An Indecent Proposal

by MimiDubois_1620

Summary

New York 1776. All alone in the British occupied city, A Boston raised Lady Mary Ludlow with ties to the Patriot cause finds her loyalties questioned when her father inherits a ducal title. A chance meeting with 'The Handsomest Man in the British Army' at a dinner party finds her the most unlikely protector setting into motion a set of events that will change her life and those around her forever.
The Dinner Party

New York
Winter 1776/7

"Major Andre, may I make known to you Mistress Mary Ludlow? Mistress Ludlow hails originally from Boston and is the owner and head mistress of The Thomas Aquinas Academy for Young Women." Katrina von Lieden, their pretty and plump blonde hostess said bringing forward a young lady of what appeared impeccable breeding from the set of her head and posture dressed fashionably in pale ivory silk gown embroidered all over with brightly colored wildflowers.

"Major Andre, my pleasure, I believe we are neighbors." Mary stated, bobbing a curtsey then holding her hand out for the obligatory kiss.

John's breath caught, instantly struck by her English Rose beauty and how young she was. He would bet his horse that the girl had not yet seen eighteen summers. Her figure, from what he could ascertain through her gown, was curved in all the proper places, lovely shaped breasts swelling up over the lace that edged the low square neckline of her bodice, a tiny waist which he was certain a man could span with his hands, rounded hips, underneath her gown and petticoats he imagined a pair of long legs made to wrap about her lover's hips whilst he pleased her intimately.

Her hair was a glorious red-gold that fell in thick waves down her back. Her skin was gorgeous, the color of the finest polished alabaster with a fetching freckle and there, large Ceylon sapphire blue eyes fringed with dark long lashes in a heart shaped face looked up at him. The gaze direct and intelligent, flashing with a spark that bespoke a spirit that lay hidden beneath. He took the moment to inventory her face, high cheekbones, a long straight nose with a slight turn up at the tip, a pair of pink lips that were luscious and practically begged to be kissed. "Your servant, Mistress." He said, his voice a low seductive caress, taking her hand, pressing his lips upon it.

"Major, I thank you." She said. Sweet Jesu! Were those his teeth nibbling her skin? She felt her breath catch, rooted to the spot, unable to move feeling the handsome British officer's cobalt blue eyes sweep over her, boldly. Not bothering to hide his interest.

"Since we are neighbors, Mistress Ludlow, we should set about becoming better acquainted." John said, his eyes caressing the low square neckline of her gown.

"I trust the officers and soldiers under my command have behaved as true gentlemen?"

"So far Major."

"You will avail me if they give yourself, your staff or your pupils any grief or trouble, won't you? How did a lady as youthful and lovely as you come to open such a school? Certainly one would be content within the whirl of New York society."

"As an educated man yourself, do you not believe women should be afforded the same opportunities?" Mary asked.

"I am flattered that you made inquiries as to my back ground." John said with a grin. "MMmmm." He pondered the question. "If they comport themselves such as yourself, Mistress Ludlow, I see every reason to educated women. Officers do enjoy more than decorative flowers gracing their salons, dining tables and beds."

"Do you have a preference, Major?" Mary asked, unable to help herself. It did not hurt to flirt with the dashing officer did it? It could help The Cause.

"That you would be inclined to be most neighborly, calling upon me next door as much as possible to share meals, tea, or whatever that which you require and will amuse you. I would be delighted to service...erm, serve you personally." John replied his eyes twinkling with mischief. "And protect you from the rakes and rogues of the city, a young lady, unmarried and with no men of her own family about needs a protector."

"Who will protect me from you, Major Andre?" Mary teased.

"I promise that you will enjoy reforming my many vices, Mistress Ludlow." He flirted back. "I
understand that you also without a matron and will most definitely need a gentleman to keep the wolves at bay."
"That is most kind. How will I ever repay such a kindness especially with a war on?" She asked. "Trust me, I will think of something." He answered with a rakish wink and smile, his gaze sweeping over her, lust and desire burning in his eyes.
"You mistake me for a lady of easy virtue, Major. I assure you that is quite far from the truth." Mary whispered so only he could hear reading the look in his eyes.
"No my dear, I did not. There is nothing shameful in the wanting." He explained. "You are ripe for the attentions of a gentleman which I will be happy to oblige you, being strictly neighborly, of course." He lied.
What had she done? She should have tendered her regrets to the van Leiden's invitation claiming a headache for this evening. She had walked straight into the lion's den. If Andre knew what she kept hidden in the attic of her academy periodically he would charge her with treason! He would not be pleased to hear who some of her friends were either especially seeing what and who her father had recently become! "Of course you will, Major Andre." Mary said.
"I believe we all will, Mistress Ludlow!" A young lieutenant said, one of the half a dozen that were crowded about her now, dressed in their scarlet coated uniforms.
"I will personally see to Mistress Ludlow." John said, clearly staking his claim to the beautiful redhead. The other officers would be soon taking bets as to how long it would take the handsome Major to seduce the young lady give his reputation and the lady's looks and obvious charms. Better yet, seeing as she was rich, unmarried and probably a virgin, how long it would take him to wed her and bed her.
"Dinner is served!" The butler of the house announced. "Shall I escort you to dinner?" John asked Mary, offering her his arm.
"Keeping the rogues and rakes at bay already, Major? I am impressed." Mary said, slipping her arm through his, allowing him to lead her with the other guests into the dining room, not liking the way one of the junior officers was looking at her, instinctively moving closer to her escort, her fingers increasing their pressure upon his forearm.
"Are you quite alright, my dear?" John asked, feeling the increase in pressure against the fabric of his scarlet coat. "No need to fret. I will keep close to you for the rest of the evening. Do allow me to escort you home."
Mary nodded. "That is so very kind of you, Major. I accept."
"It will be my pleasure." He said, smiling. "Ah, I see we are to be dinner partners." He added as they reached the table finding that the pair was to be sitting beside one another. He pulled out her chair, allowing her to skirt past him, being certain that his front brushed against her back, making her aware of him and his powerful masculinity, his hips brushing her back ever so slightly but enough to elicit the reaction he sought, watching, pleased, as a tell-tale blush stole over her chest and cheeks staining them a pretty pink. "Excuse me." He stated, taking his own seat beside her, brushing his thigh against her own through the layers of the fabric of her gown when he sat down.
"Of course." Mary murmured as she placed her napkin in her lap, snaking her tongue out from between her lips to moisten them, swallowing as flames of desire snaked and leapt up her thigh. She went to shift her leg away but he would not allow her, keeping the contact of their thighs next to one another Mary catching the corners of his lips lifting in a smile as he winked at her, blushing even redder she looked away, suddenly quite interested in the pattern upon the fine china plate in front of her.
"I believe those are Eglantine roses, if I remember my varieties correctly." John whispered in her ear, his hot breath ruffling her hair, sending a shiver of intense and consuming need dancing down her spine.
What was the matter with her and the considerable physical attraction she felt for this particular British Officer? She was virtuous, still a virgin not the sort to carry on as some bitch in heat! Yet she could not help but react to him. He had awakened and stirred something in her that she had never felt before. God help her! Better be prey to the attentions of a dashingly handsome officer such as Major
Andre than some of the others she had met and spoken to this evening. "They are quite beautiful." Mary said making conversation.

"Not as beautiful as you, my dear," John said to her.

"Silver tongued rogue!" She shot at him. "So quick with the compliment."

"I don't see you objecting." He fired back as the first course was served, a thick pea soup laced with sherry. "Quite the contrary, does that fetching blush extend all over?" He asked.

"Extend all over what?" She answered his question with one of her own.

"Your most delectable person or will you be kind enough to allow me to unveil the mystery myself at some point? I so look forward to it." He whispered, taking a spoonful of his soup.

"Major Andre!" She admonished him, blushing redder.

"Has anyone ever told you how desirable you are when you are flustered?" He asked with a grin. "I believe that I will thoroughly enjoy our carriage ride home." He said looking at her out of the corner of one of his eyes, taking another spoonful of soup, bringing it to his mouth.

"Will you now?" She breathed, looking over at him.

"Mistress Ludlow, though I believe it is Lady Mary Ludlow now, is it not? Did His Grace of Sutherland, your father, make it safely back to England?" One of the other dinner guests asked.

John immediately perked up becoming instantly interested in the nature of this conversation. Mistress Ludlow's father was the Duke of Sutherland? How did he not know that?

"Thank you for your inquiry, Mister Ballard. He did. I received correspondence from him last week stating that he and my mother were settling in quite nicely at their home in London under the difficult and unusual circumstances."

"My condolences on your uncle's tragic death, we read about it in the London Times. Breaking his neck falling from his horse, how horrible, now your father is His Grace."

"The Duke of Sutherland is now Charles Ludlow, the merchant from Boston? Friend of the traitors Hancock, the Adams cousins, the late Doctor Joseph Warren, General Washington himself and many others?" John asked looking over at Mary. "Why did you not tell me of your father?"

"You never asked, Major."

"This changes the game entirely, Lady Mary."

"In what way?"

"You are no longer an orphan but the most eligible daughter of a powerful Peer of the Realm. I will not be inclined to let you out of my sight for your own safety. I would advise that you move in with myself and the soldiers and travel next door to the academy to teach every day. I will have a suite of room prepared for you. This evening we will make other arrangements." He stated the tone of his voice clear that he would entertain no arguments to the contrary.

"With all due respect, Major, I am thoroughly capable..." Mary began.

"The matter is settled. There will be hell to pay if anything happened to you. General Howe would have a fit of apoplexy if he knew that you were left prey to the rebels and not protected." John stated, figuring out how he was to handle protecting her and running his spy network.

"What of my boarders, Major? Shall they be left prey to whatever goes bump in the night?" Mary asked.

"My dear young lady, not one of those young women is the daughter of a Peer of the Realm. If it will ease your mind and not cause you undue stress, I will personally assign officers and soldiers under my command to stand guard over the academy at night whilst you remain safely under my personal protection." John stated. "The matter is settled and I will hear no more protests about it, Lady Mary, at present or in the near future."

"We shall see about that. Must I remind you, Major Andre that I outrank you socially being, as you have been so clear to point out to me several times this evening, the daughter of a Peer of the Ream, specifically a duke, whereas you only hold the rank of Major in His Majesty's army." Mary reminded him.

"As I have stated, Your Ladyship has no male relations present to see to your welfare and protection. Therefore, because of your position, it is prudent that I act as General Howe would expect, Lady Mary. You will be moving in with me, the officers and soldiers." John reiterated his stance on the
matter. "Hush, now. I believe dinner is served. Do you sing or play any instruments, Lady Mary?"
He asked brightly, changing the subject as platters of ham and roast chickens were passed about, along with several types of vegetables, the wine poured.

"I do both, Major. I sing and play the harpsichord and harp." Mary replied, turning about to serve her some ham from a platter one of the footmen offered, her thigh unintentionally brushing next to his as she did so. She looked down at his tight buff colored breeches that appeared to hug his muscular thighs, blinking, heat traveling from her own thigh up her hip to settle in her core, her stomach muscles tightening, her breathing becoming slightly shallow, and her eyes meeting his.

John arched a brow over one of his eyes, questioningly, winking at her, his lips curling up into a smile, all too aware of her reaction to him, rather enjoying her breasts strain against her bodice as they rose and fell over the low cut neckline of her gown, as she strove to discreetly calm herself.

"Quite accomplished I see. Am I correct to assume that you are quite accomplished in all that which is required of a young woman of your station?" He asked. "Have you made your debut, Lady Mary, have you been courted?"

"Sadly no, Major. I am only seventeen. I sincerely doubt there will be an opportunity for such frivolities as there is a war on. I would not expect to have a formal debut." She replied.

"You will be my hostess." He stated, serving himself some of the mashed parsnips and pumpkin that were being served about the table. "There will be many opportunities as we do much entertaining."

"Though some of the manner of what goes on is not fit for a young lady." Mister Ballard murmured under his breath. "I trust, Major Andre that the young lady's reputation and Good Name are of the utmost importance to you? A young woman such as the Lady Mary living in a household full of gentlemen, I trust that there are officers' wives present to act as chaperones? Certainly there are female servants but they hardly are Her Ladyship's social equals."

"Mister Ballard, I think you for your concern, but the officers and soldiers under my command have been trained to treat a young woman with respect and decorum. Lady Mary need not fear for her reputation or virtue. Remember she will be my personal charge." John replied.

"That is what we are afraid of." Someone quipped, earning some good natured chuckles and laughter from the men and titters and giggles from the women. It was all in good fun.

"No need to worry, My Lady. You will be safe. You have my word on it." John reassured Mary. The meal passed along apace. The conversation turning to music, dancing and painting, Mary finding out that John was highly educated and quite accomplished. Not only was he one of the handsomest officers in His Majesty's army but also one of the most charming. She found herself becoming more attracted to him with each passing minute they passed in conversation much to her distress.

After the meal they retired to the drawing room for a musicale. Four of the gentlemen guests compromised a string quartet playing selections of Haydn and Handel. Mary and John sat beside one another toward the back of the group. "Do you play, Major?" Mary whispered.

"All manner of wicked games." He teased back.

"No, an instrument." She clarified.

"I can play all nature of them." He replied. "I have been told that I have the ability of making them sing ecstatically. I would be delighted to demonstrate my proficiency at time of your convenience, Lady Mary." He offered a roguish smile playing about his mouth.

"I look forward to the demonstration." She said innocently not catching the double entendre.

"Consider it a way in which we will become much more intimately acquainted." John said, low.

"Intimately?" She whispered in his ear, ruffling that thin platinum blond braided queue he wore.

"Yes, most intimately, Lady Mary." John reassured her the second time that evening. "You have my word on it as a gentleman. I promise that I will endeavor to do my best, not to disappoint."

"Disappoint?"

"It will be most pleasurable."

"What will be?"

"The intimacy, Sweetheart." John replied, delighting in watching her reactions to his low husky whispered words each one as a caress fueling and fanning the fierce attraction between them.
"It was so good of you to attend, Lady Mary. Do tender our felicitations and best wishes to Their Graces when the next time you write. I trust that His Grace, your father, is adapting well to his new position.” Katrina van Lieden said in farewell. Major Andre, I trust that you will keep a close eye on the young lady since she will now be staying under your roof."

"Thank you, it was a pleasure to be invited. The meal was superb. It is so kind of you to send along the instructions for the sauce that accompanied the chicken. I will send over the instructions for the pudding and the ice cream. You must come to tea, that is if Major Andre and his officers would be agreeable to having a clutch of women descend up them."

"No, not at all provided I and the officers are invited.” He stated looking at Mary, taking her hand and helping her into the carriage.

"Yes, of course.” She answered, moving past him to settle herself onto one of the seats.

"Thank you ever so kindly, Mrs. van Lieden for your hospitality this evening, the meal was delicious and the entertainment simply delightful. Your servant, Madame.” John said, kissing the lady's hand farewell, hopping up into the carriage, allowing the footman to close the door, John rapped his fist on the inside roof of the carriage indicating that the driver was to move on.

"I am so dreadfully sorry that I was unable to send along a message for someone to fetch a few things for you this evening, Lady Mary. We will have to visit your home. Seeing as it is not that far from mine I did not see that as an inconvenience.” John explained. "As I stated before, you will, I am afraid, have to sleep in my bed not with me in it, of course. Though mayhap at another time, General Howe will be casting about to find a proper well connected officer for you to wed."

"Where will you be sleeping?” Mary asked.

"On a pallet in front of the fireplace do not fret over me. Soldiers are used to such hardships.” John replied. "I am certain that General Howe will convene a meeting to select those officers and Loyalists he would consider as suitable candidates for your hand."

"Without His Grace, my father's permission?” Mary asked.

"It would take far too long for a letter to be dispatched to England, time is of the essence. We cannot have some rebel carrying you off and holding you for ransom or worse. A lady with the charms and attributes such as you possess would incite the lust and desire of any man."

"I am too young to be entertaining thoughts of a husband!” She protested.

"Many women your age have come out into society or are engaged and courting. I am surprised that you do not have a whole coterie of young gentlemen making calls and seeking you out at social functions.” John stated.

"There were some young men this evening at the van Lieden's, you practically growled at poor Henry Phipps when he wished to have a word with me before the musicale.” Mary observed.

"What he wanted was completely inappropriate!” John stated.

"How would you know, Major? Did you divine his thoughts?” Mary asked.

John's eyes bored into Mary's in the darkness, the moonlight casting shadows upon the lines and planes of his face. "Henry Phipps is not capable of concealing his intent. It was clear that the nature of what he wanted was not gentlemanly.” John explained to Mary. "I did not divine his thoughts but it is clear that the young rascal does not have honorable intentions. I merely dissuaded him to protect your honor and reputation. You do not want to get tangled up with such as Henry Phipps. My subordinates tell me he is known quite well in the not so respectable establishments having a perchance for visiting taverns, brothels and the theatre. He keeps a mistress. Not the manner of young man a lady such as you should be consorting with."

"Do not unmarried men and married men engage in such pursuits? What makes Henry Phipps so disagreeable?"

"Because I said he was!” John shot back a bit exasperated. The thought of Henry Phipps touching and kissing her made his heart constrict with jealousy. He moved to sit beside her.

Mary shifted over on the plush brocaded seat, gasping in surprise as he took her chin in his gloved hand, holding it between his thumb and forefinger.

"He wanted to engage in intimacies such as this with you!” He said, his mouth crushing down upon
hers in harsh, hard, demanding kiss, which quickly turned to several kisses of great passion, John drawing her against his hard muscular body.

She whimpered low in the back of her throat, pure naked desire surging through her, feeling the pointed tip of his tongue, that tasted faintly of champagne, trace along the seam of her lips eager to gain entrance, the thumb and forefinger holding her chin slipping down over her neck, beneath her cape, skimming over her chest, teasing the lace at the neckline of her dress, his fingers then splay against her silk covered ribcage as her arms wound about his neck, her mouth finally parting on a soft moan, his tongue pushing past her teeth to fence delicately with hers abruptly pulling away breaking their embrace.

The coach stopped, pulling up to the entrance of the academy. The coachman jumping down to open the door to the carriage, John getting out first, then assisting Mary, the contact and close proximity of their bodies to and near one another setting the air between them crackling and snapping with sexual tension. Not to mention the kisses they had just shared.

"A word, Major Andre." A young sergeant said, approaching John as he and Mary made their way up the short walk to the front door.

"Cannot the business wait, Sergeant MacLeane, do you not see that I am otherwise engaged?" He asked impatiently.

"There is a woman waiting for you, Major. She arrived when you were out and will not leave."

"Find the means to get rid of her. Do you not see that I am occupied?" John asked, referring to Mary.

"No desire to entertain two?" One of the lieutenants asked looking over at Mary who stood waiting, her features illuminated by the moonlight. "Though that beauty looks to be more than an armful."

"That beauty, as you so correctly refer to her, Lieutenant Richards, is the youngest daughter of the Duke of Sutherland and will be staying with us as our honored guest as her position makes her present accommodations at the academy unsafe." John said. "She will be residing with me until her rooms can be prepared. I cannot keep the lady waiting much longer out in this cold. Do what you must to get rid the woman." He ordered referring to his mistress. "Then see that the fires are stoked in my rooms, a decanter of brandy and two glasses are sent up as well as some bread, cheese and apples."

"Is there something amiss?" Mary asked John.

"No matter that cannot be resolved by His Majesty's Army." John answered. "Let us venture inside before we freeze from the cold."

"I trust that you will see it your duty to warm me, as well." John chuckled. "My Darling Girl, you have no idea." He stated leading her inside the academy's front door shutting it behind them.

They made their way through the illuminated entry past the parlour, pausing at the door. John sensing someone or a pair of some ones was inside, he pushed the door in. Mary close behind him.

"Oh My God!" She gasped, burying her face into the fine wool of John's cape to hide her embarrassment at the sensual tableaux before them. One of the maids sat upon the settee, the bodice of her dress unlaced, her bosom bare, her skirts about her waist, legs spread where one of the footmen knelt pleasuring her intimately with his mouth. The maid's gasps and vile words encouraging the young man on in his endeavor filled the room.

The maid opened her eyes for a moment, shrieking in alarm at the sight of the dashing British officer. She was about to extend an invitation for the major to join them but then she spied the young Mistress of the house and thought better of it, the lovers quickly separating.

"Get your things and get out!" Mary said, recovered from the initial embarrassment, repelled and fascinated at what the maid and footman had been doing but knowing the proper cause of action for showing such disrespect, they had to be sacked. It had been all so wickedly exciting though, she thought. Briefly wondering what it would feel like if she and John had been in their places. She felt her cheeks burn as the visions took form in her mind. "I need to get my things. Are you coming, Major?"

Raising a brow at her words, John lips quirked into a grin in an attempt to dispel a rather awkward
"At a later time perhaps, that I am most certain." He murmured. How this girl aroused his senses and awakened his desires. "Yes, of course." He added following her out of the parlour, the lovers ignored, into the well appointed Entrance Hall and stair case, noting how the young proprietress of the academy had spared no expense, Chippendale, Heppelwhite and Sheraton furniture, rugs and various accessories from the Orient including India and China decorated what he could see. He allowed her to lead him up two flights of stairs to the third floor, down a hall to a door, placing an index finger at her lips to remind him to keep quiet. The young ladies were obviously in their beds asleep.

"What am I to tell the young ladies in the morning?" She asked him.

"I will help you think of some viable explanation. No need to fret about it." He answered, watching her open the door to her suite of rooms.

"Wait here." She ordered indicating a blue brocaded winged back chair near the fireplace as Mary hastened through a door way to what must be her bedchamber. He heard the rustling of fabrics and the gentle clattering of glassware against itself. Curious, John crossed the room to stand in the door way observing her place lacey feminine under clothes into an embroidered satchel.

"Let me help you." He said, crossing the space to where she stood, his eyes fleeting over the well appointed four poster bed. The lovers display in the in the parlour had aroused him, he was impatient to get her settled. For a moment he regretted sending his mistress, Philomena away. He most certainly could have used the distraction that she would have afforded him. He came up behind Mary noting and delighting that she was completely unable to conceal her reaction to his physical nearness to her. That she was all too aware of his powerful virility and the effect it had upon her.

"Is this proper, Major?" She asked.

"Certainly not, Lady Mary. But it is a necessity." He replied, brushing his front against her back, placing a hand on the small of it through her cape.

"I...I am almost finished." She stammered flustered at his nearness.

"Oh, no! Quite the contrary, My Dear, you have only just begun."

Unlike the academy, the New York City Hall where the officers and soldiers were lodged was still bustling with activity; they could hear laughter and the clinking of glasses and cutlery coming from the dining room when they entered the large foyer.

"Welcome, Lady Mary." I am Abigail." A pretty medium skinned black woman greeted Mary. "I hope that your stay with us will be pleasant. Major, your room has been prepared as you instructed. Lady Mary, I can escort you if you wish, help you prepare to retire." Abigail offered.

"Thank you, Abigail. Yes, please." Mary said.

"I will be up in no longer than an hour." John said as two enlisted men helped them remove their cloaks and take their gloves. "Until then, milady." He said, bowing with a flourish, taking her right hand in his, bringing it to his mouth, kissing it, his lips lingering a bit longer than what was considered proper. Mary felt her cheeks burn happy when he released her hand and ventured into the dining room.

"Do wait up." He said, his voice low and husky, catching her eye, winking, rogously then disappearing beneath the doorway to join the officers and enlisted men.

Dressed in a low cut lace edged nightgown with long full sleeves, Mary sat up against the pillows in John's bed, the light from the candelabrum and the fire crackling and snapping merrily in the fireplace burning brightly. Looking up from the copy of the Iliad she was reading when she heard the door open. John stepping over the threshold, his eyes alight with pleasure at seeing her in his bed.

"That is a sight that I could become accustomed to quite quickly." He murmured unhooking the fastenings of his jacket, shrugging it off, dropping it over the straight ladder backed chair nearby, his hands going to the black stock at his neck.

"Can I assist you, Major?" She asked, watching him, closing and laying her book aside, tossing the covers off, getting out of bed, crossing to where he stood.

"So eager to undress me, Lady Mary." He teased, pulling the black stock from about his neck,
placing it on top of his scarlet jacket.
"It is time for bed."
"You wish me in yours." He continued to tease.
"There is a pallet prepared for you by the fire." She reminded him.
"I do not have to use it." He countered guiding her fingers to the buttons of his waistcoat, lacing them together making quick work of them undoing each one in quick succession, taking it off and laying it on top of his stock. "It is unusually cold this evening. We both may sleep better if we share the bed." He offered, inclining his head playfully, nuzzling her nose with his, and kissing the tip moving his arms about her to undo the cuffs of his shirt, drawing her into the safety of his arms.
"There will be enough gossip regarding the fact that we shared your rooms, Major. Dare you add fuel to the fire and compromise my reputation? No officer will wish to marry Major Andre's whore no matter how grand my connections and fortune. "She said practically though her body was all too aware of him, wanting his touch, his kisses, a fact that he clearly knew feeling the same inexplicable intense sexual attraction to her.
"Are you certain that you wish to banish me to the cold lonely pallet by the fire? No one need ever know." He explained his voice low and seductive, a thumb tracing her cheek up to a temple, enticing her.
"Need know what?" She whispered.
"That we shared a bed. I promise to be a perfect gentleman." He vowed.
"Major Andre, you are proving to be quite persuasive." She said, her steely resolve slipping away.
"How can I resist that charm? Remove your shirt. I wish to see you."
John grinned. "So bold, Lady Mary. It will be my pleasure." He said moving away from her, pulling his shirt over his head. "If I get cold you must promise to warm me." He added tossing his shirt on top of his other clothes, bare chested he turned to her.
Mary's mouth fell open. He had to be one of the most handsome and sexy men that she had ever seen. The British officers that had been quartered with her family in Boston had been incredibly young as were most of the men of her acquaintance other than family and her father's colleagues such as Mister Hancock, Doctor Warren, Mister Revere and the like which she had not entertained improper thoughts about. Major John Andre was a full grown man with an intense sexual magnetism that made him virtually irresistible.
"Go on, don't be afraid. Touch me. I promise that I won't bite. Unless you wish me to, of course, and ask very nicely then I promise to have you crooning with pleasure."
"You do?" She asked unable to resist twining the fingers of one hand about his pale braided queue, the index finger of the other tracing the hollow at the base of his throat down over his chest to the tops of his buff colored breeches.
"You like to play with fire, don't you?" He breathed, just before pouncing.
The next thing she knew she was slammed up against the wall closest to them, John's mouth ravaging hers, his hands all over her, touching, seeking, caressing, pulling her from the wall, drawing her into his arms, his lips still entertaining their sensual assault upon hers, tumbling with her upon the bed. "I wish to see you, too..." He whispered against her wet swollen mouth, drawing away for a moment.
"My reputation..."
"Is already compromised enough as it is, Lady Mary. I will be General Howe's first suggestion as a potential husband considering the present circumstances and what has transpired between us. The other considerations will be but a formality. If such matters do come to pass, which I am certain they must and will, at least there will be some pleasure found in the physical portion of what will begin as a Marriage of Convenience." He explained, one of his hands going to the closures at the neckline of her nightgown his mistress, Philomena completely forgotten.
It was just dawn when she awoke, virtually trapped. One of the major’s long legs tossed over hers, her bum tucked neatly against his groin, one of his arms tossed over her head on the pillow, the other wrapped protectively about her, his palm cradling one of her breasts. She wriggled her bum against his groin in a feeble attempt to get free.

