy, playing at a man’s game.”

Ben’s jaw ticked, though no other visible evidence of his irritation from the remark showed in his expression. “Just cooperate and do as your told, Arnold. You have lost this one, and you know it.”

John raised his hands slowly in surrender. “He’s right, Benedict. There’s no need for any trouble, least of all in front of a lady.”

All of a sudden everything happened at once. As if reminded of her presence, Arnold whipped around with a swiftness she never would have thought capable given his state and hauled her to him. Her back slammed against his chest, and his arm snaked around her throat, the crease of his elbow pressing dangerously tight against her larynx. Abigail wheezed.

Vaguely, Abigail was aware of the sound of a pistol being cocked among some very angry shouts.
“Arnold, release her,” John insisted, extending a warning hand towards him while the other extended towards Ben, who looked more than ready in that moment to shoot him dead between the eyes. “She has no part in this.”

Arnold growled. “Not until the boy lowers the weapon.”

Ben’s voice dripped with venom. “Let the woman go, Arnold, or so help me…”

“Lower the weapon, Tallmadge,” Arnold snarled, “or so help me I’ll break her goddamned neck.”

The pressure against her neck increased significantly to the point she choked on a gasp. He continued to press even more, hauling her closer to him, which caused her head to slam back against his collarbone. Dark spots danced along the edges of her vision.

“Don’t,” she croaked before he squeezed her neck again, cutting off anything else she was going to say next.

She watched helplessly as Ben lowered the pistol, not once removing his gaze from them.

Arnold eased a little on the pressure of his chokehold but barely. Seeing as he gained the upper hand, he began to slowly walk backwards, dragging Abigail along with him.

“Arnold, release her. Now,” John insisted, only his attempt at playing the mediator began to expire.

“I don’t think so,” Arnold slurred, his beady eyes not once leaving from the young major. “No, I won’t release her until the boy drops his weapon and leaves the way he came.”

He was leading them backwards towards the kitchen, Abigail noted with growing dismay. Towards the closest unmanned exit. How far did he plan on taking her? It couldn’t be far, not in the condition he was in, though she really hadn’t expected him to be lively enough to make a grab for her either.

Stopping just short of the corridor that would lead them out, Arnold held on tight to the one advantage he had left. “I’m afraid I must insist upon this, major. I would hate to have any arm come to Ms. Williams due to your lack of cooperation.”

Swallowing hard, Ben glared at the man with such an intense hatred equal to the burning of a thousand suns. She knew in her heart he didn’t want to leave her, not when she was being held captive by a drunken lunatic, but Arnold had given him no other alternative. Raising his hands as a sign of good faith, he cast aside his weapon and took a step back, then another until he was finally at the door, not once breaking eye contact with her until the closing door did the job for them.

The silence in the room stretched on for what felt like hours, with Abigail still in Arnold’s grasp. John had continued to pursue them, maintaining a distance of only a few feet, but not close enough that would encourage the turncoat to do anything foolish. Only the sound of retreating hoof steps allowed him to relax.

Once he convinced he was gone, Arnold unceremoniously shoved a breathless Abigail into John’s arms before turning on his foot and making a run for it, heading straight towards the kitchen and out the back door.

Neither John nor Abigail dared to pursue him.

Touching her face carefully, he stepped back and asked, “Are you all right?”

Sucking in a lungful of air, it took her a moment to respond, “I can breathe at least, but yes, I’m
Loud shouts and cries drew their attention towards the kitchen. Quickly, the pair rushed into the kitchen and opened the backdoor, only to be greeted with several lit torches. Arnold fought valiantly against his many assailants, but even with his size, he was outnumbered by Ben’s men, who solely held the upper hand for the very fact they were all stone cold sober.

Abigail watched in morbid fascination how Arnold was ultimately wrestled to the ground and forced onto his knees, cursing up a wild storm, none of which she hadn’t heard before. Ben was the one who bound his hands in front of him but ordered for his men to keep a sharp eye on him. When asked what to do about John, he told him to bind his hands and hold him as well, but when the ordered soldier approached, he laid a hand on his shoulder and told him to only tie it loosely. The young soldier nodded and turned to John, who held out his hands in resignation.

Ben inclined his towards to house the moment their eyes locked, and Abigail followed him without question.

The moment they were alone the major grabbed her waist and pulled her into a deep, long kiss, which she returned wholeheartedly.

After catching their breath, he pulled back to run worried assessing hands over her face. “Did that bastard hurt you?” he demanded quietly, his eyes glittering with no small hint of anger.

Abigail had made a vow to herself to never keep the truth from Ben, which had usually seemed to lead her into a world of trouble, so she couldn’t turn back on it now. “A little. I’m almost positive there’ll be some bruising in the morning.”

He muttered a curse and pressed a protective kiss to the crown of her head. “I swear, he’ll pay for this, love.”

“He’ll pay for a lot more than that,” Abigail remarked, reaching up to cup his face tenderly. Her soft smile blossomed with pride. “You finally got him, Ben. You did it.”

His grin matched hers, even as he gently corrected her, “We did it.” He kissed her again, which sent a surge of warmth straight down to her toes.

A few minutes later, Abigail slipped back into her bindings to join the men outside, borrowing Ben’s cap to help conceal her features. It was decided that Arnold would make the journey back to New Windsor on foot with the end of the rope held by one of the soldiers on horseback. Since John had cooperated, Ben reasoned, he would be afforded the courtesy of following on horseback, though under his direct supervision.

He promised Arnold should he attempt to flee he would not hesitate to shoot him, having retrieved his officer’s pistol from the house. Not to shoot with the intend to kill but only as a deterrent from further attempts of escape.

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The group traveled well into the night on the road back to New Windsor. Come dawn, they stopped briefly to give their horses a rest and a chance for a quick breakfast, barring Arnold naturally.

Seeing this as an opportunity, Arnold did in fact attempt to flee, managing to slip his hands loose from his binds and making a mad dash in the direction which they had just traveled from. He didn’t make it far before Ben’s flying bullet struck him in the thigh, the very thigh that Arnold had injured during the Battle of Saratoga, one that had only just recently healed.
There was a sense of poetic justice in that, Abigail thought, grimly satisfied.

Chapter End Notes

And so Benedict Arnold is no more. Well, not yet anyway.

Thank you guys so much for all the love!!! Seriously, your feedback inspires me to keep on writing and posting, so thank you!!

Also, yes I know uncurtained is not a word, but I made it one SHHHHHHH
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 4x08. Some of the dialogue is taken directly from the episode so that the plot can keep on flowing, but that's not until the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

New Windsor
Camp Base

Benedict Arnold’s trial didn’t begin until after the first of the new year. General Clinton had given orders for him to ship out with his American Legion to Virginia around late December, but when news of Arnold’s capture had reached the British commander-in-chief, the British were forced to scramble for another course of action. As it would later turn out, they would carry out their plans with another appointed officer, but with the Christmas holidays coming upon them, everything remained at a standstill, and not just for the British troops.

The delay of Arnold’s day of reckoning was not meant as an extension of mercy. Washington had only thought of his men. It was that time of year where spirits were lifted by the promise of Christmas, and for several in camp, this would be yet another Christmas they spent away from their loved ones, their homes. The least he could do was offer a momentary respite from war.

News of Arnold’s capture had rejuvenated camp life. If the executions of leaders of attempted insurrections hadn’t calmed the waters of disenfranchised soldiers, the arrest and confinement of the man who had inspired said insurrections almost collectively squashed any remaining whisperings. The overall mood among the soldiers eased from apprehension to downright giddiness, from what Abigail observed. Many believed Arnold would get what was coming to him. No one dared to make any comment of anything to the contrary, especially not in private.

On January 2, 1781, Arnold was brought before the military tribunal for the start of his trial, which only a few days even with testimony, evidence, and deliberations. The return of the verdict came after one hour of discussion, of which Abigail had to wonder why it had taken that long. He was found guilty on charges of desertion, conspiracy engagement with the enemy, treason, attempted espionage, among other indictments.

It was a chilly grey morning when the disgraced former Continental general was lead up onto the scaffold. Snow had fallen the night before, making the steps and carriage slippery to leather soled boots. Arnold only stumbled once, favoring his freshly wounded leg as he was escorted to the noose, his face as solemn and grey as the morning sky. However, moments later the sun peeked out from behind the clouds, the comparison ended there.

In front of every soldier, officer, camp follower, and under God, an officer read out a list of his crimes before concluding with his sentencing. He then asked him if he had any final words. Pale and drawn, Arnold refused to speak and pressed his lips together in defiance with a slight upward tilt of his chin. Many had thought he would have seized the opportunity to lambast about his woes and injustices, so his silence came as a quiet shock.

Once the noose was secured around his neck and his hands tied, the carriage driver encouraged the
horse into a walk. For a moment, Abigail watched a flash of pure, instinctive fear dawn across Arnold’s face, and he backed up with every inch of the carriage he lost underneath him. No one bothered to stop him, anticipating the inevitable drop.

His neck didn’t snap at the drop unlike so many others. He struggled and gasped for breath, his limbs twitching sporadically while fighting for breath. No one bothered to intervene or even assist him as he writhed and twisted under the rope. The sight was horrific and disturbing. After witnessing less than a minute of this, Abigail discreetly slipped away from the crowd. Despite her intense hatred for the man, she couldn’t stomach watching another execution.

It took ten to fifteen minutes for him to die, which she could only imagine felt like an eternity for those who stayed to bear witness. Arnold deserved what he got, she wholeheartedly believed it. His treachery had threatened to tear the Continentals and the Cause apart. Now closure, or the beginnings of closure, would be achieved.

Around noon, everything seemed to return to normalcy, albeit slowly. Arnold’s body had remained untouched on the noose for the morning, but by now, his remains had been removed from view and disposed of, whatever that meant.

Her next concern pertained to John. Despite whatever deal Washington had made with him, she believed John earned his right to be released, no matter what side he was on. He had held up his part of the agreement, having successfully captured Arnold. She voiced this concern to Ben hours later, and he had reiterated what she had already known, that John had already agreed to Washington’s terms to remain in their custody until the end of the war.

Even with this knowledge, she knew she couldn’t allow herself to stand idly by without exhausting all of her options. She asked him if he could speak with Washington, to ask him to reconsider. Guilt tugged at her heart as she witnessed the conflict in Ben’s eyes. After a moment, he promised her he would try but could make no promises.

Later in the evening, as the soldiers finished their dinner rations, the major found her as she was making her way back to his tent. He told her that he had spoken with Washington just as she had asked. Washington hadn’t changed his mind. Sighing quietly, Abigail accepted this with a small nod, and once they were alone, she allowed herself to be drawn into Ben’s warm, comforting embrace.

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Not long after Arnold’s execution came the news of the British’s raid in Virginia. Having found a replacement for Arnold in his American Legion regiment, Clinton tasked the Virginia raid to a young, ambitious Lieutenant Robert Douglas. Within days’ time, his regiment led a ruthless ambush on Virginia soil, killing and pillaging for the taking. The news reached the New Windsor camp like wildfire, resulting in an immediate meeting between Washington and his higher ranked officers. His generals proposed a counterattack against Douglas in the South. Washington agreed to send Marquis de Lafayette to meet with his men head on but ultimately refused to abandon York City.

Abigail herself wasn’t all that concerned with military stratagems where the Virginia raid was concerned. The very fact that Abe was among those men in Virginia troubled her greatly. Initially, Abe had enlisted into the British ranks in order to infiltrate Arnold’s regiment, hoping to ultimately lead to his capture. Seeing as they had succeeded in their mission, albeit from another methodology, there was no reason that he should remain in their ranks, a sentiment both she and Anna strongly agreed upon.

It was this desire that prompted Anna to meet with Ben and demand that he have Abe rescued from Virginia at once. Naturally, Abigail had gone with her to extend her support - not that she believed
Ben would argue against it. In fact, he agreed with them wholeheartedly. Abe needed to removed and brought back to camp.

Anna had been practically a nervous wreck when she had first set foot inside the barn, not that the blonde could blame her. Seeing her distress, Ben stepped forward and clasped the brunette’s trembling hands and squeezed them briefly. “Abe will be returned safely. I’ll see to it personally,” he promised her.

As much as she admired his dedication to their friend, she couldn’t help but wonder about the possible ramifications for him. If there was one thing to be known about Benjamin Tallmadge, it was his fierce loyalty to his friends and family, no matter what it cost him. Promises meant a great deal to him, and if he were forced to break his word, it was due to circumstances beyond his control, not that it would stop him from feeling regret.

Still, she had to know. “Do you think Washington will approve this?”

Without hesitation, he shook his head. “Most likely not, which is why I’m going to resign as head of intelligence.” Turning his attention back to Anna, he ordered her to see to that she learned all that she could about Mrs. Bates before he left.

While Anna returned to the trading post, Abigail had no qualms over following Ben wherever he was going, even if she had to jog to cover the distance to keep up with him. Just because he left didn’t mean she was finished with the conversation.

“I’m going with you,” she announced as soon as caught up with him. “And you can’t stop me.”

Ben shook his head firmly while seemingly struggling with the urge to sigh. For what felt like the hundredth time since she enlisted, he was going to tell her no, she already knew that. Naturally, as always, she was going to ignore him. That was just the nature of their relationship.

She had a feeling he was thinking along the same lines even as he responded, “No, absolutely not. It’s too dangerous.”


“Ab –” Ben started to say but quickly cut himself off when he realized where they were. With a glance at their surroundings, he muttered something under his breath before grasping her by the elbow and steering her towards his tent, not caring whether or not they were being observed.

Once alone, the argument continued. To be perfectly honest, however, his attempts were seemingly half-hearted at best, at least from what she observed. She could see for herself that she was wearing him down and in record time no less. She was thoroughly versed in these arguments by now, having grown too used to them. Judging by his increasingly weary expression, he had as well.

Ultimately, he knew that she was going to do what she wanted to do whether he liked it or not, whether he ordered her or not. After a few more minutes of her pushing the issue, he finally agreed, though it was evident there was something else he wished to say.

Abigail waited patiently for him to gather his thoughts, not entirely certain of what he would say.

He tightened his hands into fists then released them, unease and worry clearly etched into his handsome features. “It seems that every time my back is turned…” he began then paused briefly. Shaking his head in mild agitation, he continued, “Whenever my attention is elsewhere, you manage to find yourself in a world of trouble. Either you disappear, or get hurt, or get captured, or some
combination.” He laughed quietly, bitterly before bringing his hands to press briefly against his eyes. “I… can’t bloody well stand it. But I really should be used to this by now, shouldn’t I?”

Her heart clenched inside her chest, both at the tired, worried look of him and his words. She realized then that he was starting to get used to being in danger. The more often she stumbled back with a new injury, the alarm had slowly transitioned into resignation over time, and knowing that fact, he must have hated the feeling. There wasn’t another moment in her entire life where she could remember ever feeling so small.

Instead, she chose to focus on the here and now. She didn’t have a choice, neither of them did, not if they wanted to save Abe. Without even checking to see if the tent flap was shut, she closed the distance between them save a couple of inches and touched his face, gently coaxing him to meet her gaze.

Abigail murmured, “When are you going to get it, Benjamin? We’re better together than apart.” Her other arm slipped over his shoulder and around the back of his neck, her other hand soon following suit. She smiled then. “I believe those were your words after all. Or am I mistaken?”

Ben chuckled lately despite himself. Instinctively, his hands reached out to settle on her waist, drawing her closer until those few inches of space disappeared. “Why must you use my own words against me, hm?”

Smiling, Abigail teased with him a press of her lips to his. “All’s fair in love and war, my dear.”

---

The moment he found the strength to part from Abigail’s tempting mouth, Ben sent word to Hamilton in request for an important meeting. The two men met in the main house where he awaited the Colonel. All of his files, notebooks, and other important documents pertaining to Culper, along with the codebook for particularly sensitive correspondence, were all handed over to him the moment he made his intentions of resignation as head of intelligence clear. He intended to recommend Hamilton to take up the position, and he shared this with him.

Hamilton accepted without a moment’s hesitation. The major knew Hamilton was an excellent candidate for the job, but he couldn’t help but wonder about the man’s ambition.

Before he could entertain this line of thought, there was a knock on the door, prompting both himself and Hamilton to look up to see Caleb Brewster standing before them. This wasn’t the lost, broken version of the man who had indulged in almost daily drunken benders, but he appeared more subdued than his usual jovial self.

“Colonel Hamilton,” Caleb nodded in acknowledgement, then to Ben. He cleared his throat. “Major Tallmadge.” He pulled out a sheet of parchment from his coat and approached the table. “The time has come for me to resign my commission.”

While the colonel remained silent, all Ben could do was stare, which the whaler returned levelly. He broke eye contact to glance at the parchment, and sure enough, there it was in writing.

“Colonel Hamilton,” Caleb nodded in acknowledgement, then to Ben. He cleared his throat. “Major Tallmadge.” He pulled out a sheet of parchment from his coat and approached the table. “The time has come for me to resign my commission.”

While the colonel remained silent, all Ben could do was stare, which the whaler returned levelly. He broke eye contact to glance at the parchment, and sure enough, there it was in writing.

Accepting the document, he swallowed back his concern, remarking, “I, uh… I understand.” He looked up again and smiled at his friend, which felt more than a bit forced but his next words were utterly sincere. “Thank you for your service, Lieutenant Brewster.”

The whaler returned his smile and nodded in kind when Hamilton extended his own thanks. Before he exited the room, Ben asked him what about his future plans.
Caleb smiled wryly. “Actually, I was thinking of heading south. See if I can’t find a friend of mine down there. He’s a farmer, used to be a lawyer in fact though not really sure about that these days, and he’s having trouble in bringing in his crop.” There was a twinkle in his eye, and in that moment, Ben witnessed the spark of life back in him. “Thought I might go lend a hand.”

Ben didn’t need to ask for any clarification. Caleb’s meaning was all too clear.

Abraham Woodhull might live to see another day yet.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooooo I made this episode into two chapters, the second half of which should be posted by sometime next week. If I had kept it together, it would have been one pretty damned long chapter so I thought I should spare you guys from that XD

Once again, thank you guys SO MUCH for all of your love and support. You guys make writing so much fun for me. Seriously, it means so much to me <333
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 4x08

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Windsor
Continental Camp

“May I speak with you for a moment?”

Abigail glanced up from her work of cleaning her musket and saw a nervous looking Anna Strong standing above her.

No. Nervous wasn't quite the right word to describe her nor would anxious; she was something though.

“Of course.” Abigail made room for Anna beside her on the log. She preferred being alone to clean her musket in peace, which often led her towards the edge of camp perimeters and a few steps into the woods, so whatever Anna wished to discuss would remain between them and the woodland creatures.

A few moments after she settled in beside her, Anna announced she had chosen to divorce Selah. It took her a few more minutes before she could speak again, but the blonde waited patiently, understanding far too well the conflict and guilt warring within her. And she suspected she knew the very reason for her decision. A few years back she had made a similar decision of a very similar nature herself.