"Mmmmm... What a glorious manner in which to awaken." John said, adjusting his leg over her, drawing her closer to him if that were at all possible. His lips brushing the back of her spine sending a thrill down her spine. "Shall we explore more of the physical side of our impending alliance?" He inquired, punctuating each word with a path of kisses over the slope of her shoulder, the hand cradling her breast going to the closures of her nightgown, undoing the top button, shifting his weight on the bed, the arm on the pillow moving down, grasping a handful of her nightgown, lifting the fabric, his fingertips tickling the backs of her bare thighs.

Mary squirmed uncomfortably, flames of desire leaping up her thighs to settle in the very core of her. She felt her center begin to ache with a longing that she knew he was the only one capable of satisfying. "John! You have to move to the pallet." She warned her voice breathless in the quiet room.

"Only after we have ceased our exploration into the realm of physical passion and desire." He replied, his fingertips now tickling her bare backside as he had hiked her nightgown up about her hips. "Has anyone ever told you what a temptingly delicious little arse you have?" He asked cupping the twin moons within his hands, his face nuzzling her neck, planting hot burning kisses on it and her shoulders, his cheeks chafing against her skin. "My, my! So that fetching blush does extend all over. Just as I had suspected." He observed, his fingertips caressing the spot where her bum and thighs met, precariously close to her sex.

Ascertaining where his fingertips may venture next, she went to tilt her hips away from him, the movement causing one of his hands to slip down between her legs. John clucked his tongue, disapprovingly. "Do not try to escape, my dear, I promise to give you exquisite pleasure, not pain you, well... Not now, though there will be brief pain later but just for a moment. Let me please you. It will help to ease this burning between us." He said, the fingertips caressing the soft smooth skin of her inner thigh.

"They will be here with my bath soon. Dare whoever brings up the tub and water find the pair of us in bed engaging in Lord knows what?" Mary asked, trying to evade the inevitable, making another feeble attempt to get away from him but he would not allow it.

"Oh, no! You are not going anywhere!" He declared, his fingertips moving higher along the smooth soft skin of her inner thigh, to brush the golden curls covering her sex, she knew if she moved, those same fingertips would venture inside her. "What manner of Lord knows what would you care to be caught engaging in? If you are to be married soon there is a manner of intimate pleasures that you must be taught that will delight your husband. Shall we begin Lessons in the Arts of Eros?"

"Should we not leave such lessons to my husband to be?" Mary asked.

"Do you not remember what I clearly explained to you last evening? But for the possible addition of Adjutant General Randall, there will be no other suitors for your hand that General Howe will deem appropriate but me. A young lady such as you may find a man such as Black Jack Randall too old at thirty-five years, more than twice your age, though General Randall is known for his devastating charm and great success with women. I, on the other hand, am twenty-six only nine years your senior. Given to make the final decision as opposed to General Howe, you may prefer a younger, and more virile, man in your bed."

"Such a decision may be left to General Howe. How did General Randall earn his sobriquet of 'Black Jack' given his charm and success with women?" Mary inquired.

"It is a reference to the color of his soul, a type of man that a woman may wish to dally with for a time as a lover but certainly not the sort to entertain as a husband." John said.
"What sort of man are you, Major?" Mary asked.
"I am the sort of man that haunts your wildest erotic dreams and fantasies at night, the sort of man that will teach you all about the Arts of Love and have you wanting more." He replied.

How many officers is Major Andre considering?" Abigail asked meeting Mary's eyes in the mirror, noting that at the mention of the major she flushed prettily.
"Four to six. Mary answered adjusting the pearls that the maid had just tied about her throat.
"Is Major Andre putting himself forth as a candidate?" Abigail asked smoothing the younger woman's glorious red-gold curls, gathering portions on other side of her head, combing through them, twisting the hair about and pinning it to the back of her head letting the loose curls fall about her shoulders. "Very nice, My Lady." She added, looking at her handiwork.
"He is determined to find me a husband." Mary answered the query regarding her marriage prospects. "Thank you, Abigail. It is lovely. You are incredibly talented." She added, admiring her hair.
Abigail smiled warmly at the girl's reflection in the mirror. "Whilst you live in this house?" Abigail asked, she had noticed how the major had looked at Mary when they had passed him in the hallway earlier that morning, how he had been unable to take his eyes from her, how he had turned his head about and looked after the young lady when they had moved beyond him, pausing for moment to admire her. The whole situation did not bode well as far as Abigail was concerned. He was obviously attracted to the young lady which worried Abigail. "Who are the candidates?"
"Major Andre made mention of a General Randall but no others." Mary replied.
"Oh!" Abigail said unable to conceal the alarm in her voice.

"Come in, my child, come in! Lady Mary Ludlow, is it? I hear that circumstances have left Your Ladyship in desperate need of the protection of His Majesty's Army. We are to find you a husband." General William Howe greeted Mary and Abigail as they entered the dining room for breakfast wasting no time to getting down to the matter at hand, all the officers seated about the table rising as the women entered. "Major Andre has been kind enough to cast about and find some suitable candidates. One of these young men is bound to be agreeable to Your Ladyship and will make you a fine spouse."

Mary looked about the table at the officers that the major had selected each looking quite dashing in his Regimental Uniform. All the men had taken great care in their appearance keen to make a good first impression upon their potential bride. John had been lying there were other officers besides himself and General Randall that Howe considered appropriate. He clearly had not gossiped or bragged to the other officers as to the nature of how and where he had spent his previous evening at with whom when he certainly could have. Major Andre had not even put himself forth as a suitor. Then why was he so keen on getting her into his bed? She found it all quite confusing. Were his attempts to seduce her clearly for show and a game? That he wished to ruin her or, even worse, take her as his mistress? If his intent was ruin he would have bragged about what had transpired between them. Or was he sincere? Instinctively she knew that he was not faking his desire for her or the passion in his kisses and caresses nor his other odd behaviors when they found themselves together. Mayhap the men he had put forth were in possession of certain attributes or other virtues that the major lacked? Also, why did the major make a point to look over at her and give her a roguish smile his eyes alight with mischief? The look set her heart to racing. She tried to gloss over her discomfort by scowling at him and raising her chin regally. Sensing that he had unsettled her, his smile became broader and he winked at her.
He was flirting with her! She tried to tear her eyes away but he held them for a few more moments until General Howe's voice from beside her brought her back to reality. "Lady Mary, I see that you are acquainted with Major Andre. May I make known to you some of the other officers and potential husbands?" He indicated the officers that were still standing. "General Jonathan Randall of the King's Own Regiment of Foot." A well built strikingly good looking officer in his early middle years with glossy dark brown hair tinged with red-lights nodded toward her staring down his long
aristocratic nose at her, his hazel eyes assessing and weighing what he was viewing, obviously pleased. He had a neat trim figure that was only enhanced by the cut of his uniform. From looking at him, Mary could understand his success with women.

"It is a pleasure, Lady Mary." His voice was rich, smooth and low-pitched. "Major Lord Alexander Edrington." The second officer was a tad shorter than General Randall, his blond curls tamed into the requisite queue tied round with a black ribbon, his hazel eyes bright and alert. He was handsome in a neat and charming way but lacked the sheer sexual magnetism of Major Andre.

"Of His Majesty's First Regiment of Foot." Edrington added. "My pleasure, Lady Mary. I do hope that we are to become more intimately acquainted."

"Major Lord James Graham of His Majesty's Third Foot, our lad from north of the border." "I hope that ye dinna hold it against me, Lady Mary." The tall dashing Scot said, his blue eyes twinkling with mischief. He grinned.

"No, Major Graham, I will not."

"Graham is heir to the Duke of Montrose." General Howe added as if to sweeten his prospects. "His Grace, my brother, has yet to sire an heir." Major Graham explained.

"Captain Lord Charles Gray." The next suitor was introduced. He was shorter than the others with dark brown hair and eyes and small neat impish features that many ladies, though not Mary, found quite appealing.

"Of Her Majesty's Light Dragoons." Lord Gray announced his regiment. "I look forward to getting to know Your Ladyship." He said his eyes sweeping over her from top to toe, lingering on her breasts and hips in a manner that made Mary feel instantly uncomfortable especially when he licked his lips as if her were contemplating a tasty morsel, the captain's meaning all too clear. "In the company of a superior officer?" Mary asked.

"I will be delighted to serve as chaperone." John offered before any of the others could, noting Mary's distress and coming to her rescue. He could not bear the thought of Lord Charles Gray getting even remotely close to her. Rogers said that Gray had quite the reputation and was not above becoming forcibly persuasive if he was not getting what he wished from a conquest.

"Thank you, Major." Mary said, noting the exchange of looks that passed between John Andre and General Jonathan Randall, it was clear that Randall was not pleased that John had offered to chaperone her before he had a chance to. He could always pull rank but a gentleman did not do that.

"Of course, your servant, Lady Mary. It will be my pleasure." John said with a nod of his head.

"Lastly, Captain Lord Archibald Kennedy." General Howe introduced the last suitor, a blond, blue eyed adorable man with a ready smile and dimples to die for!

"Captain Kennedy." Mary said in way of greeting. He was the youngest at twenty-three. All the others were in their latter twenties with the exception General Randall who was 35. The introductions made, Mary and the officers sat down, placing their linen napkins in their laps as the servants brought forth platters of food. There was porridge with maple syrup and cream, scrambled eggs flavored with nutmeg and dried tarragon, rashers of bacon, stewed apples and pears with cinnamon and ginger, loaves of fresh baked bread with freshly churned butter and plum jam. There was hot chocolate and coffee to drink.

Mary took a bit of everything offered filling her plate. She took hot chocolate instead of the coffee that was offered which all of the officers took with the exception of Major Andre.

"No, coffee this morning, Johnny?" General Randall asked, disdainfully, looking over at the major. "I did not wish the lady to drink alone, General Randall. I also fancy of bit of hot chocolate now and again." John retorted.

General Randall snorted. "What else is it that you fancy now and again? I see the merits of the gallantry displayed by the gesture, Major Andre, and the offer to chaperone Lady Mary. For a man that did not put himself forth to be considered as one of the lady's suitors and husbands, you will be spending an inordinate amount of time together. I wonder what your mistress' feelings will be on the matter."

"As Her Ladyship's protector." John strove to clarify, glaring at the general, making the choice not to
answer the question regarding Philomena especially in front of Lady Mary.
"So you say, Major." General Randall murmured, not believing a word that the major said.
"Lady Mary, I have heard that some officers of General Randall's regiment were quartered in your home whilst you lived in Boston. Do you happen to recall their names? Mayhap they have not been killed or wounded. I could arrange a reunion if you would like." John offered changing the subject completely. Why did it bother him so that Lady Mary would find out that he had a mistress? Was it because he had been instantly attracted to and drawn to her upon their first meeting? That she fired his blood and awakened his desires in a manner that Philomena did not?
"That is incredibly kind of you, Major. If I recall their names were Captain Benedict Pitt and Captain James MacLeane. When hostilities broke we lost contact for a time, are they still part of your regiment, General Randall?" Mary asked sweetly.
"Pitt and MacLeane?" General Randall mulled the names over in mind for a moment, trying to place faces to names."Yes, the names do sound quite familiar. Both have distinguished themselves in several skirmishes. If you wish, Lady Mary, I could arrange a meeting. Captain Pitt is up for promotion."
"Captain Pitt would be delighted to become reacquainted with Your Ladyship. The captain has mentioned developing a tendre for a young lady in Boston. Was that Your Ladyship?" Captain Kennedy asked.
"Not me. If it was, I was completely unawares. Captain Pitt fancied Lottie Shaw, if I recall." Mary replied.
"And who was this Lottie Shaw?" Major Andre asked.
"Charlotte Shaw is one of my best friends. We have known one another since we were children. We were taught by the same tutors. Both of us displayed a head for learning so our fathers decided to educate us with our brothers. Of course the boys went onto Eton and further. Our educations were enhanced by the teachers at Harvard College."
"You did study the natural sciences and the laws of Physics, Sir Isaac Newton?" John asked.
"Yes, Major. Charlotte and I received a good grounding in all subjects including business." Mary replied.
"I hope that you gentlemen fancy a lady with brains as well as beauty. Lady Mary is quite the blue stocking." General Howe stated.
"Some gentlemen find a lady who is better educated than they are intimidating and will run the other way when they find out that she has more interests that those of gowns, gossip and parties." Lord Edrington said, taking a sip of his coffee.
"I find a woman of intelligence a challenge. One can get incredibly bored rather quickly with a lovely face and body when there is nothing there to stimulate one mentally." John opined.
"From your words, Major Andre, one would ascertain that you fancy a lady with beauty and brains." General Randall observed, his gaze going from John to Mary and back again. "At least you will not find yourself bored when you are protecting Lady Mary. What of this Charlotte Shaw is she still in Boston or did she accompany Your Ladyship to New York?"
"Mistress Shaw is at the Academy. She teaches Latin and French." Mary replied.
"Has she come out and is she being courted?" Lord Gray asked, looking over at Mary with hooded eyes. He was obviously hedging his bets. If he did not win over the Lady Mary Ludlow at least he would have this Charlotte Shaw to consider.
"No, Lord Gray, she has not. Neither of us have had a chance to because of the war and situation in the City of New York." Mary replied. "I have no need of a season now because General Howe has been kind enough to gather all of you together for my consideration."
"With the inclusion or exclusion of Major Andre?" Major Graham asked. "Go on, Johnny, toss yer hat in the ring! The lass is lovely, intelligent and ye could probably use the fortune, shipping interests and sugar plantation in the West Indies. Of course you would have the lot of us to fight for her attentions and affections. Nothing like a good contest, though, eh?"
"I do not have the sort of pedigree that His Grace would entertain whilst considering an appropriate husband for his daughter." John replied.
"There are more attributes in a husband for Her Ladyship that Charlie Sutherland would look for besides whether or not he is addressed as His Grace or Milord!" General Randall remarked, nipping off the edge of his slice of bacon as if to make a point staring at Andre. All of General Howe's choices with the exception of Graham were not truly competition for the lady's hand. He sensed that several would drop out within weeks. He wanted another rival that would raise the stakes of the hunt, one that would go to great lengths to win Lady Mary's hand. Black Jack knew that John Andre was that man. That is, if he could get the major to agree to put himself forth for consideration. "Come on, Johnny where is your ambition? Never thought you to be a coward when it came to women!" He goaded the major.

John laughed. "I already have my orders from the General, Jack." John replied brushing off the question. "Not a coward. I have no desire to flood the pond." He added with a wink. Several officers near him chuckled. "Lady Mary are you just about finished? I thought that we would venture to the academy to collect some of your items and personal effects. The furniture is in the process of being brought over and placed in your suite. It might be the proper time to inform your pupils of what has transpired in regards to your new living arrangements. We will post guards at the school so that the young ladies need not fear for their virtue. General Randall, are you to see about arranging the reunion with Captains Pitt and MacLeane for the lady? Before they have to venture out on another patrol."

"Of course, I will do all that I may to please you, Lady Mary." Black Jack Randall said, his hazel eyes caressing her, his double entendre all too clear.

"Thank you, Major Andre that is incredibly kind of you. When shall I be ready? General Randall, I most sincerely appreciate your efforts in fulfilling my desire to see the captains once again." Mary said.

Jack Randall smiled wolfishly. "Of course." He murmured taking a forkful of eggs, his eyes assessing her more closely. He normally fancied blondes but he would make an exception for his ginger haired girl, she was also a bit young for his tastes but that could be an asset. When they were married, he would take great delight in teaching her the intimacies that went on between a man and a woman in the Marital Bed, mold her to his liking.

"If we may be excused, General Howe?" John asked.

"Yes, yes... Get on with the pair of you!" The General said, waving them away with a hand. "Thank you, Sir." John said, wiping the corners of his mouth then placing his napkin on the side of his plate. He rose from his seat, stepping back behind Mary's chair waiting.

"If you gentlemen will please excuse me, I have business at the academy that requires my attention." Mary said, wiping her mouth as well with her napkin and setting it aside. She rose, as did all the officers.

"Do not be overlong." General Howe stated, as he watched her leave John close behind. "I would wager that General Washington would envy the manner in which you began to twist General Randall about your little finger. Be careful there." John warned when they were in the hallway.

"General Randall was just being gallant." Mary offered.

"So he has charmed you already? Remember what I said about him this morning." John told her.

"There is not only one member of His Majesty's Army that can catch the interest of the ladies, Major Andre. You said so yourself. Does that fact that, despite his age, I do find General Randall rather intriguing distress you?" Mary asked.

"Someone should teach you to do kinder things with that glib tongue of yours than the baiting and teasing of gentlemen." John remarked.

"Such as?" She asked.

"If I were to tell you it might offend your Fine New England Moral Sensibilities." He replied, grinning when her mouth dropped, Mary blushing bright red. "Ah, Lady Mary, having you here will prove to be a most entertaining diversion to the business of war. Remember, we leave in five minutes. I advise you to be ready." He added as he walked toward a room off the hallway to see to where his cape and gloves were kept.
They walked up the steps of the large Georgian style brick mansion. John marveling at the richness of the furnishings that had not been visible last evening, how had he missed the reception table on which sat a silver salver for calling cards? A crystal chandelier with beeswax candles was hanging from the ceiling. Mary made her way down the carpeted hallway to the parlour.

"Why don't you begin in the library? I would like my collection of Shakespeare." She said as she sailed past him a bit too quickly. He immediately became suspicious. What was she hiding? He took off down the hall after her. He found her in the parlor rummaging through a Heppelwhite desk. She had the top of the desk open, there was a stack of letters tied with a blue silk ribbon, Mary held the stack down with one had as she took out one of the desk's secret compartments. Turning it upside down, she gave it a decided shake trying to release whatever was lodged inside with the other.

"Looking for something important?" He asked from behind her. His voice was low and dangerous. One of the gloved hands closing over the hand that held the letters, squeezing hard, she could feel his hard body pressing against hers from behind. He had her trapped. He held her hand still and with the other snatched the compartment. "What are you so desperate to find? Hmm?" He demanded.

She didn't respond. She just stood there mute and defiant. "Did you hear me? What are you looking for? Answer me! Damn it!" He growled, squeezing the hand over the letters harder making her gasp with pain.

"I didn't know how you would react if you found these first. Charlotte Shaw and I still carry on a correspondence with various friends in the colonies." She began.

"That is nothing unusual unless they are friends in Boston. What traitors do you write to Mary? Who are the letters from? You can tell me or I can read the letters. But if I have to read the letters I will have to punish you and I promise you that you will not like your punishment though you may." He mused, tossing the compartment on the desk.

"What is my punishment to be?" She asked.

"Why I will take you over my knee, lift your skirts and spank you of course!" He exclaimed. "Come now tell me which rebels you write to or do I have to take you over my knee? The choice is yours." Mary took a deep breath. She was determined that he was not going to spank her, not in the manner that he intended. No one had spanked her since she was five years old. "Abigail Adams, Dorothy Hancock, amongst others. I swear to you there is nothing treasonous in these letters except for maybe the exchange of ideals." She told him.

"Thank you very much. That's a good girl. That wasn't so hard, was it?" He asked. His voice was rough with arousal. His lips were so close to her ear she could feel the heat of his breath and smell the faint scent of chocolate. She felt him nip her earlobe gently, his lips gently brushing the sensitive skin below it. The hand that covered hers over the packet of letters relaxed its iron hold. His fingers caressed her hand for a few moments sending shards of molten heat up her arm. It then moved beneath her cloak, up her wrist and forearm, dropping ever so slowly to come and rest on her hip, his fingers splayed. He caressed her hip through the fabric of her gown with light feathery touches until he felt her stiffen in alarm and begin to tremble. He withdrew his hand and stepped away from her but not until he was absolutely sure that he had made her aware of his physical and sexual power.

"Shall we go and see about those volumes of Shakespeare now? Or do you wish me to tend to something else?" His sexual innuendo was all too clear.

"Please go see about the volumes of Shakespeare." She told him. She was still trembling slightly.

"You don't really want me to, do you?" He asked, removing his tricorn hat and tucking it under his arm.

"Please. I don't want you to touch me anymore." She said turning about to look at him.

"No? Then why are you trembling? Why are your cheeks stained a pretty pink? You look very lovely blushing. It adds a nice color to your porcelain skin." He stated.

"Please, Major. I beg you." She pleaded. As this morning in bed, he had once more totally unsettled her with his touch. "My mama warned me about men like you."

"This is a fine time to become frightened of me, Lady Mary. You know that I would never bite you. Not unless provoked of course but given the circumstances you may enjoy it and what and where my
"teeth nipped you." He told her, his voice taking on rich timbre that was like velvet.
"What circumstances would those be? I can't see where biting would be pleasurable at any time." She retorted.
"Circumstances that if I described them to you would once more offend those fine sensibilities you possess. Ah, you are so innocent. You have so much to learn. I could teach and show you things..." His voice trailed off.
"Despite this morning, I would prefer to be innocent and remain so until my marriage, than clearly be dissolute and corrupt like you." She shot at him.
"If you are going to be married shortly, I suggest that you change your prim and proper attitude. Unless of course you have no reservations of your husband taking a mistress or amusing himself with available women." He replied.
"Never! My husband would not humiliate me in such a fashion! My father never has!" She cried, indignant. "You are taking me down a very dangerous path. This conversation is not proper nor the sort do those in polite society engage in. I do not wish to discuss this any further with you."
"Your father never has probably because he is one of those fortunate gentlemen that has found a wife that, uh, suits him." John explained totally ignoring the fact that she had expressed her desire to end their conversation. Damn that Lucky Charles Sutherland! He had been extremely fortunate in his marriage to Mary's mother.
"I hope that one of the officers that General Howe put forth will make me as happy and suit me just as well." She mused.
"We will see, won't we? If you need me I will be in the library. Not unless of course you need my help here." His blue eyes raked the room. He turned to leave but then he remembered something and began to walk toward her until he was standing in front of her, looming over her.
"What do you want now, Major?" She asked swallowing nervously. His body was almost touching hers. Why did he not get it over with and kiss her again for God's Sake, she wondered. She knew that he was going eventually, and if the truth were told, she wanted him to. Damn the man! He was an extremely handsome devil and deserved of his reputation. It was painfully obvious since their meeting last night that they were wildly attracted to one another.
He gave her a look that told her exactly what he wanted. Instead of immediately acting on it, he reached behind her and retrieved the packet of letters that were tied with the blue silk ribbon. When he did so his body brushed against hers, lightly. She could feel the energy in his slender but powerful body which was essentially and intensely male. An intensity that was sexual—there was no other way to describe it. All of her senses came alive when he was near her, her feminine instincts aroused. That is what unnerved her about him, his powerful sexuality and the effect it had on her.
"These!" He replied showing her the letters, tucking them into his waistcoat. "And this!" He added, brushing the compartment, quills and paper that were on the desk onto the floor with a sweep of his hand, grasping her roughly about the hip and bum making her gasp in alarm, his fingers digging into her soft skin through her gown and petticoats, lifting her upon it, yanking her to him, tilting her chin up, his mouth claiming hers in a searing possessive kiss, his lips rough against her, kissing her with great passion, hands roaming up and down her back, clutching her bum as the kisses deepened, his fingers digging into her firm flesh, his teeth nipping her lower lip, chuckling in triumph when he felt her grip his forearms to steady herself, her body shifting deeper into the source of her pleasure.
"Whatever happened to you not wanting me to touch you anymore? Change your mind?" He rasped, breathlessly against her mouth, their foreheads touching, a rakish smile dancing about his thin lips. An index finger creating swirling patterns on one her thighs, seeming to entice her to wickedness. Mary's breath hitched, she nodded. "Have you forgotten about the library? Am I proving to be that much of a distraction, Major Andre?" She asked trying to regain her equilibrium which he had totally unsettled with those kisses.
"No, Lady Mary, just a most deliciously pleasant temporary diversion." He replied, his mouth arching into a smile, drawing his head away. "As much as I enjoy bantering and flirting with you, I had best see about Mister Shakespeare."
She found him in the library, seated in one of the large comfortable wing backed chairs near the
fireplace, engrossed in a volume of Richard II by Shakespeare, stacks of books that he had chosen
for her to take with her, scattered about the chair and near the bookcase.
"Major John Andre? Oh, May, Jane Fairfax is going to be so jealous when she hears that you have
been taken under his protection and at his insistence. You know how she was bragging about having
danced with him at a cotillion earlier this month." Lottie Shaw said, as the friends made their way
down toward the library.
"Shhhhhh... Lottie! He'll hear every word!" Mary admonished her friend, the pair entering the
library.
"Hear every word of what?" John asked, looking up from the book, rising as the young women
entered the library. "Good Day, Mistress. You must be Charlotte Shaw, Major John Andre, at your
service." He greeted Lottie gallantly as she bobbed a curtsy.
"Major Andre." She said.
"You have quite an extensive library, Lady Mary. I hope that you do not mind but I took the liberty
of selecting books that may be of interest to yourself and the officers." John explained. "These chairs
are quite comfortable as well. I was entertaining the thought of having them brought over and
replacing them with those that would be more comfortable for young ladies though not as large,
perhaps? Certainly these are almost big enough for two. Did you speak to your charges, Lady Mary?
Have all matters been settled to your satisfaction? Mistress Shaw, did Lady Mary tell you that
Captain Pitt is in New York under the command of General Randall? I believe you knew him whilst
you were in Boston, or so I was informed."
"Yes, Major. It all has been settled. My charges were quite interested to hear about General Howe's
candidates for my hand. Several of the young ladies were quite curious to know if it was *THE*
Dashing Major John Andre that had accompanied me."
"What did you tell them?" He asked.
"That indeed it was. Then I agreed that the word to describe you was rather quite accurate. It is a
rather correct assessment." Mary teased.
"I am delighted that you have such a high opinion of me." John bantered back.
"Well you are elegant and gallant in appearance. No one can fault you there. It must be the
impeccable tailoring of your uniform." She replied.
"Just the impeccable tailoring?" He probed. "Are there not other bits of my person that Your
Ladyship finds agreeable and to your liking? Does my appearance please you, Lady Mary?"
"You are rather handsome and attractive for an Officer of His Majesty's Army." Mary mused.
"Do you find me better looking than Major Edrington?" John asked.
"Major Edrington is not unpleasant to look at though he does have an arrogant air about him that
gives a clear indication as to his position in society." Mary offered her opinion.
"What are the young ladies of New York's opinions on Major Edrington? Is it his looks or the
possibilities of becoming a countess that are a portion of his appeal:" John probed.
Begging pardon, Major Andre, ladies." A sergeant said from the doorway of the library. "We are
here for the books."
"Thank you, sergeant. Do come in. I do not believe that you have met Lady Mary Ludlow, the Duke
of Sutherland's youngest child. Lady Mary, Sergeant David Howden, he is under Lord Major
Graham's command. The other young lady is Mistress Charlotte Shaw from Boston, one of the
teachers of this fine establishment and an acquaintance of Captain Pitt." John made the introductions
making certain that the sergeant was aware the pair of young ladies was off limits.
"It is a pleasure to meet you sergeant. How are you finding New York?" Mary asked. "Oh, do have
a care for the volumes of Shakespeare. They are my favorites."
"Likewise, Your Ladyship. Well, thank you. We will. These will be placed in your study as
instructed, Major." The sergeant said to John.
"You're absconding with my Shakespeare?" Mary said, incredulous.
"Not so much absconding as placing them in a place of safe keeping. You can come and read them anytime you wish." John offered.
"I will not be disturbing you?" She asked.
"Quite the contrary, I could use a bit of distraction from the business and tedium of this reckless war." John answered, watching as several enlisted men came in and took the selection of books that were set out and about.
"Are all of the books to go to your study?"
"All but that pile there." John replied, pointing to a small stack. "Those are going to Lady Mary's suite which is next door to mine. You can take anything that you like from my study up to your suite, milady. I was thinking that perhaps we could read together in the evenings after supper or at other convenient times, that is if there are not other matters pressing. Would that please you?"
"Yes, Major, thank you. It would please me very much." Mary replied. Sitting in Major Andre's study reading Shakespeare was certainly more appealing than going on outings with several of her suitors especially Charles Grey and Lord Edrington. If the truth were told, Charles Grey made her feel quite uncomfortable and not in a good way. There was something about him that repulsed her.
"Well, then it is settled. Whenever we do not have other pressing matters to attend to we will read Shakespeare together. Which of the plays would you care to begin with or would you prefer to start with the sonnets?"
"Richard the Second, please. Mistress Shaw and I are reading that with the young ladies, aren't we Lottie?"
"Yes." Charlotte replied.
"Then Richard the Second it is. Are you planning on reading that particular history arc? After Richard the Second go onto read Henry IV, Parts I and II and then Henry V? I am quite an accomplished amateur actor, if you wish I could help stage a few of the scenes, we could rehearse." John provided, certainly helping her out at the academy staging amateur theatrics would be another excuse to spend time with Lady Mary and keep her occupied. "We could make it a joint production if you wish. I could get the officers and enlisted men to participate. Sergeant Howden, how do you feel about Shakespeare?"
"Major Andre gave specific instructions that you are to be made as comfortable as possible. He wishes that you think of this as your new home. I see there are several dresses here appropriate for dinner. Do you have a preference?" Mary shook her head. "No? What about the dark blue velvet or crimson taffeta? Either one will look gorgeous with your vivid coloring." Abigail suggested. "Come, let's get you in the bath before the water gets cold."
Mary undid the sash of the dressing gown, shrugging it off, handing it Abigail. Now nude, she stepped into the still hot tub.
"Is there a particular fragrance mi'lady prefers?" Abigail asked.
"Roses and jasmine," Mary managed to say.
Upon hearing her mistress's preference, Molly went to the basket, picking up a few of the vials of essential oils until she found the ones she was seeking. She undid the caps and then poured equal amounts of the oils into the bath. The scent of roses and jasmine immediately filled the room as Mary settled into the tub. The hot fragrant water smelled wonderful.
Pricilla took a sponge and a cake of rose scented soap, washing Mary's back handing her another sponge so she could wash the rest of her while Pricilla was tending to those places of her person Mary could not reach.
"Why don't you sit here in the water for a bit and relax. We'll be back in a wee bit to help you dress." Abigail told Mary when Molly and Pricilla had finished the three women slipping from the room, shutting the door behind them.
Mary leaned back in the tub enjoying the feel of the water against her skin. She inhaled the fragrance of roses and jasmine, sighing she closed her eyes. She did not hear the knock at the inner door that separated her suite from Major Andre's.
John knocked on Mary's door a second time. He wanted to see how she was settling in, he knew that the events of the last twenty-four hours had been upsetting and disturbing to her. He had wanted to catch a private conversation before supper. When no one answered his knocks, he opened the door and walked inside, inhaling the sensuous fragrance of the roses and jasmine, he spied the towels and dressing gown on the winged back chair, the tub near the fire. He had caught her bathing. He walked toward the tub.
Thinking it was Abigail, Molly and Pricilla that had returned to come help her dress, she stood, the water sluicing down her body, her back to him. John felt himself instantly become aroused as he gazed at her naked body from behind, remembering how she had felt in his arms the previous evening. She had a lovely figure, he noted once again.
"Could you please hand me my towel?" He heard her ask him.
"Certainly." He murmured handing her one of the towels from its place on the wing backed chair.
Mary turned as she took the towel. Her eyes widening with shock when she saw him standing there bold as brass. "Major Andre! Get out! This isn't proper!" She shot at him, clutching the towel to her in a vain attempt to cover her nakedness from his gaze.
"I am so terribly sorry for the intrusion, Lady Mary. I did not realize that you would still be indisposed. I was concerned as to how you were getting on." He said ignoring her protests.
"As well as can be anticipated given the present circumstances. Major, please! Do you mind? Abigail, Molly and Pricilla are due at any moment. What if they were to come in and find you here? What if word got out and the little birds started chirping especially after our sleeping arrangements last night which I am certain must be all over the British camp by now. One most certainly could not fault any of my suitors from withdrawing. Not to mention the damage to my reputation. No one will wish to enroll their daughter at an academy where the head mistress has been found in several compromising positions with an officer of His Majesty's Army. Not to mention when the officer in question is you!"
"Are you quite finished with your lecture?" He asked. "Your Ladyship had best put on a dressing gown lest you catch a chill." Reaching for the one draped over the wing backed chair he went to hand it to her, and then hesitated."Let me dry your back first. No need to glare. There is nothing that I haven't seen before, Sweetheart, though possibly not as strikingly well-made or shaped as you." Mary blushed furiously as he snatched the towel from her. His body so close that she felt the rough wool of his scarlet jacket brush her hot fragrant skin, gasping in alarm when he pulled her violently into his arms, tilting her chin up, her dressing gown falling in a whisper upon the carpet.
"Lady Mary are you trembling again? Shall I carry you to the bed and help to ease that burning desire inside you? Don't fret I feel it, too!" He whispered thickly against her lips, his hot breath fanning her face.
"John..." She whispered staring up into his mesmerizing blue eyes made darker in the dim light of the candles lifting her chin up to accept his kiss. That proved to be John's undoing, he yanked her closer against him if that were possible, wedging her thighs apart with one of his muscular legs, lifting her up on the tips of her toes as he kissed her hungrily, his mouth ravaging hers, planting hot burning kisses on her already warm flesh, his mouth descending to her jaw.

"Oh, John..." Mary's voice was a breathless whisper of longing in the silent room as mouth trailed a path of blazing kisses along her jaw line then down along the side of her neck, springing apart from her when he heard footfalls in the hallway.

"Lady Mary?" Abigail asked, her head popping about the door just in time to see the major helping her young mistress to tie the sash of her dressing gown, steal a kiss and then quickly move away from her. What manner of mischief was he up to?

"Abigail, come in!" His voice was jovial. "I was just inquiring how Her Ladyship was settling in." John explained as Abigail and the two maids entered the room.

Looking at Mary, Abigail instantly noted her high color and swollen wet lips, someone had been recently kissing Her Ladyship and Abigail knew exactly who, her eyes venturing to the major who looked rather pleased with himself.

"Go off with you now!" She shooed John away with a wave of her hand. "We are going it dress the lady. It is not a place for a gentleman when that occurs let alone you, major!"

"And I was hoping that you would allow me stay." He flirted his eyes on Mary. He winked. "I will see you at supper then, Cherie." He whispered against Mary's hair, grasping one of her arms turning and leaving the room through the private door that separated their chambers, closing it behind him. Mary watched him leave, unable to take her eyes from his retreating back.

"Please do not take offence at my observation, Lady Mary, but Major Andre appears to be quite taken with you. Be careful that one of your suitors does not call him out when they learn of his tendre. The major will be liable to kill every one of them with the possible exception of General Randall and Major Graham." Abigail told Mary, motioning her to come forward, noting the major's scent, a mixture of cologne, sandalwood and spices lingered on the young woman's skin.

Molly, Pricilla and she worked together dressing Mary, rolling on a pair of midnight blue stockings which were decorated with stars and red rose buds beneath her dressing gown, the garters silver ribbons with deep red rosettes edged with silver. They then helped her to slip into her matching brocaded shoes. Then a small sleeveless low-cut silk chemise trimmed with lace that fell to about mid thigh. A corset was laced over that, then her petticoats and gown, a midnight blue confection embroidered with stars and planets in silk and silver threads.

"No fichu this evening let the officers admire your lovely bosom. They will not be able to keep their eyes from you this evening." Molly declared. "And your wealth." She added, putting a necklace of diamonds and pearl drops about Mary's throat then fixing the matching earrings in her ears.

Pricilla came forward to dress Mary's hair under Abigail's intricate instruction twining strands of pearls within the abundant waves falling down her back to her slender waist. Abigail stepped away to view the full effect of their efforts. "The Major will be growling at the other officers this evening." She laughed in delight. This young woman was much more striking than that actress her employer was involved with even though Philomena was the typical pretty blonde. Abigail doubted her affair with the Major would carry on for much longer with the advent of Lady Mary Ludlow in his life. Not from the way she had caught him looking at the duke's daughter and what the trio of maids had almost walked in on was any indication.

"Growling? That will be a sight to see." Mary smiled.
"Wait and see." Abigail said. "It is time to go down."
"Simply ravishing!" John announced coming to stand by Black Jack's side. Not to be outdone. "So that is Charlie Sutherland's youngest, eh?" Robert Rogers asked coming to stand near Captain Kennedy. "Come to stay with you lot for the winter. With such as her living here, I would not be inclined to leave the premises to go hunt and engage rebels unless it proves to be a necessity. What a fine piece to come back to. Is she another perk for the Commander's favorite boys? The birds have been singing that General Howe introduced her to five officers he's considering matching her with at breakfast this morning but that none of them can manage to get close to her because of a certain major."

"Gossip travels fast within twenty-four hours." Archie remarked. "It isn't as though I was in Setauket or scouting for rebels, Captain. I was in the city on the way to see the same major to wish him a Joyous Season. I see I could not have arrived at a more opportune time, to dine on a fine meal and to have a lovely young Scots lass to look upon whilst doing it, makes me get all sentimental for home. Though I dinna knew that Johnny fancied fiery haired beauties. I was under the impression that he preferred blondes. I would wager that the Ludlow lass twists him about her wee finger and has him dancing to her tune before too long. It would serve him right!" Rogers remarked with a cheeky grin.

"You know that I am one of the officers that General Howe has considered for the Lady Mary's hand?" Archie asked. "You! Why would ye be wishing to settle down lad, yer young, handsome and titled? Though given what is being offered who could fault ye? If I were twenty years younger and in your position I would offer for her myself. Instead I will sit back and watch this drama unfold. Good luck to ye, lad! You are going to need it!" Rogers exclaimed, looking to Mary who appeared to have General Randall's attention, listening to what she was saying to him, he could hear snippets of words and phrases including Boston, the State House, and other words that spoke of a connection.

"His Grace, your father, did have a reputation for hospitality. I do remember dining at his residence in Boston once or twice whilst quartered there." Black Jack mentioned. "You were a precocious little chit of thirteen or fourteen then. Not even out of the schoolroom. Completely enamored of learning and what those men from Harvard College were teaching you, especially the Classics, poised and polished for one so young. Your brothers, one home from Oxford and the other from Yale College in Connecticut, if I recall, would not let any of the young officers have a private word with you."

"I am surprised that His Grace, your father, encouraged such behavior. You did learn other accomplishments, singing, dancing, how to play an instrument, drawing and painting, and all the accomplishments that make a young lady of your station attractive to her beaux." Charles Gray said, unable to take his eyes from the diamonds that were glittering about her slender throat enhancing her pretty bosom. How he ached to kiss and caress those breasts, tweak her nipples until they hardened with want beneath his expert touch, hear her moan and beg him for more. He bent his head toward her ear. "Allow me to tutor you in the Arts of Love, Lady Mary. I trust that I have the skills that will bring you infinite pleasure." He whispered so only she could hear.

Mary looked at him askance, her eyes widening in shock at his boldness, the predatory way his eyes swept over her. "I thank you for your invitation, Captain Gray, but I must graciously decline without having sought Major Andre's opinion upon the matter." She said diplomatically. "Do not believe for a moment, Sir, that because you have been put forth as a suitor for my hand that the rules of courtship and propriety are not to be observed. I do not believe that Major Andre would appreciate your desire to corrupt my Moral Sensibilities. Have a care that I do not let him know of your insult. Must I remind you Captain Gray that he does outrank you and thusly could discipline you for your infraction?"

"So all that I have heard about titian haired women is true? You do have a spirit and fire within you that I will take great pleasure in taming within and out of the bedchamber, milady." Lord Gray remarked with a leer.

"That is only if you win me, captain." Mary warned him, going to move away but he caught her by a forearm his fingers digging into her flesh.

"Oh, I will, Lady Mary. You have my word on it." He whispered, releasing her.
A few feet away, deep in conversation with a clutch of officers, John had watched the entire exchange, his lips pursing in concern. "Pardon me, gentlemen..." He said excusing himself. "Captain Gray, your commander requires you posthaste." He said, sardonically, coming up behind Mary's would be predator. "Lady Mary, is everything alright? Captain Gray is behaving as a gentleman?" He added, looking from Mary to the captain, knowing full well what the answer was, arching an accusing brow at Gray.

"Of course, Major Andre." Captain Gray said smoothly.

"Hmmm... Looks can be deceiving then, captain. Run along now, you do not wish to keep Rogers waiting." John said, dismissing the captain with a shoo of a hand, and then turned his complete attention to Mary. "Are you certain that you are alright, nothing is vexing you? I apologize for even considering and suggesting to General Howe that Captain Gray be weighed and put forth as one of your suitors. I thought that he would adjust his means of courtship when it came to a lady of your standing." John's eyes scrutinized her face for any signs of distress.

"Well, Captain Gray did not." Mary spat at him.

"So you are upset. What did he say to you?" John demanded the chivalrous need to protect and defend still claiming an iron hold on him.

Mary widened her eyes. "Not here!" She hissed.

"In private then, this way." John indicated, letting her precede him into his study. "You will become quite familiar with this room in due time, Lady Mary. I do hope that you find it agreeable and to your liking. Now, what did Captain Gray say to you that distressed you so?"

"It is not appropriate to repeat!" Mary replied.

"Lady Mary, if you are to be living under this roof under my protection we must learn to trust each other and learn to be able to speak openly and frankly about matters and issues that either of us, at one time, may find inappropriate or indelicate. Now, I repeat, Lady Mary what did Captain Gray say to you? I demand to know." John's voice was gentle but firm.

"Captain Gray asked permission..." She swallowed nervously.

"Come now! I know that you are braver than that. You know that whatever is said between us will remain within this room. Though I do assure you that Captain Gray will be disciplined." John probed.

"He asked me to allow him liberty to tutor me the Arts of Love." Mary stated her eyes down cast, shuddering involuntarily with revulsion.

"Good God!" John sighed in disgust.

"I told him that I had to seek your opinion upon the matter, that you would not be pleased to learn of his desire to corrupt my Moral Sensibilities." She explained.

"Bloody Hell right!" John spat, his voice angrier than he intended. "Though how do I discipline him for speaking aloud what many of the officers in that room were thinking?" Including me, John thought to himself. "Though they did observe the dictates of propriety and kept their private thoughts private. I will speak to his commander and will personally discipline him myself, I will advise General Howe to remove him from your suitors."

"Thank you, Major."

"Lady Mary, rest assured that I will do all in my power to safe guard your good name."

"That is rather ironic, major, seeing as your actions over the last day have done the most to cause the little birds to chirp and sing." Mary said. "What will they think when it is learnt that we have connecting bedchambers?"

"They will all envy me." John replied, boldly honest.

"I do appreciate your kindness and attention to my well-being though you do flatter me." Mary said. "A lady such as you does deserve such compliments." He explained, looking down into her face, they were close, perhaps too close, their bodies almost touching, drawn together by that inexplicable attraction. "Why is it when we find ourselves alone together that I cannot resist kissing you?" He whispered huskily, dipping his head. "Will you allow me a taste of your luscious sweet mouth?"

"Giving the birds more to chirp about? She asked. "What happened to being my protector and guarding my good name?"

"I lied." He replied, chuckling watching her mouth fall open, taking the opportunity to draw her
against him, his mouth covering hers, kissing her soundly, Mary's hands reaching up, grabbing fistfuls of his scarlet red jacket, pressing her body enticingly against his as they kissed for several fevered moments.

"Major..." A voice near the door caused them to spring apart by not quick enough, the young lieutenant witnessing the young woman brush a bit of imaginary fluff off of the front of Major Andre's uniform, her fingers dancing over his scarlet coat. The pair seemingly lost in their own world for several moments. "Pardon the intrusion, Sir, but the officers are ready to go into dinner. They are awaiting the Lady Mary and yourself to lead them into the dining room."

"Yes, of course. Shall we?" John asked, offering Mary his arm, leading her out of the study preceded by the lieutenant.

"Well would you look at that? It appears that Johnny has staked his claim on Charlie Sutherland's lass. Have a care with him Archie, lest Major Andre calls you out for sniffing about what he believes is his. He is a bloody good shot and a master swordsman!" Rogers stated watching John and Mary together.

"He took her into his study because it appears Captain Gray offended her. He wanted to know the why and wherefore."

Rogers whistled. "Knowing the captain I can imagine what he said to young lady. Charlie Gray best have a care lest Johnny calls him out for his behavior! But I would wager that the major is thinking the same as Gray but he has acted upon it." He chuckled.

"He did give explicit orders that she be placed in the suite right next to his which I know have been carried out." Archie provided.

As the senior lady and the hostess that evening, Mary entered the dining room escorted by Major Andre, as host. She took her seat at the head of the table, beside her, on either side, sat Generals Howe and Randall as the most high ranking officers and honored guests. The meal was much like the one that she and the major had attended the previous evening with the exception that she was the only female present. It was an interesting meal, the younger officers, many forgetting there was a woman in their midst received several glares from their seniors when their conversations threatened to turn indelicate or venture down paths that were not suited for a young woman such as the Lady Mary Ludlow. General Randall having a care to command her attention so as to avoid her hearing the junior officers' prattle and thus become offended some of which he would not have wished to hear himself as the younger men where muttering and complaining that he was too old to be considered as a husband for her.

"Gentlemen, Lady Mary just told me that she will be celebrating her birthday on New Year's Day, the first of January." Black Jack told the officers near him as dessert was served.

John's ears pricked, turning his head from the conversation he was enjoying with Captain Benedict Pitt. "Lady Mary, you must allow me to host a dinner in your honor."

"Thank you, major." Mary said, graciously. She knew that he wouldn't take no for an answer, he was known for being a gracious host; his parties were the talk of the city and legendary. "I had thought that I, Mistress Shaw and our pupils would celebrate quietly together."

"Tosh! Such an event will be the perfect time to introduce you those still loyal to king and country. We will plan it together." John said.

It was time for the gentlemen to have their after dinner port and sherry.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, I will leave you to your spirits." She said, wiping the corners of her mouth with her napkin, rising from her seat, all the officers rising as well.

"Lady Mary, a word before you go." John said, moving away from the table, walking about to where she was, blocking her from the view of the others. "Do avail yourself of the books in my study. Have Abigail bring you another glass of champagne or whatever you wish. I hope not to be long."

"Do not rush on my account, Major." Mary said.

"And I had thought that you were looking as forward to reading Richard II as I, Lady Mary. The company of a lovely young woman as you is so much more preferable to that of gentlemen, no matter how agreeable they may be." His voice was a low seductive caress that sent a shiver up her
spine. "Please don’t disappoint me."
"I could never do that." She assured him.
"Good." He said unable to resist giving her one of his self satisfied smirks as she walked past him, out of the dining room.
Walking into his study he spotted her curled up in one of the over sized winged backed chairs, intently reading.

"So impatient that you could not wait? Remind me to teach you patience, you must learn to savor and enjoy your pleasure." His voice sounded rich against the crackling and snapping of the logs in the fireplace as he knelt down beside her chair.

Mary looked up from the copy of Shakespeare's Richard II that she was reading. "Are you cross with me then? Will you discipline me?" She asked her eyes meeting his, pouting prettily.

"I can spank you if you like." He offered smiling roguishly.

"No one has spanked me since I was five years old. Why don't you teach me patience, show me how to savor and enjoy pleasure." She posed.

"You are so very tempting, Sweetheart." He whispered drawing her out of the chair as he stood taking her with him, the book tumbling to the carpet. "So incredibly tempting."

"Then teach me, you want to don't you?"

"If I did, I would no longer be the gentleman that you believe me to be. I would be as horrid as Captain Grey."

"I don't care for Captain Grey." She murmured.

"Do you care for me?"

"I haven't known you long enough to have formed an affection."

"Could you find it in yourself to? Could someone like me make you happy?"

"Would you wish, above and beyond your duties as my self-appointed knight errant? Do you truly wish to make me happy?" She asked.

"I believe we both know the answer to that." John replied.

"Fighting another urge to kiss me, Major?"

"Would you desire me to, Lady Mary?"

"Do you find me desirable?"

"John chuckled. "I believe we have established that I do."

"Have we?"

"Oh, most assuredly we have." John replied drawing her into his arms.

"We are neglecting King Richard and Bolingbroke." Mary whispered.

"His Majesty and His Grace can wait. They would certainly understand a gentleman and a knight errant tending to his lady, showing her how to savor and enjoy her pleasure."

"What manner of pleasure do you have in mind?"

"Let me show you..."

"Are we to completely ignore our evening's entertainment then?"

"We are just changing the manner of amusement." He stated.

"To?"

"That which is more intimate than reading by the fire."

"I do not believe that my suitors would approve of your methods."

"Quite the contrary, Lady Mary, they would all applaud my tactical skill." John bantered back his long elegant fingers tracing the neckline of her gown, the tips seeming to sear her bare fevered skin.

Mary swallowed in a vain attempt to moisten her suddenly dry mouth. She could feel her heart fluttering in her chest, her breathing becoming shallow as a warm flush of fire stole from her head down through her body to settle in her core which began to ache with need. "So confident that you will succeed in the objective of your mission, Major?"

"My tactical skills are such that I rarely, if ever, fail, Sweetheart." John's breath was hot against her
lips, the fingertips at the neckline of her gown slithering up her chest and the column of her throat over her pearl and diamond necklace to cup her jaw, tilting it a fraction of an inch higher and closer so that their mouths were barely touching. "See?" He asked, the pointed tip of his tongue snaking out, quickly darting over his lower lip to moisten it before his mouth crushed against hers in a fiercely passionate kiss that when it was over left them both breathless and panting.

"What other manner of pleasures do you intend to show me?" She whispered, an index finger tracing flirtatiously about the white stock tied at his neck then down over the buttons of his waistcoat feeling the hard muscles of his fit warrior's body beneath the fabric remembering how he had felt against her this morning in his bed and how she hungered to feel him once more.

"All manner of intimacies that would most certainly corrupt and shock those Fine New England Moral Sensibilities you possess." John replied with a smile. How this Boston raised beauty stirred his blood and captivated his interest. "So you are giving careful consideration that I could make you happy? No more complaints as this morning in the library at the academy, you do still wish that I touch you? You want me to."

"The Major's uniform is impeccably tailored, isn't it, lass? Made by Thomas Hawkes of Brewer Street in London. Am I right, Johnny? I was on my way out but I thought I would tender my farewells to the lady. Has he allowed you to inspect the cut of his breeches?" Rogers asked with a leer, standing in the doorway.

"Do you have anything more to say?" John asked, gently moving away from Mary striding toward Rogers.

"I was completely unaware that was the manner in which finely raised young women from Boston read. If that be the truth, I and the Queen's Rangers wish to ferret out rebellion in Massachusetts, though our uniforms are not as impeccably tailored or smart as yours. Must be the scarlet color of the coat, eh, Johnny?"

"Did you ever stop to consider that it may be the man inside it?" John asked.

"Oh, aye!" Rogers chuckled, grinning lasciviously. "Lady Mary, a pleasure." He said bowing with a flourish in Mary's direction.

"Does that mean that you are leaving us?" John asked, hopeful, the measure of his voice indicating that was exactly what he wished Rogers to do, it was clear that the burly ranger had intruded upon a private moment.

"Eager to get rid of me? Want the cut of your breeches inspected? She appears ripe and keen for instruction. Philomena will be furious when she learns of your defection for greener pastures. Not that I blame you. The lass is incredibly tempting."

"I have merely taken it upon myself to protect the young lady." "By seducing her and luring her into your bed?" Rogers whispered, looking back at Mary.

"My intentions are honourable." John stated.

"Lying to me or yourself, boy? The manner in which you look at her betrays you. You aren't fooling anyone! It is clear that you want to fuck her. Impatient to debauch the girl then keep her warming your bed?"

"I believe that it is time for you to leave, Rogers, you are clearly foxed. Good night. Mayhap the travel out in the cold will clear your head." John stated hustling the burly drunk Scot out the door of the study. "Rogers had to tend to pressing business with his men. Shall we see about the cut of my breeches?" John teased wickedly walking toward her.

Mary blushed her cheeks staining a pretty pink. "They are quite flattering; they do appear to be painted on your person."

"Are you completely certain, Lady Mary? I do believe that they require a closer inspection."

"Do you, major?"

"Oh, yes, absolutely." He stated, standing in front of her, his eyes twinkling with mischief, grasping her hands in his, guiding them to the front of his breeches.

"This is highly improper. If another of the officers were to walk in and catch us." Mary protested.