“It’s the right thing to do. I know that now,” Anna exhaled shakily. “I… I love Selah. Of course I do. But if someone were to ask me if I loved him wholeheartedly… As much as love Selah, he has never had all of my heart.” She folded her hands tightly against the folds her skirts, as if to stop the tremors coursing through them. “No matter how many years have passed, there’s still this piece of my heart that always belonged to Abe, and no matter how much I fight against it or do my best to ignore it, his hold still remains.”

The brunette laughed humorlessly. “When he’d broken off our engagement to honor his brother, I was hurt, angry, devastated… but I understood. He felt responsible for what happened to his brother; he still does. But after everything that’s happened between us and then Mary and Major Hewlett…”

“Everything’s changed,” Abigail finished for her, smiling sympathetically.

As if coming out of a trance, Anna blinked for a moment and then slowly and briefly shared her smile. “It has.”

Carefully, Abigail placed her musket on the ground so that her hands were now empty. She wanted to reach for Anna’s hand but instead flipped her own over so that her palm faced upwards in an unspoken invitation. She knew that sometimes people didn’t always appreciate physical contact for comfort. In the past year, she had found herself as one of those people as she found her way through
her own grief.

Recognizing the gesture, Anna smiled gratefully and slipped her hand into Abigail’s, who covered her hand and pressed it comfortingly. “You don’t have to say anything more than you want to. I hope you know that.”

Anna nodded. “I know, but what I also know is there aren’t many others in camp who can understand what I’m going through.”

The blonde smiled sadly and shifted a little to accommodate Anna as the other woman rested her head on her shoulder. She listened without interruption as Anna shared with her who she had written back to Selah, wording how much he meant to her and how very much she did love him but at the same time knew it was unfair of her to remain married to him when she still had feelings for someone else, feelings that haven’t gone away.

She had sent the letter a little less than a month ago and had just received one in return from Selah, accompanied with a packet of divorce papers. His response wasn’t spiteful or vindictive. If anything, his words felt resigned and regretful though understanding. Apparently, he had known for some time that while she had been fully committed to their marriage that her heart hadn’t entirely been in it. Abigail was surprised when Anna shared with her that Selah had suspected her feelings for Abe remained at the beginning of their engagement but had hoped in time her heart would fully open to him.

Not only had Abigail heard those words before, she had actually lived them herself. Now she couldn’t help but wonder how much Tobias had known about her feelings for Ben when he proposed to her. Had he known when he proposed to her? Had he known when he had first began courting her? If so, why hadn’t he said anything to her? Why would he marry her at all if he knew he came in second to someone else?

In the end, Abigail knew it was futile to plague herself with these questions. She would never receive the answers to them – much of the blame rested on her shoulders, she knew that well – but maybe one day, Anna would pluck up the courage and speak with Selah, once all was said and done.

Perhaps at least one of them could gain some closure from the men who served as placeholders for another.

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It was high noon before the major returned from camp headquarters, steam practically pouring from his ears. The meeting with Washington and his generals had gone over less than well, resulting in the termination of his post as head of intelligence.

Ben had watched as General Anthony Wayne urged Washington to send men to the south to defend Virginia, which was on the verge of collapse, but the commander-in-chief remained resistant, insisting that the battle for New York was imminent and that General Greene could handle himself. When he asked if the same could be said about General Wayne himself, the general pressed lips together, gave him a courteous nod before exiting the room.

Once alone, Washington then inquired of Ben’s plans. The major stepped away from his desk and proposed taking Fort Slongo east of York City, while having compiled information on enemies within the area, but before he had a chance to finish, Washington asked him if he could see that General Wayne’s opinion was wrong. And for the life of him, Ben couldn’t find it in himself to lie to him. He respected Washington far too much for that, even if in that moment he believed his obsession with New York was clouding his judgement.
He voiced this opinion, which had led to a nasty quarrel. He believed that striking in the South would show the British that the Continentals would be everywhere, and that they would not quit no matter the stakes. Washington, on the other hand, insisted that abandoning New York would be as good as admitting defeat and accused Ben of making his decision based in cowardice.

Unable to control his temper, Ben had countered back that his decision was rooted in vanity, just like Arnold. The resulting silence that fell upon the room had been deafening. With a hardened expression, Washington quietly demanded that he amend himself, but Ben refused to recant, which seemed to force the commander-in-chief’s hand in demanding his resignation and handing over the intelligence to Colonel Hamilton, which of course Ben had already done and said as much before storming out.

The major retired to his tent briefly, giving himself the chance to cool off. He had intended on his resignation if Caleb hadn’t already beaten him to it in order to rescue Abe. And what he told Washington he firmly believed, that his fixation with New York would be a detriment to all. He refused to listen to any arguments against it, and Ben wasn’t willing to take any more risks, not for their men, his friends, allies...

Though with his resignation, he would no longer have access to the inner workings of Culper, meaning anything he had been previously privy to he would be no longer.

Which also meant he longer held control over any agent correspondence, which agents went where, or any plans involving any of his agents. His only regret would be he wouldn’t be able to keep tabs on any of those involved. His friends would no longer have his protection.

Nor would Abigail.

At the turn of his thoughts, a sense of unease washed over Ben, right in the gut. He knew the feeling wouldn’t go away until he saw her, preferably within arm’s reach.

It took some time for him to track her down; the blonde rarely ever was where she should be, something that no longer surprised him. During their childhood, Abigail always had the knack for finding herself into places where she shouldn’t, something that had admittedly drawn him towards her in his youth. The tenacity that had driven her could almost be described as admirable if it weren’t for the fact it almost always came to bite them in the arse, and lately that was usually hers.

Finally, he came across her as she stepped out between a group of tents. Her face brightened immediately when she saw him, prompting his heart to skip a beat.

As soon as they were close, he asked if he could speak with her privately. Without hesitation, she agreed, then her expression turned into concern at whatever she saw in his face. He asked to meet him in the barn in five minutes, only barely remembering himself and where they were to keep from pulling her along with him.

Five minutes felt like an eternity until the sound of the barn door opening halted his pacing and drew his attention towards her. Once everything was secure, he told her everything. He was incapable of holding anything back, not with her and especially not in that moment, venting and pacing until it all poured out of like a ruptured dam. She didn’t dear speak a word until he was done.

Only when there was a definitive lull in his speech did Abigail ask, “Are you planning on leaving camp then? You said you were planning on giving up your position to save Abe, but now that Caleb’s already gone…”

She trailed off, as if unsure of what to say next. He could hardly blame her; he wasn’t entirely certain
what else to say either.

“I’m…” Ben sighed, running a hand through his hair agitatedly. “I’m not sure what my next move will be.”

Pushing herself away from the wall she had been leaning against, Abigail approached him slowly, unfolding her arms. “Well, whatever you intend to do, you can count on me coming with you.”

He shook his head, frowning. “Abigail, if I do go to join up with Caleb to get Abe and you come with me, if word got out that you left camp without warning… you would be marked as a deserter.”

Abigail shrugged. “You’ve made that argument before.”

Ben stared at her pointedly. “And if caught, hanged as a deserter.”

“Once again, an argument you’ve already used on me before. It didn’t work then, and it’s not working now,” she remarked, uninterested in his arguments even if they were perfectly valid.

Now she was within half a dozen steps of him, and it took everything inside him to not reach out and pull her into his arms. Before he had the chance to wonder why he even bothered to restrain himself, Abigail closed the distance between them step by step, until she was close enough to slip her hands up along his forearms and higher along his biceps, her touch leaving a trail of gooseflesh through the material of his shirt.

Her arms settled along the back of his neck, her expression mildly exasperated and slightly expectant. “Didn’t you hear a word I said about us being better together than apart? And also were you paying attention to how I reminded you,” she squeezed a shoulder lightly in reminder, “how those words came from you?”

Ben’s hands moved to rest low on her hips, his gaze not once breaking from hers. “Well, pardon me for refusing to allow danger and risk anywhere near the woman I love.”

Abigail stilled. “What?”

His brows furrowed in confusion, not realizing what he had said. “What?”

“You…” her voice trailed off. “What did you just say?”

He frowned. Then he mentally went over the last thing that he said, wondering what on earth would have her looking at him the way she was. Then it struck him like a bolt of lightning – “refusing to allow danger and risk anywhere near the woman I love.” The woman he loved.

He as good as told her he loved her, when she had specifically told him not to, not until she was ready. And he had completely forgotten.

Shite.

“Shite,” Ben murmured, blue eyes growing wide. Her expression was unreadable. His heart suddenly felt caught in his throat. “Christ, I’m sorry, love. I know you asked me not to say it, not until you asked me to, but it just…”

No. No, actually, he wasn’t sorry. Not one bit. Something must have shifted in his expression betraying that sudden line of thought because Abigail’s finger was suddenly pressed against his lips.

“Don’t,” she spoke softly, shaking her head. A few stray golden curls slipped from her hair tie, and
his fingers itched to touch them. “Don’t you dare apologize, not for that. Don’t ever be sorry for that… unless you are.”

“I’m not,” he murmured vehemently against her finger, causing her to smile.

“Good.” Abigail’s gaze flickered down to his mouth where her finger currently residing and watched as she slowly slid her forefinger downwards until it brushed against his lower lip. She bit her own unconsciously, and oh, how he ached.

Expression thoughtful, Abigail continued, “Besides, I don’t believe you actually said the words, those words I forbade you from saying to me back in Morristown, in those words. So in essence, you have no cause to be sorry. I… shouldn’t have said those words to you. I was in a different place then. I didn’t believe I deserved to hear them.” Suddenly, her blue eyes flickered up to meet his. “Forget what I asked. I wish to hear them now.”

Ben’s grip tightened on her hips. Instinctively, he drew her closer until any little distance that remained between them ceased to exist. “Abigail…”

“Please,” she murmured, eyes widening earnestly.

“I love you.” The words suddenly tumbled from his mouth in a rush, the feelings have been locked away and suppressed for so long he couldn’t stop himself. One hand remained at her hips while the other moved to cup her face. “You. I love you. The only person in this entire bloody world who manages to challenge me, push me, and infuriate me to no end, yet I can’t imagine my life without you in it. That’s why I argue whenever you insist on following me down a path where I have no idea of what the risks are. Just the thought of something happening to you… again…”

He shut his eyes then shook his head. No. That would only lead to another argument, and this was important, dammit. No time to get bloody sidetracked. He opened his eyes to find her gazing at him with such tenderness it nearly stole his breath away. He brushed his thumb along her cheek, smiling softly. “There’s never been anyone else for me. It’s always been you, Abigail. Always.”

Her mouth pressed against his with such intensity he stumbled half a step backwards, though his arms snaked around her waist, drawing her closer. He returned her fire and kissed her back fiercely. The rising heat was rapid, but that did not make the buildup any less tantalizing, any less consuming.

Too much heat and emotion radiated between them for far too long, and neither of them were content to leave it only to kissing.

Exhaling harshly, Abigail pulled back only so far to murmur against his mouth, “Did you check and see if the doors were bolted?”

The question caught him off guard, mostly because he was too busy trying to recapture her mouth. A moment later her words registered, and his brows furrowed a bit. “All other points of entry yes, but not the door you stepped through.”

Abigail leaned forward and nipped at his lower lip. He groaned quietly. “I really think we should change that, unless we want an audience. As much as I love you, I’m not willing to share you.”

Just hearing her say those words was enough for his heart to race, but the blatant desire shining in her expression kicked it up a notch. “You love me, huh?” he asked lightly, though his growing grin threatened to split his face in half.

“I do. And you love me,” Abigail affirmed, heart soaring to new heights. Then her eyes glimmered in mischief as she eased her hands between them and undid the loop of his belt.
“Bolt.” She unbuckled the belt without breaking eye contact, her gaze full of promise. “The door.”

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Abigail found the gentle patter of rain against the barn’s roof quite soothing. She wasn’t sure when the rain had started, but she had been a little too preoccupied at the time to pay any attention to any changes in the weather. The only other sounds, apart from the rain, were the occasional faint sounds of camp life beyond the barn walls, but even those sounds were distant.

Cuddled up against Ben, solid and pleasantly warm, she pressed her face against his bare chest, nuzzling against him as his fingers continuously ran through her hair in gentle, relaxing strokes. Their clothes were strewn about the barn in their earlier passion, and she was far too comfortable to even bother raising her head to assess in which direction lay her clothes.

It was a good thing Ben had bolted the doors.

The afterglow, while slowly faded, simmered just below the surface. Still, even then Abigail’s mind wandered, to places there was no point revisiting. Yet she found herself doing so anyway.

“Do you remember how our family dinners?” she found herself asking despite her best efforts.

Humming affirmatively, the major remarked while brushing a stay curl away from her face, “Ah, yes. The Tallmadge-Williams dinners. Those nights were famous.” She felt his grin as he kissed the crown of her head. “Or infamous, depending on who you asked.”

Abigail grinned. “Yes, especially for those who would sneak away from those dinners with a bottle of brandy so that they may entertain themselves.” Oh, she still recalled that night vividly. Certain details never escaped her memory from that evening, but this wasn’t the moment to reconjure them just yet. She had those safely tucked away in her arsenal for future use.

His low chuckles vibrated against her. “I was only following your lead – but I suppose it’s well-established now that I would follow you anywhere.” She smiled to herself and pressed a kiss to his chest for the sentiment.

And then he asked, “Why do you ask?”

She made a noise, not quite a sigh as she shifted against him so that her chin now rested lightly on his chest. So she could get a better look at his expression when she answered him. “It was the evening you were returning from Yale for Christmas break.” It had been his first year she believed, but that detail wasn’t important.

“Before you arrived, I overheard our fathers discussing some things, but it all kept coming back to one topic in particular – the possibility about your intention of proposing to me.” She met his gaze levelly. “I’ve always wondered why you never did, or perhaps I might have been mistaken.”

“No, you weren’t mistaken,” he murmured. He halted his stroking ministrations in favor of pulling her closer to him, which was a near impossibility seeing as how she was all but on top of him already. Neither of them seemed to mind. “I had every intention to. Roughly two months prior, I had returned home to visit my father. And yours. To ask for your hand and to determine the best way to ask you.”

Stunned, Abigail stared at him. Not once had she ever remembered Ben coming home from his studies apart from the holidays. “When was this? I would have remembered seeing you if you’d
visited my father.”

Ben smiled ruefully. “That was a bit of deceit on my part, on all of us involved rather. Do you recall when your father received a summons to see to an injured worker when there was work being done on the addition to the church?”

“Yes, I…” Her eyes widened in realization. “That was a lie?!”

“Consider it more as a ruse, along with plausible deniability.”

Abigail gaped. “I asked my father when he returned how his patient was, and for a moment, he didn’t look as if he had known what I was talking about!”

He fought back a grin, though hints of his amusement lingered in his eyes. “If it makes you feel any better, he did treat someone while he was with us. Dad managed to get a rather nasty splinter caught in his thumb while assisting in the movement of the wood. Yours was able to get the wee bastard out.”

Barely concealing a snort, Abigail shook her head. It was amazing what you learned about people. Soon though they had to return to the topic at hand. “That brings us back to my question. Why didn’t you?”

Ben went quiet before he finally answered, “By the time I returned, there had already been rumors murmuring about. You know how they are. But it wasn’t the fact they were talking but what was being said. You had much better… prospects.”

By prospect, she knew precisely who he meant and appreciated that he didn’t mention Tobias name. The Hawkins had been one of Setauket’s more prominent and wealthiest families within the area. It had been only natural to assume that Tobias would inherit from whatever wealth and business from his parents if anything were to happen to him. “And with someone who could offer you far more than I ever could hope to.

“I can easily attest to the fact that I was young and foolish at the time, but even then the growing unrest with the British… I knew given the first opportunity that I would enlist, to join the fight against the redcoats.” He reached for her hand and placed a gentle kiss to the back of her hand, lingering. “Even if I had plucked up the courage to ask for your hand, I had no desire to make you a widow, if anything were to happen to me. Nor would I have wanted you to get caught up in the fallout should we have lost by now, being the wife of a rebel.”

She wanted to argue back, to insist that none of that would have mattered to her, that she would have happily married him anyway had he asked. Who knew, perhaps she would have followed him into enlistment anyway, and they could have ended up right where they were. But she knew that all the “what ifs” and “could have beens” didn’t amount to anything, not now. Not when they had this, this intimacy she would never trade for anything else in the world.

But her eyes burned stubbornly at the reminder of how much time they had lost. Stubbornly, she fought back, reminding herself again it didn’t matter. What did matter was the time they did have, and the future she hoped to build with him.

After releasing a shaky breath, Abigail murmured, “Say it again.”

“Say what?”

She thought she heard a hint of teasing in his words and narrowed her gaze at him playfully. This time she rolled on top of him, shifting so that they were now face to face. Her lips quirked upwards
when she noticed his eyes dip down briefly before returning to meet her gaze. “You know what.”

Ben didn’t say anything for the longest time before he finally uttered sincerely, “I love you.”

Blinking back happy tears, she leaned forward, murmuring, “Again.”

He kissed her softly. “I love you.” And then without warning, he roll them over so that she was lying underneath him, laughing delightedly at her surprised squeal. “I love you.” He continued to repeat those three words against her skin, taking his time in exploring every inch of her body to both their hearts’ content.

This, she thought wondrously, was all that mattered.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay in posting! Work has been crazy, and I'm getting ready for another round of grad school in August.

Thank you all so much for the support for this fic! It really means so much to me. Your feedback keeps me writing and posting for you guys, so thank you for all of your comments <3
This chapter takes place during 4x09.

As for the different months, I’m rapidly trying to catch up with the show's cannon thanks to my taking some liberties with the show’s plot/historical rewrittenness haha. I apologize for any confusion! I hope you enjoy! :)

Late March 1780
Virginia

It had taken a considerable amount of time, but Caleb finally managed to discover a lead on Abe’s whereabouts. He’d made it to Virginia with relative ease, but tracking down Woodhull and the Arnold’s former American legion had proven far more difficult than anticipated.

He ran into a rebel soldier not long after his arrival and was brought to a barn when he learned they were holding a captured British soldier claiming to be a rebel spy. Unfortunately, it wasn’t Abe they had captured. It was John Champe instead, the soldier Ben had sent to infiltrate Arnold’s regiment in the hopes of contacting Abe.

Once alone, the whaler asked Champe about Abe’s whereabouts. Champe then told him that the original plan had been to seek refuge on the Marquis de Lafayette’s ship. Unfortunately, they had gotten separated, so he wasn’t entirely certain if that was where Abe wound up.

Caleb left the barn immediately to seek out Lafayette for himself. Uncertain information on Abe Woodhull was better than no information at all. But that didn’t stop himself from fantasizing about wringing the foolish man’s little neck for not sticking with Champe. That would have made his job that was easier.

But then again, where was the fun in that?

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April 1780
New Windsor

Abigail scrubbed Dr. Anderson’s medical tools clean, a task she took with the utmost care. Contaminated tools, particularly surgical instruments, could just as easily kill a man as a flying bullet or the sharp blade of a bayonet. She used soap and water to remove the grim and procured smuggled alcohol to finish the job.

There was never a dull moment while working with Anderson. Some days there were lulls between patients, but then there were other days they were up to their elbows with injured and ill persons. Most recently, a small outbreak of smallpox plagued the camp, which resulted in a massive influx of those seeking the infirmary tent for treatment. Even after Washington’s order of a mass inoculation two years prior at Valley Forge, the disease remained an omnipresent, just under the service. An occasional outbreak was inevitable, though the numbers were no longer as large as they had been.
Initially.

Over the past few weeks, Abigail had assisted in seven cases of smallpox. As soon as the number reached ten, her patients - Anderson’s patients technically, but she still considered them her own as well - were relocated to the barn, the only suitable place for quarantine. Despite Washington’s orders of mass inoculation, not all of the men had been inoculated, since the order had been revised so that men were available in case of an attack or deployment for battle.

Needless to say, she hadn’t seen sleep much in the past several weeks. In the past three days, she hadn’t seen sleep at all, and she saw even less of Ben because of it. She tried to steal some cat naps in between patients in the barn - she had no worries for catching the disease, having already been inoculated herself as a child - but those moments were few and far between.

Unbeknownst to her, a meeting was taking place with Washington and his generals in attendance, along with Ben. The discussion pertained to dealing with General Clinton’s presence in the south, with Washington proposing to send an army to meet with the French fleet but also hoping to trick Clinton into believing they were still attacking York City.

Ben maintained a neutral expression, but he was surprised to hear that upon news from Lafayette pertaining to the vulnerability of General Cornwallis in Yorktown Washington was willing to give up on York City. Washington’s refusal to abandon York City had been the catalyst of their quarrel and thus his resignation as head of intelligence. However, the major wasn’t one to hold a grudge, especially if a chance to turn the tide in their favor was within their grasp.

As the generals began pitching their ideas, he remained quiet, observing what was being proposed. The seeds of a plan began to formulate in his mind. Suddenly, he recalled his final order to Anna for keeping an eye on the alleged Mrs. Bates and knew exactly what needed to be done.

Once there was a lull, Ben chimed in, “I believe I know a way that can convince Clinton.” His gaze met Washington’s directly. “And all without moving a single soldier.”

There was the faintest flicker of approval in the commander-in-chief’s face, but somehow he managed to catch it. “Well, then, Major Tallmadge. Let’s hear your proposal.”

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Practically dead on her feet, Abigail trudged her way back to the tent she shared with Ben. Once their patients were tended to, Anderson ordered that she get some rest and by rest, he didn’t mean shutting her eyes for a few minutes against a haystack. Unable to argue with that logic, although she did put up a decent fight, she pinched herself lightly along the inside of her wrists to make sure she stayed awake.

That was when she ran into Anna, almost quite literally. She blinked in surprise and began to apologize, but her friend was quick to brush off the apology. Instead, she gave her a quick assessing look with concern. “You look awful,” she commented.

Abigail sighed quietly. “I feel awful, but what can you do? That’s the life of a physician for you. Or a physician’s apprentice anyway.”

Anna smiled faintly, though she was still looking at her critically. “When was the last time you slept? I won’t even ask when they last time you ate.”

“I appreciate that.” Abigail then scrunched up her face thoughtfully. “I think the last time I caught a few moments was around the time Colonel Hamilton had a meeting with some unruly officers for
drinking too heavily on watch.”

Anna stared. “That was three days ago.”

The blonde did a quick count on her hand. “One… two… three. Yes. That sounds about right.” She rolled her head, which felt as heavy as a cannon ball. “Anderson sent me away and told me not to return until I got some rest.”

Anna nodded approvingly. “Good on him. And so you should.”

Fighting back a yawn, Abigail fell back into step with Anna, asking, “What are you doing here? Not that I’m not happy to see you and all, but Washington made it clear about the boundaries between camp and the camp followers.”

“Ben sent for me,” the brunette remarked, taking no offense. “Apparently, he’s worked out some plan that’ll fool Cornwallis.”

Abigail perked up a little at that. “I’m all ears.”

Anna filled her in as they made the short trip to Ben’s tent, careful not to say too much around the wrong people. They only stopped long enough for Abigail to fetch a cup of water. The cool crispness of the water quenched her thirst. She was sorely tempted to retrieve another cup but didn’t want to delay Anna’s meeting with Ben any further. Instead, she settled for a quick splash of water to her face. From what Anna had just filled her in on, she wanted to be as awake as possible.

Ben was stepping out right as they approached, his anxious expression easing into relief. Although the moment he glanced in her direction, more than a hint of concern shone in his face. She knew he what he wanted to ask and shook her head. “Later.” Quickly, she followed Ben and Abigail inside, the tent flap falling behind them.

“Sorry for my unexpected appearance,” Abigail remarked, self-consciously tucking a wild curl behind her ear. “I was on my way back from treating patients when Anna and I literally ran into each other.”

“And I invited her,” Anna added, sneaking a glance between the two. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“I could never mind,” he murmured, his reply intended for Anna but his attention focused on the blonde. He stepped forward and pressed a kiss to the crown of her head, unable to help himself. “I’ve missed you.”

“And I you,” Abigail returned, and despite the intense exhaustion she felt, she smiled pleasurably. She happened to cast a glance in Anna’s direction and couldn’t miss the amused little grin of hers. Not once did her own fade. “But we can talk about that later.”

As soon as they broke apart, Ben returned to the business at hand, the explanation of his plan. What better way to fool Cornwallis than to utilize one of the spies for Clinton that had been sent to camp. Abigail raised her eyebrows curiously. The only person he could possibly be referring to was Mrs. Bates, Anna’s gossiping employee at the trading post.

Anna’s eyebrows furrowed. “What do you intend to do? Confront her about her allegiance and attempt to coerce her to our side?”

Ben shook his head. “No. That would take far too long, and I’m not even sure that would work.” His gaze briefly shifted from Abigail to Anna before adding, “Do you remember how we agreed to using certain, ah, rumors, to our advantage?”
The brunette immediately understood, judging by the rising color in her cheeks. “Yes, I believe I do.”

“Well, that’s part of the plan I proposed,” he said, suddenly uncomfortable. “Composing a fake love letter from myself to you, in order to deceive Clinton.” Quickly, he explained the details. Upon receiving the letter, Anna would “accidentally” leave it in plain sight of Mrs. Bates so that the other woman might have access. Among the contents in the letter would be the news of his leaving and the army’s intended movement to York City. Naturally, Mrs. Bates would seize the opportunity to bring this letter to Clinton’s immediate attention. Throughout his explanation, Anna nodded along approvingly, agreeing that Mrs. Bates would jump at the change of something like this.

Abigail remained silent throughout the discussion, not once interrupting with an opinion. She waited to hear the plan in its entirety before drawing any conclusions, something that had been instilled in her by her father. Thoughts of the late Thomas Williams filled her with grief. Although it had grown muted over time, the pain remained very much raw.

She hadn’t realized how distracted she had become with the memories of him when she felt a nudge at her side. Blinking, she noticed Ben and Anna looking at her and recognized that they were waiting for her thoughts on the plan.

“It’s a good plan,” she acquiesced with a slight shrug of her shoulders. “Definitely smart. I agree with Anna. If Mrs. Bates really wishes to further her husband’s advancements in Clinton’s rank, securing prime information such as this would certainly expedite it.” Seeing the major’s vague unease, as if afraid she was upset by the proposal, she smiled reassuringly. “You should do it.”

Reassured, Ben turned to face the desk and procured some parchment and an inkpot. Abigail eyed the cots speculatively but ultimately decided against it, preferring to leave him to his writing. As much as she approved of the plan and all that it entailed, she felt her presence wasn’t necessary for the actual writing of the letter. She saw the worry in his eyes as he had begun to lay out the framework, so she only assumed she would only serve as a distraction.

“Where are you going?” Ben asked as she crossed the small distance in the tent.

Pausing with her hand on the tent flap, Abigail answered, “I forget to fetch some for Anderson.” Thinking fast, she blurted out the first thing that came to mind. “Extra washcloths for those infected. The cool water compresses help fight down the fever.”

Anna’s brows furrowed. “But didn’t you say that Anderson sent you to rest?”

The blonde nodded absentmindedly. “He did, but I really should get those to him before I even think about closing my eyes.” And then, because she couldn’t resist the impulse, she crossed the small distance between where she stood and the desk to deliver Ben a chaste peck on the lips. “I do have one request though. Please don’t refer to Anna as your ‘little bar wench’.”

Abigail winked at Anna, who barely suppressed a giggle, and slipped out before Ben managed to formulate a response.

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May 1780

The crafted love letter had found its way into Anna’s possession a few hours after it was written. Feigning discreetness, the brunette had made sure to read the letter in Mrs. Bates presence before tucking it away among her inventory lists, which could be easily accessed. As predicted, when Anna
had returned from her errand, she had discovered the letter to be missing. Mrs. Bates had risen to the bait all too eagerly.

After the appropriate allotted time estimated for the woman to send word to whatever agent would reach Clinton, there had been talk of whether or not Mrs. Bates should be apprehended and tried for espionage should she return to camp. Ben didn’t believe Mrs. Bates would ever return, not if she were reunited with her husband but ultimately had to agree with his fellow officers and Washington. Should the woman ever step foot back into camp, her arrest would be imminent.

Mercifully, his conscious had been spared, seeing as the woman was never seen or heard from again.

Once again, neither Ben and Abigail had seen much of each other, not with Ben having to help prepare the men for the journey towards Yorktown and Abigail working with Anderson to help tend to the sick. The numbers had doubled within the past few weeks alone, which forced a delay in Washington’s plans to move out, much to his frustration. They couldn’t very well move out until the illness was eradicated, or at the very least isolated.

Abigail’s head pounded in dull throbs, her vision somewhat blurry from once again the lack of sleep. It was taking everything she and Anderson could humanly muster to care for the ill soldiers. Of the original ten that had contracted the illness, only one had failed to recover, and his remains had been properly buried with respect and honor but also at a respectable distance to avoid the disease from spreading any further. Clearly, that hadn’t done them much good.

It wasn’t until late into May did signs of progress begin to show. While the ill soldiers had yet to make a full recovery, no one else appeared to have contracted the disease, a small blessing but a blessing nonetheless.

The blonde was amazed at the sudden resurgence of the pox, considering how adamantly Washington had pushed for inoculation and the results that had followed, showing that the vast majority of inoculated soldiers survived the process. Of course, there was always a case here and there but never quite at this magnitude, at least not for quite some time.

The only justification for it, in her mind, was that perhaps one of the soldiers, probably a newly enlisted one, had somehow neglected to receive the treatment, and this very soldier serving as a carrier for the disease. Whether or not the act was an intentional attempt at sabotage, Abigail couldn’t say, but in her humble opinion, she highly doubted it.

As they began the steady crawl towards June, things appeared to be taking the turn for the better, slowly but surely. At least four of the soldiers had fully recovered and soon enough were able to rejoin the general population. Another four had lost all signs of scabs, which meant they were no longer contagious, however, they were not entirely out of the woods yet due to the presence of fever, which left ten remaining pox ridden soldiers in their care. The number was still considered high, but it was a far cry from the burgeoning twenty that had threatened to overwhelm them.

As the numbers dwindled, Anderson and Abigail began taking shifts, so that the other might have time to eat and rest. It was late in the afternoon before Anderson came to relieve her of her shift. While reluctant to leave, she gave into his insistence and set to washing herself before returning to camp.

The food had no taste as she forced herself to eat. Once again, sleep had more promise than food. Once sufficiently nourished, she returned to Ben’s tent, which was vacant, and promptly crawled onto her cot. She was asleep before her head touched the pillow.

The blonde woke hours later to the gentle press of fingers running through her hair.
Stirring slightly, she blinked blearily until Ben’s face came into focus. She smiled tiredly. “Hi.”

He smiled gently, continuing to softly brush back her hair. The act was so tender and intimate, she wanted nothing more than for him to lie with her. “Hi there. I got worried when I didn’t see you with the others for dinner. Figured I should check back here before heading to the barn. I’m glad that I did.”

Abigail shifted slightly so that she was now facing him fully, rolling onto her side. If not for Ben sitting at her side, she most likely would have tumbled off. “Have you heard anything from Caleb? Any progress?”

“He wrote to me a few weeks ago to inform me of Abe’s whereabouts. Abe somehow landed himself into Lafayette’s custody aboard his ship. Caleb doubts anyone’s going to believe that Abe is on our side, and he plans on going to retrieve him himself,” Ben remarked. “Once he’s there, Lafayette can inform him of our plans to head towards Yorktown, so that he and Abe can meet us there.”

The blonde sighed with relief. “That’s good then. I’d hate to think Simcoe getting his hands on him.”

Ben nodded in agreement, his fingers having yet to pause in their ministrations in her hair. “How are the men in your care?”

She shared with him that progress was slow, but it was being made, going over the very numbers she had most recently looked over herself. It might be a few more weeks before the rest recovered, but the odds of recovery appeared good, the exception of one older gentleman who lingered in the worst stages of it. She advised Ben that they shouldn’t move until they were sure the outbreak was contained. When he asked how long she believed it would take, Abigail estimated perhaps a month, and that was after the others recovered. It was very likely they wouldn’t be able to leave for Yorktown until July, perhaps even August. Not unless a miracle occurred.

While it was apparent he wasn’t happy to hear about this, Ben knew this was by no fault of her own. He asked how it was possible for an outbreak to occur when everyone had been inoculated. This was when Abigail presented her theory about the new, unvaccinated soldier and shifted awkwardly underneath Ben’s sudden scrutiny. She was quick to add that she believed the possible carrier for the disease had already died, being one of the original five who had turned up with the disease back in April.

After a moment of silence, Ben finally spoke again, though it had nothing to do with smallpox. “I wish you would have stayed.”

Abigail’s brows furrowed in confusion. “Stayed when?”

“When I wrote the letter, you know the one.”

“Ah.” Noting the shift in tone, she pushed herself up into a sitting position, so that her thigh pressed against his while stretched out in front of her. “I didn’t think you needed me there. You looked uncomfortable enough telling me about it. You looked uncomfortable enough telling me about it. I would’ve just distracted you.”

Ben frowned. “No. You presence is never unwanted.” His hand, having fallen from her hair when she moved, now sought out her hand, his fingers lightly tracing a pattern along her palm. “Quite the opposite in fact,” he added in a quiet murmur. His gaze slipped from their hands to finally meet hers. “I only wish you had stayed long enough to read its contents. I hadn’t been thinking of Anna when I wrote it. I thought of you the entire time, which made the composition even easier to write.”
Bringing up her hand to his lips, Ben lingered for a moment, his the corners of his mouth curving upwards. “I love you, Abigail Williams. And I always will.”

Abigail smiled happily. “And I love you, too, Benjamin Tallmadge.” She leaned forward to replace her hand with her lips. “I don’t think I’ll ever tire of hearing you say that.”
Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 4x09

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yorktown

Slowly but surely even further progress was made. As the weeks stretched on, those who were already ill didn’t get any worse, yet the number of those who contracted the disease did not increase and then, gradually, began to decline. As unfortunate as it was for the sudden outbreak to delay Washington’s desire to move onto Yorktown, Abigail had been grateful the extension had given her patients enough time to recover. Out of the twenty infected, they had only lost two men.

As soon as he had received this news, Washington had ordered the preparations to journey to Yorktown.

The journey from New Windsor to Yorktown should have only taken them a few days, but with the camp equipment paired with the camp followers, including pregnant women and children, it took them a little over a week. Nor were they helped by the blazing heat enhanced by the high summer sun.

Needless to say, tensions were high, and the heat made it worse. More than once, Abigail found herself assisting with someone suffering from dehydration and only reminded herself to drink so she wouldn’t be counted among them herself, if so then she’d prove useless. Whenever they stopped along the way, she caught glimpses of Ben making his way among the men. He only paused long enough to shove a canteen in her hand.

At first, she had allowed it, but over the course of the journey, she felt gazes of growing resentment around her whenever it happened. She had no choice but to remind Ben that he had to treat her like he would treat his other men. And while yes, she knew in his heart he would have offered any man a drink, they both knew all too well he sought her out often enough to incur more curious and suspicious glances. She hated to remind me of Decory, Bartholomew, and Jasper – her ribs nearly throbbed painfully at the memory – but that seemed the only way to get through to Ben, whose face drained of color and jaw set angrily at the memory her words reconjured.

The French had beaten them there by the time they arrived and were very helpful in setting up the remainder of their camp equipment. Anderson found her and requested her help to oversee the setting up of the infirmary tent. It took days to help reorganize everything, from medical equipment to medications, and herbs. She was so consumed with her work she missed Caleb and Abe’s arrival.

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Abe dismounted his horse and landed on the ground, his legs the equivalent of jelly. After traveling for a significant amount of time on horseback, it was a rather odd feeling to be on his on two feet, much like having sea legs after a long journey at sea.

Ben and Anna were waiting for them, having been alerted of their impending arrival from Caleb’s
letter. He would never understand the whaler and his intricate courier system. Perhaps it was for the best he never did.

“Daddy!” Thomas squealed, wriggling loose from Anna’s grasp. Anna gave a half-hearted attempt to restrain him, but Abe didn’t pay it any mind, his eyes only for his son.

He rushed forward to meet the boy more than half way before crouching down and scooping him into his arms. Abe nearly crushed his son to his chest he hugged him so fiercely, but little Thomas didn’t seem to mind, his tiny arms clutching around his neck eagerly. Tears burned in his eyes, but he didn’t care. He pressed a kiss to his son’s head, squeezing his eyes shut. “I’ve missed you, son,” he murmured into the golden tuffs of hair. “More than you could ever possibly know.”

“I love you,” Thomas greeted emphatically and dammit, the tears were definitely coming now.

“I love you, too,” Abe whispered back fiercely, squeezing him tight.

The others gave them their moment, for which Abe would be forever grateful, but the moment couldn’t last forever, much to his disappointment. With a wipe of his hands to his eyes, he rose to his feet, his son clinging to his legs. The others wore various forms of smile at the sight. Anna had tears glistening in her eyes, her smile practically blinding. Abe’s heart skipped a beat.

Ben stepped forward, and the two men embraced. “So much for Samuel Culper.”

Abe huffed out a laugh. “A helluva lot better than Culpepper. That will always be true.”

The major chuckled as they parted, clapping him on the shoulder. Abe’s gaze flickered over the group, noting one particular absence. “Where’s Abi?”

“Off helping with setting up with the infirmary,” Ben answered. Abe wondered if he realized the way his face softened at the mere mention of the blonde. Nah, probably not.

Abe suddenly grinned. “That’s good then. I’ll surprise her.”