"Don't fret, Darling, they are all either totally foxed by now or otherwise engaged for the remainder of the evening. No one will ever know." He said smoothly.
"No more intrusions like that of that dreadful ranger?"
John laughed. Your Ladyship is incredibly diplomatic in voicing your assessment of Robert Rogers."
"I could get more specific if you wish."
"Get as specific as you please." John said, amused and delighted that she was not afraid to be boldly honest in her distaste for Rogers.
"Do you promise to keep it in confidence?"
"It will be our secret, one of many we accumulate in the course of our acquaintance, I am most certain. I did tell you that you can trust me. What is your more specific assessment of that particular member of the Queen's Rangers?"
"He is a scoundrel." Mary stated baldly, running a hand down one of his muscular thighs. "Though he is correct in his assessment of Mister Hawkes tailoring, there is just enough room here so that it is not uncomfortable for you to sit but tight enough in the proper places to impress a lady." John grinned at her honesty."Are you impressed, Lady Mary, or would you care to make a closer inspection of the man inside?" He asked, guiding her hands, still clasped in his, up to his waistcoat.
"How are you ever going to be properly prepared for marriage to an officer in His Majesty's Army if you do not familiarize yourself intimately with the nature of the uniform?"
"Are you offering yourself as my tutor?"
"Who better to assume the position than the officer that has been ordered by General Howe, himself, to protect you? No man wishes to encounter a frightened virgin on his wedding night and considering what transpired between us last evening we still may find ourselves entangled in that Marriage of Convenience therefore it may be best to find if we do indeed suit one another." John assured her.
"I would prefer to perform my inspection in private."
"There is no one here but the pair of us, Lady Mary." "I assume there is no chance that we will be reading Shakespeare together this evening?"
"No, Sweetheart, not this evening, remember the nature of amusement has changed. No come here and begin your inspection." Mary hesitated. "The door to your study..."
"There will be no interruptions. I left orders that we were not to be disturbed, orders that Rogers did not heed. You have nothing to fear, my word on it as a gentleman. Now let's see about that stock, shall we?" John said with a small smile, sitting in one of the winged back chairs, patting a thigh, motioning for her to sit in his lap, which she obeyed, nestling her bum against his rock hard thighs, feeling the heat from the fire that continued to burn in the hearth or was it the contact of their bodies next to one another that set her aflame?
"The ends of it are tucked inside the collar of your waistcoat." She observed nimble fingers reaching inside, the tips swirling patterns against his shirt fishing for the ends of his stock. "Am I doing this properly?" She asked sweetly looking up at him through lowered lashes.
"Yes, your technique is commendable; use your forefinger to slip the end over. Yes, just like that. Perfect." He approved.
"Untie the knot? Then unwind it from about your throat? Like this?" Taking the ends she passed them about his neck, tickling the nape of it, beneath his queue with the tips of her fingers, caressing the smooth skin.
"What are you about?" He laughed. "Naughty! Who taught you?" He asked as she drew the long piece of white cloth off him in a slow sensual movement.
"Feminine instinct." She whispered, raising her eyes to stare into his face. He is very good-looking in the soft light of the candles, she noted. It was unnerving and thrilling at the same time to know that he wanted her! The man they called 'The Handsomest Officer in the British Army' wanted to make her happy and most likely do the most unspeakably intimate things to her. Her heart pounded thinking about it. None of the other officers affected her the way John Andre did. He was so confident, commanding, and charming. "What is next? The closures of your jacket?"
"Yes."
"Simple." She said undoing them, tracing her hand down his chest. "Now the waistcoat."
"So methodical." He teased. "Does touching me make you nervous?"
"I am learning to savor and enjoy my pleasure." She teased back. "Do you believe that we will suit?"
"Possibly, it does merit further intimate exploration but my study is not the place." He answered
helping her quickly undo the buttons of his waistcoat.
"I thought that I was to inspect what a uniform of an officer in His Majesty's Army entailed. I did not
realize that such an exploration would merit something more intimate." She said, parting the edges of
his waistcoat, tilting backward for a moment, John sitting up to shed his jacket. "Let me!" She said,
ascertaining his intent her hands going to the dark blue facings. "I had best get used to this."
"Helping to undress me? Yes, you should, Lady Mary. I would most certainly advise it." John
agreed, giving her one of his classic self-satisfied smirks, brushing his chest against hers, his hands
running sensually slowly down her sides, their close proximity in the chair making it impossible for
them not to touch as the pair of them removed his jacket, laying it neatly in her lap, leaning back in
the chair now with his waistcoat unbuttoned and opened, his stock removed John quickly and
expertly assessed the situation. "Not wishing to chance the possibility of a horrible scandal, the other
items should be removed in a much more private venture. Grab my jacket, please."
The next thing she knew, he was carrying her in his arms, striding toward the door of his study,
pushing it open with a booted toe. They could hear the noise coming from some of the officers who
were still at their port and sherry in the dining room. From the sound of it they had imbibed quite a
bit and were becoming rather raucous and bawdy.
"There will be a few thick heads in the morning." John observed.
"I imagine they think it is worth it." Mary replied as he made for the staircase. "Where are you taking
me?"
"You haven't finished your inspection but I dare not chance a scandal so we are going someplace far
more private where, at this hour, I have complete assurance that we will not be disturbed."
"Where is that?"
"Your bedchamber. Shhhh... No protests now about your reputation, would you rather have me in
your bed tonight or one of those drunk and randy officers? I hear that Major Lord Edrington likes a
bit of rough play with his pleasure especially when he is foxed and I have already told you about
General Randall's reputation. The pair of them and any of the other officers in there would seek you
out and not for a late night game of cards." John explained, his mouth close to one of her ears she
shivered.
"Cold or anticipating what is to come?" He asked, Mary turning her head to see him grin at her as he
ascended the staircase. "I promise that I won't disappoint you. You have nothing to fear from me."
"What would I do without you to keep me safe, John?" She asked, pressing a hand upon his chest.
"Seeing to my education and the conservation of my reputation, such gallantry should be rewarded."
Leaning up, she kissed his chin her eyes dancing trying to be brave.
He groaned a low feral sound in the back of his throat, titling his head down, his mouth meeting hers
in a hot demanding kiss, his mouth devouring hers, walking up the scant few more stairs to the
landing, continuing to fiercely kiss her as he navigated down the corridor to her bedchamber,
reaching down to open the door with a hand, nudging it open with his shoulder. "Reward me then."
He told her, carrying her over the thresh hold shutting the door behind them, carrying her through to
her bedroom looking down at her waiting for her consent.
Looking up into his face, swallowing nervously, she nodded.
He carried her to the bed, gently depositing her upon it, the two of them staring at one another, John
tossing his stock and jacket upon a small upholstered chair near it, coming to lie beside her, easing
Mary into his embrace, lifting her chin with his fingers. "Tell me..." He prompted her, allowing her
to be certain.
Her heart was pounding in her chest with anticipation. "No one will ever know?" She wanted
reassurance.
"They may suspect as much but that is no matter. I promise that no one will ever question your virtue
or reputation."
"Such gallant words, John. You seem so confident and assured."
"Better me that one of the other officers." He explained, brushing a lock of hair from one of her temples, marveling in its softness, how it curled about his fingers. How the thick mass of waves would feel caressing his naked chest, brushing against his nipples, his belly. How she would arouse him in her innocence seeking knowledge of what occurred between women and men. She would prove to be an adept pupil, a woman made to pleasure a man.

"Who will see to your reputation?" She asked, her eyes searching his.
"Do not fret about me. I am used to it. Your concern touches my heart."
"What other parts of me touch you?" Reaching up, fingertips of one of her hands caressed one of his cheeks, the index finger dashing across the seam of his lips which were warm to her touch.
"Every precious inch of your person, your mind and your very soul; I want to possess the very essence of your being."

"Begin with my body. You desire me?"
"You know that I do, more than anything."
"Do you not always take what you want?" She challenged him.
"Where have you heard that?" He asked.
"Is it not common knowledge? Take what you want, what you desire, use that famous charm upon me that has all the ladies in Society swooning." She told him, her eyes trying to read what emotions and feelings were contained behind that deep blue gaze of his that seemed to burn with an unquenchable fire whenever he feasted his eyes upon her.

"You wish me to? Why the change of heart, Lady Mary? So fearful or ruination a moment ago but now you are practically begging me to corrupt those fine moral sensibilities you possess in the most wicked of manners. Being the gentleman that I am, I have no choice to acquiesce to you request. Dare I be hopeful in ascertaining that you are beginning to form an affection for me, that I could, indeed, make you happy? Or is what am I to do part of the test to see if I could?"
"General Howe will be furious when he learns that you may have wasted his time." Mary observed.
"Will he? Wasted his time? Truly, in what way?"
Mary arched a brow over and eye.
"Stop with the expression. Help me remove my waistcoat, vixen!"
Mary did as she was bid, John tossing the garment on the chair with his stock and uniform coat turning back to her. "My shirt..."
"That comes next or your boots?"
"Whichever you wish."
"Your shirt. Then what about me?"
"What about you, Sweetheart?"
"Am I not horribly overdressed?"
John grinned, wickedly. "Now that you mention it... You are testing me this evening?"
"Major Andre whatever do you mean? Did I not tell you to take what you wanted, sir?"
"John. I like to be called John or Johnny by those that I am familiarly acquainted with. Since we are familiarly acquainted and are to be quite intimate in so many respects, I suggest that you use it. No moans of Major Andre in the throes of our passion passing forth through those delicious lips of yours. Yes, you did. I intend to take most of it tonight." He said, his fingers going to work on the closures at the front of her gown, skimming over the top of her breasts, making her gasp with desire.
"Take most of it? What do you intend to leave, Ma... John?" Mary caught herself. He was making it difficult for her to think, to breathe, setting her body aflame.
"Your maidenhead, Mary, I will leave that for your husband but I will take everything else for myself including your heart and soul. Once your husband has your maidenhead, I will take your body as well. You will be mine in every sense."
"Will I?" She challenged.
"Oh, yes. You will be mine." He vowed.
"You will have to win me first, John. Then I will decide if I wish to have you!" She shot back.
"I accept your challenge because I have all intensions of winning." John said his voice resolute.
"General Howe will be so cross...." She mused.
"Will he now?" John flirted, unbuttoning the last two buttons of the front of her gown, parting the fabric, nuzzling the side of her neck, planting burning kisses on her skin.
"John!" She exclaimed giggling a delicious shiver dancing down her spine. "John! Please...Oh!"
What was he about? She thought as expert fingers pushed her gown off her shoulders, deftly drawing her arms and hands through the sleeves, she was bared to his gaze, in her corset. Pulling back to admire her, John could not conceal his gasp of appreciation. She was exquisite in the midnight blue silk brocade and lace, he felt the organ between his legs swell and harden, and becoming more aroused the hunter within him awakened. He would possess her and make her his.
"Lift your bum." He instructed, the quicker that she was divested of her clothing the better.
Mary did as she was told, pushing her gown down a bit more.
"Here, let me!" John offered, his hands grasping portions of her gown, pulling it with agonizing slowness over her hips and bum caressing her though the fabric of her petticoats. "Let's take these off, too!" He said, undoing the fastenings of her petticoats pushing them off, which, along with her dress, fell into a heap onto the carpeted floor. She was now just in her stockings, garters and corset, a scrap of silk tied on either side of her hips with a scrap of lace in two neat small bows against her hips barely covered her sex.
"Can I unwrap the rest? Those darling bows are quite fetching but appear to be begging to be undone. Do let me oblige them." He quipped, blue eyes dancing, his teeth gently nipping her shoulder, a hand sliding sensually over the swell of her hip, swirling feather light caresses over her smooth soft skin, his touch seeming to scorch her skin, brand her. She hesitated for a moment, then nodded, watching an elegant forefinger and thumb grasp the edge of a bow, give it a gentle tug undoing the closure, the lace and silk falling away from her hip, revealing a tiny peak of the V of golden curls that covered her mons.
"Beautiful, simply beautiful." Her whispered thickly his hand snatching the tiny bits of silk and lace away, revealing the rest of her to his lustful hungry gaze.
"Oh, God!" She moaned.
"Do not blaspheme!" He said swatting her backside playfully. "Whatever am I to do with you? This?" He asked rolling her over upon her back, tickling her ribs, looming over her.
"John!" She shrieked through giggles. "John, no!"
"Hush!" He admonished, his mouth dangerously close to hers, he kissed her. "John, yes!" his mouth trailed a path of hot kisses down to her chin, the smooth slender column of her throat to the tops of her breasts, pausing briefly to admire the diamonds and pearls encircling her neck. "Allow me to sketch you wearing that necklace."
"Only the necklace?"
"And the earrings with only a silk shawl to cover you."
"Shocking!"
"Mmmmm... I do not hear you protesting. We need to remove this." He indicated her corset.
"But you are still overdressed."
"Easily remedied." He moved off of her for a moment, divesting himself of his boots and shirt, tossing them near the other clothes, dressed only in his breeches now, he came back to her. "Like what you see? I am yours." He declared noting her eyes sweeping over him.
"For how long?"
"Eternity for that is as long as you will desire and wish to have me." He replied, a hand going to the bow at the top of her corset, tugging it undone, making quick work of the laces, loosening it, the fabric falling away from her, revealing her pale skin and the swells of her breasts beneath. "Such lovely treasures." He stated, his eyes darkening with lust a hand dipping inside to caress the smooth swell of one of them, fingertips teasing her nipple which hardened to a taut peak with arousal.
"Oh!" Mary gasped with pleasure at the deliciously unfamiliar sensations feeling him yank her corset away. She was now naked save for her stockings and garters.
"These are the intimacies that I told you about, but it is just the beginning."
"The beginning?"
"Yes, Darling, the just the beginning, I have so much to teach you, there are so many manners and ways that one can enjoy and savor one's pleasure..." John winked giving her a devouring smile that made her blood run hot, how she ached for him, her heart racing. "Let me try to make you happy."

He said, rolling her onto her back, nuzzling her neck with the tip of his nose, trailing a path of fevered kisses over her chest, his mouth closing over the swell of a breast, a hand trailing down one of her sides over her smooth skin, marveling at its softness, to the indentation of her tiny waist, the other hand caressing the other breast, teasing the nipple to a hard peak.

Mary gasped, her breath hot and shallow, every fiber of her being alive, aroused, aware. Aware of every flick of his tongue, stroke of his fingertips, tickle of his tiny braid over the taut skin of her torso, John sucking gently upon her nipple, releasing it, blowing on the damp skin, the feel of his warm breath making her shiver, a low throaty sensual moan escaping from between her parted lips. "Joooooohhhhhhhhhnnnnnn."

"Does that make you happy?" He asked, his mouth moving southward, over her taut flat abdomen and belly, kissing and licking the fevered skin, running the tip of his nose teasingly over her, "Or does this?" His tongue dipped into her navel, the pointed tip moving about with feather light licks, his teeth grazing her skin moving yet further southward. "Or this?" he asked once more, planting scorching kisses all over her lower belly. "Or this? Hmmm... Yes, this will make you exquisitely happy..." He mused, positioning himself between her thighs, his mouth closed over her sex, his tongue slashing across her clitoris, his hands reaching beneath to grip her bum, yanking her closer to him, making her nearly shriek with pleasure of the increased pressure on the most intimate part of her, his palms and fingers caressed her bum sending thrills through her. She tossed her head back on the pillows keening softly the incredible danger of what they were engaging in adding to the passion and urgency.

His tongue and his lips were giving her joy beyond imagining, his hands traveled from her bum running over her hip and waist to her lovely bosom, John's fingers caressing the twin mounds of flesh, her nipples hardening with arousal into two pebbles aching under his expert ministrations. He was driving her near to madness. So this was part of the pleasure that he had been so eager to teach her? If it was, she could learn to enjoy and savor it for hours.

Her fingers tangled into his thick wavy hair, pressing his face further into her a finger twirling about that little pale blond braid. The source of her joy increasing whilst his tongue stimulated her overly sensitive nub of flesh, her breath coming in soft hot pants, her teeth worrying her full lower lip to stifle her cries of rapture not knowing what was clearly happening but knowing that John was making good his promise to her, the muscles of her stomach tightening, a sweet heated flush spreading all over her body as her drew her closer and closer to that which she craved then hurtling over that wonderful edge of the precipice, her body throbbing and spasming with her first orgasm.

He came up to hold her close afterward the pair snuggling beneath the bedclothes, not wanting to let her go, stroking her hair and back as they lay together, John spooning her, nuzzling her neck creating their own special intimacy. "Did I make you happy?" He asked, the tip of an index finger swirling patterns over her breasts, down over her taut flat torso, his other fingers quickly joining it as he moved them down to cup and caress a rounder hip whilst his lips planted tender kisses along the line of her shoulder.

Mary felt her skin heat from the roots of her hair to the tips of her toes, flushing with embarrassment and contentment. "Blissfully and incandescently happy, is it like that every time? The intensity, I mean or is that just between us?"

"Just between us." John said, smugly, kissing the slope of her shoulder, the hand that was cupping her hip traveling over her lower belly to tangle within the golden curls covering her sex. "Part of the Natural Law of Cause and Effect. You are familiar with Isaac Newton?"

"Mmmmm." She snuggled back into his embrace, wriggling her bum suggestively next to his groin. "Do you hear that?" She asked, someone was pounding upon her bedroom door. She heard a voice using vulgar expletives.

"Lady Mary! Open the door! It is time for your first lesson! I am going to fuck that pretty cunt of yours with my fingers and my tongue!" Lord Charles Gray 's slurred voice demanded.
"John..." Mary's voice was anxious. "It appears that Captain Gray is determined. Put on a nightgown and wait here, I will tend to him." John said, kissing her upon the forehead, tossing the bedclothes off, hopping out of the bed, traveling through the candlelit alcove and door that connected their rooms, taking a dressing gown that hung on peg nearby, shrugging into and belting it, coming back through her bedroom finding Mary sitting on the edge of the large four poster bed dressed in a low cut full sleeved cotton and lace nightgown, his eyes lingering on her as he walked through to the outer room, opening the door. "Cease your clamoring, Captain. Do you seek to disturb the house at this hour and frighten the lady?" John chided Gray. "Your demands are hardly those of an officer of His Majesty's army or the gentleman that your title suggests, offensive to a young lady's ears in their crudeness." Gray looked the dashing major up and down, quickly assessing the situation, drawing completely all the improper, though if the truth were told, correct conclusions, though John, committed to the preservation and welfare of Lady Mary Ludlow's Good Name, would never allow any man to question or impinge with accusations or innuendos. "Yet your attire and present situation bespeak of..." Gray began. "I was reading in my room. Lady Mary sought me out when she heard your incessant pounding upon the door and your insulting words that scared her. I was merely doing what any gentleman would have when finding himself in a similar situation. I kindly ask you to leave the lady be and seek your own bed to avoid further embarrassment. I would be inclined upon the morrow to speak with General Howe in regards to your less than gentlemanly behavior. I do not believe that this is the first time that you have made lewd suggestions to the lady. Is it, Captain Gray? Obviously you have not changed your means of courtship. A Lady of Quality such as Mary Ludlow does require and deserve to be treated with honor and respect. There will be no duke's daughter as a bride for you. Good Evening. I do hope that you find a woman to quench that fire of lust inside you but the woman to do it will not be the Lady Mary."

"You may rest assured, Major Andre that there are many women more than willing to quench my fires including a certain actress of our mutual acquaintance by the name of Philomena." Gray tried to bait John, disappointed when the major did not react at the mention of his mistress' name whose favors Gray had also sampled. "I wish you the best of luck with that." John said, completely non-plussed. "Good night, captain." John slammed the door in Gray's face not before the other man got a quick glimpse of Mary in her nightgown illuminated by the soft candlelight looking ripe and ready for the wickedness which Charles Gray knew Andre would be more than happy to introduce her.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all that have been reading this story. It is greatly appreciated.
"Get back in bed, Darling! I am not through with you!" John said, playfully turning about from the door walking toward the bed, listening as Grey's footsteps retreated down the hallway.

"What do you intend to do?"
"I find that I have a desire for another taste of the sweetness contained between those soft pale thighs of yours." He replied bluntly.

"Striving to keep me happy, John?" She asked crawling back into bed. When had she become so wanton? She asked herself. Was it because the safety of the young Continental soldiers that hid in the attic of the academy hinged on her twisting him about her little finger? Which wasn't proving all that difficult the powerful attraction and what they felt for one another was very genuine. There was no deception involved.

John grinned in response, unbelting and removing his dressing gown, tossing it upon the foot of the bed, coming to her, lifting her nightgown up about her thighs. "Oh, dear! You mustn't have garters and stockings beneath your nightgown." He lamented, the fingers of a hand pulling upon the bow that held the rosette fastened causing it to fall away, John trailing his fingertips inside her inner thigh virtually branding her skin, rolling the stocking ever so slowly over her thigh, tickling the pale smooth skin causing Mary to giggle, trying to pull her leg away.

"John, please!" She cried.

"Please what? What is it that you want, Sweetheart, impatient to have me to taste you once more?" He teased her, flashing one of his famous dimpled smirks.

"That is your desire, John." She replied gasping as he made quick work of the stocking, revealing her neat bare foot, tossing it on the carpet, kissing the hollow of her ankle, up her calf, to her knee, heat leaping through her limbs where his mouth touched her.

John came up, Mary running her hands on his shoulders tracing a path down over his chest. "What of the other stocking?" She flirted, tracing patterns over his smooth skin, marveling as the muscles flexed and rippled at her touch.

"What of it? The garter goes first." He said, making quick work of it, tossing it off the bed, rolling the other stocking down her other leg in the same manner he had done the first, kissing her from knee to thigh, his teeth grazing her skin.

Pressing her buttocks further into the mattress, Mary's legs fell further open to accommodate her lover whose tongue was licking dangerously close to her most intimate place, her body bowing off the bed slightly when his mouth closed over her sex for the second tome that evening. "Oh, John!" She crooned. What was he doing with his tongue? She would die with the pleasure of it. The flicks against her sensitive nub, was he sucking on her now? Oh! Good Lord! "John! Yessssss! Oh!" If he did that once more she would swoon from the pleasure! She was aflame, liquid fire surging through her veins, grasping handfuls of the bedclothes with one hand, lacing the other in his hair, fingers twirling about his tiny pale braid, purring with desire.

"Am I still making you happy?" His voice was rough, husky and hot against her. "This may help." He added slipping an index finger into her sheath whilst his mouth continued to work its magic on her clitoris drawing her closer and closer to the pinnacle of pleasure. A second finger thrust inside her proved her undoing as John brought her to the second incredible climax of the evening, his body coming up. "Taste yourself!" He demanded his mouth devouring hers, tongue plunging violently inside, fencing with hers, his fingers continuing to thrust in and out of her carrying her along the crest as wave after wave of the most incredibly delicious pleasure crashed over her. Her body trembling in its excitement, the pair continuing to ravage each other's mouths with kisses, the taste of John and
that of her own intimate place mingling together, her lover kissing down her chin, along the line of her jaw, teeth grazing down the side of her neck.

"Yes, Mary! That's it. Oh, yes, Sweetheart, grasp it, take it! Don't fret. I will catch you. I promise."

That was all she needed, she thought as one orgasm gradually subsided to have another crash into her, just as wild and powerful as the first.

Mary grabbed him tightly, holding on as the surges of fierce delight washed over her once more.

"John! Dear God, John!" She cried her breath coming in short hot pants, digging her fingers into his shoulders as her hips moved in rhythm with his thrusting fingers, his lips stifling her keening with passionate kisses.

She lay in the security of his embrace afterward, beneath the bedclothes, her back nestled next to his front as they had the evening before, John's fingertips tracing patterns absentely along her hip and thigh, nuzzling and planting sweet kisses along where her shoulder and neck met.

"You know that we have barely begun your education in the Arts of Eros, though I daresay you are proving to be a most adept and charming pupil, who would have thought that one so young possessed such fire and passion within her though it appears that you were made to enjoy the intimate delights found between a man and a woman. It appears that I have the good fortune to be your teacher. I will not have any other man touch you!"

"You will not have any man touch me? What of the suitors that General Howe approved of and you, yourself, suggested and put forth for his consideration and approval. What of them? What is it that you truly want and desire, John?"

"Have I not made that absolutely clear to you?" He answered her question with one of his own.

"So you are to be the one to teach me the intimacies found between a man and a woman and then you will do the noble deed of handing me over to my husband? I do not believe that the likes of General Randall or Lord Major Graham would look too kindly on the realization that you have given me instruction. Some men, I have heard, like to tutor their virgin brides themselves. What are you afraid of? I am not like Honora Sneyd, I have no intensions of breaking your heart if I were fortunate to have you entrust it into my care." Mary felt him tense slightly upon the mention of the woman he had proposed to in England five years previous who had rejected him, breaking his heart, causing him to join the British Army.

"Mary, I have told you as much that I do care for you that I wish to make you happy. It is you that made it clear that you have not known me long enough to have formed an affection, so do not speak to me of being afraid of you breaking my heart were I to entrust it into your care. I have never entertained such thoughts nor would I. I was the one that posed the question for you to consider carefully, which after what has occurred between in the privacy of this room it would not be too presumptuous of me to assume that your answer when the question were to be posed to you once more would be a resounding yes. I also offered myself as your tutor when you ventured to inspect the cut of an officer of His Majesty's Army's uniform an inspection that Your Ladyship undertook without hesitation and also served to protect your reputation from the young drunken and randy officers such as Captain Lord Grey who was intent on ravishing Your Ladyship this evening. I have performed my duties as your protector and what would be expected of me as a gentleman. There is clearly no denying that there is an intense attraction between us where I have demonstrated thrice this evening that I am thoroughly capable of making you, what were the words you said, blissfully and incandescently happy, was it? I have proven myself more than capable; you must decide whether or not you wish to have me!"

"Do you want me?"

John laughed. "I want you more than you can possibly imagine, you fiery haired vixen! Will you allow me to escort you to the theatre tomorrow evening after we pay a visit to Madame Bernon earlier in the day? You must have a new gown to wear at your birthday dinner."

"What of my responsibilities at that academy? Madame Bernon? But her creations are so exquisite."

Mary protested.

"Then we will have her measure you for two gowns. You may attend to matters at the academy after breakfast." John said lightly.
"Two gowns? Would not the money to be spent be better served to pay for supplies for the troops, John?" Mary posed.

"When did a Boston raised young lady with ties to Hancock, Adams and Revere turn her coat?" John teased, partially serious. With her connections she would make the perfect double agent.

"My circumstances have changed. I believe that I should use my considerable resources for good." Mary said, honestly.

"You are in possessed of many resources not to mention a most desirable face and form." John countered wishing to find distraction in bed with this beautiful young woman for several hours. He did not wish to think of the horrible business of war but of the contentment and peace he found when he was with her. "You are in possession of the sort of desirable form that should be dressed in manners and ways to please a man in private. Many gentlemen, Sweetheart, appreciate what is worn beneath a lady's gown and take great pleasure in serving as maids to their lovers, a bit of silk and lace against bare pale skin does a great deal to increase a man's ardor especially when viewed in the softness of candlelight."

"You do not find my night gown to your liking then?" Mary asked, knowing that if John were to tell her he did not he would be lying, evidence to the contrary was nestled next to her buttocks, the organ between his legs rock hard with arousal.

"I like your night gown very much though I do have one complaint about it." "What is that?"

"It is covering far too much of your skin at present." He replied, a hand tugging at the fabric, raising it quickly to bare her from waist to toes, running over the smooth hot skin of her thigh, dipping his finger tips between the juncture, gently coaxing her legs apart.

"John!" Mary admonished him, trying to push the fabric of her gown down.

"Do not fret, Mary, you won't catch a chill. You are already becoming inflamed at my touch, I can feel it." He murmured seductively in her ear, his breath hot next to her skin, biting her lobe gently with his teeth, his fingers stroking her inner thigh sending flames of fire through her to settle in her core.

"John, no! Please not again! We need to get some sleep!" Mary said, squirming against him feeling his organ swell even more if that were at all possible.

"Just one more, Sweet Darling Mary. You will sleep so much better afterward, I promise." He purred in her ear, his fingertips delving into the folds of her sex, the index finger finding and stroking her little nub of flesh.

Mary moaned, her breathing quickly becoming ragged with each stroke of John's fingertip across her clitoris the tips of her fingers digging into one of his thighs as his caresses brought her closer and closer to Paradise with each stroke of his expert touch.

"You can scream when you reach your crisis, Sweetheart. I will catch it for you." John whispered in her ear, tilting her chin back, covering her mouth with his in a demanding searing kiss to stifle her cries and keens of rapture whilst she experienced her fourth incredible climax of the evening as behind her eyes her world shattered into a thousand stars, John seeming to drag her down into that vortex of sensual pleasure and desire that she appeared to have no hope of escaping.

Dear God! If she were this passionate and fiery when he touched, stroked and did all but the act with her he could only imagine how it would be between them when he finally took her and made her truly and completely his in the biblical sense. Not other man was going to have her! ""How was Paradise, Darling? Because I did take you there, didn't I?" He asked.

"Absolutely wonderful! So that was Paradise?" She asked, closing her eyes, nestling closer to him.

"Yes, do you feel better, ready for the Sweet Land of Morpheus?" He added, dashing his fingertips over her stomach, swirling about her navel, teasingly.

Mary shivered beneath his expert touch. "Yes!"

"Good." He said. "Rest now."

"It does me good to see you, Mary." The voice said from the shadows of her third floor bedroom at the academy. "Caleb Brewster and I received word of your changed circumstances. I do not know
whether to offer congratulations or sympathies. They are treating you well? What of the officers, of
Major Andre?"
"He won't let me out of his sight for more than a few minutes. Upon learning of my father's
inheritance of the dukedom and subsequent travel back to England he had me move into the house
the officers had conscripted where I am living at present."
"I heard he moved over some of the costliest and most elegant of the furnishings that your parents
had gifted you for the academy as well as raided the library?"
"Yes, he has a fondness for Shakespeare."
"I knew that he was not all that horrible, he does have a reputation."
"Which he has lived up to."
Ben Tallmadge raised a brow over one of his grey blue eyes upon hearing that bit of information. "If
he does not comport himself as a gentleman, war or no, I may have to call him out for breaching your
honor. Ned and Jamie are not here to defend you so I must. He knows you are a lady? Is he aware of
your relationship with General Washington?" The General happened to be one of her godfathers.
Mary smiled. "He does, he has been quite kind. General Howe wishes me to marry one of his
officers. He has put forth several candidates, among them General Jonathan Randall and Captain
Lord Charles Grey of the Queen's Rangers. I don't think he knows of my relationship with Uncle
George. If he is aware he has not imparted as much to me. I don't believe it necessary to tell him
unless he asks."
"Is Andre one of officers that have been put forth as a candidate?" Ben asked. "Good! If you must
tell him do. Especially if it will serve to aide you though he could use it as a means to get valuable
information from you and once Howe learns of the connection it could prove adverse for you. There
will be officers lining up to court General Washington's Tory Goddaughter!"
"He would like to be." Mary answered. "Benjamin Franklin's bastard son, William is the Governor
of New Jersey and a Tory himself. It happens in the best of families."
"Rightly so, do not get mixed up with Captain Grey. True. Just be careful. If you have to chose,
chose the lesser of the evils. Pick an officer that will make you happy and will be loyal."
"You know that I cannot go on as I was before, Ben. It has become far too dangerous. I cannot risk
it."
"Just a few more, Mary, the Cause needs you! General Washington needs you!"
"I do not think I can risk it. I am watched like a hawk now, Ben. Major Andre has confiscated my
letters from Dorothy Hancock and Abigail Adams."
They heard the front door open and the faint tread of footsteps on the plush Oriental carpet in the first
floor foyer.
"Lady Mary!" A familiar cultured British voice called loudly, the voice carrying up the stairs.
"Where is my Sweet Little Dove?"
"Andre?" Ben asked.
"Mary nodded. "Quickly, hide under the bed!" She whispered suddenly frightened, hearing the
British officer ascend the staircase. "Hurry now! If he finds you here he will kill you!"
Ben bent down, set to do as he was told. "I know the risks involved, remember?"
"Mary, Sweetheart!" John's voice called.
"Sweetheart?" Ben asked, eyes widening. "You have become his sweetheart? Go to him so he won't
become suspicious, Mary." He instructed his entire tall muscular person disappearing beneath the bed
skirt.
"Here you are! Did you not hear me calling for you?" John asked coming into the room, he had
removed his tricorn hat which he held cradled beneath an arm looking Ten Shades of Gorgeous, his
Great cape draped rakishly over his uniform gloves covering his elegant hands.
Mary had placed herself near the bedside table a book they had forgotten yesterday in her hand. "No,
I must have been lost in the book that I was reading." She lied, her voice a bit too bright, desperately
trying to hide the fact that her hands were shaking.
"What distracts you so?" John inquired unable to hide the amusement in his voice. His instincts on
high alert, he knew that there was a third person hiding in the room. John could feel it. The same one
that he had viewed entering the house from the tradesmen's entrance the night before when he had peaked out her bedroom window close to dawn. "I would rather it be me!" He stated moving closer to her.

"You really should not say such things?" Mary admonished him trying the best to calm herself sending up a silent prayer to the Almighty that Ben did not do something stupid that may get him discovered. She knew that a few scant inches and a bed skirt was the only thing that separated the British and Continental officers.

"Why? We both know it to be true. I would care to believe that you think me a much more pleasant distraction than..." He tossed his tricorn on the bed then took the book from her hand, reading the title from the spine. "Paradise Lost." He tossed the book on the bed next to his hat, turned back, drawing her into his arms. "How I longed to kiss that tiny bit of jam from the corner of that luscious mouth of yours during breakfast this morning, the one that was right there." A gloved finger caressed the spot then gently traced her pink full lower lip.

From his hiding place beneath the bed, Ben Tallmadge could hear the sound of Major John Andre kiss Ben's Yale classmate's youngest sister. Not once but several times, pulling her up on her toes, his shiny boots and her brocaded Louis shoes with their silver buckles (a present from Paul Revere and his wife) visible a scant few inches from Ben's face.

"MMMmmmm... You still taste like chocolate." John murmured their lips parting. "Is all your business concluded here? We do not wish to be late for our appointment with Madame Bernon." Ben's eyes narrowed in speculation, was that affection that he detected in the major's voice? Had John Andre developed a deep affection for Mary Ludlow even upon so scant an acquaintance? An affection that could be used for the good of the war effort at a later time?

Mary nodded, staring up into John's handsome face. "We could reschedule the appointment for another time and spend the hours here. I could give you another lesson in the Arts of Eros." John posed, smiling rakishly, his dimples showing. Beneath the bed, Ben Tallmadge's jaw dropped open in shock.

"If we forgo the appointment Madame Bernon will not be able to sew my new gown in time for my birthday dinner." She pouted prettily, gazing up at him through lowered lashes playing the coquette. "What if someone were to find out that were closeted in my bedroom for several hours unchaperoned?"

Ben almost sighed audibly in relief hearing her retort. All he needed was to get stuck beneath the bed whilst Major Andre gave Mary further instruction in the Arts of Eros. Arts of Eros? What was the Major about with Ned and Jamie's little sister?

"Madame has been known to be incredibly discreet as to what transpires between her patrons and their gentlemen in the fitting rooms." John teased, laughing lightly, yanking her against his hard chest the fabric of his Great coat chafing next to her exposed skin, his gloved fingers digging gently into her bum through the layers of gown and petticoats. "Do not worry, My Little Dove, there will be no scandal." He reassured her, playfully kissing the bridge of her nose.

Madame Gabrielle Bernon's dress shop was one of the finest in New York, run by a French Huguenot lady from La Rochelle whose family had settled originally in Newport, Rhode Island before making their home on Manhattan Island. She was a small elegant woman with white hair and merry black eyes.

"Ah, Jean!" Madame Bernon greeted John warmly using the French version of his name, kissing him upon both cheeks. "Ah, ce doit être la belle jeune femme que vous me parliez. Lady Mary Ludlow. Nous allons vous faire deux belles robes, mon cher. Votre homme demande que je crée pour vous une certaine lingerie pour être porté en privé? Est-ce votre nouvelle maîtresse John? Elle est belle! Cette peau de porcelaine et les yeux! Je vais profiter de l'habillage celui-ci!" Ah, this must be the beautiful young woman that you were telling me about. Lady Mary Ludlow. We shall make you two beautiful gowns, my dear. Your gentleman is requesting that I create for you some intimate apparel to be worn in private? Is this your new mistress John? She is lovely! That porcelain skin and those eyes! I will enjoy dressing this one! The dressmaker prattled on in French, raising Mary's chin with a
fine boned hand, assessing what she could view of her figure through her cape, quite pleased with what she saw.

"Non, madame, pas ma nouvelle maîtresse, une jeune femme qui, si je ne fais pas attention, peuvent voler mon cœur." No Madam, not my new mistress, a young lady that, if I am not careful, may steal my heart. John replied in the same language.

"This one looks as though she is thoroughly capable! Not like that actress or that widow!" Madame said, laughing lightly referring to Philomena and another of John's former mistresses, two of the many.

"Come with me, Mademoiselle, we shall look at designs and fabrics. I have a bolt of peacock blue silk shot through with gold thread from India that would look beautiful with that glorious golden hair and pale skin you have. You have an almost opalescent sheen to it." Madame said to Mary.

"Am I not allowed an opinion?" John asked, looking from Mary to Madame Bernon and back again his eyes dancing.

"What would it please you to see the lady dressed in?" Madame asked.

John smirked at the question. What would he like to see her barely wearing? Was more the question. "Pale blush embroidered silk run through with the finest silver thread." He answered.

"An excellent choice, major" Madame approved.

"Accented with silver lace." Mary provided. "Bright pink velvet ribbons."

"As I would have suggested." John approved. "Almost transparent pale pink silk, ribbons and and lace for something far more intimate." John whispered in Madame's ear.

"Major Andre! Major Andre is that truly you?" Jane Fairfax exclaimed with a delighted squeal spotting the dashing officer. "Mama! Look! It is Major Andre!"

"Major." Anne Fairfax greeted the major with a nod of her head looking him up and down making her desire plain, she imagined that she would no be the first Loyalist matron he had dallied with if he took her up on her too blantant invitation. She frowned when Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter, Abigail dashed over making a great show of delight that they had found the major in Madame's shop, both women fawning over him.

"Ladies, if you would please excuse me."

"We will not allow it will we mother?" Abigail Fletcher asked her mother.

"Miss Abigail, I am afraid it is a pleasurable necessity." John said gallantly bowing to the women then clearly making haste to another. It was clear he was eager to seek her company. The women and their daughters all pursed their lips in disappointment catching sight of one of Madame Bernon's footmen helping Mary remove her cloak.

"Mary Ludlow." Jane Fairfax spat.

John turned. "Miss Jane would you not show the Lady Mary the respect due her rank? Her father recently came into his title."

"His title?" Jane asked.

"Charles Ludlow is now His Grace the Duke of Sutherland." John provided happy that he had not pursued the girl. Though quite pretty, the remarks and actions he had witnessed were proving that she was quite mean spirited.

"Come now, Miss Fairfax, it does one no good to be rude. Lady Mary, it is a great pleasure to make your acquaintance." An elegant woman of about thirty curtsied to Mary, her smile friendly and sincere. "Major Andre." She added in a way that indicated that there was some history between them. "Charlotte Allen, my dear." She introduced herself to Mary then quickly turned to John. "She is simply stunning, Johnny! Leave it to you to find the only unmarried duke's daughter in the city! Lady Mary, do all the ladies of New York a great service, lead this rogue a merry chase!"

"Rest assured my dear Mrs. Allen, she is!" John smiled good naturedly handing his hat, cape and gloves to a waiting footman.

"Good. You must come to and dine with Mr. Allen and myself, Lady Mary, have the major escort you. I will send along an invitation. Well, I shan't take up any more of your time. It has been such a pleasure to meet you." She said warmly, pausing, leaning in toward John. "Good luck to you with this one, Johnny, you may have finally met your match!" She whispered to John indicating Mary,
smiling up at him looking at Mary.
"Madame Allen is correct. Vite! Vite! We must take your measurements. Follow me."
"Major Andre as well?" Mary asked Madame Bernon when John clearly made no effort to sit in one
of the chairs that Madame had placed about for the gentleman to sit in whilst they waited for their
women.
"Yes, Sweetheart. Do you not remember what I told you about Madame and her complete
discretion?" John asked with a smile.
"Non! Non! Do not believe a word he says, Ma Petite Cherie. I will not allow him to be less than a
gentleman, Lady Marie!" Madame Bernon protested.
"But what if she does wish me to behave as less than a gentleman, Gabrielle?" John asked.
Madame gave a Gallic shrug. "That is between yourself and the lady, Jean." She stated, bringing
them through to one of the private dressing rooms. There were upholstered chairs set about a table
near a blazing fireplace, hooks on the wall to hold the items being viewed and tried on, a small chaise
lounge upholstered in red silk brocade was placed against a wall, a throw and pillows arranged
elegantly upon it. "The room is to your liking?" The question was directed to John and not Mary.
"It is perfect, Madame." John said, elegantly settling into one of the chairs, crossing his legs the
leather of his boots chafing one against the other, his tight breeches molding over his thighs. "You
shall bring luncheon when and if we require it? I know that your chef is a master in the kitchen!" He
asked Madame but his attention was focused soley on Mary as two assistants entered the room and
began unhooking the front of her gown the front falling open to reveal her creamy white breasts and
the lace-edged
corset of icy blue embroidered silk.
"Ah, such gorgeous skin! Smooth as the finest silk! One of the assistants remarked.
"Such a lovely figure! Do you not believe so, Major Andre?" The other one asked with a cheeky
grin noting that John had shifted in his chair leaning forward to get a closer look as more of Mary's
body was revealed even though he had seen it all before.
"Perfection!" John commented, brightly. "Though I may require a closer look."
The two assistants giggled, noting how Mary's skin flushed a pretty pink at the compliments dancing
over to stand in front of him, dressed only in her corset, a scrap of silk and lace covering her private
place, stockings, garters and shoes. A strand of pearls encircling her throat, heavy red-gold waves
tumbling down her back to her waist.
"Do you still find me perfect or do you require further inspection?" She flirted.
John laughed at her clearly blatant proposition. "I require further inspection. A most thorough
inspection. Allow yourself to be measured now." Good God! It was taking every ounce of his iron
self control not to pull her down in his lap and do the most deliciously wicked things to her, things he
knew would have her screaming in ecstasy. How he ached to kiss and nip that fetching freckle on the
top of her left thigh. "Go on!" He instructed with a grin.
Mary walked away from his swinging her hips ever so slightly.
"Have a care now, milady!" He warned chucking unable to take his eyes from her as she made her
way back to the two assistants who took out their tapes and began taking measurements marking
them in a book under Madame Bernon's instruction.
"We will make you a beautiful dress that be the envy of the other young women in the city! They
already envy you your protector." Madame remarked.
"Do they?"
"Oui, cherie! All the femmes wish they were you. The young ones all brought their mamas you
brought a handsome man that clearly cannot take his eyes from you." Madame told Mary snatching a
glance at the major to emphasize her point.
"Sadly my mother is not here. She is in England." Mary murmured, eyes down cast.
"Ah! Do not be distressed, ma cherie! Her Grace, your mama, would be happy that her precious
daughter had one as brave, gallant and good looking as Major Andre to escort you." She said
finishing her work. "Wrap yourself in this so you don't catch a chill then move by the fire. Wait
whilst I bring a selection of fabrics." Madame said handing Mary a robe, helping her in it before
bustling out taking her two assistants with her leaving Mary and John quite alone.
"Come here, Sweetheart, I will endeavor to keep you warm." John instructed crooking an index finger at her just after the last assistant had slipped from the room.

"Do you deem that prudent and wise? It is in my experience that whenever we find ourselves in close proximity to one another we end up in one another's embrace kissing."

"Does that vex you, Lady Mary? I thought that you enjoyed my kisses." He pouted, though his eyes were dancing with mirth pinning her with his gaze.

"You must excuse me, my memory is faulty. I have seem to have forgotten whether I do or not."

"Come here! I will be more than delighted to refresh, what appears to be that faulty memory."

"What if Madame and her assistants were to return? What about the young women and their mamas out there? You know as well as I that the moment we were spotted together that they have not ceased their speculation and gossip."

"Let them speculate and gossip. When we arrive back at City Hall there will be a stack of invitations for the pair of us. Far too many than we can ever honor, Lady Mary." John stated, getting out of the chair, walking the several feet over to where she stood standing directly in front of her. "Now where is my Sweet Little Dove?" He asked lifting her chin with the knuckle of an index finger, his blue eyes gazing down into hers. "Can you give me that engaging smile? Ah! There it is!" He smiled, dipping his head, his lips brushing hers, withdrawing. "You're so beautiful." He dipped his head lower to the base of her throat. "Such beautiful skin." His breath was soft as his lips glided down to her breasts, nuzzling them through the silk covering them, kneeling before her, grasping her thighs, parting the fabric of her robe. "You have the most fetching freckle right here." He murmured against her, his mouth pressing against the spot.

Mary moaned softly, her breath short and shallow feeling the major's hot mouth planting burning kisses over her fevered skin. Johhhhhhhhhmmm." Praying that Madame and her assistants did not come in at this moment, her fingers pressing into his scalp, John's hands moving around to her bum, squeezing gently continuing to kiss her, higher, to her hip.

Mary tossed her head back, closing her eyes, her breath still short and shallow reveling in the sensual sensations of his kisses.

"Oh, what shall I do to you now?" He whispered.

"Behave."

John barked with laughter. "Not a chance, cherie!"

"Wicked and naughty man!"

"I do not hear you complaining." He shot back. "I am going to kiss you. Right here. Tonight." His voice was thick with desire against her silk covered sex.

She was aching for him, there was no denying it, her legs trembling lightly. Almost relieved when Madame and her assistants returned their entrance causing John to stand and move away from her quickly unable to hide his disappointment at their arrival.

"So many bolts of fabric for you to chose from, Milady." Madame came in smiling knowingly looking from Mary then to John. She had a good idea as to what the major had been up to with the girl. The assistants laying out the bolts of fabric including the peacock blue and pale blush silks that had been mentioned at the beginning of the appointment amongst about a dozen others in shades choses to compliment her coloring including several shades from violet to the palest lavender, deep crimson to blush pink.

"Oh, Gracious!" Mary gasped with girlish delight. "They are all so beautiful! I will have to choose half a dozen more. I am prepared to pay, of course, three quarters of the price of all eight gowns now and then the balance when they are all delivered in time for my birthday on the First of January."

Madame Bernon's eyes widened, the young woman knew how to negotiate, she thought impressed.

"You may send the bill to me for all eight gowns along with the amounts that I will owe you for all the other items that I will be ordering today for Her Ladyship." John insisted.

"Yes, Major, of course." Madame said.

"Thank you for the kind offer but I cannot possibly accept it... It would not be proper. I was intending upon..."
footing the bill and that would be that! "Now a gown in that sapphire blue embroidered China silk would match your eyes. Of course, one in scarlet to match my regimental jacket, that icy violet silk."
"With dark blue trim? You most certainly have an opinion on fabrics, Major."
"I only wish that you continue to look your best, Lady Mary. Which three would you choose for yourself?"
"Since you have picked my first choices, the Wedgwood blue embroidered silk there, then the dark green and midnight blue velvets."
"Perfect choices." He approved.
"Why Thank you! I am delighted that you approve." Mary smiled.
"Now that the fabrics have been chosen it is time to choose the designs. I will leave your ladyship with the pandoras and sketches to look at. Excuse moi for several minutes. Major Andre..." Madame Bernon motioned for John to follow her out of the dressing room. "I have a selection of fabrics for the other pieces that you require. Here is the sheer blush silk that you requested. May I suggest the icy blue silk and this embroidered deeper blue brocade for the matching dressing gown? This black lace for a corset? All items will be created with the utmost discretion."
"Merci, Gabrielle! Do you have a frothy pale cream lace and silk?"
"Like this?" Madame brought out what John was looking for. "Another night gown and robe for Her Ladyship or that actress?"
John chuckled smiling, he shook his head. "For Mary not the actress."
Madame chuckled her tongue in disapproval. "Why are you not out trying to find a respectable matron to act as chaperone for the lady, Jean? What is keeping you from searching about the city for one, eh? The young woman must have an elderly aunt in Boston or Connecticut that you could send for? Or do you rather enjoy the gossip being bandied about concerning yourself and the girl? That notorious actress is now forgotten like this?" She snapped her fingers.
"I believe that their was mention of an ancient aunt, nigh on ninety, that lives in Connecticut. I will make inquiries if the lady is well enough to travel and make the arrangements. Not to mention that she still be in possession of all her facilities at such an advanced age to properly act as chaperone. Gabrielle, I told you that the lady is endanger of stealing my heart!"
"Ah! What of an ensemble in sheer black silk? Like this, Major?" Madame suggested, all business again. She ran her fingers beneath the silk showing John. "You wish all these to ready at the same time as the dresses? So improper yet so deliciously wicked!" She grinned laughing lightly.

Chapter End Notes

A Few Notes on this Chapter

A huge thank you to those people that have been kind enough to leave kudos and comments on this story, I appreciate your kindness and praise. This will be a 'Lobster Friendly' story. We see so many stories about the American Revolution through American eyes and see them cast as the heroes. I wanted to show a more balanced portrayal of both the Americans and the British during this important time in American history. Not all the British were moustache twirling villains and to portray them as such does a disservice to both sides. There were many gallant and well respected officers on both sides of the conflict among them many who you will meet within the course of this story.
The modiste, Gabrielle Bernon's back story and name are a tribute to an ancestor of mine that was a French Huguenot, Gabriel Bernon (1644-1736) who came from France to Rhode Island settling in Newport, Rhode Island.
Please accept the delay in posting this chapter. Research, reading and immersing myself
into the lives of the characters and the era was a reason for the delay. Several books and websites have been invaluable to be. Among them:
Oatmeal for the Foxhounds: http://home.golden.net/~marg/bansite/_entry.html a site dedicated to Colonel Banastre Tarleton, his life and friends.
Dr. MM Gilchrist's Lobster Creel portion of Whistle World. http://www.silverwhistle.co.uk/lobsters/index.html The good doctor has written a biography on Major Patrick Ferguson that comes highly recommended by this author.
Major John Andre: Gentleman Spy by Adele Gutman Nathan
Major John Andre: A Gallant in Spy's Clothing by Roger McConnell Hatch
The British Army in North America: 1775-1783 by Robin May and Gerry Embleton (Osprey Military Series 39)
Philomena paused for a moment watching as Major John Andre came out of Madame Bernon's with a strikingly lovely young lady, her arm tucked cozily within one of his. Philomena's heart clenching with jealousy as she watched the Major smile and then laugh at something the lady said, squeezing her hand, turning his head, looking down at the golden haired beauty, his smile broadening to a grin, giving a bark of laughter at another quip the young woman made. "Ah, Lady Mary! What will I ever do with you?" She heard him ask.

"What do you wish to do with me, Major?" Came the flirtatious reply, the tilt down of the chin, the peering up at the dashing British officer through long dark lashes, the slight parting of her lips. The bastard is practically preening under gaze! Philomena thought, watching him lean down to whisper some wicked retort in the Lady Mary's ear, a smile playing about his mouth. The Major was visibly preening like a peacock now! There was clearly an attraction there, one that Philomena was certain a sophisticated man like the Major would quickly lose interest in, though the Lady Mary Ludlow, from what Charles Grey had told her after he had fucked her sore the previous evening, was highly educated, well accomplished and wealthy. Grey telling her that the Major appeared to be captivated by the Duke of Sutherland's daughter out of a potent sense of chivalry and apparently pure sexual desire. He wanted the girl. He wanted to be far more than her protector.

Philomena suddenly felt sick looking at the pair her eyes fixated on her virginal rival. She clearly knew that John Andre was not just being gentlemanly! Charles Grey had been right, it was all too clear that the Major wanted to fuck the Lady Mary.