The major gave him a mock assessing look. “You know she doesn’t take too kindly to surprised.”

Abe’s grin widened. “I know.”

“Well, I hope you’re prepared to duck.”

Before Abe could reply, he found himself with an armful of Anna, who had been unable to contain herself any longer. Instinctively, he wrapped his arms around her, steadying them both. He heard her tearfully mumble, “Idiot,” against his neck.

“Aye,” Abe agreed. “An idiot who’s missed you terribly.”

Anna’s breath caught at that and burrowed herself closer.

Abe was vaguely aware of the sound of a throat being cleared. “Tallboy, I believe we should give these two sometime alone, aye?”

Ben nodded in agreement. He went to take a step forward to retrieve Thomas, but seeing as he remained stubbornly stuck to his father’s side, he observed warmly, “I’m afraid he’s refusing to leave his post.”

Abe inclined his head, saying he had him after reaching down and ruffling his son’s hair.
The moment they were alone, he continued to hold onto the woman in his arms. All of the words he wished to say suddenly died on the tip of his tongue. The feeling of Anna Strong in his arms, the familiar scent of her filling his nostrils, overwhelmed him.

Finally, he did manage to get out, “Thank you for taking care of Thomas. I… I can’t possibly begin to express how grateful I am to you for it.”

Sniffling quietly, Anna exhaled shakily. “There’s no need to thank me, Abe. I was happy to do it. I love your little boy as if he were my own.”

Abe’s heart swelled inside his chest, his throat threatening to constrict, but he needed to get the words out. “I need you to do something else for me. I need you to get on a boat with Thomas and return to Setauket.”

Anna pulled back and gave him an incredulous look. “What?”

“It’s safer for you both.”

“I’m… afraid I can’t do that. I’m needed here. Besides, there’s another children of Thomas’s age among the camp followers, and there are plenty of women around to help look after a children. I think he’s grown rather fond of it, myself”

Thomas peered up at Anna and gave her such an adoring little smile Anna couldn’t help but bend down to kiss his forehead.

Abe sighed. “I had to try. Caleb said you’d say that.”

“Well, Caleb’s right for once.

Lips twitching upwards in a barely suppressed smile, he added, “I think it’s time that we talked. Properly. But not here.” He reached out and cupped her cheek gently. “There’s so much we need to talk about.”

Anna’s eyelashes fluttered lightly and then she smiled. “Yes, I believe there is a lot we need to discuss.” She looked as if she wished to kiss him but thought better of it. “But what about…”

Thomas interrupted her with an audible yawn. He rubbed at his eyes tiredly. The poor lad. Abe bent down and scooped him up, balancing him on his hip. Thomas rested his head on his shoulder, his eyelids drooping. “I think it’s safe enough to bring him with us. He’s all but tuckered out.”

Smiling warmly, Anna allowed him to take her hands, watching as their fingers slowly laced together, as if refamiliarizing with the other’s touch. “I think I know a place.”

---

Having recalled seeing some fresh rosemary on the way into camp, Abigail excused herself from Anderson’s company to investigate, bring a basket with her. To her pleasant surprise, there was much more than rosemary that awaited her: basil, sage, some caraway, and lots of mint. She really hoped she could find some lavender or perhaps chamomile, but she was grateful for what she could find.

Humming quietly, Abigail lost herself in her herb picking adventure when suddenly she felt arms seize her around the middle. With a cry, she dropped her basket and slammed her head backwards into her assailant. She was satisfied at the crunching sound she heard upon impact, along with a muffled, “Fucking ow!”
Only… that voice sounded far too familiar, muffled or not. She jerked around only to discover Abe Woodhull hunched over, clutching at his face. To her dismay, blood trickled down his fingers.

“What are you doing here?!” she demanded,

Abe winced. “Trying to surprise you, but Ben did warn me to duck.” His voice was more than muffled due to him clutching at his face. She walked forward to assess the damage, forcing him to move his hands so she could properly look. With a slight grimace, she noted she did a fairly good job of bloodying his nose.

She gently prodded at the bridge of his nose and was relieved that she hadn’t broken it. He still winced through every poke of her fingers but was smart enough to leave her to her work. “You’re lucky I didn’t break your nose, Fievel,” she remarked, her tone apologetic. “Sorry about that.”

“Remind me to never sneak up behind you again.”

Abigail’s smile was faint. “Believe me, I’ve had enough of those sorts of surprises to last me a lifetime.”

She had him sit on tree stump while she ribbed a strip of cloth from her own shirt and passed it along to him, instructing him to lean forward and pinch his nose with the cloth until the bleeding stopped. Eventually, it did stop after a few minutes of uncomfortable silence.

Once assured he was all right, Abigail reached out and hugged him. She asked him what happened, and Abe was happy enough to explain, as long as she didn’t threaten to headbutt him again. She playfully nudged him in the side, and the friends began to get each other up to speed in their lives.

Abe rubbed at his nose a little a little while later, wincing. “Where’d you learn to do that anyway?”

Abigail smiled smugly. “From Ben, actually. He wanted to make sure I could defend myself in case I didn’t have any traditional weapons at me disposal.”

“Smart man,” he muttered as he wiped the last of the blood away from his face. His nose remained red while some flecks of drying blood lingered. “Speaking of whom, I debriefed the latest on the British’s supply inventory with him. I snuck a glance at Arnold’s ledger. They’re low on munitions powder.”

Abigail hummed thoughtfully. “That’s good. There’s no way they can get through even a handful of battles if they’re that short, let alone one or two.”

He nodded, pausing a for a moment. “I’ve also enlisted with the Continentals. Officially.”

She shouldn’t have been surprised, but she was all the same. She gave him a rueful smile. “So you and I are going to be fighting side by side on the battlefield, aye?”

He returned her smile, albeit somewhat fainter. “Seems to be that way. Unless Washington’s officially made you the camp physician’s assistant, which means your presence would be required in the infirmary tent?”

His tone was hopeful, but she had to set him straight. “Not as far as I’m aware. Besides, I’m one of the regular blokes, remember? It’ll look like I sought out a way to get out of fighting. The last thing I need is another reason for the soldiers to get suspicious of me.” Again.

“Fair enough.”
The afternoon sun flickered through the richly green leaves of neighboring trees. Birds chirped in the distance among the other wildlife noises bustling about them. The calm, almost serene feeling was all a charade, at least for the humans. There might not have been one now, but there was in fact a dark cloud lingering over them all. It was all about to come to a head, she just knew it.

Abigail envied the innocent obliviousness of those woodland creatures.

Chapter End Notes

I know what you're thinking - how much longer are you putting off the ending of this fic?? The answer is simple... I'm denying that I am XD. The Battle of Yorktown will be in the next chapter, so I wanted to make sure I uploaded some sweetness and some fluff before the chaos commences.

I hope you guys enjoy! And thank you so much for your continued support!! <3
Chapter 62

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during 4x09. Some of the dialogue comes directly from the episode, but it's used to keep up with the episode's plot.

On the eve of battle, Washington assembled with his generals to devise a plan to defeat the British. He proposed using the enemy’s own entrenchments and overtaking the redcoats. The plan had its risks of course, but using something vital of the enemy against said enemy sounded brilliant enough to see through.

Which was how Abigail found herself crouching low and sliding down into the enemy trenches with several other soldiers, having been assigned for the evening’s mission. She wasn’t even sure if Ben knew she was among them nor did she want to bring attention to herself to cause him any distraction. God only knew that he and Hamilton had their hands full already, especially with attempting to boost morale among the soldiers assigned to digging.

It was clear that neither man was exactly inspiring any of the soldiers’ motivation. Some remained pressed against the wall, clutching their muskets as sounds of gunfire pierced the night air. Others had dropped to their stomachs at the first sound of a shot. She could hardly blame them, being so close to enemy lines, but the lack of action was getting ridiculous.

When words of encouragement didn’t work, a swift turn to thinly veiled threats and innuendos of cowardice came next, especially from Hamilton. A soldier here and there did rise to start digging, but their attempts were half-hearted at best.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Abigail muttered, sweat pooling down the nape of her neck as she continued to dig. The tip of the shovel struck something hard underneath the dirt, and a pain so jarring shot up her arms. Catching the gaze of the one other soldier who was actually putting in the effort, she forced a smile at his sympathetic wince. She gritted her teeth to hold back a curse and forced herself to keep on going.

It went like this for a time until a sudden hush fell over the trench. No, there was still the gunfire overhead, but it turned into secondary noise, at least it did to the blonde as she continued to stubbornly shovel deeper into the earth.

“May I be of some assistance?”

Bringing a hand up to wipe at her forehead, Abigail lifted her face towards the voice, her eyes suddenly widening, stunned. Standing above her was George Washington, his broad, powerful figure standing out among the others in the trench. Just his very presence drew even the most reluctant soldier to attention.

But the commander-in-chief wasn’t simply there for appearances sake. He reached for one of the spare shovels and stood beside her. Abigail watched in amazement as he began digging without further comment. She knew precisely what he was doing, and just the very fact he was doing it increased her admiration for him tenfold. If he ordered others to carry out a task risking their lives, how could he not join them as well?
Little by little, men rose from wherever they were and, following Washington’s example, began to
dig, with more vigor and determination than Abigail had witnessed in them thus far, even while the
British continued shooting above them blindly.

So, ignoring the weariness deep in her bones, she nevertheless persisted.

---

By the time the sun rose, the battle of Yorktown was already going strong. Dark clouds of powder
burst forth as cannons blasted from both sides. Among the blasts were the persistent sparks and
whirring of musket bullets. Everyone was scattered about in what felt like organized chaos, which
was perhaps the most apt description of military strategy, at least in Abigail’s opinion.

Several regiments advanced in hand-to-hand combat with officers charging into the heat of battle on
horseback. Those not on the field either remained back in the maintenance of cannon fire or fought
from the entrenchments, where she currently found herself, alternating between shooting and keeping
track of their ammunition supply all the while dodging bullets.

Everyone she cared about was out there in some way or form. Caleb was assisting in manning the
canons. Rushing back and forth between canons, Anna carried a bucket of water and a deep bowled
ladle to keep the cannons from overheating. Meanwhile, Abe, having officially enlisted with the
 Continentals, was in the trenches with her, taking aim and firing against the redcoats charging at their
men on the field. Naturally, Ben was fighting alongside his men on the field on horseback.

Abigail’s insides knotted every time she remembered. It wasn’t something she could easily forget.

Abe had just lowered musket to his side after firing another shot. Suddenly, he looked up and
announced over the deafening noise of gunfire, “I’ll be right back!”

Abigail frowned. “But where are you -”

But he was off and out of the trench before she could finish her question. Even if he hadn’t, the
sudden boom of yet another blasted cannon would’ve done that job for him.

“Motherfucker,” she swore, swerving around. The cannonball landed quite heavily into the trench,
apparently having misfired. She flinched at the sound of alarmed cries from men of their own side
from the startling impact, and looked upwards, wanting to know which fool up there was
responsible.

Instinctively, she took a step forward towards the injured party but stopped herself short. She knew
what her orders were. As much as her instincts screamed at her to help, she knew she was needed to
help man the trenches. Every man - or perhaps just person in her case - was needed.

Swallowing back guilt, Abigail quickly cleaned and reloaded her musket. She was about to take aim
when she heard familiar shouts coming from behind her. Against her better judgement, she turned
and saw with growing horror that Abe was now lying on the ground, Anna hovering over him in
distress, blood blossoming through his shirt against his shoulder blade. Thankfully, Caleb was able to
rush to his side in a matter of seconds. With Anna’s help, he was able to lift Abe to his feet as
quickly as he dared without causing him more pain than necessary. She shifted slightly to the right to
get a better look.

Again, the pang of guilt from not being able to assist surged through her, but before she could dwell
on it, the soaring sound of a flying bullet struck right past her. She ducked a few seconds too late.
The bullet had already struck the dirt wall. From where she had just been standing, it struck just
within a few inches of her head.

Unconsciously, the blonde brought up a trembling hand to her ear, and when she withdrew it, her fingers were red with blood. The bullet must have grazed her ear.

Somehow, she managed to escape death once again but only by a literal hairsbreadth.

---

The fighting gradually drew to a lull around late afternoon. For now, the sun remained hidden behind a thin layer of clouds, a merciful reprieve from the unseasonable fiery heat. Taking advantage of this temporary respite, Washington convenes with his officers once more. Hamilton asserted that while Deux-Ponts advanced on redoubt nine, he would advance on ten with bayonets fixed and muskets unloaded, to which Lafayette replied skeptically the odds were not in his favor with only the use of twenty men. However, the colonel insisted they could very well this war tonight while they had Lafayette’s men in reserve. Whatever argument Hamilton presented, Lafayette was pushing back, though his own arguments were strong as well.

Ben observed the two carefully, knowing that both men were right, though he leaned more towards Hamilton’s line of thinking. Something needed to be done tonight. To end this war once and for all. Suddenly, Abe’s information he had given him returned to him, and he had no choice but to interrupt now. “They don’t have enough powder.”

Every officer and Washington turned to stare at him. Unperturbed, the major continued, “They may have made a show of it at the start, but they’re running on reserves.”

“How do you know this?” Washington demanded softly.

Ben smiled faintly. “Culper. While in the enemy camp, he observed their black powder was running low, enough for a march, but not for a siege. They'll save what they have left for cannons, not mines.”

Slowly, Washington began to return the smile. With a look around the room, he remarked, “Now or never, deliverance must come. We attack the redoubts at nightfall.”

---

The fighting had arrived at a standstill, providing Abigail with the perfect opportunity to check on Abe for herself. She lifted an empty crate high enough to peak over the entrenchment, and when no immediate shots resounded, she dropped the box, dug her fingers into the earth’s edge with a deathlike grip, and proceeded to pulled herself up and over, grunting quietly with the effort. She landed on her stomach with a quiet “oomf” before quickly pulling herself upright and heading directly towards the infirmary tent.

She found Anna at his side, and from her harried appearance, she must not have ever left since they arrived. Abe was sound asleep on the examining cot, exhaustion clearly lining his face. Every unconscious shift prompted a quiet grunt of pain.

Abigail went to examine him as Anna filled her in on what happened, how Abe had walked Anna through the removal of the bullet. Satisfied when she noticed no sign of inflammation or infection, Abigail commended her on a job well done, gave he a comforting squeeze to her shoulder, and regretfully informed her she had to return to the fray before anyone knew she was missing.

Men still remained in the trenches but had cast aside their weapons in favor of obtaining a drink, whether it was several mouthfuls of water or a sampling of something stronger. Just beyond the
trenches was the battlefield, with several corpses, rebels and redcoats alike, scattered across the ground. A handful of soldiers braved the risky conditions and went to the field to retrieve the bodies of the fallen in order to give them a proper burial, soldiers from both sides.

In that moment, Abigail looked down and caught her breath at the body of a middle aged private staring up at her sightlessly, a bloody hole engraved into his forehead. Chills ran down her spine as she took in the pale skin, the raven hair… The private looked almost like her dear friend Christopher Morgan, had he lived long enough to reach thirty.

One moment Christopher had been kneeling a few feet from here, and the next, he was lying on the grass, a dark red mark spreading across his forehead, his blue eyes open staring at the sky without seeing.

Slowly, Abigail crouched down beside the man. With trembling hands, she reached towards him and gently closes his eyes with a gentle press of her fingers. She murmured a quiet prayer before rising back to her feet but was unable to move, unable to stop herself from staring.

That was where Ben found her, staring at the deceased man while thinking of the boy she used to know. No, the man she used to know.

Feeling a gentle press to the small of her back, Abigail looked up and saw the major standing next to her. She attempted to greet him with a smile, but it felt almost strained. The pressure along the small of her back increased. She took comfort from the additional pressure.

Ben was about to speak when suddenly his gaze locked onto her face. Without hesitation, he hooked a finger under her shin and turned her head so he had a better look, barely suppressing his alarm. “What happened?” he demanded.

It was then she realized she had neglected to tend to the bullet graze at her ear. She vaguely recalled feeling the warm, sticky mess of blood trickling down her face while fighting in the trench. All she had been able to accomplish was an occasional furious wipe at her face with her sleeve.

She could’ve lied. She could’ve up with a number of things, but nothing that could be thought of would’ve been sufficient. Instead, she answered, “I was in the trenches, with the others. I’d just turned around for a moment, when… the bullet grazed my ear.”

For several minutes, Ben’s gaze remained steadfast on her face. Briefly, his eyes flickered down to the fallen soldier beside them and back towards her ear, all the color draining from his face. Even a fool could sense the connection, so she neglected to ask.

And without warning, she found herself in a tight, fierce embrace. Her arms remained at her sides, so surprised was she that he was willing to risk such an act in front of everyone, anyone that could see, but judging from the ferocity of the embrace, he didn’t care. And to be perfectly honest, neither did she.

The faint mixture of blood, sweat, and dirt filled her nose, but she ignored it easily in favor for that scent that was so distinctly Ben, something earthy, woodsy almost with the faintest hint of mint. Somehow, some way, she never failed to find that trace of mint on him, forever a mystery to her, but the familiar smell of it was comforting him. It reminded her of home, seeing as he was her home, now and always.

She expected to hear furious mutterings of “you must learn to be more careful” or any other possible scolding, but there was none. The protectiveness of his embrace, the amount of terror at the threat of her loss, was palpable.
As quickly as the embrace came, Ben was forced to step back, for image’s sake if for anything else. A hint of regret shone in his eyes, but he made no further movement to pull her back into his arms, which was a crying shame. “I’ve been tasked to gather a group of men, both from my own regiment and a few others.”

Abigail observed him carefully. “Why? What’s going on?”

Ben remarked quietly after a brief glance over her shoulder. “Abe informed me that the British are low on powder. They’ll only reserve it for their canons, but after that, they have nothing. We’re planning an ambush tonight, on their redoubts.”

She nodded carefully, squaring her shoulders readly. “When do we leave?”

He smiled briefly. “I’m on my way to gather the troops now. You won’t be.”

Her brows furrowed. “But I’m in your regiment,” she reminded him. “You can’t just leave me out of this.”

“Oh, yes I can.”

The blonde’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “You can’t just order me to stay put. I’m coming with you whether you like it or not.”

Ben’s eyes turned into steel. “Abi…” he started to say but quickly corrected himself. “We’re so incredibly close to finishing this war. Victory is within our grasp. And I will not risk putting your life in danger. Not again. So yes I am ordering you to stay behind. For once in your life, I would appreciate it if you would do as you’re told.”

“I think I’ve proven I can take care of myself.”

His eyes narrowed. “Really? Because this,” he touched her grazed ear gently, frowning deeply as she winced, “proves otherwise.”

Abigail shook her head vigorously, ignoring the sense of dizziness resulting from her rising panic, panic that he would be off risking his own life and that she couldn’t help him. “No, I can’t do that. I can’t just sit back and wait for your return. That’s not who I am, and you bloody well know it.”