Later that Same Evening

Mary smoothed her palms over the scarlet China silk of her gown looking at her reflection in the mirror one last time. She was pleased that she had foregone powdering her hair completely this evening. Letting the opalescent substance Abigail and Molly had applied to her hair lighten and give unusual sparkle to her golden red tresses. Round white pearls nestled in her ears a pearl choker encircled her throat tied with a scarlet ribbon edged with dark blue. Her entire ensemble chosen this evening to compliment the Major's uniform, giving no doubt as to where her loyalties now lay. Outwardly at least, no one would ever know the secrets of her heart. She did not know what they were at present herself, torn between her family's new position and her own beliefs, the entrance of a certain officer in her life over the last few days making it all that much more confusing. "Am I presentable? I suppose I must go down." Mary turned to Abigail awaiting the maid's approval.
"You look absolutely lovely this evening, Milady, he won't be able to take his eyes from you!"
Abigail exclaimed with a warm smile, the pair both knowing who 'He' happened to be.
"The neckline of my gown is not indecent?" Mary asked, looking down at her bosom that threatened to swell over the top of her bodice.
"It is the fashion, Lady Mary." Molly offered. "I don't think that Major Andre would object to you displaying a bit of your assets to the envy of all the gentlemen in the theatre knowing that he is your escort this evening and it will be him that will see you home."
"Shall we wait up?" Abigail asked as Mary turned from the mirror.
"Please. I do not believe we will be too late." Mary replied as Pricilla opened the door for her young mistress.
Once in the hallway, Mary took a deep breath and walked down the short expanse of hallway, descending the staircase.
He was waiting for her in the foyer, engaged in conversation with a junior officer, as if on cue he turned just as she reached midway down the stairs, his lips parting, a glorious smile splitting his face.
"There you are! I see that it was well worth the wait. Your Ladyship looks absolutely splendid!"
His eyes shone delightfully in the candlelight unable to masque his developing deep attachment to her, he knew that he was endanger of falling madly in love with the Duke of Sutherland's girl if he was not half in love with her already which he knew he was, even on such short acquaintance. She looked most fetching in her scarlet gown, John appreciating how the neckline enhanced her beautiful bosom and tiny waist. He debated with asking her to stay in tonight, he knew it was dreadfully cold this evening and he was aching to spend more hours in bed kissing that adorable freckle that was nestled on her left hipbone and make good the promise he made to her at the modiste's earlier that day, he would not only kiss her where he said he would, he would do more of what he had introduced to her last evening.
He was there to meet her when she reached the landing. "Simply enchanting!" He murmured seductively, taking her hand in his, lifting it to his mouth, planting a lingering kiss upon it. "Simply enchanting!"
She flushed prettily under the caress of his gaze. His expression making no doubt that he wanted her.
"Thank you, Major! You are looking rather dashing this evening yourself if I may say so."
"You may!" He replied with a roguish smile, his eyes twinkling.
A servant came with their capes, gloves and the Major's tricorn hat, helping them put them on, one of the enlisted men nearby opened the door, the cold air coming in from the outside swirling about them. Mary shivered.
"Are you certain that you do not wish to spend the evening with Mister Shakespeare and hot brandy by the fire instead?" John asked making note of her discomfort as the pair walked down the steps to the awaiting carriage.
"Could we leave at the interval?" She asked.
"We can do whatever you like, Sweetheart." John stated, standing aside as one of the enlisted officers who was playing the role of footman, helped Mary to precede John into the coach.
John gracefully getting in after her, sitting beside her, the steps were placed back inside, the door shut.
Mary placed her feet on the hot brick placed at her feet as John rapped upon the roof of the coach indicating the man to drive on.
"There will be men from His Majesty's navy at the theatre this evening. Admiral William Clarke and several of his junior officers are to attend." John explained.
"More dashing gentlemen in smart uniforms to admire! What a treat!" Mary said a teasing smile playing about her mouth.
"Just as long as the only thing you do is admire them from afar." John warned.
"Yet I am supposed to endure it as every lady in this city, young and old, throws themselves at you!"
Mary shot back.
John barked with laughter. "Your display of jealousy is quite gratifying and endearing, Lady Mary."
"So is yours, John!" She fired back.
"Touché!" John laughed. "Just remember I will be the one to take you home this evening and we have adjoining bed rooms. You are beginning to form an affection for me, I see."
"How do you know that?" She turned her head to look at him, their eyes meeting.
"So it is true!" He crowed, unable to conceal his delight. "Your Ladyship does not appear the sort to give her favors lightly and without consideration or allow a gentleman such liberties as I was so privileged to indulge in last evening."
She blushed fiercely remembering the quartet of times he had brought her to Paradise using his talented mouth and fingers, breaking their gaze suddenly interested in her hands that were resting in her lap.
"Shall I strive to make you incandescently and blissfully happy this evening?" He asked, tilting her chin up with an index finger, forcing her to look at him, his eyes capturing hers, his gaze direct and intense.
"How do you propose to do that?"
"You have forgotten so soon?" He pouted. "I will have to refresh your seemingly faulty memory, won't I?"
"Mmmmm... Please!" She whispered feeling the sexual electricity snapping between them. The pointed tip of her tongue slipping out from between slightly parted lips darting quickly over her bottom one to moisten it.
He chuckled, the corners of his mouth lifting in a smile. "It would be rude of me to deny such a pretty request."
"Yes it would." She agreed.
His smile broadened into a grin. "Quite rude, wouldn't it? He murmured his face moving closer to hers the tips of their noses touching.
Swallowing nervously, she lowered her eyes, heat stealing up from her chest over her neck and her face blushing hotly. She nodded. "Yes." She whispered just before he kissed her, his mouth claiming hers in a searing kiss.
"We could always go back and spend the evening with Mr. Shakespeare and hot brandy by the fire." He posed.
"After the interval." She offered. "Have you devised any entertainments or dinners for the Christmas Season that is if this is where you will be encamped for the winter? If I am to act as hostess I should know what they are to be."
"I was planning on broaching the subject with you at breakfast tomorrow. Yes, I do have plans. It will prove to be a whirlwind of parties and balls with Your Ladyship beside me at each and everyone provided this tedious business of war does not intervene and I am called away to attend to it."
"Do you believe there will be fighting?" Mary asked. "General Washington and his army now are encamped in Pennsylvania now are they not?"
"Yes, General Lord Cornwallis chased Washington and his rebel forces through New Jersey they crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania several days ago."
"Mayhap you will not have to engage in the tedious business of war. Washington's army is said to be demoralized and incapable of mounting an attack. You can spend the winter months ensconced in your cozy quarters here in the city not having to fret about the enemy."
"I look forward to spending the winter getting more intimately acquainted with Your Ladyship." John stated.
"Do you now? Though just because General Washington's army is incapable of mounting an attack does not mean that situation will last for very long. The General is energetic, courageous and steadfast. I do not believe that he will give up the fight so easily. He will do what he must to find the means to retaliate against Cornwallis and Howe. Like a dog when backed into a corner, he will fight."
"Where did you come to form such a rather insightful assessment of Washington's character?" John asked.
"When one hears things one can certainly form an opinion, cannot one?" Mary asked a bit too brightly for the second time that day.
John's eyes narrowed slightly perplexed; there was something that Mary was not willing to come forth with, information or a relationship that she wished to keep secret. He would probe about more, banter and flirt with her to get it out of her. Mayhap after several hours of sensual and sexual pleasure in bed she would be more willing to tell him that which she was clearly hiding? He did not have that much more time to ponder upon it as the coach pulled up to the entrance of the theatre.

"It appears we are here." Mary exclaimed as the coach came to a stop.

John grasped one of Mary's hands in his whilst the soprano's voice rose out from the stage and over the audience, Mary turning her head, feeling the eyes of a pretty blonde member of the chorus upon her, Mary smiled at the woman in return, alarmed when, from the stage, the woman pursed her lips at Mary her eyes narrowing. What have I done to offend you? Mary thought to herself focusing her own eyes upon the soprano.

Damn Lady Mary Ludlow! Philomena cursed in her mind, watching Admiral Sir William Clark and Captain Christian Nicholls steal covert glances at the girl, both men clearly finding her very attractive and worth noticing. She knew that she could keep the admiral captivated for the cold winter months if she could not entice the major back into her bed. Her attention caught once again by John who now had the Lady Mary's hand resting upon one of his thighs, palm up, tracing patterns over it sensually with an index finger, Mary closing her fingers, grasping his, causing him to smirk, clearly of a mind to flirt, her expression telling the major to focus his attention upon what was happening upon the stage.

"Look my way!" Philomena silently prayed, catching his eye for just a moment, but that moment was all that she needed taking the fleeting opportunity to let the major know with her eyes and the slightly parting of her mouth that she was his that evening if he cared to pursue her. She would snap him back from that little bitch he was playing with no matter how lovely, well-educated and wealthy Lady Mary Ludlow was. She was still a virgin. It was doubtful that she would be eager to part with that priceless commodity no matter how charming and persuasive the major was though it was clear that he was willing to go to great lengths to have her! The Bastard! Philomena thought watching him preen slightly when Lady Mary brushed a piece of imaginary fluff from his thigh. I may have to employ drastic tactics to have him back between my thighs though it could just be a flirtation? Couldn't it? She was deluding herself. The look on his face when she caught sight of them leaving the modiste's earlier that day told her that Lady Mary Ludlow would be far more than a passing fancy. Unless... unless... She was a beautiful woman and she knew that the Major had a weakness for a pretty face. She could also offer a rollicking good time in bed something that she doubted the virginal Lady Mary Ludlow was capable of. The Major looked as though he was desperate to fuck a willing partner and Philomena was more than willing. The curtain closed and the audience applauded. It was the interval.

"Are you prepared to venture back and spend the rest of the evening reading by the fire? Or would you care to stay for the duration?" John asked Mary.

"Major Andre who is this lovely young woman, you must introduce us!" An admiral in His Majesty's navy, from what Mary could ascertain from the look of his uniform, said approaching with a friendly smile giving Mary no time to respond to the major's query.

"Come now, Andre! You must!" The younger officer beside the admiral teased. "Captain Christian Nicholls, at your service, Mistress!" He added, bowing before Mary with a decided elegant flourish not giving the major the chance to make the formal introductions.

If Major John Andre had earned the title of 'The Handsomest Man in His Majesty's Army' than Captain Christian Nicholls had most certainly earned the title of 'The Handsomest Man in His Majesty's Navy', Mary thought to herself involuntarily flushing as his dancing smoky blue eyes gazed up into her sapphire colored one's giving her hand the obligatory kiss. He had forgone
powdering his hair this evening or wearing a wig, the color of his hair, dark brown from what she could ascertain in the light of the candles, dressed neatly in a queue tied with a black silk ribbon. "A pleasure to meet you, Captain!" Mary exclaimed.

"Lady Mary Ludlow, may I make known to you, Admiral Sir William Clark and Your Ladyship was just introduced to Captain Christian Nicholls, both of His Majesty's Navy." John stated glaring at Nicholls, his lips set.

"Your servant, Lady Mary." The admiral said taking the hand that the captain had reluctantly released to place a kiss upon it.

"Lady Mary is the honored guest of General Howe and Officers of His Majesty's Army for the Christmas Season and the duration of the winter." John explained.

"Where did you find someone as lovely as Her Ladyship hiding, Major? Certainly a young woman such as the Lady Mary would be difficult to overlook." Captain Nicholls asked the corners of his mouth lifting in a roguish smile.

"At a dinner given by the Van Lieden's for His Majesty's officers two or is it now three, evenings past? No matter. I had the most delightful privilege and opportunity to make acquaintance of the lady there finding out in the course of the evening that we are neighbors."

"If a lady that lovely was living virtually under my nose I would certainly be aware of her existence long before a dinner party, the tedium of this blasted war taking up your time or other pursuits, Major?" Captain Nicholls asked.

"The tedium of war, of course." John replied, coldly. He did not care for how the young naval captain was looking at Mary, though one inclined to accept the admiration of his female companions by other gentlemen he felt a stab of jealousy surge through him when he caught the captain's eyes sweeping over Mary Ludlow with unconcealed interest. "I so sincerely hate to be boorish, gentlemen but if you would please excuse us we were just leaving. Weren't we, Lady Mary?" John stated placing a proprietary hand beneath Mary's elbow beginning to guide her toward the exit.

"Can I call on Your Ladyship?" Captain Nicholls was ever so hopeful.

"Major Andre! Oh, Major Andre! Have you forgotten about me?" A female voice purred. "Well, I see you have! Who is this delicious young lady?" Philomena asked suddenly appearing beside them.

"Hello, Philomena." John said shortly his expression darkening, hoping to keep his encounter with his mistress as short as possible especially in front of Lady Mary.

Mary looked from John to the woman that had entered their midst. Clearly she and Major Andre had some sort of relationship or the woman took great delight in implying that they had to unsettle Mary whom the older woman had instantly viewed as a rival. Was this *the* Philomena that she has heard whispers about since she had taken up residence with the officers?

"Apparently Major Andre has." Mary said, not the least bit intimidated by the older woman noticing a young enlisted British soldier, that hung back slightly in the shadows, he appeared to have the same physique, hair and eye color as the major.

"How kind of you to keep him amused for me!" Philomena exclaimed with false brightness going to place a proprietary hand on John's shoulder which he avoided, his thin lips setting in a firm line. He obviously no longer harbored the same affection that the lady did for him or he did not wish for Mary to become embarrassed by the show of the former intimacy between them. John clearly wanted the woman to move along and leave the pair of them alone.

"Do come back, Johnny, once you see the young lady home. I will be waiting!" Philomena purred in John's ear her implication clear. "Lady Mary." She said, grasping for Mary's hand in a gesture of saying farewell, whispering in the younger woman's ear. "Be a dear and leave him alone. He's mine." She said vehemently, her cold challenging gaze locking with Mary's, releasing her hand. "No!" Mary shot back, just as low, looking at Philomena her sapphire blue eyes just as cold and challenging knowing that she had her fierce intelligence and John's obvious intense attraction to rely on in what may transpire later. It was clear to her who the dashing major probably wanted. How dare the actress speak to her thusly! She was a lady!

Philomena and her young soldier moved off.

"Good Evening, Admiral Clark, Captain Nicholls. As far as calling upon me you will have to get
Major Andre's permission, Captain Nicholls. General Howe has chosen several suitors for my hand and I do not know if the general would appreciate an officer from the Navy to be added to them."

Mary teased.

"I see no objection. You may call within the next few days, Captain Nicholls" John said, diplomatcially but inside he was seething. Good evening!" He added making the proper farewells turning to leave with Mary upon his arm.

"I sincerely apologize that you had to witness that." John said once they were outside entering the carriage to be taken home. "Philomena, is...erm... rather persistent."

"What transpires between you and that actress is none of my business." Mary stated. "Though I will tell you for the sake of our friendship is that she told me to leave you alone. She has staked a claim on you."

"Bloody hell!" John whispered, angrily. "Mary I... we have been lovers but I never promised her anything beyond the manner of a relationship between an officer and his mistress." He offered knowing it was improper to discuss such delicate matters in such a fashion but wanting to be clear and honest with her.

"She obviously believes otherwise." Mary retorted. "I told you what transpires between the pair of you is none of my concern!"

"Then you still wish to read and drink hot brandy by the fire?" He asked, hopeful not knowing if she would change her mind. Damn that blasted woman for even putting a shred of doubt in Mary’s head! He thought. He would have to be certain that Mary knew that his feelings for her were sincere and honest. He would make a point of showing her that he was clearly interested in her and no longer Philomena.

"Yes." She said quietly. "I won't listen to her, I have no intention of leaving you alone, it must be the rebel in me, being born and raised in Boston."

John laughed not realizing he had been holding his breath until he found himself exhaling with relief upon hearing her answer. "Is that so, Lady Mary? I never would have known!" He teased relieved that her Good Humor was restored.

"You are home earlier than expected, Lady Mary. Was The Beggar's Opera not to your liking?"

General Randall asked causing her to pause in the Entrance Hall.

"The evening is too cold. Major Andre promised me Richard II and hot brandy by the fire." She replied turning to engage him.

"How kind of the major to continue to consistently monopolize all of your time." Black Jack commented taking several steps toward her.

"General Howe did entrust me into his care and place me under his protection. Major Andre, as any officer in His Majesty's army, is only carrying out his superior's orders to the best of his ability. Certainly an officer of your experience and reputation can respect that, General Randall."

"Not when it interferes with furthering our acquaintance in countless ways." Black Jack stated, his hazel eyes caressing her face. "Not to mention that time that he possesses does not give any of the officers the opportunity of courting you." He took another step forward, closing the gap between them, the back of a hand coming up to caress one of her temples then traveled down her cheek.

"Lady Mary!" John's distinctive voice called out. "Ah, there you are! Good Evening, General Randall, not enjoying a game of whist with the others, I see." He stated approaching the pair immediately assessing the situation. He did not trust Black Jack Randall, a known seducer, alone with Mary. No matter that General Howe, and he, himself, had put the general forward as a suitor for the young woman. John did not appreciate the way the older man was gazing at her.

"Not this evening, Major Andre. I have a previous pressing engagement, if you would excuse me."

Black Jack went to move off, paused, "Good Night, Lady Mary."

"Good Night, General Randall." Mary replied.

Black Jack smiled, his eyes raking her from top to toe lingering upon her breasts and lower, imagining briefly what treasures were contained beneath that gorgeous gown she wore. "Good Night." He repeated. "Major." He nodded toward John advancing down the Entrance Hall toward
the door, a servant coming forward to hand him his cape, gloves and hat which he quickly donned, pausing, turning back to meet Major Andre's fierce glare, one of John's hands placed possessively on the small of Mary's back, guiding her into his study. Black Jack arched a brow over an eye in a challenge, turned and walked out into the cold dark night intent on spending the rest of it fucking a luscious Loyalist widow.

John took a sip of his hot brandy, shifting his weight, adjusting Mary who sat in his lap, legs tossed over his thighs as the pair snuggled on the settee. "Shall I begin then?" He asked. "Or are you going to mock me, You Cheeky Rebel? If you become too naughty I will carry you upstairs and chastise you!"

"Remind me to be particularly wicked then!"

John snorted with laughter. "Why Lady Mary, I do believe that you are seeking to entice me to take you up the stairs."

"Whatever gave you such a notion, Major?" She flirted, dancing her fingertips over the stock at his neck, loosening the knot tickling the nape. "Aren't you going to begin?"

"Seducing you?"

"Reading, though I do intend to be incredibly naughty. Go on..."

John cleared his throat, taking another sip of brandy. "You know the consequences." He warned. "Oh, I plan to entice you!"

"I could be so fortunate... This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, This other Eden demi-para dise." He recited.

"In your arms." Mary whispered twining her fingers about his tiny braid.

"Shhhh..." John hushed her unable to resist smirking. "This fortress built by Nature for herself, Against infection and the hand of war, This happy breed of men, this little world. This precious stone set in the silver sea. Which serves it in the office of a wall, Or as a moat defensive to a house."

Mary made a face. "Happy breed of men." She whispered shaking her head.

"Mary..." John warned.

"Am I being sufficiently mocking to merit chastisement?" She asked.

"You are skirting about the edge. Now stop talking so that I may finish."

"Make me!" She challenged licking her lower lip suggestively, staring into his eyes in the flickering light of the candles.

"I will, My Sweet Little Dove. Against the envy of less happier lands." John read, his mouth getting closer and closer to hers with each phrase and word. "This blessed plot." Closer. "This earth." and yet still closer. "This realm, This England." His mouth captured hers kissing her passionately. "I find that I am incapable of leaving you alone." He confessed when their lips parted.

"Then don't." She replied.

"Shall I continue?"

"Reading or kissing me?" She countered.

"Which do you prefer? Because I do have a preference."

"Then I am to listen to Mister Shakespeare wax on about the greatness of England." She teased.

"Hardly, we can get to know one another."

"I thought that your intelligence would unearth everything about me, all my deepest and darkest secrets. You have been making inquiries."

John laughed. "Well, I did learn that you spent your summers travel abroad before the war began. You even visited Geneva where I was educated. There were also trips to the Northern Neck of Virginia."

Mary was not going to lie but she was not prepared to tell the complete truth either. She did not have to tell him who she visited in Virginia. She could hold onto that important bit of information a bit longer. "Yes, a dear friend of His Grace, my father, and his family live there. He and father met fighting the French years ago."

"Mmmm..." John knew she was withholding something from him as in the carriage, information
about General George Washington. She had just told him that the Duke of Sutherland and the general had formed a friendship that went back to the previous war with the French. He would let her hold onto what she was hiding a bit more until he had her in a position where she would be unable to hide it any longer, hopefully when she was naked and on her back on his bed. "Where did you visit on the Continent? Did you travel to Italy?"
"Yes, I adored Venice and Rome. Traveling by gondola along the canals was so unusual. I had never experience anything like it except water travel along the Thames but that river is so much wider."
"What did you adore in Rome besides the Vatican, because ever visitor to Rome delights in the experience of the Vatican and hardly can speak of anything else when they return."
"The Coliseum, the ruins, the art and the theatre. Rome has such beautiful art." She mused.
"Have you had your portrait painted? Certainly a young lady of Consequence such as yourself has been asked to sit for an artist."
"Twice. By Mr. Copley, when I was a girl and before he sailed for London two years past."
"Not in Italy?"
"Just sketches." Mary replied.
"Did you enjoy the music and dancing?"
"In Italy?"
"In every country, Sweetheart."
"Oh, yes! My parents took us to concerts, musicales, operas and plays."
Dances? I would imagine that Your Ladyship amassed a coterie of admirers."
"You flatter me."
"It is not flattery. You are rather beautiful, if truth be told."
"Thank you, John. But it is just a shell; there must be substance and character within similar to the man inside that smart officer's uniform you wear."
"Well, upon our short acquaintance I am finding that you possess quite a depth of character and substance in a most desirable shell." He grinned when she went to playfully swat at him, tipping her off his lap to land on her back on the settee, John gazing down at her. "A most desirable shell..."He repeated his mouth scant inches from hers.
"I should have known that I would find you by a cozy fire trysting with a lovely lass, a brandy at your elbow, Johnny, while the rest of us are out in the freezing cold hunting for rebels and deserters. Did you find the cut of Major Andre's breeches to your satisfaction, Lady Mary? Because it is quite clear that he most certainly finds everything about Your Ladyship to his!" Robert Rogers drawled from the doorway, sauntering into the room.
"Nay but I see that yours has. Trapped a lovely red-headed vixen in your snare?" Rogers asked his eyes lingering on Mary. "Odd way to be reading, boy, wouldn't you say?"
"Should you not be back out hunting for rebels and deserters?" John asked impatient to be rid of Rogers especially since he did not have any intelligence to report.
"There are rumors that there may be a rebel safe house in the city but we have not been able to locate it."
"I suggest that you make it your business to find out where and who is hiding them." John ordered. "Or discern if it is a counter ruse to put us off the scent of the enemies' true intentions." He added gauging Mary's reaction from out of the corner of his eye, noting nothing. If she was involved, as he suspected, she did a wonderful job of hiding it, the girl didn't even flinch.
"Your powers of divinization faltering, Johnny? Though I understand the reason for your present distraction." Rogers chuckled still staring at Mary.
John grinned. "You know it would be most ungentlemanly of me to ignore such a charming young lady."
"Appears you have been most attentive." Rogers drawled.
"There is much to attend to." John shot back.
"I can see that. I am certain you will, ah, perform to the best of your ability." Rogers said his meaning all too clear.
"You are keeping me from my duty. General Howe will be furious once he receives word of it." John was tired of bantering with Rogers; he wanted more brandy and the young lady sitting beside him on the settee and not necessarily in that order.
"You tossing me out into the cold?" Rogers asked.
"Are you placing me at risk for court martial for not following orders?" John answered a question with one of his own. "You do have to attend to finding that safe house. Do let me know when you do. Good night, Rogers. The men will escort you out." John said dismissing the burly Ranger with a wave of his hand.
"Following orders, eh?" Rogers chuckled as her turned to leave. "Is General Howe aware of your methods, Major?"
"As long as I tend to my duty and follow my orders I do not believe that the General cares as to what methods are employed so as long as I achieve my objective." John replied.
"Whatever you say, boy!" Rogers muttered leaving the study, pausing to take one more backward glance at Mary, chuckling to himself as he disappeared out into the night.

"Once again, I apologize for the intrusion." John said when Rogers had gone. "Now what was it we were discussing before we were so rudely interrupted?"
"I believe you were a wee fraction away from kissing me." Mary provided.
"Is that so or are you just angling to be kissed?" He flirted.
"I thought it was a method that you were employing to achieve your objective." Mary replied, placing a splayed hand against his chest, her fingertips walking up over the open buttons of his waistcoat to the stock at his neck playing with the knot.
John laughed. "Why Lady Mary, you have found me out."
"So Mister Shakespeare has been abandoned for the evening once again?"
"There are far more desirable matters to attend to."
"Such as achieving your objective?"
"Yes, I believe we should continue this conversation in a much more private venue. I have a vow that I made to you earlier today to fulfill. The officers are also getting a wee bit foxed. I did not care for the way Lieutenant Brandon was staring at you earlier this evening. The sherry and brandy he has drunk will embolden him best to whisk you out of harm's way, Sweetheart. I hear that his dark good looks have quite an effect on women not to mention what a lovely young woman such as you can do to a man." John explained.
"Not to mention what a handsome young man can do to me."
"What would that be, Sweetheart?"
Mary blushed prettily. "I believe we had best seek out that private venue."
"Lead the way." John grinned helping her to her feet, Richard II abandoned.
Mary and John could hear laughter and bawdy comments coming from the dining room. "Quick! Come with me!" Mary cried grabbing one of his hands making for the stairs, pausing for a moment to be certain that there was no one about watching in the Entrance Hall., skirting unnoticed past several soldiers whose backs just happened to be conveniently turned, to the staircase dashing up the step to the floor above, Mary pulling him along the corridor by the hand. John allowed himself to be guided along stopping in his tracks midway to her room, pulling her to him. "I am going to have to make you realize where your loyalties truly lie." He stated, slamming her up against a wall, tilting her chin up. "Fuck the rebel out of you." He vowed firmly, a whisper in one of her ears, his breath hot, drawing back, smoky blue eyes meeting her sapphire in the dim candlelight, searching her soul. "I have a hunger for you!" His mouth met hers in a burning kiss filled with passion, desire and fierce lust. Mary snaked her arms up about his neck allowing John's powerful strong body to press her up against the wall as the kiss deepened. John pulled her close once more, dancing her down the corridor, continuing to kiss her fiercely, reaching the door to her bedroom, opening it, the pair crossing the threshold, John closing the door behind them, slamming Mary up against it, cradling her chin in his palms. "What are you doing to me?" His voice was husky and thick with desire, before his mouth claimed hers in another burning kiss as intense as the others, bruising her lips. Gasping and panting when he withdrew, Mary invited another kiss as the Major skirted her about from the door to a large wing backed chair near the fireplace where a fire blazed and crackled, backing her up against it until her knees were forced to give way, sinking into the comfortable seat cushion whilst he kissed a path southward from her luscious mouth to the neck of her gown, pausing for a moment to undo the closures, exposing more of the creamy flesh of her bosom to his gaze, slowly lowering himself to kneel in front of her, his lips leaving a path of scorching kisses through the fabric of her gown whilst his hands lifted the hem and petticoats exposing her shapely legs clad in white silk stockings held in place with fetching rosette garters of red and white trimmed with gold lace. Grinning wickedly, the Major's head traveled lower, drawing her hips toward him, his head disappearing beneath her skirts. "John!" Mary gasped feeling his teeth tugging on one of the ribbons that held the scrap of silk covering her sex in place, sweeping the pointed tip of his tongue over her skin quickly, undoing the bow near her left hip where that adorably fetching freckle was, an index finger parting the ribbon sliding down her pale naked flesh that shivered with need beneath his expert caress focusing his attention to her right hip, which sadly, did not contain a similar fetching freckle upon it, fortunately there was one that, the Lord in his Goodness, had decided to place near her right leg’s inner thigh close to that tangled V of golden curls, three treats for a lover to explore if he were so inclined, the two freckles that practically begged to be kissed and the tiny sensitive pearl of flesh he was impatient to taste once more desiring to use his expert skill to take her to Paradise. His teeth gripped the ribbon, giving it a gentle tug, chuckling when she moaned softly when his teeth grazed her, using his mouth to part this ribbon, a hand yanking the scrap of silk and ribbons away letting them fall onto the Oriental carpet. He nudged her legs slightly further apart, moving a fraction closer, his smooth cheeks caressing the soft silky flesh of her inner thighs, kissing her golden curls as he had vowed he would at Madame Bernon’s that morning inhaling her fragrance, the faint scent of roses and jasmine mingled with that
of her femininity, a scent that intoxicated him and incited his lust, his intense desire something that he knew that he would never tire of as long as he lived and breathed. Lady Mary Ludlow had awakened something in him that he had thought had died when Honora Sneyd had rejected his proposal those years ago. It was that and something far more. He had never felt this way about a woman upon so short acquaintance. It unnerved and thrilled him all at once he reflected. The tip of his nose tickled her curls, making her giggle as he kissed her again, his lips moving southward, ever that much closer forcing her bare thighs upon his scarlet clad shoulders the wool of his regimental coat sensually rough next to her soft skin his hot mouth finding her wet and burning beginning to devour her sweetness.