Taking a moment to catch her breath, she demanded, “Are these your orders or someone else’s?”

“They’re mine.”

Both Ben and Abigail turned at the sound of a third party and were both surprised to see Washington approaching them. Abigail felt an immediate flush in her cheeks. How much had the commander-in-chief overheard?

“Although I suspect Major Tallmadge has his own reasons,” Washington added, his gaze flitting from her to Ben. His eyes lingered on the major with a look Abigail couldn’t even begin to attempt to decipher.

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Night had finally fallen, and Ben and his group of soldiers were well on their way to storming the British redoubts. Having withdrawn heavily from their stations to prepare for the morning – and more than likely to figure out how best to proceed with the odds now stacked against them – the redcoats would hardly suspect such an ambush, especially from rebels of whom they believed to be superior to in every shape and form. And now they were as vulnerable as a newborn babe in the
woods. Funny how thing could come full circle.

From her perch among the cannons, unmanned at the moment – well, apart from her anyway – Abigail fixed her gaze towards the enemy lines, refusing to look away even for a moment. Gradually, her eyes became adjusted to the dark. It was easier to see running dark forms among the fields, but she just couldn’t see who it was. She lip her lower lip anxiously as she waited for the first signs of a successful takeover. It had only been precious minutes since they’d first set out, but for Abigail, it felt like an eternity.

“So you intend to stay here all night?” Washington’s voice briefly broke her gaze from enemy lines, his deep voice automatically commanding her attention. That’s what made him such brilliant leader. Just his voice alone was enough to ensnare people’s respect and attention.

“Yes, sir,” Abigail remarked honestly, even though she assumed the question was rhetorical. She would do just that. She would remain rooted in that very spot until her major returned.

Washington suppressed a knowing smile as he remarked, “You should be conserving your energy. Who knows what the morning may bring?”

Abigail nodded. “Yes, but who knows what tonight may bring? I can’t rest knowing that, not until they have safely returned and the mission successful.” Until then, she refused to abandon her self-designated post.

This time the Grey Fox did in fact smile. After some maneuvering, he joined her amongst the canons, seating himself in a space made for himself. “I’m sure you’re wondering why I ordered you to remain behind, why I specifically wanted you to remain with me.” When she said nothing, he continued, “Do you recall the first night we met? Valley Forge in ’78. At least it was the first time we met face-to-face.”

“Quite literally, too,” Abigail remarked immediately, recalling all too well how he had seized her and shoved her against the wall, believing her to be an assailant. Her eyes widened in mortification, but he brushed aside her outburst with a hint of a rueful smile.

“Yes, I acted rather… oddly that night, I admit,” he murmured, his tone apologetic. “I wasn’t quite myself that night. There was so much that needed to be done, so much pressure from every way I turned. I… didn’t know which way to turn. And then we talked, about our mutual admiration for Narragansett Pacers and other things, although I had been more in favor of solitude at the time.” His eyes found hers, and a gentle smile entered his gaze. “Out of concern for me and my welfare, you followed me that night, yet remained at a distance when I requested it. You watched out for me. I’ve never forgotten that.”

As much as she would’ve liked to, Abigail couldn’t bring herself to break away from his gaze. She felt a surge of warmth rush through her at his words. This must have been what it felt like for those generals who were commended for their brave and clever tactics in battle, though what she did was hardly up to par. She did what anyone else would’ve done, surely. But still, one could not simply dispute praise coming from a man such as George Washington. Nor did she desire to.

“You thought you were protecting me,” he continued in that low timbered voice of his. “And so, naturally, I thought it best if I finally returned the favor.”

Abigail frowned in confusion. “What do you mean, if you don’t mind me asking, sir?”

Washington regarded her, assessing. For a long time, he didn’t speak, but he when he did, confidence rang out in his voice. “You would’ve gone with them if I hadn’t commanded it. In the
past several years, you’ve already risked so much, so what’s one more in the grand scheme of things? But it’s precisely this reason I couldn’t allow you to go.

“Your situation… it’s a precarious one,” he acknowledged. “There wasn’t much I could do for you in the past, not without drawing attention to you, but I can do this for you now. I understand how difficult this must be for you, being unable to help when you desperately want to but cannot. Nor is it easy to be separated from the one you love. That’s a particularly heavy burden to bear.”

Abigail took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, looking back towards the enemy lines, partially in attempt to compose herself. In that moment, Washington reminded her so much of Thomas Williams, her father, she wasn’t sure to what to do. After a few steadying breaths, she remarked softly, “I… just now you sounded just like my father. I think he would’ve really admired you.”

At this, Washington smiled. “I believed I would’ve liked your father as well. Even though we have never met, I do admire him, for raising such an admirable young woman.”

She ducked her head humbly, working hard to make sure she kept the tears at bay. “Thank you, sir.”

Together, they watched until they caught the first spark of gunfire. One spark turned into several, and then the sounds of fighting carried through the night air. It wasn’t until the blast of canons, the British’s own canons, being sent towards their own lines did Abigail feel the fist clenching around her heart begin to ease.

Without looking away from the unfolding scene, she heard herself murmur, “And yes, I do love Benjamin. More than I can properly express.”

If she would have turned her head slightly, she would’ve caught sight of Washington’s amused smile. “I’ve had my suspicions.”

---

With much of the British’s supplies destroyed along with almost everything else in the British controlled town, the redcoats surged out to meet the rebels with all the strength they could muster. The fighting continued well into the morning, but both sides both knew very well that the redcoats couldn’t last much longer, not without powder.

Standing next to the canons above the trenches, Washington observed as the fighting gradually dwindled among the field. Their own side had yet to fire a canon, choosing to reserve their resources until absolutely necessary.

And then, on the field, a redcoat began to fall back, and where there was more, multiple others followed suit. Keenly alert, the commander-in-chief reached for his spyglass and focused on those men. They… were retreating. The redcoats were retreating. Then he lifted his spyglass towards the trenches only to discover a white flag blowing gently in the October wind.

Washington lowered his spyglass slowly. It was over. It was all finally over.

The Continentals had won.
Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during and a little bit after 4x09. I hope you guys enjoy!

A British soldier, unarmed and in possession of a white flag, was sent over to discuss terms of a ceasefire. After the negotiations were discussed, the messenger returned to the British side in order to convey the terms in company with a Continental soldier, so that Washington would be kept informed.

At high noon, both armies came together onto the field, which some soldiers had fondly dubbed as “surrender field” when news of British surrender made its way through the trenches. The British were forced to march through a gauntlet of both French and Continental forces, with each redcoat handing over their weapons as was custom in a military surrender.

Lafayette then instructed some of the allied musicians to play “Yankee Doodle” during the gauntlet. Abigail did her best to conceal her amusement, though it was a significant struggle. She did hear a few snorts from those men standing beside her, but when she happened to steal a glance at her companions, their expressions remained surprisingly stoic.

When the redcoats had finished disarming themselves, a British commanding officer brought up the rear of the gauntlet to present Washington with General Cornwallis’s sword. It was clear from the displeased expression on the commanding officer’s face that Cornwallis would not deigning to make his appearance as he should. It was a petulant snub if there ever was one.

If this snub affected Washington in anyway, he didn't let it show. Instead, he accepted the sword graciously, saying, “I am honored to accept your surrender.”

---

The camp erupted into celebration the moment the both sides departed from the field. With their dead having received the proper burial of fallen brethren, it was time to celebrate for the living. The alcohol was flowing and spirits soaring. Not only was the war finally over, but they had won. The victory for freedom had come at an incredible cost, yet against incredible odds, they managed to achieve victory.

Slowly, Abe returned to consciousness, gradually having been lured awake by the ruckus outside the tent. And was that… music he was hearing? Before he could even process that, several peals of laughter soon followed.

With a quiet grunt, he attempted to pull himself up into a sitting position. A soft hand pressed against his uninjured shoulder in gentle restraint.

“You shouldn’t be trying to get up on your own,” Anna’s reprimanded him gently. “Rest is what the doctor ordered.”

Abe made a noncommittedly noise but made no further movement to rise, at least not quite yet. There was a sudden clash of noise followed by another stream of raucous laughter. “What on earth is going
on out there?” he asked, more than a little bewildered.

Anna’s eyes lit up. “Oh… you were out cold when it happened.” She grabbed a chair and sat by his side, taking his hand in hers. “The British surrendered this morning. Not just to the battle but to the war.”

Abe stared at her in amazement, his heart beating rapidly in his chest. He could hardly believe…

“Are you serious?”

Anna beamed as she nodded vigorously. “Yes, the commanding officer presented Washington with Cornwallis’s sword to him in defeat. Naturally, Cornwallis refused to appear.”

*Arrogant sod,* he thought briefly before the weight of Anna’s words finally washed over him. It was over.

Now all of the strange noises and music made since. It was a celebration, a more than justified one. Smiling at her then, he said, “You should be out there celebrating with the lot of them. Surely, camp followers are allowed within camp, at least this once.”

Anna nodded, still smiling. “They are. Most likely, there’s going to be a lot more revelry than what we’re used to, if you understand my meaning.”

Abe chuckled quietly, doing his best not to allow his amusement to irritate his wound. “Then you should be among them.” When he realized what he said, he frowned briefly. “Okay, perhaps not in that kind of fun. I’m afraid I don’t have enough strength to hunt down the man attempting to ravish you.”

The brunette shook her head exasperatedly, even as a tiny laugh escaped her. “You foolish man.” She brought her hand up to her lips then pressed it between the two of hers. “I’m exactly where I want to be.”

Abe’s heart was full of so much love for this beautiful woman it ached. Anna Strong was the one woman in this world he knew, with absolute certainty, he could never bear to live without. How had he been so foolish to think otherwise? He didn’t necessarily regret the reason for breaking his engagement to Anna in order to wed Mary for the sake of his brother nor could he truly ever regret their marriage, which had given him little Thomas. He’d made a sacrifice and had lived with the consequences, not once having thought there would ever be a time where he could long look upon her in such a way again. That was until now.

He pushed himself into a sitting position, prompting Anna to spring to his side, to help steady him. He took a few measured, laborious breaths before finally looking into her eyes.

For a while, he was simply content to just get lost in her beautiful brown eyes. However, the longer he remained silently thoughtful, the more concern Anna appeared to become.

“Are you all right?” Anna asked urgently. “Perhaps you’d better lie down…”

“No, I’m all right,” he assured her. “As much as I’d like to get down on one knee for this, I don’t think I’d ever be able to get back up again.”

Anna stilled, her eyes widening. “Abraham…”

“Anna Smith Strong,” he began, his voice a tad tremulous, “I have loved you for as long as I can remember. I know things have never been easy between us, especially these past few years, and that this is hardly the place to do this, but I can’t think of anything else I’d like more than to ask for your
hand. Again.” His smile turned briefly sheepish but then hopeful. “Will you do me the honor of being my wi…”

She kissed him before he could even finish. Her lips pressed against his gently, but he could still feel the full effects of her passion even in those briefest of moments. After a beat, she pulled back, her eyes glimmering with unshed tears.

Practically on the verge of tears himself, he asked quietly, “Is that a yes?”

“My answer has always been and will be, yes.”

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Drinks remained full and spirits high well into the evening. Celebrations such as this had always been few and far between, but they all paled in comparison to this moment. All the fighting and bloodshed was behind them. What would come next?

Instead, everyone decided to focus on the present, choosing to indulge in their own revelry in any way they could get it. Naturally, with the presence of the camp followers, certain forms of revelry would occur, though Abigail was hardly worried about anyone attempting to make a pass at her. There was only one man she hoped would be up to the task. Her entire body heated at the very thought. She took another sip of the strong smuggled ale proffered by some red-faced, possibly pissed soldier.

She had already consumed the contents of her drink when suddenly inspiration struck – or rather a sudden boldness she was too weak to bypass. Excusing herself briefly, she managed to slip into one of the abandoned trenches and get rid of that horrible fucking binding once and for all. Sighing with no small amount of relief, she took the binding and tucked it underneath the too large coat she wore before climbing back out again.

She dusted herself off before returning to the merriment. Someone, or a group of someones it appeared, had decided to start a large bonfire right in the center of the camp. Thinking nothing of it, she walked right up to it, retrieved her folded up bindings, and tossed it right into the fire before walking away, not bothering to look back.

“Williams!”

Abigail turned around with a mild start, only to realize with immense relief that it was only Caleb. She grinned as he bounded towards her with a rather sizeable pouch of what she could only assume to be smuggled rum. Because according to the whaler, the best stuff was always smuggled. He spread his arms out and laughed heartily. She took that as an invitation and embraced him, laughing as he swung her around even as he nearly threaten to topple them both towards the ground.

“You’re absolutely pissed, aren’t you?” she observed with a wry grin.

Caleb waggled his eyebrows. “Absolutely. But I believe, madam, you’re not drunk enough. How much have you had?”

Abigail indicated the number of cups of ale with her index finger. He sighed in dismay, extending the pouch towards her. “Come on, love. Bottoms up.”

She feigned a sigh, accepting the pouch from him. “Oh, why not?” Uncorking it, she took a deep swallow, nearly choking on the strength of whatever the bloody fuck it was. She returned it to him with a quiet gasp, swiping the little bit that trickled down her chin with her thumb. She couldn’t help but laugh at his proud grin. “What on earth is that anyway?”
But Caleb shook his head. “You don’t want to know. Trust me.” Then he turned abruptly, his grin widening impossibly more. “Ah, Tallboy! There you are!”

The major was walking towards them now, sans his helmet and other official weaponry. Having removed his uniform coat, he was stripped down to a simple white shirt, which remained tucked neatly into his trousers, and boots. He looked so very good. Abigail’s throat suddenly went dry. She almost reached for Caleb’s pouch again and would’ve, too, if he hadn’t suddenly held it out towards their mutual friend.

“Join us, won’t you?” Caleb invited, his eyes bright with joy and whatever alcohol he had consumed. “Just this once. I promise not to tell anyone you imbibed, even a sip.”

They both thought he would decline but were pleasantly surprised when Ben accepted the pouch and took a healthy swallow. He passed it back to Caleb and gave Abigail his complete, undivided attention. The way her body was reacting to that very intimate look was definitely not appropriate in their current settings, but somehow, she forgot to care.

He pulled her in for an embrace, and she fell into him easily, throwing her arms around his shoulders. Her coat fell backwards when she opened her arms, and now she her body was flushed against his, chest to chest save for only the thin material of cloth between them. She smiled to herself when she felt him stiffen.

“Ah… where…” Ben cleared his throat before shifting to murmur into her ear discreetly, “Your bindings…”

“Gone,” she murmured back, grinning impishly. “Burning in the bonfire, the last I saw… but there is another way for you to know for sure…”

She felt him shudder lightly against her, along with a quiet “shite” until they were forced apart by a tutting Caleb Brewster.

“None of that now,” he remarked, playfully wagging a finger at them, though she highly doubted he had overheard the brief exchange. “It seems like you’ll need yourself a chaperone.” He smiled demurely at Ben’s mild attempt at a glare and cackled with delight as the major swiped his pouch to procure another swallow, this one longer than the last.

Anna and Abe found them just along the outskirts of the festivities, which also happened to be conveniently located next to a crate full of smuggled rum and ale. Caleb’s personal touch no doubt. The blonde rose from her spot on the ground beside Ben to check on Abe’s wound, sober enough to be up to the task. Once satisfied with her inspection and Abe’s responses to her questions, she returned to her seat, this time just a tad bit closer to the major. She heard no complaints.

Little Thomas was off playing with a group of children around his age under the mindful gaze of the camp mothers. The boy was also just in Abe’s line of sight as well, which provided the man with some comfort, thus alleviating some of the tension from him.

Once the two new arrivals had their cups, the celebration could truly begin. They drank and laughed and celebrated amongst themselves, every now and then commenting on the commotion behind them. Every now and then, Abigail found herself looking around the circle and feeling a sense of rightness in the world. Everything had fallen into place. They had all started out their lives together, and somehow, it only felt fitting they were altogether now, celebrating not only the closing of a particularly nasty chapter in their lives but also for a new one. To the future.

Caleb was reaching behind him to begin refilling cups when Abe cleared his throat, prompting all
eyes towards him. “I’ve got something I’d like to announce, being in the presence of some of the few most important people in the world to me.” He looked towards Anna, tenderness in his expression. “Anna and I are engaged.”

Abigail beamed and was just about to offer her congratulations when Caleb remarked, unsurprised, “What? Again?”

“Oh!” she interjected, shifting away from Ben so that she could better extend her leg and kick at his foot. At the sound of Ben’s amused snort, she squinted up at him and delivered him a playful swat. Neither Abe nor Anna seemed particular bothered by the joke. In fact, they were more than a little amused all around. “Congratulations,” she added warmly.

“Yes, congratulations,” Ben lifted his cup towards them. Everyone else did the same. “To Abe and Anna. May you find a lifetime of happiness!”

“Hear, hear!” Caleb echoed jovially. Everyone finished off their drinks before another round began.

After pouring himself and Anna another cup of ale, he passed along the bottle to Ben, remarking, “Hopefully, I’ll be able to find us some accommodations until I can find a place for us. Whitehall isn’t… exactly an option for us anymore.”

Abigail frowned. “Why not?”

Abe shifted uneasily. “It… sort of belongs to Hewlett now.”

Anna turned towards him, confused. “I’m sorry. What?”

He shrugged lightly. “Kind of a long story.”

Abigail watched the engage with mild interest, the warmth of the alcohol running through her veins, keeping her arm, that and the oversized coat and the press of Ben’s solid form against hers, thigh pressed to thigh… Before her somewhat inebriated brain could carry off on this tangent, an idea presented itself, and she couldn’t very well in good conscience ignore it.

“I think I just might have the solution to your problem,” she spoke up before anyone could push for more details of this mysterious deal with Major Hewlett.

Abe looked towards her, curious. “What do you have in mind?”

“That you and Anna should have Hawkins Hall.”

Surprised, Anna asked, “Your home?”

Nodding, the blonde replied, “Yes. Before enlisting… Tobias left the house in my name, to do anything with it that I wish, and I wish for you both to have it.” Before either one could protest, she shook her head emphatically. “And before you say it’s too much, I… couldn’t bear to live in it any longer. You would both doing me an incredible favor.” She smiled reassuringly. “Consider it a wedding gift.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Anna remarked softly, “but where will you go?”

Abigail felt the warm press of a hand against the small of her back. She looked up to find Ben observing her with a concerned, protective expression. There was nothing she wanted more than to crawl into his arms and remain there. “My father’s house, I think. I was staying with my father right when the war began and Tobias… well, you know the rest. Most of my belongings are there
anyway. It wouldn’t be difficult to make the transition.”

Sensing the tonal shift, Caleb took it upon himself to ask if anyone needed another round. Unsurprisingly, no one turned him down. “So we know what Anna and Abe will be up to soon enough. And Ben here’s already volunteered himself to help create a government from the ground up.”

“Just for a year,” Ben assured her when she raised a playful brow. “And not a day over. I’d much prefer teaching children.”

“Well, you’ll be in good company then. Sounds to me a lot of those congressmen have the emotional range of children,” she commented. She heard Caleb snort from behind her but paid him no mind as Ben leaned forward to conceal his amusement against the crown of her head.

After a brief pause, Caleb continued, “So what’s in the cards for you, Williams?”

The blonde didn’t know how to answer that. To be perfectly honest, she had never thought that far ahead. After enlisting under her father’s name, she hadn’t really given much thought to what her life would be after the war. It wasn’t that she believed she wouldn’t live to see it, though the odds were greatly stacked against her, but it just hadn’t occurred to her.

“Hmm. Actually, I have no idea,” she mused. “Perhaps I’ll be a pirate.”

Ben sighed heavily while Caleb grinned approvingly. “That’s a lucrative business. I can teach you all about the smuggling. You can be my apprentice. Just in case the physician thing doesn’t work out for ya.”

Abigail perked up. “Really?”

“Caleb…” Ben warned but was effectively ignored.

Caleb looked at her, considering. “You’re pretty good with a gun so no worries there. You’ll just need to find your sea legs.”

Abe jumped in. “And sword fighting. We mustn’t forget about that!”

From beside him, Anna shook her head exasperatedly but seemed to know there was little point in trying to intervene.

Ben, however, didn’t see the fruitlessness of it. “No. Don’t you two encourage her!”

Caleb complained, “Oh, why not! She’d be good.”

The major’s eyes narrowed. “Because she might actually do it.”

Abigail turned back towards him, her blue eyes widening earnestly followed by a light pout. Ben tried his best not to look directly at her, but she was making it damn near impossible. She knew exactly what she was doing. “Oh, don’t give me the eyes.”

“What eyes?” she asked innocently, slowly batting her eyelashes at him.

“Those eyes,” he murmured, low enough for only her to hear, knowing that Caleb was doing his damndest to eavesdrop. Fortunately, Anna had taken it upon herself to distract him. He had drunk his fair share of cups for the evening, making it even easier for him to become tongue-tied, especially when he was around her. That certainly wasn’t going to help him.
Nor was he helped a sudden heat emerged in her gaze. Her pout shifted into a coy little smile, and slowly, she bit her lower lip suggestively. The major’s gut tightened instantly. *Sweet Jesus.*

Miraculously no one else appeared to notice.

For the next hour, the two couldn’t bring themselves to drink another drop of alcohol. They were far too distracted for that, being as neither of them could no longer keep their hands off each other. It started off innocently enough, the simple press of their thighs together as they sat, an occasional brush of his hand against the small of her back. But now his fingers danced on the edge of dipping underneath her untucked shirt while her own hand rested on his upper thigh, her fingers pressing down firmly at the first brush of his fingers against the bare flesh of her back.

Goosebumps rose along her skin at the brush and continued to do so each and every time they dared to go higher. Inhaling sharply, quietly, she pressed herself against his hand and was immediately rewarded as his wandering hand inched higher, pausing right where her bindings were supposed to be.

Unable to resist, she murmured, “So you’ve found out for yourself.”

“I suppose I have,” came the low timber of his voice, knowing precisely what she referred to. There was a huskiness underlying his tone, a sure sign of his arousal. She licked her lips unconsciously, then felt his grip tighten on her briefly. Quietly, she sucked in a trembling breath, her insides all but quivering in anticipation.

“Where are you going?” Ben asked, a little put out as she shifted, which prompted his hand to fall from her side.

Throwing a quick glance in the direction of their friends, Abigail finally returned his gaze, a wicked gleam in her eye. Then she leaned forward to purr into his ear, “Meet me back at your tent in ten minutes.” She risked a quick, yet lingering press of her lips against his jaw before carefully rising to her feet, only stumbling slightly.

Caleb called out after her, asking her that very same question. She gave a vague answer of needing a walk and assured them they shouldn’t wait up for her. She threw a coquettish look over her shoulder for Ben, which wasn’t circumspect at all. Enthralled, Ben couldn’t remove his gaze from her as she walked away.

Sitting there, mentally counting down the minutes, was absolute torture. So naturally after only a handful of minutes, he pushed himself to his feet, made the proper excuses to leave, and headed in the direction of his tent. Instead of the allotted ten minutes, he reached the tent in five.

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Ben found Abigail standing in her loose white shirt and nothing else, the material reaching midthigh. She’d only managed to light a lantern and one or two candles, but even in the dim candle light, he could easily make out the rest of her. That golden hair, removed from its restraints, fell loosely along her shoulders in a wild mass of gentle curls. The moment she saw him, she gave him one of those smiles of hers that never failed to stop his heart.

“You’re early,” she observed, though not displeased by the observation.

Adopting solemn expression, Ben approached her purposefully, letting the tent flap close behind him. “I believed the matter sounded particularly urgent, so naturally required promptness.” A hand settled low on her hip once within distance of her. He leaned forward, adding in a murmur, “And my
undivided attention."

Abigail hummed contently. “You are correct. This is a matter of the utmost importance.” She brushed her lips against his. “Requiring your full attention, major.” The kiss was brief but filled with need. He chased her lips as she pulled back slightly to murmur, “I need you. I need your hands on me, and I need them. Now.”

This time the kiss, when it happened, was searing, hot, and demanding. She pressed herself fully against him, arching just right so that her breasts pressed against his chest fully. He gasped and drew her closer, his grip tightening on her hip. She sighed against his mouth and began to walk backwards. He followed, completely and thoroughly under her spell. When her lips retreated, he chased, eagerly seeking them when she was happy to be caught.

A quiet thud briefly broke his focus. Instead of making their way to their joined cots, they somehow managed to find their way to his desk, which was now conveniently clear of any and all important documents, papers, or writing utensils, and better yet candles. Judging from the immediacy in which she hopped on top, he suspected she had this planned.

“I’ve always wondered how sturdy this desk was,” she mused, running her hand slowly over the smooth oak or whatever it was made out of. Some sort of wood, though Ben surely was no carpenter. But really he didn’t give a damn about blasted carpentry, especially not now. She smiled flirtatiously. “Care to find out?”

“Christ, woman,” he growled, eliciting an adorable giggle from her. “You’re determined to be the death of me.”

Shaking her head, she ran her fingers lightly over the front of his shirt and began to untuck the material from the confines of his trousers. “Only a little one. Isn’t that what French call it? ‘The little death’?”

He kissed her again, deep and insistent, to which she responded in kind, only parting long enough for him to remove his shirt. Eagerly, she raked her fingers down his back, reveling in the exposed flesh and the way gooseflesh appeared under her fingers. Ah, revenge was sweet.

But Ben’s mouth was sweeter.

But then his hand was on her thigh and inching higher, much too slowly for her liking. Not only were her insides quivering for him but the rest of her was as well, her arms trembling as they wound around his neck to bring him closer. And then, finally, a hand skimmed underneath her shirt, which had ridden up considerably at this new position, and found its way exactly where she wanted him.

She gasped wantonly as his hand slid between her thighs, shivering as he groaned appreciatively. “You’re so wet for me already,” she heard him murmur, his voice pitched lowly almost as if he were in distress. He pressed his mouth against hers desperately. “So ready for me.”

Jesus, she thought breathlessly, this was something new. Over time, he had of course gained more confidence and initiative in their lovemaking, but not once had he ever spoken like this. And not once had she ever imagined herself reacting to it just like this, gasping and shivering in anticipation, malleable under his hands. She would do well to remember this in the morning, lest she forget.

Oh, who was she kidding, she was not going to forget this.

He slipped a finger inside her, and they both groaned favorably. She pushed her hips downwards to meet his hand greedily, both thrilled and a tiny bit frustrated as he took his time with her.
Expression glazed in lust, Ben watched as she worked herself against his hand, meeting every gentle thrust of his fingers with an eager roll of her hips. He couldn’t look away even if he wanted to, and there was no way, in any universe, that he would ever want to. He was vaguely aware of the hard press of his arousal in his trouser, filled with the need to bury himself inside her, but his focus remained fixated on her. Abigail completely overwhelmed him, the sight of her flushed face as she writhed against him, the half-stifled moans of pleasure purred against his ear, the scent of lavender intermingled with her arousal, and dear God, the taste of her…

He swallowed hard. The image of his mouth on her, there, filled his mind suddenly, and there was almost nothing more than he wanted. He murmured the request against her neck, but she couldn’t hear him, nuzzling her face against his as she asked him to repeat himself.

“I want to taste you. No… I need to,” he said, on the verge of begging but he didn’t care. “Please, say that it’s okay.”

Abigail’s lips parted into a small “o”, her eyelids fluttering at the lovely image that would make. Her inner muscles throbbed eagerly. “It’s more than okay.” She mumbled a curse in Gaelic, something far too obscene than could be expressed in English. “Your fingers, you mouth. I want it all. Just do something. Please.”

His fingers eased out of her, much to her disappointment, but before she miss his fingers, Ben lowered himself to his knees and… the visual was far better than the imagination. His hands slid up to her hips, encouraging her to forward. Abigail gripped the edges of his desk, heart pounding in her chest as he pressed a lingering kiss to either thigh. Instinctively, she spread them further apart and gasped as he nuzzled against her thigh approvingly.

At the first press of his home at her center, Abigail’s eyes widened, half-choking on a gasp. For a man who had never done this before, Benjamin Tallmadge was rapidly proving himself to be a very promising student. After a number of initial licks, his tongue slipped inside her slowly, exploring. Her body trembled with the effort to stay still, let alone upright on the desk.

Try as she might, she was incapable from stifling her gasps and moans of pleasure, much to his delight. It seemed every noise that escaped her she was rewarded with cleverly crafted maneuver of his mouth and… she suddenly recalled her thought from earlier. Revenge might have been sweet, but Ben’s mouth was definitely sweeter, in more ways than just one.

Soon enough, her hands sought purchase in his hair, her trembling fingers lacing through those infuriatingly perfect locks of his. At a particular delightful stroke of his tongue, she accidentally tugged to hard and for a moment worried if she had hurt him, but the resounding groan against her soothed any inklings of anxiety.

She was rapidly approaching her climax far too soon. This time when she tugged, it was insistent. She shuddered at the vibrations of his groans against her clit, her bucks bucking against his mouth. “Ben,” she gasped. “Please… I need you to…”

Pulling back, he stared up at her, panting quietly against her thigh, his pupils blown in desire. “Are you okay?” he asked, concern entering his voice.

Abigail nodded jerkily, running a hand through her already wild hair. “For now, yes.” Desperately, she waited until she could catch her breath. Her skin glimmered with sweat. The shirt she was still wearing clung to her, revealing every curve of her feminine figure that she had no doubt he was noticing. “But… if you don’t…” She exhaled carefully. “If you’re not inside me soon, I think I just might die.”
“Well, we can’t have that,” he murmured. He stumbled to his feet, his coordination and elegance seemingly escaped him for the moment. It was very gratifying to know he was as equally effected. She watched through half-lidded eyes as he removed his boots, biting her lip in amusement as he cursed colorfully at their stubborn removal. Upon his success, she crossed her arms and slipped out of her shirt, tossing it casually next to wear his boots now laid.

If it were impossible, the major’s eyes darkened even more with desire. The only other sound in the room, save for their heavy breathing, was the clinking sound of the unbuckling of his belt. He recaptured her lips into a lingering kiss. She could taste herself in his mouth, which made her whimper and draw herself closer to him, all the while her hands roamed down his shoulders, down his back until the rested right above the trouser hemline, which she began urging downwards at the sound of his belt clattering to the ground.

“Do you remember the last time we drank together?” she murmured against his mouth. He gave a quiet grunt in reply, which she took as affirmative. “The evening before you left for Yale.” It was the night she had decided to “borrow” one of her father’s bottles of brandy, as a proper sendoff or so she had claimed at the time to convince him. Though really in hindsight, he hadn’t taken much convincing.

“You were teasing me,” he remarked after a time, stifling another curse as he struggled to kick off his trousers, which were now around his ankles. “As you always do.”

Abigail smiled mischievously and wrapped her arms around him. “It’s that one night in particular when things had gotten… interesting. I refused to give you the bottle, and you tried to snatch it away from me, but in your haste, you fell on top of me.”

With his trousers no longer an issue, Ben reached for her, brows furrowing slightly. “Is there a point to this, because I thought we were in the middle of something?”

“Oh, we definitely are,” she assured him. In fact, she parted her thighs and coaxed him closer with her calves. “I just felt the need to confide in you of my true intentions in that moment. You see, I wasn’t trying to wriggle from underneath you. I was trying to hike up my skirts to allow you better access.”

It took a few moments for her implication to register, but when it finally did, Ben stilled. His dark eyes widened, his lips parting slowly. “Are you saying…”

She nodded slowly, purring softly, “Yes, I am.”

He groaned, as if he’d just been punched in the gut. “You can’t just say things like that.”

“I can and I have.” Arching her hips, she rubbed herself against the head of his member, shivering in pleasure. “Now, if you don’t mind…”

The major needed no further encouragement. He entered her in one, smooth stroke until he was fully inside her. Both moaned in unison.

Together that evening they discovered just how well Ben’s desk was actually built. Twice.
Philadelphia

Abigail had experienced far too many things in her now twenty-eight years of life, far more than anyone could imagine. She’d witnessed executions, fought beside her fellow soldiers on the battlefield, and even spied on one of the British’s top ranking officers in York City. If anyone were to ask how she had done all of this, she could easily tell them the truth, that most of the time she had been flying by the seam of her pants, which was a very ironic turn of phrase if one thought of it.

But this, seeing crowds of people lined up along the streets, filling in every nook in cranny possible, from the elderly to young children alike, craning their necks to chance a look at the Continentals returning from victory – this was by far the most amazing sight she had ever seen. And it was something she would not soon forget, not even once her hair turned grey.

The crowds cheered for Washington and his men as they made the gradual march down the streets of Philadelphia. It wasn’t the first time they encountered this form of reception, having traveled through other towns in order to arrive at the Congress where negotiations of establishing the end of war and tying up loose ends would be made. This wasn’t the first victory parade, nor would it be the last.

Abigail, practically dead on her feet from all the walking, was rejuvenated by the joyous cheering from the crowd, at least for the moment. She looked forward to having a rest before setting off to York City. Since she remained in her alias, she had to walk along with the other soldiers. Naturally, she handed over Cantor’s reins to Ben, who was the only person apart from herself that could manage him. Even from a distance, she sensed her gelding’s preening at all the attention. She smiled fondly to herself, thinking of her little rat with a swell of affection.

The moment they came to a halt and eventually granted leave for rest, she found herself being welcomed in by a family of six – a young mother and father of three children ranging in ages from three to fourteen, and an elderly woman she took to be their grandmother. She and two other soldiers were invited into their home, practically by bribery with the promise of food and a place to rest.

“It’s the least we can do, since you’ve fought for us,” the elderly woman insisted warmly. Abigail took to her immediately and found herself enjoying spending time with the children while eating some of the most delicious stew she had ever eaten. The bread was so fresh it all but flaked apart in her hands. For the first time since her stay in York City, she fell asleep with a full stomach.

By the time she awakened, it was close to dusk, surprising herself that she hadn’t been out for the count. Thanking her hosts graciously, she excused herself to explore the city a bit, and that’s what she ran into Anna. Abe and Thomas had already returned to Setauket to settle things with Whitehall Manor, but the brunette had been determined to join them on the journey to Congress.

Upon running into her, Anna shared with her that she had meet with Selah, and the two of them had talked, about everything. Not only that, but he had also shown her a bill he had drafted to ensure
payment for war veterans. He even asked for her input, and she assisted him in revising the bill. Afterwards, Selah informed her the divorce papers were signed and officially filed. When Abigail asked how she was, she assured her that they actually parted on good terms.

Despite her reassurance, Abigail was quick to embrace her anyway, telling her that she would always be there for her. Anna returned the embrace as well as the sentiment. They were sisters after all, perhaps not by blood but sisters nevertheless.

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York City

Much like Philadelphia, they arrived to a cheerful and celebratory crowd. Flags were waving and drinks were flowing. A tiny flock of children attempted to run out to greet the horses, but their vigilant parents snatched them back in the nick of time. Of course, one of them managed to slip past them so he could get a better look at the soldiers, only to find himself face-to-face with an approaching horse.

Thankfully, Ben had spotted the boy before bringing Cantor to a quick stop. He smiled down at the boy, moving to the side the allow the others to pass him. With a quick glance towards the boy’s parents, he observed, amused, “I believe this belongs to you.”

Face going red with mortification, the mother babbled out an apology, but Abigail watched as Ben assured her it was fine. Then he reached inside his pocket and passed something to the child, whose face instantly lit up with excitement. She didn’t get to see what he had given the child or hear his next words as she was forced to continue walking forward among the lines of soldiers.

That was the last she saw of him for the rest of the morning.

The parade extended well into the city, and as much as Abigail enjoyed the celebrations and the jubilant faces, she couldn’t bear to walk another minute. The blisters from the marching were becoming irritated, and she wouldn’t be surprised if they were filled with her blood.

The men and women of New York were dressed in their best for the occasion, some more extravagantly than others. She admired more than a few dresses as she passed. As much as she preferred trousers in their conveniences, a part of her missed the utter femininity of a dress, though she didn’t miss those blasted corsets. Ever since she burned those awful bindings of hers, she had been forced to wear a coat to help conceal herself, an irritating consequence of her inebriant act of liberation.

Suddenly, an idea sparked inside Abigail’s mind. Wouldn’t it be interesting that the next time Ben saw her she was no longer in uniform?

Tiredness forgotten, she smirked to herself before swiftly removing her hat and began inching her way out of line until she was no longer in the center. With a glance behind her, her eyes roamed the crowd for Anna until she finally spotted her not to far from her. Catching her gaze, she gave a subtle head tilt, and before she could elaborate any further, she continued to inch herself out of line until she was now among the crowds.

The holy ghost must have been on her side since her maneuvering didn’t appear to cause any disruption. Without a second thought, she gave her hat to a young girl, squinting against the sun, and moved to an open space so that Anna could find her.

When Anna finally did catch up with her, Abigail beckoned her closer. “Do you think any of these
fine, upstanding women would mind if I borrowed a dress?”

Anna’s previously furrowed brows smoothed over and a wicked grin spread across her face. She knew exactly what she had in mind. “I’m sure they have enough dresses that one won’t be missed.”

The blonde returned her smile. “Indeed.”

The two women snuck into the first house they came to, with Abigail casually picking at the backdoor lock with a crude instrument as Caleb had taught her. The house was tall and proud and most likely belonged to a very wealthy family, so she didn’t feel as bad for the breaking and entering.

Anna observed her ministrations with a mixture of amusement and concern. “You’ve been in the army far too long.”

Abigail tossed her a grin before they slipped inside.