Mary dug the fingers of her hands into the arm of the chair, her bare thighs chafing against the wool of his scarlet coat, the sensual sensation adding to the overwhelming pleasure, moaning and mewing, her breath coming in short hot pants, as his mouth and tongue gave her the most exquisite pleasure. John held her steady, his fingertips pressing into the smooth and firm flesh of her bum, the skirt of her gown and petticoats a tangle now about her waist. His tongue flicking against her incredibly sensitive nub of flesh as he continued to devour her like a ravaging wolf his prey, delighting in listening to her cries and moans of pleasure as he brought her closer and closer to her climax, one of her hands releasing an arm of the chair to tangle within his hair.

Mary's thighs began trembling, her fingers tangling in his pale blond queue, the other releasing the arm of the chair, shifting slightly in the chair, her fingers reaching down to claw at the black and gold epaulette at his shoulder. "John! John! Oh! Oh! Oh, John! Please! Oh, John! Jijiiioooooohhhhhmmn!" She cried, feeling her soul being torn from her body as he brought her as near to Paradise as she could afford in this world.

He rose, pulling her roughly into his arms, kissing her fiercely, bruising her mouth. "Now tell me where you loyalties truly lie?" He asked a roguish grin playing about his mouth. He chuckled. "With King and country, of course!" She replied her eyes dancing. "As well you should!" He agreed with a roguish smile. "Major Andre!" An urgent masculine voice called from the hallway.

"Excuse me, Sweetheart, but duty calls." John said reaching into his waistcoat withdrawing a lace trimmed handkerchief one Mary immediately recognized as belonging to her. She could see her monogram and the embroidered flowers and butterflies she had stitched that autumn when the Major brought it to his mouth looking down into her eyes. "Please do not be cross with me. I could not resist availing myself of a favor." He said referring to the handkerchief pressing the fine cotton to his lips, regretfully wiping a portion of her scent that lingered there after their intimate encounter. "Wait for me!" He said with a quick kiss opening the door to see what was so urgent that required his immediate attention.

"Good God!" John swore gazing down at the battered and bloodied corpse of the Earl of Edrington, sniffing the air he wrinkled his nose, the ammonia tinged scent of urine unmistakable in the cold winter air. Damned Rebels!" He cursed not only had they violated His Lordship but they had pissed on his body as well, stripped him virtually naked, stealing his hand tooled boots, signet ring, gold watch and uniform. John studied the wounds on the dead officer's body; he had been stabbed several times with a bayonet. "How does Major Lord Graham fare? Any better?" He asked Lieutenant Brandon and young Banastre Tarleton.

The Scot had sustained some severe injuries in what had been a rebel ambush of a British patrol. "If it is any consolation we fired several houses and barns on the return venture, took horses and livestock." Tarleton reported. "That will only fire them up more. Were you able to capture those that did this? General Howe would like them held accountable." John stated looking toward the young officer. "Sergeant Howden and some of the others under Graham's command took off hell bent for leather after the rebels. Ten guineas say they will be captured before dawn." Ban said with a grin. "I wager you twelve and a night with whore that they will come forward with them within the hour." Lieutenant Brandon countered.
"Care to increase the wager, Major?" Ban asked John who shook his head. "Ah! Sutherland's girl has you so distracted that you are refusing the prospect of a bit of sport with one of the Cities' finest ladies of Easy Virtue?"

John just smiled in reply winking at Ban. "As much as I would enjoy extolling the young lady's beauty, and her wealth of vast and extensive charms they will have to wait. Come and meet the lady yourself, Tarleton." He offered then immediately regretted it not knowing how prudent it was to have the "Pocket Adonis" as Banastre Tarleton was called by some, despite his rather prominent nose, near Lady Mary. She could fall for Tarleton's easy charm and good looks and the young dragoon would become enchanted with her.

Ban's eyes widened, he laughed. "How can I refuse such a kind invitation? The surgeon is examining the Major now. His wounds were grave though not as severe as those of His Lordship. We will have to gauge to see if he survives the fever and if poison gets into his blood. That is what may kill him. He incurred several stabs to the arms, chest and several to the region of his upper thigh."

"How grave?" John asked not believing what Ban was telling him, he had seen injuries such as had been described, they usually proved to be fatal especially when the injury occurred on a certain portion of the thigh which appeared to be the case with Major Lord Graham. He was a good man and soldier. It was that fearless Scots' courage that had gotten him injured, rash and reckless in battle as he was.

"There is lots of blood. The surgeon cannot get the bleeding from the wounds in his thigh to stop. Graham fainted."

John heaved heavy sigh. "Is there someone with him?" He asked Ban. "It could be only minutes..." His voice trailed off.

"Yes, one of his lieutenants," Ban replied.

"He should be holding the hand of a lovely woman when he dies." John mused almost to himself. "Find one of the pretty whores or that red-haired laundress, what is her name... Polly, is it? The one with the ample breasts and ready smile, the one Brandon's been fucking. Go on with you. I will join you in a few minutes."

"Yes, Major." Ban said. "See you inside then, Sir."

John nodded stepping away from him, his boots crunching on the frozen grass. Edrington and Graham gone before morning, he thought, narrowing Lady Mary's group of suitors down to two in such a short time though Captain Nicolls had asked permission to call. The man did have a good pedigree, he would give him that. Christian Nicholls was the second son of the Earl of Durham; he had gone to sea at an early age and had risen quite fast quite quickly due to his father's influence and the young man's considerable abilities. He would be another good match. The thought of Mary marrying someone as handsome and well connected in his own right as the dashing captain made his heart constrict with jealousy. He could speak with General Howe to discourage the match, he smirked to himself, walking along down by the garden near the rose bushes. Though how that would bode with Admiral Richard Howe, the General's elder brother? He may not look too kindly upon an officer of His Majesty's navy being tossed over for one in His Majesty's army. The navy being the older of the two services, there were certain traditions to be upheld.

The moon shone high in a cloudless sky. John stopped in his tracks spying a deep red bloom on a bush near the brick wall that separated the City Hall from St. Thomas' Academy, protected from the elements; it was still in bud, defying the odds. John reached down and plucked the stem, twirling it about between a gloved thumb and forefinger, bringing it to his nose to inhale the fragrance. It would be the perfect romantic gift for a particular young lady. Lady Mary Ludlow, their attraction upon that first meeting at the Van Leiden's had been mutual, immediate and intense, a relationship that would deepen and grow over time to develop into a fierce long lasting passion and friendship if John had his way. He could not bear to see her married to General Randall or Captain Lord Kennedy. He would speak to Howe in the morning, though not of the same social standing as the others or the lady in question, his position in her life and reputation could increase his prospects. He owed it to his widowed mother, three sisters and younger brother to make a good advantageous match. What better
than that of a rich peer's daughter who was in possession of a large fortune herself?

John opened the door that connected his room with that of Lady Mary, the rose in his hand tied with a ribbon and a brief note; including a small couplet he had composed especially for her. Whilst he had been attending to the business of war, Abigail and Mary's pair of maids had undressed her and helped her prepare to retire, dressed in a nightgown, her long glorious hair was freed of his elaborate hairstyle and fell free and loose about her shoulders and down her back as she lay in the large bed asleep, completely unaware of what had been transpiring that evening. Lord Major Graham had died of the wounds sustained in his thigh as suspected he would, the poor man had bled to death.

Banastre Tarleton had won the bet. The recalcitrant rebels that had murdered the two British Majors having been captured just before dawn were being held outside, heavily guarded as to not be abused. John wanted them very much alive when the full treatments for their crimes were administered. He knew that if General Randall had his way the full quarter of the punishment would be carried out. The rebels would be flogged within an inch of their miserable lives that is if the six of them survived. They would be sent to one of the prison ships that was anchored in the harbor then if General Howe did not deem it fit to hand the rebels over to the men that had been under the respective majors' commands. Both men were respected and well-liked especially Major Graham. John shuddered thinking what manner of revenge the soldiers would wreak upon the men that had murdered the two officers. He would rather focus on more pleasant matters such as Lady Mary, who stirred in her sleep as though she knew that he was watching her as he lay the rose on the empty pillow beside her, leaning down to plant a kiss on her brow, unable to resist, smiling when in her sleep her lips lifted and she sighed contentedly. "John." She whispered snuggly beneath the warm goose down filled duvets that covered the bed. Her movement caused one to fall away revealing her body from head to waist clad in cotton and Belgian lace the low-cut neckline of her nightgown enhancing the swell of her breasts, the sight causing the organ between his legs to swell with desire. It was difficult to step away, she was so very tempting but he knew that Abigail, Molly and Dru... no, it was Pricilla wasn't it? He asked himself trying to remember the name of the other maid. No matter! Abigail and the pair of maids would be arriving soon to awaken her and help her bathe before breakfast. He may have to 'accidentally' look in upon her when he heard her splashing about in the tub. It would probably fall to him to inform her of the demise of Edrington and Graham, sad business that. He would be certain to be available if she required comforting upon learning the distressing news.

The rose was beautiful, almost blood red in color, tied with a scarlet ribbon, Mary unfurled the note attached. In memory of a most perfect evening. John

It read below was a brief verse that he had composed in French praising her virtues and other assets. Mary's cheeks burned, a warm flush spreading through her, the corners of her mouth lifting in a smile. She tossed the covers off, slipping out of bed, reaching for her brocaded dressing gown, slipping it on; she belted it, walking softly to the door connecting her room and the Major's. She rapped lightly.

"Come!" John's voice called.

Mary opened the door quietly, stopping in her tracks, gasping as John stepped out of the bath, the water sluicing down his broad muscular back over taut buttocks and long legs, the tiny rivulets and droplets that glowed like small clear jewels next to his skin in the morning sunlight. She swallowed her mouth suddenly dry as dust unable to look away, transfixed by the sight. Good Lord! He was beautiful! She thought just as the major turned his head, their gazes locking.

"Lady Mary! What do I owe the pleasure?" He asked, grinning broadly, unable to conceal his pleasure at seeing her. He reached for a nearby towel.

"I..." She dashed into the room, taking in more of his magnificent nakedness as the gap between them closed the closer she got to him, John turning about, having the decency to cover himself to
"You know that you really should not be here. Your reputation but since you are, what is it, Sweetheart?"

Standing up on her tip-toes, wrapping her arms about his damp neck, she brought her mouth to his, kissing him gently, whilst John pulled her into his arms, his damp chest crushing next to her breasts, reaching between their bodies, untying the sash of her robe, chuckling when she moaned, a low sensual sound in the back of her throat. "Thank you." She whispered, her breath fanning hot against him.

"If Your Ladyship is insistent you know in what manner you can show your appreciation?" He teased dipping his head, nuzzling a side of her neck sending thrills down her spine. "I have finished my mission..."

"Have you now? What manner would that be, Major? You may have to instruct me." She flirted back laughing lightly fluttering her eyelashes at him an index finger seductively tracing a path from neck southward over his naked muscular chest. Why was it that when she was with him she became rash and reckless? Testing the proper boundaries of courtship between a young lady of her station and a gentleman of his? The sensual caresses had their desired effect. John laughed completely enchanted. "I imagine that you do, you naughty vixen!" He chuckled, drawing her that much closer into his embrace, smiling broadly. "Come to bed." He coaxed. Damme! He was hot to have her!

"Lady Mary! Lady Mary!" Abigail's voice called from Mary's bedroom.

"Bloody hell!" John sighed making Mary giggle. He did not appreciate being interrupted. He was hoping for a wee bit of love play before breakfast. He certainly needed the warm embrace and affection of a woman after the events that had transpired last night specifically that of Lady Mary Ludlow.

"Poor John." She whispered her fingertips still working their magic upon his chest, moving further southward to his flat abdomen.

"Lady Mary! There you are!" Abigail said from the threshold that separated the two bedrooms just as John tucked the edge of a towel at his waist covering his nether regions from hips to knees.

"Good Morning, Abigail! Her Ladyship was just assisting me with my toilet, upon my instructions, of course." John provided.

"Yes, Major." Abigail knew enough not to pass judgment. She was all too aware of Andre's intense physical attraction to the young lady. She was just worried for the girl's reputation and morality. Abigail, upon their short acquaintance, was becoming incredibly fond of Lady Mary and did not want her hurt in any way. But the Major had been rather adamant that he would not tarnish Mary's reputation or Good Name. Abigail prayed he would be true to his word. "The soldiers are bringing up your bath, Lady Mary."

"If you need help undressing I will be delighted to serve you." John teased, winking. "Wash your back perhaps?"

Mary blushed prettily. "John!" She warned. "I will see you at breakfast."

"I will be counting the minutes, Lady Mary." He murmured disappointed to see her go.

"General Howe, if I could please have a word." John asked as the two officers made their way in the Entrance Hall.

"Of course! How is Sutherland's girl getting on? I am immensely grateful, Major Andre that you took the initiative to protect Her Ladyship especially after the tragic events of last evening. Those damned rebels! Several invitations have been arriving for the Lady Mary since early this morning. So living beneath a roof with all gentlemen did not have the adverse effect upon the young lady's reputation that I was afraid of." General Howe smiled. "They are on the silver salver on the table over there with the others." He pointed to a table with a large Chinosoire vase containing seasonal flowers upon it.

"What was it that you wished to speak to me about? The rebels that were caught? Some new intelligence? Captain Lord Nicholls request to call on the Lady Mary? Even if his is a navy man he will be an asset to the pool of suitors for Her Ladyship. I have learnt that the pair of them is distantly
related through marriage to one of Durham's ancestors, Thomas, the sixth Earl, this could prove to be an advantageous match for the pair of them. He is another second son and his brother, the current earl, is as yet unmarried. General Howe remarked as the two made their way to John's private office. "Tarleton is a courageous soldier but a bit rash and reckless for a young lady such as Her Ladyship, wouldn't you say?"

"Captain Lord Nicholls is quite a lucky man, if I may say so. I had not given a thought to Tarleton as a possible suitor for the Lady Mary, General. You assessment of his character is rather accurate. He may not be a proper choice. No, Sir, nothing that you mentioned another matter entirely." John cleared his throat.

"Out with it then, Major Andre!"

"The Lady Mary, General Sir. I thought that due to the fact that we have been seen in one another's company a great deal, and will continue to be as I have been appointed as her protector, that to avoid tarnishing her reputation in any way, that I would be considered as suitor for Her Ladyship's hand? I find myself forming a deep affection for her, Sir. We appear to get on rather well upon our short acquaintance, share many of the same interests. It would also serve in a manner to keep the wagging tongues of the Ladies of the City quiet if word got out that we were courting." John stated.

"A deep affection that would have matrimony as its end result? Major, you know how our world operates. Your antecedents are not those His Grace would entertain for his youngest daughter but given the unusual circumstances, I will give careful consideration to your request. You are ambitious. I admire that. Best have you married to the lady that causing more scandal as her lover. You are a most competent and resourceful officer, Major, I would hate to lose you in a Duel of Honor. Randall and Kennedy are reputed to be damn good shots and swordsmen, as is Captain Lord Nicholls." General Howe quipped, a twinkle in his eyes. "I had made inquiries as to chaperones for the lady. Unfortunately the ancient aunt in Connecticut I heard about succumbed to a fever earlier this autumn. Pity that! The duty of protecting the lady's virtue will still fall to you, Major. Until a suitable matron can be found or the lady is married."

"Yes, sir." John returned with a small smile.

"What are your opinions on an appropriate punishment for the prisoners? General Randall is advocating flogging. Would you concur, Major?" General Howe inquired.

"I do not believe that the men under their commands would consider any other manner of punishment, General." John replied measuring his words. He knew how brutal Black Jack Randall could be. This was war! The rebels deserved the punishment, set up as examples. The soldiers were out for blood especially since the manner of abuse that Major Lord Edrington had endured was getting about the house and the nearby camp.

"Administered by General Randall?" Howe asked, quirking a brow.

"If the General does not believe such behavior beneath him, otherwise I would suggest Sergeant Howden, who served under Major Lord Graham, Sir. I am certain that he would enjoy wrecking a bit of revenge upon the rebels." John offered.

"Have the officers and soldiers assemble in the yard. Have the sentences carried out. Sergeant Howden and the Sergeant Major from Lord Edrington's regiment may administer the punishments."

"Very good, General, how many lashes, Sir?" John asked Howe.

"One hundred! I will all present to witness." Howe replied.

"The Lady Mary?" John posed.

"I leave that to your discretion, Major. If our present business is concluded?"

"Yes, General."

They moved out of John's private office into the Entrance Hall almost colliding with General Randall. John stopping dead in his tracks unable to look away watching Mary descend the staircase his gaze raking her from top to toe. "A fine Good Morning to you, Lady Mary!" He greeted her unable to contain his delight and pleasure.

Mary smiled warmly under his clear appreciation heat stealing through her limbs when their eyes met, memories of seeing him emerge from the bath and the subsequent flirtation that had followed flooding her mind, flushing watching the tip of his tongue dash quickly over his lower lip. "A fine
Good Morning to you, Major Andre! General Howe and General Randall, my apologies, I did not see you in the shadows, Good Morning!" Mary added smoothing over her breach in protocol distracted by the Major but the generals had been hiding, she justified in her mind.

"Good Morning, My Dear! I trust that you are finding your new lodgings and living arrangements comfortable? The officers have been respectful?" Howe inquired as Mary curtsied before him as he took her hand to place a kiss upon it, smiling warmly down at her.

"Yes, General, Major Andre has been attending to my every comfort." Mary replied.

"I see!" The General murmured under his breath his glance passing between the pair.

"Lady Mary we are required in the yard. Major Lord Edrington and Major Lord Graham were killed whilst out on patrol last evening. The offending rebels have been captured and are awaiting punishment." John stated matter of factly.

"Oh, how horrible!" Mary was upset for the loss of the lives of two of her potential husbands but she had not known either officer long enough to have formed an opinion or attachment. "They were both fine and courageous officers." Taking her gloves from servant who draped her fur lined cape about her shoulders. "What are the punishments to be?"

"Flogging!" General Randall replied with a smile. How he despised the rebels. "Up to one hundred lashes each." He lifted a brow at Mary, his eyes raking over her. The Loyalist widow last evening had been eager and enjoyable, he hand the nail marks upon his back to prove it, that did not dissuade him from entertaining lascivious thoughts involving the luscious young lady standing before him and the fox lined cloak she was wearing. "Shall we?" He asked.

All the officers put on their tricorns, capes and gloves, the group venturing out the front door.

The yard was a sea of scarlet uniformed soldiers with the exception of the Legion. All standing at attention and prepared to witness the flogging. General Howe motioned to one of the legionnaires to break ranks and come forward.

"Lady Mary Ludlow, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton of the First Dragoon Guards of the British Legion." General Howe made the introductions. "Colonel if you, MacLeane and Pitt could please see to Her Ladyship?"

"Lady Mary, a pleasure!" Ban said with a nod of his head, taking her hand to place a kiss upon it as she curtsied, the formalities being taken care of. "Come with me, please!" He offered his smile warm and welcoming leading her to where some Junior Officers were standing waiting for the punishment to commence.

Upon General Howe's signal a Regimental Drummer began to beat out a tattoo whilst two soldiers brought out the first prisoner, one on either side of him.

The young man appeared to be no more than a boy, struggling frantically, terrified as to what was about to take place, his eyes wide with fear. Mary could hear him pleading with his captors.

"Not so brave, now, eh? Rebel cunt!" One of the soldiers was heard to mock as they tied the young Continental soldier to the whipping post, one of the soldiers grasping the collar of the young boy's shirt, rendering it in two, revealing an expanse of scrawny back.

The drummer beat another tattoo, Sergeant Howden stepping forward with a whip in hand standing behind the prisoner, prepared to administer the punishment.

"One hundred lashes!" Major Andre called out, the whip hissing in the air as the first blow was struck, leaving a red welt on the offender's back, striking a second time, a third... Fourth... Fifth... Sixth... Welts becoming redder, deeper, the boy moaning in pain as more lashes were administered.

Mary stood motionless beside Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton and Captain Lord Kennedy, her features impassive, knowing that John was watching her intently for any betrayal of emotion that would arouse suspicion. There would be none.

The six prisoners were no one Mary knew, they were Backwoods ruffians. She caught one staring at her intently as though he remembered her face but Mary did not recall his.

The boy's back was getting bloody now with each stroke of the lash, it oozing out from his wounds with each stroke, trickling in tiny rivulets down his back, crying out in pain, the whip biting into his skin, sagging against the post as he fainted.
"Revive the prisoner!" General Randall called out. There were still another sixty lashes to administer. "The lad has fainted, Sir!"
"Cut him down. Bring out the next prisoner!" Howe ordered.
The ordered was carried out. Another young man brought out, a brunet with green cold and accusing eyes. "British Whore!" He spat, glaring at Mary.
She flinched inside, keeping her face impassive as he was brought forward to receive his punishment.

"I recommend hanging the lot!" Lieutenant Brandon exclaimed slapping his fist on the dining room table to emphasize his point.
"Sending them to HMS Jersey may be far more effective." General Randall offered, referring to the notorious prisoner ship. He took a sip of his tea. "Though I appreciate your enthusiasm, Lieutenant Brandon."
"Send them to HMS Jersey which is moored in the harbor." Howe ordered, biting the smoked Cod fish he had on his fork, chewing and swallowing. "What are your plans for the day, Lady Mary? A fitting at Madame Bernon's? Attending to your charges at the Academy? So dreadfully sorry about the loss of two of your suitors, My Dear, they were a pair of damned good officers."
"I am disappointed that I did not have the opportunity to increase out acquaintance before both of them were killed." Mary said perfunctory.
"Your Ladyship's pool of officers that will make appropriate husbands had diminished considerably in such a short time. Poor child! We must remedy that. I hear Captain Lord Nicholls has requested to call. There is one other officer but I may prevail upon him to make his intentions known to Your Ladyship personally though I may be persuaded to reveal his identity myself."
"Not Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton or Lieutenant Brandon, General?" Mary asked.
Upon hearing his name, Brandon looked over flashing a smile at Mary.
"Too wild, too young, and too brash, the pair of them! Young Tarleton is a fine dance partner and dinner companion but certainly not husband material. Not now. The same does hold true with Brandon. He is not the man for you!" General Howe stated making his feelings clearly known on the matter.

Chapter End Notes

A Few Notes on Chapter VII
A huge thank you to those people that have been kind enough to leave kudos and comments on this story, I appreciate your kindness and praise.
The mutilation of Major Lord Edrington's body is historically accurate. It was no uncommon at this time for notable personages of either side to have their bodies mutilated after battle, stripped of their finery and personal possessions, etc. This happened on both sides. Two prime examples are what happened to Doctor Joseph Warren after the Battle of Bunker/Breeds Hill in June of 1775 and what happened to Major Patrick Ferguson at the Battle of King's Mountain in October of 1780.
Major Lord Graham's femoral artery in his thigh was severed causing him to bleed to death.
We have the introduction in the story of Banastre Tarleton.
John Andre was not born into the British Ruling Class he would need a rich wife with the proper connections to advance his career. Being intelligent and ruthlessly ambitious he decides to offer himself as a possible suitor for Lady Mary's hand.
Flogging was a usual punishment for prisoners. HMS Jersey was, of course, that hell hole of a prison ship moored in New York harbor.
Mary was relieved that Major Andre had paperwork and meetings to attend to so that he would not be able to accompany her to the Academy that morning. He left her rather regretfully, hopeful he would be able to attend her that afternoon, offering the prospect of a ride upon horseback or a walk. She was greeted at the front door by a servant and Lottie Shaw.

What happened to cause the flogging of those Continental soldiers? Some of us watched from the windows." Lottie declared.

"Major Lord Edrington and Major Lord Graham were killed whilst out on patrol last evening. Major Lord Edrington's body was horrible abused by the Continentals. Major Lord Graham bled to death. The perpetrators were captured. Given their flogging and will be sent to the HMS Jersey to wait out the rest of the war unless they perish from their wounds." Mary explained.

"They made you witness it all?" Lottie asked.

"What am I to do, Lottie? I am the daughter of a duke now! It was my duty to witness the punishments." Mary posed. "If I had refused it would have made them suspicious as to the reasons why. I could not claim a delicate constitution. It would have not been believed. I certainly would not have fainted. Major Andre is suspicious enough as what secrets I happen to be hiding from him. I believe he knows that I have some manner of connection to General Washington. I have just not told him what it is nor has he cared to ask me."

"Where is your Major Andre?" Lottie asked looking past her. "The young ladies will be so disappointed that he did not accompany you this morning."

"Lottie, please, he is not my Major Andre." Mary admonished her friend blushing hotly at the mention of his name.

"I believe he would very much like to be. Jane Fairfax is furious that he escorted you to Madame Bernon's yesterday. How attentive to you the Major was. Jane was whining when she told us of your change in circumstances." Lottie laughed. "Oh, Mary! The look on her face!"

"Was it that dreadful?" Mary asked pleased that Jane Fairfax was more than a bit jealous. "Yes! As thought she had smelt something dreadful!" Lottie replied. She giggled.

Mary smiled. "Truly?" She should not be feeling so smug but Jane Fairfax was a vicious snob who possessed a spiteful tongue. The only reason she was a part of their circle was because she was a relation of Lottie's.

Lottie nodded. "Oh, Mary, it was glorious! She did deserve it. Remember how she bragged about dancing with the Major at that cotillion? Had you not been in bed with a chill that evening, he would have paid all of his attention to you, as much as he dared, without inciting gossip!"

Mary blushed. "Do you think so?"

"Absolutely!" Lottie replied.

"Any mice in the attic?" Mary whispered changing the subject completely.

"No."

"Are any scheduled to arrive?"

"No. Not that I am aware of? Why? What has happened?" Lottie asked, suddenly becoming a bit fearful.

"They know that there is a safe house in the city for the Continental soldiers but they don't know where it is. Major Andre sent Robert Rogers, a Queen's Ranger, to search it out. We have to be incredibly careful. Be certain that there is no evidence left about. If we are discovered..."

"I will get a message to your contact. He left behind a note for you."