Just one look around the place, it was clear the house was abandoned. The place was still tastefully decorated, but some things were turned over and scattered about. Knocked over knickknacks and papers littered counters. An imprint of where a carpet once used to be lingered on the floor. Abigail wondered if this house had belonged to a prominent Loyalist and upon news of the British defeat decided to pack up and leave. A wise decision if it were true and a very fortunate one for herself. It would’ve been awkward for Ben to arrest Anna and herself for illegal trespassing.

The two women washed up quickly with what toiletries they discovered before ascending the stairs to the bedrooms. In their haste, the former residents had left many things behind, including an assortment of accessories and dresses, much to her relief. She shredded her clothes immediately, leaving her stark naked as she began looking through the clothes. When Anna entered the room, she took one look at her and said without batting an eye, “You really have been in the army too long.”

Abigail smiled demurely before returning her attentions to her search. Gradually, she began to layer herself in the appropriate manner, purposefully neglecting the corset. Then a flash of blue caught her eye, prompting her to push aside the other garments to reveal a royal blue dress. It was stunning, positively stunning in its simplistic styling. The sleeves appeared to come up just below the elbow, the edgings trimmed in the faintest hint of white lace. Down the front, there were lacings of the same coloring as the dress, crisscrossed along the front with buttons lining down the middle. How useful.

With Anna’s help, she slipped into the dress, tying up what needed to be tied and all the workings that went into getting a woman into fifteen layers of just one dress. She slipped her poor, abused feet into a pair of comfortable shoes, which were carefully concealed underneath the skirts of the dress. Finally, she was done. She looked up in the mirror across from them. No, not quite. Lifting her hands to her hair, she removed the ribbon that had been holding the bun, and her golden hair pooled around her shoulders in a mass of wild, loose curls.

Abigail couldn’t help but stare at herself. It wasn’t that she was suddenly enamored with her own reflection – she wasn’t a narcissist. Just looking at herself, it almost felt as if no time had passed, as if the past five years hadn’t happened. Her hair hadn’t once been cut since she had first left to enlist and had long since returned to its former length. She was much thinner than she had been five years ago, but apart from that, she felt as if she were looking into a time capsule. It was eerie.

“Are you all right?” Anna asked gently a few minutes later. She volunteered to help her with her hair and sensed something was off when the blonde hadn’t assured her that she could do it herself.

Abigail smiled faintly. “I… yes, I’m…” She sighed quietly, looking down. “I’m not sure really. It’s just being in this dress and seeing myself, like this… it feels as if no time has passed, that nothing’s
changed. But that’s hardly true, is it? Everything’s changed.”

It was all over now. She could return home and finally visit her father’s grave. Her fingers clenched at her skirts at the thought, clenching even more when she realized that Tobias would never receive a proper burial.

“It has,” Anna agreed cautiously, her gaze briefly dropping from Abigail’s mirrored face to the brush in her hand, gently taming the wild golden hair. “We’re no longer under British control. It’s a new day, a new country now. Everything’s changed.” She glanced upwards to catch Abigail’s gaze in the mirror. She smiled. “You have Ben now. But then again, you’ve always had him.”

Abigail smiled back, but the smile was fleeting. She loved Ben with all of her heart, she always had and she always would. There was never a doubt in her mind that she didn’t. It was only… “This is the first chance that I can properly mourn. My father and… Tobias.” Although it had been years since their deaths, just speaking of them aloud was still painful for her, though far less than the initial shock and horror upon her first discovery of the news. She didn’t know what to do with that.

The brunette maintained a carefully neutral expression, though not unkind. “You’ve been in mourning for the past three years for them,” she reminded her gently.

Abigail began to shake her head, then remembered the brush. She paused, biting her lip. “It just… doesn’t seem like enough.” She took a quiet breath. “I was thinking I should go into mourning, when I return home.” Back to her father’s house, the place where she had grown up, the last place she had been with Thomas Williams before she had left him to die. “It would be expected.”

Inwardly, she flinched. She thought she was past that, the gut wrenching guilt. In a way she had, but obviously a part of her hadn’t completely healed from it.

“It doesn’t matter what others’ think,” Anna remarked, smoothing out a particularly difficult knot. “I believe you know that better than anyone.”

“I wouldn’t be doing it for anyone else,” she replied softly. “It would be for me, for… for them.”

For a while, Anna continued to brush out her hair in silence. Each passing stroke of the brush was soothing and comforting. Abigail found herself closing her eyes more than once and quickly reopened them, only to find her friend looking at her considerately. She didn’t dare ask what she was thinking, but she should found out.

When she was done, Anna set the brush the side before settling her hands on her shoulder gently. “If you want to do this, I support you. But just go for one month at a time, to see how you feel afterwards. If you feel it in your heart you need to do this, then you should, but please remember that life is short. Okay?”

Abigail smiled tremulously. “Okay.”

Anna kissed the crown of her head, smiling kindly. “Now that we’ve got everything settled, I think there’s a major looking for you.”

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Gradually, the parade came to an end, and the crowds began fading with it. However, the didn’t mean the celebrations were over. They only moved into taverns and neighboring homes and businesses, soldiers and civilians alike.

It didn’t take her long to find Ben, who was standing at the end of the street and looking all around.
She took advantage of his distraction and walked right beside him, taking her time to appreciate the sight of him in his uniform. Oh, she really was going to miss that. He cut quite the figure in his officer’s uniform, especially the back of him. She fought back a wistful sigh.

The sound of carousing drew her attention towards the tavern, Abigail watched with an amused smile as the men proceeded to entertain themselves in typical fashion of inebriated men. “You’d think they would’ve learned their lesson from Yorktown,” she commented, recalling the stellar hangovers many of the men had sported. She had wisely reminded herself and Ben to drink plenty of water, which had been a mercy on them both.

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught his smile. “Well, at least their consistent with something, I suppose,” he remarked dryly, his eyes having found the men of which she spoke.

She looked up at him just in time to catch his gaze and held back a grin when he did a doubletake, his eyes widening with surprise.

He took half a step back to fully take her in, beginning with the skirts and traveling upwards to linger on her loose hair that rested right at the edge of the dress’s neckline. The blue of the dress brought out the blue in her eyes.

For a moment, he was too stunned to speak. “…have I just transported back in time?”

There was a stranger flicker in her expression, but as soon as it came, it disappeared, replaced by a light grin. “I’m not sure about that exactly, but I thought it was about time I got out of that uniform. Though I have grown rather fond of trousers.”

Chuckling softly, Ben began reaching for her hand but paused. Then it hit him he no longer had to worry about anyone observing them. He took her hand and brought it to his lips, his eyes not once straying from hers. The feeling they no longer had to hide or sneak around was a heady one. It sounded almost too good to be true.

He released her hand, having every intention of stepping forward to replace her hand with her lips, but somehow she beat him to it. She stepped into his space, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him long and deep, uncaring for the eyes that were clearly on them.

The major didn’t care either. Pulling her in close, he kissed her back, savoring the taste of her lips against his own. Only when the need for air arose, they parted but only far enough for him to murmur, “I love you.”

Abigail smiled happily. “And I love you.” Then her eyes brightened even more. “We won, Ben. It’s a whole new world now. And the future has never seemed brighter.”

Ben grinned. “Yes, we did win. And not just America’s freedom.”

She beamed, enchanting him completely. “I think you might be onto something, even if what you said was just a tiny bit corny.”

Ben’s eyes narrowed playfully. “How dare you.”

The blonde’s grin softened. “I didn’t say I didn’t like corny. I love corny.” She brushed her nose against his. “I love you.”

Ben tried to remain annoyed, he truly did, but seeing her like this made it impossible. He grinned in spite of himself and drew her closer. “I’ll forgive you for now, but you will pay for it later.”
She raised a brow, smile still intact. “You promise?”

This bloody woman, he thought to himself. Unable to resist any longer, he captured her lips in immediate response. He smiled as she sighed against his lips. Then he murmured, “I’m a man of my word.”

“Good.”

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**Setauket**

Abe scrubbed at the tavern tables distractedly, his mind elsewhere. Working at Dejong Tavern, formerly known as the Strong Tavern, had never been apart of his plan, but if he ever wanted to restore his farm, he needed money. One quick way to earn it was through the tavern. Even though he had finished his legal studies, there wasn’t much opportunity of employment for a lawyer, at least not when the new laws of a new land haven’t been written just yet. After settling his debt with Hewlett and Whitehall, he was now able to devote his time to his farm.

He and his son were currently residing in Hawkins Hall, at Abigail’s insistence despite the fact they had not yet made the arrangements for her gather her things. Although she had assured them she wanted nothing, he was still determined to see that she got something. It was what she was owed after all, although she might not see it that way.

Anna’s last letter informed him that she would be returning to Setauket within the next few days, which gave aid to his distraction. He missed her terribly and looked forward to having her back with him soon. And bless her, try as she might, she had unsuccessfully gotten a meeting with Washington for him through Ben. He had tried Ben next, but his friend had made no promises. Working for Culper drastically impacted his life on multiple fronts, he wasn’t one to extend his hand for something he hadn’t earned himself. He only wanted what he was owed. That was all.

The fate of his farm and the future for his son depended upon it.

“I think you missed a spot.”

Abe’s head jerked up at the sound of the familiar voice. Caleb stood in the doorway of the tavern, grinning broadly as he spread his arms out. Grinning back, Abe dropped the towel and met him halfway into a hearty hug, filled with back slaps and laughter.

“What are you doing here?” he asked with delighted surprise. “I’d thought you would be out on the water by now.”

The whaler replied “I was in the area and thought I’d drop by.”

Abe looked at him shrewdly. “You were not.”

Caleb shrugged casually. “Anyway, you should come outside. There’s some people waiting to say hello to you.”

Abe shook his head. “Really, I can’t. Dejong has already been on my arse…” Before he could finish the word “really”, he was already being guided towards the door.

“Abe!” Anna called happily while hopping down from the wagon. Hiking up her skirts enough so she wouldn’t trip over them, she rushed over towards him and hugged him. Abe returned the hug fiercely once he recovered from his surprise.
“You said you wouldn’t be coming back for another few days,” he said, tone half-accusing, voice muffled as he nuzzled his face against her neck.

“A little white lie,” Anna remarked apologetically, though she was still smiling. “I wanted it to be a surprise. Where’s Thomas?”

“You’ve accomplished that,” he said. His heart swelled at her expression of concern for Thomas. “He’s being looked after by Ms. McCurdy at the house, so we know he’s being well fed.”

“I think Fievel’s forgotten all about us,” came Abigail’s dry greeting.

Anna stepped away long enough for Abe to greet Ben and Abigail respectively. He gave a playful tug at the blonde’s skirts. “You’re back to wearing those again? Never thought I’d see the day.”

She gave him a playful swat, grinning. “Oh, my trouser days aren’t over, I promise you that. They’re so easy to travel in. Maybe I’ll make the switch official.”

“No,” Ben said, shaking his head. “I will not have people, men, staring at you.”

Abigail looked at him. “At what? My legs?”

“Yes!”

She snorted. “I haven’t heard any complaints from you.”

“I… I’m not complaining,” he spluttered, his cheeks turning red. “I just… dammit, Abigail.”

Taking pity on him, she pressed a kiss to his cheek in apology. That seemed to mollify him.

“What’s… what’s all this about, Woodhull?” came the indignant shrill voice of DeJong, who was storming out of his tavern in a huff. “I am not paying you to be out here, socializing! Get back to work.”

Abe quickly attempted to rectify the situation. Maarten DeJong was easily one of the most unreasonable men he ever had the misfortune to meet, let alone be employed under. “Sir, I was just coming inside…”

“I don’t care what you were doing. You are not being paid to stand around and talk…”

“We’re paying guests, Mr. DeJong,” Ben interjected smoothly before the man’s blood pressure could further skyrocket. “Mr. Brewster, Ms. Smith, Ms. Williams, and myself. We were just about to ask if there were any rooms available.”

“I… couldn’t possible reserve all these rooms. I have guests!”

“We’re willing to pay you handsomely for it. We have no desire to put you out.”

Before DeJong could make any further remark, the sound of an approaching horse prompted everyone present to turn in the direction.

Arriving on horseback was George Washington himself. While he was no longer dressed in uniform, that didn’t mean the man wasn’t still resplendent. Abe could barely breathe as Washington eased the horse to a stop and dismounted before approaching them. There was something about the man that automatically made one come to complete attention. Abe was by no means an exception.

The dumbfounded look on DeJong’s face was comical.
Abe hissed quietly to Caleb, who was closest. “What’s all this about?”

Not wanting to risk missing a moment, Caleb replied back without removing his gaze from the scene before him, “Washington wanted to have dinner with the members of Culper. Ben suggested coming here. Don’t worry. Everything should be settled now that Washington’s here.”

And of course it was. Washington requested to have DeJong’s entire tavern to host the dinner party. DeJong immediately agreed but not before snapping at Abe to clean the tables in preparation, only to be informed by Washington that Abe was the guest of honor. That certainly shut DeJong up.

While the others headed towards the tavern, Abigail approached Washington before she could talk herself out of it. “Your excellency,” she spoke deferentially, her arms crossed behind her back, her nails biting into her skin.

The commander-in-chief looked towards her, blinked, and looked back towards her again. This was the first time she had ever seen even a hint of surprise on the Grey Fox’s face. “Williams?” he inquired incredulously.

“Yes, sir?” she responded, although her tone turned it into question. She pinched herself to keep from chuckling.

Whatever shock he experienced, Washington quickly recovered. With an imperceptible shake of his head, he spoke pleasantly, “I’m pleased to finally make your acquaintance.”

Abigail finally allowed herself to smile as he took her hand and pressed it between his. She chanced a look over her shoulder to catch Ben’s barely suppressed amusement as well. “I’m very much looking forward to dinner tonight,” she said, returning her attention to Washington. “But I’m afraid I have to go, at least for now.”

Washington frowned inquisitively. “And why is that, if I may ask?”

Squaring her shoulders unconsciously, she spoke quietly, “There’s someone I need to see.”

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The Setauket Presbyterian Church was founded in 1660. Over the years, the grounds had been well maintained by steadfast reverends and the support of public funds. Reverend Tallmadge continued to protect the church’s structural integrity with grace and diligence. This didn’t surprise Abigail in the least. Ben’s father was an amazing man. She expected nothing less.

Instead of walking into the church, she proceeded directly towards the cemetery, surprised to find the newly installed waist-level gate unlocked. After the discretion of family graves by the British early into the war, many of the families had moved their graves to neighboring towns, Brookhaven being one of the most prominent.

Swallowing hard as she thought of her own mother’s grave, which had been present during this time, she felt a swell of anger at just the thought. She hated to think of her mother’s eternal resting place being disturbed; she could only hope that, if it had, her tombstone and whatever else had been disturbed had been restored.

Across the path, there were shovels and other maintenance supplies carefully placed around areas where certain graves used to be. Work was still being done to properly restore graves to their original state, but judging from the bareness of the number of empty slots, there was still a way too go. She continued determinedly up the hill and towards the small family mausoleum, one of the few that were left.
Finally, she found her parents graves towards the far east of the cemetery, almost secluded. The closer she approached, she recognized that perhaps her mother’s grave was one of the lucky few that hadn’t been desecrated. It looked very much the same.

*Alice Elizabeth Williams*
Born April 3rd 1732  
Died September 30th 1754  
Loving wife and mother

She placed a hand on the cool, ragged stone, squeezing her eyes shut then laying some freshly cut sunflowers before her. “Hello, mother,” she murmured, smiling sadly. “It’s been awhile. I know I’ve been unacceptably late.”

Then her blue eyes strayed towards the grave marker beside her. Her fingers trembled as she slowly reached out to touch the sandstone. Exhaling quietly, she greeted quietly, “Good… good morning, father.”

*Thomas Elias Williams*
Born December 15th 1728  
Died November 17th 1779  
Devoted husband and father

Just below the words of “devotes husband and father” were the words from Jeremiah 33:6, which read: “Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them; and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth.”

Thomas Williams was Setauket’s most beloved physician. The Bible passage was very fitting indeed. It spoke true of his character.

The tremors in her hands increased, so much so she nearly dropped the flowers onto his grave. The realization was to her great mortification. Carefully, slowly, she laid the remainder of the sunflowers on his grave and then gently lowered herself to the ground so that she was now kneeling before them, directly across from them but in the middle.

There had been so much she wanted to share with them, so many things she wished to finally get off her chest. During her walk from DeJong’s Tavern to the church, she could think of nothing else. But now that she was seated before them now, the words, prepared monologues, just wouldn’t come.

Only three words managed to slip out. “I’m so sorry.” A stray rolled down her cheek at the admission, and soon she was overwhelmed by an onslaught of tears. Her parents’ graves blurred before her eyes, which distressed her even more.

This wasn’t how it was supposed to go. Her intention had been to visit her parents, to update them on her life, to tell them how much she missed them. Yet the words were caught in her throat. She hoped desperately that they could hear her. She missed them terribly. She missed the sound of her father’s voice, missed his comforting presence, his welcoming hugs…

The blonde didn’t hear the approaching footsteps nor the sound of someone kneeling down beside her, too consumed in her own grief. She barely registered the arms wrapping around her but found herself leaning instinctively into the sudden presence of warmth. Lips pressed at the crown of her head and remained there.
Occasionally, Ben murmured words of comfort into her hair but for the most part remained silent, holding her protectively against him. He must have followed her to the church, she would realize later, but for now, her body wracking with sobs couldn’t bring herself to ask him.

She wasn’t certain how long they remained like this, holding each other fiercely. Over time, her sobs eased away but quiet hiccups soon followed. Ben’s hands rubbed soothing circles along her back, saying nothing but for the occasional comforting noise.

Blearily, she opened her eyes in time for her to see it, tears clinging to her lashes. Right behind her parents’ graves stood an old tree, far older than what it appeared. But it wasn’t the tree she was focused on. A solitary leaf fell from its branch and slowly descended to the earth, fluttering gently to the ground in the quiet brush of wind.

As an Irishmen, Thomas Williams had been a firm believer that the earth was alive around them. Deeply spiritual and not just religious, he had brought her up with stories of how spirits were always around them, whether in the forms of animals or in nature. “Our loved ones never truly leave us,” he always reassured her whenever she was sad. “Look to the skies and see a bird. There is your mother, looking down on you always. And when I’m gone, look at to the trees. We will never leave you.”

And Abigail knew, deep down, that was true.

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Abigail managed to compose herself in time for dinner late that night, and it was all thanks to Ben and his vigilance right until they had to go down and join the others, his hand a reassuring pressure at the small of her back as he escorted her to her seat.

The dinner was lovely and full of laughter and entertaining anecdotes. It was just the very distraction she needed. Caleb soon announced he had finally come across the love of his life, a Clara Lewis, whose name he managed to learn after she managed to drink him under the table, prompting a series of teasing jests from around the table. Washington observed them all with no small amount of amusement.

Then the whaler, for the first time in all of the time Abigail had known him, began to stammer, “- and, uh, she is - She is about to be –”

Anna’s eyes widened and even Abe, who had been unusually quiet throughout the evening, perked up with interest. “Oh, no.”

Ben was more than happy to finish for him, “Mrs. Clara Brewster.”

The blonde observed as Caleb blushed but also noted the sudden grin he could no longer suppress. “No, not quite yet. I mean I couldn’t possibly have proposed to her that quick!”

Leaning around Ben, Abigail looked at him, giving him a knowing look. “Didn’t you?”

There was a brief pause before Caleb gave up the pretense. “Oh, all right, I did.” He grinned at her. “And she said yes!”

“Congratulations!” Anna enthused, raising her glass to him as well as everyone else.

Once they took their sips, Caleb asked Anna innocently, “Care to make it a joint wedding?”

The brunette was quick to conceal her smile. “I love you, Caleb, but not on your life.”
Her response elicited a round of hearty chuckles, and the meal carried on in similar fashion. Every now and then, Abigail would catch Ben sneaking a glance in her direction. It was subtle, but she knew it was a checking in gesture. Every time she gave him a soft smile of reassurance, her expression softening every time he reached for her hand to give it a gentle squeeze, always careful and kind and worried for her. She had fallen in love with an incredibly amazing man.

Once plates were cleared, Washington called for a toast for the Culper Ring, and everyone raised their glasses. Abe, however, did not raise his immediately, appearing somewhat subdued. When asked if he was all right, he said he was very appreciative of the recognition, but he only required compensation.

An awkward silence filled the room. Anna was quick to fill it by proposing another toast for the others who could not be present, Townsend, Nathaniel Sackett, Abigail and Cicero, Judge Woodhull, and Tobias Hawkins. At the mention of her late former husband, Ben reached for her hand once more, this time not letting go. She very much appreciated the gesture and squeezed back.

Washington quietly addressed that members of the ring had sacrificed a great deal for selfless reasons, but Abe was quick to inform him that his own farm had suffered greatly while carrying out his Culper duties and that he did not qualify for the veterans’ pay as proposed in Selah Strong’s new bill.

After several agonizingly long moments with an unreadable look, Washington requested to speak with Abe privately. Abigail, Ben, Anna, and Caleb excused themselves and exited the room, more than happy to remove themselves from the mildly uncomfortable tension mounting.

After whispering briefly in Abe’s ear, Anna announced to the others she would be returning to Hawkins Hall to check on Thomas and relieve Mrs. McCurdy from child sitting duties. Caleb offered to escort her, and Anna accepted, even going so far as to insist that he spend the night in one of the guest rooms.

Now all that remained were Abigail and Ben, who retired to their room upstairs.

“I hope everything turns out for Fievel,” she murmured the moment Ben shut the door to their room. DeJong had given them look of intense disapproval when she had requested one room for the two of them, but one swift look from the major had killed any slurs the tavern owner considered making.

“So do I,” he replied. He removed his coat and laid it over the back of a desk chair. “While I’ve certainly had my disagreements with him, Washington is a fair and just man. I have no doubts that Abe will receive what he’s owed.”

She untied her hair from a blue ribbon, one she had borrowed from Anna, letting it fall onto the bedside table. “He’s sacrificed a great deal. And to lose his father on top of it…”

And then before she knew it, his arms encircled around her waist. She allowed herself to be drawn closer to him, savoring the strong, protective embrace. He seemed to be doing that a lot lately, protecting her, comforting her. Sighing quietly, she leaned back into him instinctively, her head falling back against his shoulder.

She didn’t know what she had done to deserve someone like him.

“How soon do you have to be in Philadelphia?” she inquired, her hands finding his resting across her stomach.

She felt the warmth of his breath against her forehead as he replied, “Washington will be leaving in
the morning for Philadelphia. He prefers for me to go with him but has given me permission to go the
day after tomorrow.”

There was nothing more than Abigail wanted than to keep Ben all to herself but knew that his
presence was needed in Congress. Someone needed to have a level head among the sea of white
puffy wigs. All right. She admitted it having no knowledge of what exactly a Congress attire
consisted of, but she couldn’t be too far off track.

“As much as I’d prefer to have you with me for an entire day and night, all to myself,” she paused
and turned her face to nuzzle at his neck affectionately, “you should go with Washington in the
morning. They need you there.”

Ben sighed and dropped a kiss to her shoulder. “I was afraid you’d say that.”

Abigail smiled to herself, a touch somberly. “But you know that I’m right. You need to be there to
remind all those members of Congress, many of whom hadn’t experienced this war firsthand, just
who they are serving. They’re not there to fulfill their own self-interests but to serve the interests of
the people. Don’t let them lose sight of that.”

Ben hugged her against him, his lips curving upwards into a smile as they brushed her cheek. “You
have my word,” he remarked, more than a touch of pride in his voice. “And you’re an incredible
woman.”

She warmed from his praise and responded just in kind, “And you’re an incredible man. But don’t
you forget about the women.” Her tone grew more serious, her thoughts turning back to Abigail and
Cicero. Although they were free due to earlier British influence, a part of her knew that they were
not entirely free. They would never be seen as anything more as second class citizens, if to be seen as
humans at all. It wasn’t fair. “And call for the abolition of slavery as well. It’s abhorrent.”

“On my first day?”

“On your first minute.”

“I’ll try my very best, but I can’t make any promises.”

“Just as long as you try.”

He kissed her then, tender and sweet. Sighing gently, she contented herself from the slow, languid
press of his mouth against hers. Gradually, she turned around in his arms so that her front meshed
against his, his hands settling low on her back. It was as if they had all the time in the world, though
both ignored the fact he would be leaving in the morning. Congress would be taking him away from
her for at least a month, perhaps longer, but she knew he would return to her whenever he could be
spared. That didn’t mean she had to like it, however.

“What will you be doing while I’m gone?” he inquired, brushing a lock away from her face gently.

“I have a few things to take care of back home,” she said. “My… my father’s place. There’s going to
be so much to do that must be handled, before I can even think of making house visits, as my father
did.” And who knew if the people of Setauket would accept her? But that was the last thing she was
concerned about. “Since the war is over, I can… finally, properly mourn. I’ve discussed it with Anna
– not sure if she’s mentioned it to you – and she suggested a month and see how I feel afterward. But
this isn’t about social propriety and what everyone else things of me. This is for me, for them, my
father and…”

She knew she was rambling now, but she just couldn’t bring herself to stop. But then his fingers
crooked underneath her chin, coaxing her to meet his gaze – she hadn’t even realized she looked away. His expression was full of compassion and understanding. “I haven’t waited this long for you to abandon you now. I’ll wait for you, however long it takes, because I love you.”

There were no words to describe how much Abigail loved him in that moment. Too emotional to speak, she pressed her mouth to his, expressing everything she felt for him in that kiss.

Even with all of the past pain, trauma, and heartbreak, through all the trials and tribulations, the journey had led them to this moment. That was something Abigail could never regret.

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Setauket
Two months later...

Waking up just before dawn, a habit she had adopted over the past two months, Abigail rose out of bed and prepared for the day ahead. Over the course of her first month back home, there had been plenty to do, a fair bit of housework that had been neglected for far too long. The property, on the other hand, had been surprisingly well-maintained. She later discovered that Reverend Tallmadge along with quite a number of able-bodied men from his congregation had taken it upon themselves to help keep up the property ever since her father’s passing in honor of his memory.

The days had kept her busy, beginning with her early morning visits to her parents’ graves, speaking to them about anything and everything, ranging from deeply personal to things of little to no consequence. In the beginning, it had really helped her, those conversations of theirs. Over time, though, she began to realize her father’s words to her, how spirits of loved ones were always around them, were very true. Even as she persisted in her word work into restoring the house to its original splendor, she made sure to pause, take pleasure in the world around her, to close her eyes and absorb the sun’s warmth. The warmth from the sun was her parents’ love, their undying, unconditional love. It had taken some time, but she was now at peace with it, or, at the very least, heading in that direction.

With Ben in Philadelphia for that first month, Abigail had found herself in the company of her second family. Anna, Abe, and Caleb sought her out every day, whether in shifts or altogether as a group. She enjoyed their company even through her mourning. Being the ever mother hen, Anna would bring her food, making sure she ate. Abe would lend her his ear and quite often his shoulder for whenever she needed to vent or simply talk, understanding all too well the loss of a parent. Caleb provided her with perhaps one of the most important gifts of all, the reminder to laugh, to live.

On the days they were all together, Abigail would cook for them, and for many of those days, it was breakfast, lunch, and dinner with Anna often at her side helping when she wasn’t distracted by little Thomas, who sometimes came as well.

Abigail finally got to meet the mysterious Clara Lewis soon-to-be-Brewster and was taken with her immediately. The redhead woman was clearly a Scott, tall and proud and very beautiful. She was kind and generous without being a pushover. She spoke her mind but was very well-spoken and went toe-to-toe with Caleb on more than one occasion. In some, Abigail wanted to adopt the woman as her second sister. The first was Anna who she had adopted long ago, unofficially speaking.

It wasn’t until around the second month was Ben finally able to join them. He didn’t get to visit as often as he liked, but he took advantage of when he could. His visits were few and far between, but she cherished every moment she had with him. Every time he had to live, it solidified Anna’s assertion about how short life was.
So nearly two months to the day she returned to Setauket, Abigail Williams came out of mourning. Her black mourning dress was exchanged for less somber attire, with the occasional emergence for trousers – although she hadn’t gone into town in them, yet.

In the beginning, Anna had refused to discuss the details of her and Abe’s wedding, out of consideration for Abigail, but at the blonde’s insistence, the two women had begun preparations for her budding nuptials, although Anna had been resolute in her decision not to set a date until she was out of mourning. No matter how much Abigail argued against it, insisting that Anna shouldn’t put her life on hold for her, Anna refused to budge.

Out-stubborn an Irishwoman. An impressive accomplishment.

Dressed in her riding dress, Abigail had ridden Cantor down that all too familiar journey to Hawkins Hall, a route she had been readily avoiding for some time. In the end, she realized it was a ridiculous thing, knowing the house was no longer hers and Tobias. Now it belonged to her good friends. They would make happy memories in that home, and Hawkins Hall deserved them.

Abe and Anna had finally set a date, April 25th. It was the spring wedding Anna had always wanted.

And now the day had finally arrived.

Abigail had just descended the staircase when she heard the knock on the door.

Knowing precisely who it was, she hastened her steps towards the door, her heart fluttering inside her chest. During his last visit, she and Ben had agreed to attend the wedding together. Congress was no longer in session, at least not in that moment, which allowed him to spend more than one or two nights with her. Just knowing this sent a shiver of anticipation through her.

She reminded herself they had a wedding to attend to. Behave, girl.

Any thoughts of the wedding immediately left her head when Abigail opened the door. If she thought Ben in his uniform was becoming, seeing him in formal wear was downright sinful. Ben wore a dark navy double breasted coat, opened to reveal a lighter navy colored waistcoat underneath. Underneath the waistcoat was a white, crisp dress shirt, which matched the color of his cravat. The color of both the coat and waistcoat brought out the blue in his eyes. Startled by just how good he looked, she hardly took notice of the rest of his appearance, barely noticing as he removed his hat.

Where did the hat come from?

“Hi,” she managed, blushing slightly. He blinked, just registering she had spoken, and that’s when she realized he had been just as distracted by her with some satisfaction.

She herself wore a simple pale blue dress, the bodice trimmed in light lace. The sleeves ended just below the elbow, but the lace trimming brushed her forearm. Her golden curls were tied back for the ride to the church, but prior to the ceremony, she planned on donning lace in her hair. Anna had talked her into it.

“Hi,” Ben murmured back, after a quick shake of his head. “You look very beautiful.”

Fighting back another blush, Abigail grinned and took a step forward. “Thank you. And you don’t look half bad yourself.”

Grinning, he crossed the threshold and pressed soft kiss to her lips. She attempted to coax him further, but he broke away from the kiss, though clearly not because he wanted to. “Before we go
anywhere, I have something for you.”

“What is it?” she asked, growing curious as his hands slipped inside his coat. After a moment’s search, he finally found what he was searching for and procured a bundle of… something.

Upon closer inspection, Abigail recognized the bundle as thick stack of letters, bound together with a thin leather strap. Realizing he was holding them out for her to accept, she reached for them with slightly trembling fingers.

“What’s this?” she asked quietly, unable to look away from the stack of bound letters in her hands.

“Letters,” Ben replied just as softly. “Letters I’ve written to you for the past two months.” He shifted awkwardly. “Well, nearly two months. There should be fifty-seven letters that you’re holding.”

Abigail blinked in disbelief. She ran her finger over the waxed seal in amazement. “But… you never told me you wrote me when you visited me.”

“You’re right. I didn’t. But only because I wanted you to have them all, with you,” he paused briefly. Gently, he reached out and touched her lightly on the rest, fingers resting right against her pulse point. “The letters you gave to me that first Christmas meant so much to me. I’ve always wanted to reciprocate somehow, so I thought…”

The blonde looked up in time to see that now he was the one that was blushing. She smiled. “You wrote to me every day, for two months?”

Ben nodded, his eyes shining with such sweet sincerity it nearly stole her breath. “I don’t know how I did it, but every day not being with you has been a nightmare. I tolerated it as best as I could, only because I knew that at the end of the day, I could write to you. By having that part of my day marked out, dedicated to you, it felt as if you were with me. You’re always with me.”

Abigail closed the distance between them and kissed him soundly, one hand settling at the back of his neck, while the other held the letters securely against her, guarding them as if they were the most prized possession in the world. In a way, they were. The letters were from him, for her.

“Thank you,” she whispered against him as they came apart for air. “This means so much to me. I can’t believe you did this for me.”

“Yes, you can. I’d do anything for you,” Ben smiled, his eyes softening. “Actually, there’s something I’d like you to do for me.”

“Anything,” she breathed, staring up at him happily.

He eased the letters from her grip despite her mild protest and set them down on a nearby desk. Then he took her hands in his own, which were now unusually clammy. She couldn’t help but notice the sudden shift in his body language, the raw, nervous energy suddenly radiating from him. “Are you all right?”

He nodded without hesitation. “I’m absolutely fine. But, I would be even better if you agreed to become my wife.”

Abigail stared, her lips parting softly. “I’m sorry?”

Clearing his throat nervously, Ben chuckled. “I apologize. That’s not how I meant to go about it.” He looked down at their joint hands briefly before returning her gaze. “Abigail Williams, will you…”
“Yes.”

Ben blinked. “But you didn’t even let me finish –”

“Yes,” she repeated emphatically, her heart racing. “Yes, I’ll marry you.”

He just stared at her, then a burst of laughter escaped him, one of disbelief and unadulterated joy. Encircling his arms around her, the man she had loved for the past twenty-something years lifted her off her feet, his laughter mingling with her squeal of surprise until she too was laughing along with him, her arms wrapping around her neck securely.

Eventually, Ben set her back down to her feet but not before stealing another kiss, this one deeper and lingering than the last. A surge of heat shot straight through her.

“We’re going to be late,” she murmured between kisses, giggling at his playful nip, “if you keep this up.”

He hummed against her mouth. “Late for what?”

Her giggling increasing, she forced herself to step away from him. If she didn’t, she feared they would never leave the house again – but why was that something to fear?

“Our friends are getting married,” Abigail reminded him, reaching out to smooth the creases in his cravat. “It would be wrong of us not to be there and celebrate with them.” Huh. Now that she thought about it, there would soon be a lot of weddings in the near future. Abe and Abigail. Caleb and Clara.

Ben and herself.

The blonde felt lighter than she could remember. There was also a sense of rightness, an assurance she felt know that she never truly experienced in her previous marriage. Was this what people meant by the gut feeling? To know if the person was right for you, completed you in every way? It had to be. She felt it, right then. She felt it in her heart and deep down in her bones.

Benjamin Tallmadge was the one for her, her first love and her last.

“I suppose you’re right,” Ben conceded, though he leaned in for another kiss, a minor act of rebellion. “And perhaps it would be wise not to mention our engagement until after the wedding.”

Abigail nodded in agreement. “Agreed. It wouldn’t be right for us to steal their thunder.” And if anyone asked why she was constantly smiling, she would just have to say how very happy she was for her friends, which wasn’t a lie, not really.

Ben extended his arm for her to slip her own into. “Are you ready, Ms. Williams?”

Abigail nodded but didn’t make a move to step forward when he did. At his inquisitive look, she remarked coyly, “That’ll be Mrs. Tallmadge soon.”

The joy in Ben’s eyes could only be described in one word. Radiant.
Holy shit, you guys! The fic is done! I can hardly believe it. When I started brainstorming this fic, I had no idea it would turn up like this. It simply started as me taking notes. As I would watch an episode, I’d go, “Abigail could do this here” or “actually, I think this would be a good fit here.” It sort of exploded from there. Thank you so much for being on this journey with me. It was only, what over a year and a half right? Haha

The response to this fic has been overwhelming. I’ve met so many nice, kind, lovely people as a result of posting this. You guys are the inspiration for me having kept up with writing for so long. I just can’t believe I actually finished it!

And you can bet your ass there will be a sequel. I already have it all planned out. If you’re interested, subscribe to me or the “revolutionary trash” series if you’d like to read more :)

I’ve sort of made a soundtrack for this fic so here it is right here: (I’ll update with a Spotify playlist soon!)

1. When We Were Young by Adele
2. Shallow by Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper
3. Young and Beautiful by Lana Del Rey (inspired by beaniebinch)
4. Soldier by Fleurie (inspired by beaniebinch)
5. Every Little Thing She Does is Magic by Sleeping At Last (inspired by beaniebinch)
6. You and I by PVRIS
7. Hold On by Chord Overstreet
8. Somebody Else by The 1975
9. Find a Way by Safety Suit
10. Half Light by Banners
11. I Found by Amber Run
12. I Need My Girl by The National
13. Idfc by Blackbear
14. The Lightning Strike by Snow Patrol
15. Love Song Requiem by Trading Yesterday
16. Moondust by Jaymes Young
17. My Heart Still Beats For You by Anna Ternheim
18. The Night We Met by Lord Huron
19. Oceans by Seaferet
20. Poison and Wine by The Civil Wars
21. Somebody to Die For by Hurts
22. Technicolor Beat by Oh Wonders
23. Unspoken by Hurts
24. Walk Through the Fire by Zayde Wolfe
25. Heavy in Your Arms by Florence and the Machine
26. Leave Your Lover by Echos
27. Human by Christina Perri

Another big thanks to beaniebinch for making a wonderful Spotify playlist for this fic! You can find it here :) 

Thank you so much to missjanurarylily on Tumblr who made this for me! I LOVE ITTTTTTTT :)
A fanvid I made for these idiots

Come say hi to me here [here](#) Sometimes I make fics and fanvids of stuff.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!