"We cannot be doing this anymore! Not with what has happened, Lottie. All of it, not just my title."
"Why? The situation is perfect! Even though the Major is deliciously dashing he is still the enemy, Mary." Lottie countered. "Would you truly consider turning your back on all of your beliefs and principles for 'The Handsomest Man in the British Army'?"

"Benedict Pitt is not the enemy, Lottie? He is a British officer as well. My father is a peer of the realm now. I cannot afford to work so ardently for the cause any more. I can hold rebel sympathies, and I still do and always will, but this can no longer be a safe house. It is far too risky. I have to be honest with John! He has to be able to trust me and I him. There can be no doubts or any suspicion between us!" Mary explained. "I will not hang from a British rope or shame my family by being labeled a traitor."

"John is it now?" Lottie asked noting the familiar use of the Major's Christian name. She sighed, resigned to the fact Mary would not budge unless Benjamin Tallmadge proved to be particularly persuasive. It always puzzled Lottie that a romance had not developed during the pair's long standing friendship but it appeared that Mary was showing a decided preference for scarlet over blue uniforms especially with the recent entrance of a particular British Major into her life. "Where is the note?" Mary asked. Lottie reached within her bodice. "Placed here for safe keeping." She said, drawing it forth, handing it to Mary. Mary took the message, unfolding it. "Safe near Setauket. Will contact soon." She translated from the Greek, sending up a prayer of thanksgiving to her father for her Classical Education, folding it, walking into the parlor to the fireplace consigning the paper to the flames, watching it burn. "Thanks be to God he is out of danger. Has the attic been checked?"

"Not thoroughly."

"We had best do that now before Robert Rogers pays us an unwelcomed visit. The officers are angrier than hornets after what happened. I do not believe the floggings were enough to satisfy General Howe certainly not General Randall. He despises patriots. Best attend to it now whilst the young ladies are attending their history and geography lessons so as not to be disturbed." The pair of young ladies walked out of the parlor into the Entrance Hall and up the staircase three flights to the fourth floor attic, pausing at the landing. To the left were the servants' quarters for the women, to the right the men's and the attic proper where some items were stored. The patriots had hidden in two of the rooms accessible by the backstairs. Mary opened the door to the left at the end of the hall, entering to the room, Lottie following close behind. "Keep an ear out for the Major." Mary warned. "Won't he be engaged for several hours?" Lottie asked. "I am surprised he did not send along a subordinate to accompany you."

"It vexes me that he did not. He came looking for me upstairs when Ben Tallmadge was here yesterday. Ben had to skirt under the bed."

"Good Lord!" Lottie breathed. "What was Ben Tallmadge doing in your bedroom, Mary? The Scandal!"

"I did not chose it, he did. It was the place where no one would search him out." Mary defended herself. "Major Andre searched you out and found you there!" Lottie stated. Inspecting the beds which had been stripped, the sheets and blankets folded and placed in separate piles upon two Windsor chairs in a corner of the room. The pillows were stacked upon one of the bare mattresses. "Nothing happened. I was feigning reading when the Major came in." Mary was a bit too defensive. Lottie let her friend's explanation pass without comment. She had no business prying, well, may just a wee bit. "Protecting his charge?" She asked. "Yes, of course. Major Andre has behaved as a gentleman in all of our encounters and intercourse. General Howe has given him his orders. He is carrying them out. Why would he behave toward me other than with the upmost respect and propriety?" Mary picked up the pile of soiled sheets and handed them to Chloe, one of the Academy's many servants, a pretty brunette from Quincy, Massachusetts. "Chloe, could you please take this pile of sheets down stairs and see that they are washed?"
"Yes, Mist...Milady! Very good!" Chloe replied curtseying then taking the sheets from Mary, heading out of the room.
"Cecily, would you please see to the blankets?" Mary asked another maid, this one a sweet faced blonde from Boston; she had been with the Ludlow's for some years. "I know that the soldiers had sponge baths when they arrived, there should be no fleas or ticks on them. Do check them before they are stored."
"Yes, Milady. Franny is due along with the broom at the moment." Cecily told her mistress.
"Save the coal and ash. I will negotiate a fair price with Major Andre. The British Army will desire it to make gunpowder." Mary was matter of fact, knowing it the proper course to take though she knew the Continental Army was in dire need of it. "Place it in the cask."
"Yes, Milady. As you wish." Cecily said as Franny arrived.

Mary and Lottie set about checking for lose buttons or anything that could give away the former occupants presence. When they had finished Mary paused at the door. "Clean the other room quickly and inconspicuously. Be certain that no one hears or sees any of you! We may have a visitor. Absolutely nothing of any past venture, this venture or the possibilities of a future venture is to reach his ears or those of any person besides those of us present in this room. Do you understand?"
"Yes, Milady." They all chorused, curtseying as Mary and Lottie left the room. The trio of servants, all from Massachusetts were all ardent patriots, fiercely loyal to Mary. They would do what they could for the Cause.

Mary paused in the hall way, sighing. "Do I look a fright?" She asked Lottie, thankfully neither girl's gown was ruined or dirty.
"No!" Came the reply.

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She was seated in the Music Room playing the harpsichord surrounded by several of her students when she heard the front door open.
"Yes, Major. Her Ladyship is in the Music Room. If you would follow me, please?"

John removed his hat, gloves and cape, handing them to another servant, pausing to listen to the sounds of Haydn's Sontata in E minor permeating the house, closing his eyes, letting the music wash over him, infusing his soul, standing motionless for several moments appreciating Mary's incredible talent before moving down the Entrance Hall to the Music Room, following in the servants wake. "Major John Andre." The servant announced allowing John to step over the thresh hold through the doorway.

John strode elegantly into the room, looking the epitome of British Authority, the sight of him making Mary's breath catch, as she ceased playing, standing to cross the room to greet him.
"Major Andre, what do we owe the pleasure?" She asked sweetly, curtseying, offering her hand for him to kiss as all the other young women present stood.

John acknowledged her with a polite nod of his head, grasping her hand in his, placing a kiss gently up it. "Lady Mary, having finished my tasks of the morning, I found myself desirous of Your Ladyship's company. You do not mind that I join you and the young ladies? My presence would not be an intrusion?" John asked looking to the young girls who were all excited to have a British officer of such renown within their midst.

"Oh, Lady Mary, please do not send the Major away!" They pleaded. "Please! Please! Do say he can stay!"

"The young ladies were learning proper deportment at a concert and how one must behave during a musicale." Mary provided. "We were to move onto the correct manner of social banter and flirtation between a young lady and her dancing partner and dinner companion."

"I would be delighted to offer my services, Lady Mary, who better than me to act the part of dancing partner and dinner companion to help Your Ladyship execute your example? Providing my presence will not be an intrusion."

"Of course not, Major, I would be delighted to have the assistance." Mary said as the girls squealed with excitement. "Hush! Ladies, please!"

"Shall we begin?" John asked.
"Yes. It is the English custom that a young lady dances with several gentlemen within the course of an evening, unlike the American custom of dancing and enjoying the company of one particular man for the duration. Remember that one's etiquette in the ball room transfers to other aspects of life. Being ignorant or defying the rules of etiquette place one at risk of losing the prospect of a profitable marriage contract and social advancement." Mary explained. "The act of asking a lady to dance has to be carefully orchestrated. The gentleman will stand at a comfortable distance from you, bow slightly toward you and request the honor of your presence as a dancing partner. He should never be hasty or overly sure of himself, and should never ask you to accompany him for more than four dances; as such a degree of informality is improper in a ballroom. Furthermore he should always be well acquainted with a dance before participating, since any mistakes he makes during a dance put his partner in an awkward position. You, as a lady, in turn, should not refuse a gentleman's offer unless you have already accepted another's proposal."

"If the ball is formal one, the proper introductions having been made, the gentleman will ask the lady to have the honor of your presence as a dancing partner." John instructed, focusing all his attention upon Mary. "Lady Mary, would you do me the honor?" He asked bowing slightly toward her as Mary had explained.

"I would." Mary replied.
"The gentleman will observe the proper attention of a partner. Shall we demonstrate, Lady Mary?" John drew Mary out into the center of the room. "The gentleman bows and the lady curtsies. As they execute the steps of the dance, the gentleman will engage you in polite conversation, as you how long you have been in York City, to the theatre, a concert?"

"It is all rather dull." Mary provided.
The girls giggled at their Head Mistress' honesty.
"We must do our duty. Ready?" John reminded her, bowing indicating that the demonstration was to commence.

"Yes." Mary curtsied.
"How long have you been in the city?" John asked beginning to execute the steps of the minuet.
"Quite some time, Major."
"Were you never here before?" John asked.
"Yes, several times with my family, Major."
"Indeed! Have you ever been to the play? Seen the Beggar's Opera?" John asked, smiling as they danced, the young ladies in the room seeming to fade away his attention completely focused upon Mary.

"Yes, Major, last evening." Mary replied gazing up at John through lowered lashes.
"How did you find it?" John asked, his gaze capturing hers for a brief moment, his smile broadening to grin, losing himself in their banter.
"I cannot say truly. We left at the interval." Mary replied executing the steps of the stately dance.
"Have to been to a concert?"
"Not yet." She replied. Their eyes locking once more, the heat stealing in her cheeks as his eyes caressed her.
"Astonishing. Now tell me, are you all together pleased with the city under its present circumstances?"
"Yes, I like it very well."
"Excellent! The British officers?"
"I like them very well."
"Do you now?"
"Yes. They are most gallant, attentive and are in the possession of the most impeccable manners." Mary replied honestly, the pair moving about in the steps of the dance.
"Fine dancers?"
"I find them to be some of the best of my acquaintance."
"Truly? Better than the French?" John asked.
"Some of them, yes." Mary said, diplomatically. John was half French, his mother having been born
in Paris. "The Venetians and Romans?" John asked knowing Mary had visited those two cities upon her travels. "Far superior, Major, if the truth be told." "If the truth be told. Yes, please do, Lady Mary. Your honesty is most refreshing." John responded. "Better than the Austrians, Swiss and the Hessians?" "The Swiss are a close second." She flirted knowing that John's father had been Swiss. "As they should be!" John exclaimed, delighted with the compliment clearly directed at him. He chuckled. "Of course!" Mary agreed, smiling back. "Does Your Ladyship have a preference for scarlet or blue coats?" "Scarlet, Major." Mary replied. "Indeed! As Your Ladyship should." "I am delighted that you approve." She looked up at him through lowered lashes, fluttering them in flirtation, the tip of her tongue dashing across her lush pink lower lip. "That I do. I am most gratified of your high opinion of me." He said, finishing the dance. "Thus endeth the lesson." He bowed with an elegant flourish. "That, my young ladies, is the correct way to execute proper conversation with one's dancing partner whilst dancing." Mary explained. "What of the improper conversation?" John asked, eyes twinkling with mischief. Their verbal exchange had enticed him to wickedness not to mention Mary's blatant flirting during the demonstration. The students giggled at John's comment. "What of the improper conversation?" One of the young ladies asked. "A gentleman does not engage in improper conversation with a lady." Mary stated primly, stealing a glance at John out of the corner of an eye. "No, they find a place for a quiet tete a tete. A word in private, Lady Mary, if you would kindly oblige me?" John asked. "Do you not wish to assist in demonstrating the nature of correct conversation between a gentleman and a lady at dinner, Major?" Mary asked. John shook his head. "Ladies, please observe, a gentleman, if he takes a shine to his dancing partner, may wish to engage her in private conversation after the dance in a discreet fashion provided all the proper introductions have been made. Which in this instance, they have. So if you will be kind enough to excuse us, I wish to have a word with your dear Head Mistress. Alone." John told Lottie and the young ladies. "Do excuse us. Lottie, I will leave the girls in your most capable hands." Mary took John's offered arm as he nodded to the girls. "Ladies, a pleasure." John said with a smile escorting Mary out of the room, looking up and down the Entrance Hall to be certain that no servants were about; he guided her into the parlor. "You wished a word in private, Major Andre." Mary said formally, she had to maintain a strict sense of decorum and propriety whilst they were at the Academy. John shut the door behind him, pulling her close. "Did General Howe speak with you this morning? I had words with him before you came down preceding the floggings." "And you are telling me this because?" Mary asked, looking up into his eyes. "I asked General Howe that I be considered as a suitor for Your Ladyship's hand. Due to the nature of our unusual relationship I deemed it wise as to avoid untoward gossip and scandal. The proposition is twofold; I will eventually be in need of a wife and will require one of Good Breeding and the necessary connections if I am to advance within the army. I also have a widowed mother and three sisters to support back in England. I find that I am forming a deep affection for Your Ladyship that clearly can only be satisfied in one way." John explained. "Has General Howe given his consent?" "He said that he would give it careful consideration. Broadening the pool of suitors is most advisable
given the nature of the two at present. Your Ladyship is well aware of General Randall's black
hearted reputation. Captain Lord Kennedy does have a notorious sobriquet as well. Killer Kennedy
as he is known for his berserker tendencies in battle and his expertise with a rifle. His aim is deadly
accurate." John told her.
"A spymaster is the lesser of the Three Evils?" Mary inquired.
"Of course, My Dear! You will be dreadfully bored with Kennedy within months and General
Randall will make you most unhappy."
"Captain Lord Nicholls?"
"He is a sailor. He probably has a woman in every port."
"And you, Major?"
"What about me? I have proven my worth. We both know that I can make you blissfully and
incandescently happy. You would never be bored or miserable. I state my honor on that." He
bragged.
"Shhhhh! Major Andre! Someone may overhear and misconstrue your words, Sir." Mary warned,
placing two fingers on John's mouth as if to hush him.
He kissed her fingertips in response as she drew them away, one of his thumbs tracing along her full
lower lip slipping between them. The tip of Mary's tongue flicking along the pad drawing it gently in
her mouth, sucking lightly, looking up at him, sapphire eyes locking with cobalt blue.
John inhaled sharply. "Where have you been?" He whispered, his gaze searching hers, drawing his
thumb away.
"Waiting." She replied, her heart hammering in her chest, molten heat stealing through her, as she
became aroused and inflamed.
John moaned, a low sensual sound from the back of his throat, pulling her to him as he wrapped her
tightly in his embrace, his mouth descending, claiming hers, tossing caution completely to the wind,
kissing her feverently, intensely, tongue slipping from between his lips, tracing her seam of hers with
the pointed tip, coaxing them apart, slipping between, instantly entwining with hers.
Excitement blinded her, she whimpered, wrapping her arms about his neck digging the tips of her
fingers into his nape and the fine cotton of his stock as the kiss deepened.
John grasped her tighter to him, hands slipping from about her waist to her bum, grasping through
the layers of her gown and petticoats, yanking her that much more closer if that all were possible and
not be physically inside her, which he desperately wanted to be, his organ was a hard and stiff
against her hip, his aroused male body pressing against her.
Withdrawing his tongue from her mouth he planted fierce kisses along her lips.
A noise in the Entrance Hall caused them to draw apart.
"We dare not chance a scandal, if we are discovered." Mary breathed.
"It is too late for that." John countered with a teasing wink, he grinned. "Each and every one of
those young ladies is speculating upon the nature of our relationship though will not speak it aloud."
"They are all talking about you, Major."
"And why I wished to have a word in private. Poor Darlings are blossoming under your expert
instruction. They should be rewarded with a visit from Young Tarleton and Captain Kennedy. It
would also increase the morale of the officers if they were to socialize with your young ladies strictly
chaperoned, of course, by Your Ladyship and Mistress Shaw."
"The matrons, widows, actresses and Women of Easy Virtue proving to be boring and
disappointing?" Mary asked.
John barked with laughter. "So blunt, Lady Mary, indecent speech coming forth from your lovely
lips is shocking but so disturbingly refreshing."
"I have not offended you?"
"Gracious, no! Quite the contrary, you know that I am gratified that Your Ladyship is feeling more
and more comfortable around me to be so honest, as you should be." John replied.
"So are they?" Mary pressed her point.
"I can only offer my own assessment and opinion where I would state that a young lady of
considerable quality has required all of my attention as of late. I do not have the time or the
They went riding that afternoon. Mary was an expert horsewoman and loved a fast gallop the cold air and company proving to be invigorating, awakening and sharpening all of her senses. She had never felt so alive!

"It appears, Lady Mary, that I have won the wager!" John crowed triumphantly drawing up on the reins, stopping near the stables, Mary trotting in two horse lengths behind.

"So you have, Major." She watched him dismount effortlessly tossing the reins to a waiting groom, her breath catching in her throat as he strode toward her, his boots crunching on the frozen grass.

He went to help her down, the close proximity of her sent his heart to racing, a jolt of pure desire surged through him when her hands clasped his broad shoulders, his own grasping her tiny waist, giving a gentle bounce to her out of the sidesaddle, the lady sliding with sinuous slowness down his front, their eyes locking when her feet finally hit the grass, Mary lifting her chin, the air sparking between them with that intense sexual tension.

She swallowed, attempting to moisten her mouth that was suddenly dry as dust, feeling her cheeks flaming, her heart hammering in her chest, her body trembling with anticipation, her gaze never wavering from his. She managed to exhale, her breath a warm caress upon his face, she saw it ruffle that tiny queue he wore. Hesitating at first, Mary slid one of her hands over his shoulder to the place where it met his neck, moving her gloved hand against it, her back arching, maneuvering her closer against him, her breasts grazing his chest through the fabric of her riding costume. "Care to take your reward, Major?" Mary asked, her lips dangerously close to his, her eyes looking about for any soldier that may see them, her vision not catching sight of a tall, straight backed soldier riding toward them. She was sheer utter temptation! John thought, debating if he should kiss her in the stable yard with the grooms and soldiers about or if he should wait until they were alone where things could become more intimate between them. He hesitated.

"If you do not kiss me properly I will be most angry with you." She teased.

"We cannot have that, Lady Mary." He dipped his head, planting a kiss on her cheek. "I promise to do it most properly in private later." He reassured her just as the tall rider came into view, trotting closer his features becoming clearer, the bright sunlight making the buttons on his scarlet coat flash from beneath his cloak, he wore a white wig under his tricorne hat.

"I will hold you to that vow, Major." Mary stated. "Who is that?" She added indicating the officer that was almost upon them now.

"Ah, Captain Simcoe!" John exclaimed, jovially. "So good of you to come!"

"Major Andre!" The captain's voice held no warmth. Mary looked up into his icy blue eyes, feeling them sweep over her in a quick assessment, lingering upon her face for a fraction longer than was deemed appropriate in what appeared to be an attempt at recognition. "I do not believe I have had the honor of your acquaintance, Mistress." His comment was directed at her. He would have been devastatingly handsome if his eyes were not so cold and his mouth not so cruel, Mary thought watching as the horse and captain stopped close to them, Simcoe dismounting, handing the reins of his mount to a groom striding towards them. Good Lord he was tall! Mary had to crane her neck to look him full in the face.

"Excuse me for not making the proper introductions. Lady Mary Ludlow this is Captain John Graves Simcoe just arrived from Setauket. The Lady Mary Ludlow, Captain, youngest child of His Grace the Duke of Sutherland. She is our guest."

"Simcoe gave Mary as polite nod of his head, taking the offered hand, lifting it to his mouth as he bent for the obligatory kiss. "Lady Mary, a pleasure." His icy blue gazed up into hers, the corners of his mouth twitching into a smile making his cruel expression almost warm and pleasant.

"It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Captain Simcoe. Will you be staying with us long?" She asked.

As long as the Major and General Howe have need of me, Lady Mary. Are you here with the
officers for the duration of the winter?" Simcoe asked, his eyes still never leaving hers. "Yes, Captain Simcoe, that or until General Howe has me safely married."

"Well, Lady Mary, I am dreadfully sorry that there is no female relation in close proximity to chaperone you and see to your welfare that being said, I would assure you that Your Ladyship's virtue and reputation are safe within the protection of the officers and soldiers of His Majesty's Army. I am most certain that General Howe, the other officers, especially Major Andre here, have seen that you have no cause or fear for your safety whilst you are their guest. Major Hewlett and I would be more than happy to extend the same manner of hospitality if you were kind enough to visit Setauket. There are some young matrons and ladies that would be honored to make Your Ladyship's acquaintance." Simcoe stated as they made their way toward the house.

John instinctively offered Mary his arm which she took. "Mayhap we could invite some of the ladies of Setauket to one of the soirees or dinners that we were to plan for the Christmastide entertainment? Have Simcoe give you their names, Lady Mary, I am not adverse to issuing invitations. One can never have too many friends, can one?" John said kindly. He was desperate for Mary to be happy living with the officers. He knew that the last few days had been difficult for her. Mayhap more female companions and acquaintances would help to make her more comfortable.

"Thank you, Major. I appreciate your kindness." Mary said.

"Do speak to Mistress Shaw in regards to arranging a tea and small concert with the officers by the end of the week to be held within the next few days. I do wish for Captain Simcoe whilst he is our guest to make acquaintance of the young women from your Academy. Her Ladyship is the Head Mistress of a finishing school. We are neighbors." John explained as they reached the front door to the house. Mary could see the soldiers taking target practice, some practicing with their sabers further afield including young Tarleton who caught her eye, flashing her a smile as his sword slashed though a pumpkin that was placed on a post.

John could not resist stopping for a moment. "Bravo, Tarleton!" He called, clapping, flashing Ban a grin, placing a proprietary hand upon the small of Mary's back, clearly staking his claim upon the lady, guiding her up the stairs.

A servant opened the door, others coming forward to take their hats, capes and gloves.

"Gentlemen, if you would please excuse me. I will see you at dinner." Mary said mounting the stairs. "She is a lovely young lady." Simcoe said politely following John into the Major's private office. John smiled. "That she is!" He agreed. "That wound you sustained during the rebel ambush of the safe house was not life threatening? It healed?"

"With slight discomfort, nothing that will impede me from my duties, it was truly only a scratch." "Did you find out who the informant was? Ours has obviously failed or there is a mole amongst us." John mused. He took a decanter of sherry, pouring two glasses, one for Simcoe and one for himself, handing the captain his. "Rogers has learnt that the rebels have a safe house in the city. He cannot locate its whereabouts possibly because it may be a rouse to distract us from their true actions?"

"Have you considered the traitor may be masquerading as a Loyalist? Or someone with ties to the rebel cause?" Simcoe posed. John took a sip of his sherry. "True, that! A gentleman? Henry Phipps, perhaps."

"Who?"

"A Loyalist scoundrel that I made the acquaintance of at a recent dinner party, I will have Rogers look into his activities."

"What of the Lady Mary?" Simcoe posed. "No one is completely beyond suspicion, Captain." John snapped. "But one could imagine her previous activities. Her Ladyship is loyal to King and Country though I cannot fault her harboring sympathies, she was born in Boston which we both know was one of the primary birthplaces of this present contretemps we now find ourselves in with our Colonial brethren. Her father was an incredibly prosperous merchant, one of the richest men in the Colonies before he inherited his title. Now he is one of the richest men in the Empire, the family has rebel ties one of which may extend to General Washington, himself. The letters I have from Abigail Adams and Dorothy Hancock to Her Ladyship bear that out though they contain only an exchange of ideas. I would hesitate to accuse the
Lady Mary of treason without irrefutable proof. Given her title, connections and vast fortune it would not be wise. She is far more useful and valuable to us alive than dead, that is if any suspicions that I may harbor prove true. I would rather have her married and warming the bed of an influential or young officer with ambitions with that great amount of social influence, here and in London, she now possesses. Use that power to advantage. As one can ascertain, I have other plans for her." One of Simcoe's brows shot up over an eye. "I can imagine what those other plans are, Major." "Do not presume, Captain." John's voice was icy cold. He took a sip of his sherry. "You will want to refresh yourself before supper as will I. There is water avail for a bath if you are so inclined. We will continue this conversation at another time. If you are interested in particular intimate amusements there are some clean whores about that the officers and soldiers frequent I can have provide you a list of the brothels or there are several laundresses and other women that are, erm, accommodating. Depending upon the length of your stay there are several widows loyal to the cause that are willing to serve King and Country upon a more personal level." John cleared his throat.

The interview was over.

Chapter End Notes

A Few Notes on Chapter VIII

Once again, a huge thank you to those people that have been kind enough to leave kudos and comments on this story, I appreciate your kindness and praise.

The link to the piece Mary is playing on the harpsichord: https://search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=B111US679D20140207&p=Haydn%27s+sonata+in+E+minor

Thank you to this site for information of the etiquette regarding dancing in the 18th century: http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Dance/etiquette.htm

Many thanks to Northanger Abbey for the inspiration for the conversation between John and Mary during the dancing.

Hope you enjoyed the inclusion of a certain Captain into the story.
He found her nestled on her bed, a down duvet covering her, wearing a brocaded dressing gown with clearly nothing underneath, dozing lightly, soft waves of hair falling over her shoulders, her skin gently flushed, her could see the curving swell of a breast peeking out from where the edges of her robe strove to meet.

Approaching the bed, he leaned over her.

Mary's eyes flew open; she crinkled her nose in disgust. "You stink of horse!" She complained. "Do not kiss or touch me until you have had a bath."

"Care to join me? I need assistance washing my back." He coaxed, smiling seeing her hesitate. "The doors are locked. I promise you that there will be no scandal. It is best to become familiar with some of the intimacies of marriage if we may eventually find ourselves blessed in that happy state. Do your parents not engage in such affections whilst in private?"

Mary blushed fiercely. She did recall what only could be described as sounds of laughter, moans and cries of ecstasy coming from behind her parents' closed bedroom door at the house on Beacon Hill. "Yes."

"I suspected as much. Come now, Sweetheart, I do need a valet. Hurry! Before the water cools."

"You are so very persuasive." She said.

"I was hoping that you would say that." He grinned.

Mary giggled. "Charming Rogue!"

"That is a rather accurate assessment." John approved, tossing the duvet off, reaching for her, the sash of her robe coming loose in the process, revealing more of her breasts and shapely legs to his hungry gaze. He took a sharp intake of breath when her feet hit the floor.

"Do I meet with your approval?" She teased well aware that he was staring at her.

"I may have to view a bit more to form a true opinion." He parried.

"How much more?" She decided to travel down that dangerous path.

"All of it!"

"Not until you are clean, Sir! You smell like a stable." She complained walking him backward toward the door that connected their bedrooms pushing his jacket off his shoulders. John helping her, tossing it on a ladder backed chair.

She took a brief moment to tighten the sash of her robe about her waist, turning back to him, making quick work of the buttons of his waistcoat.

"Quite eager, aren't you?"

"Do you approve? I hope that my valet skills are not find wanting, Major Sir. I only appear eager because I do not wish the water of your bath to become cold as you had stated yourself a scant moment ago." She said her voice going down an octave as she mimicked a young man, her blues eyes twinkling at him in the candlelight. Her hands went to his stock.

"I appreciate your attention to the task at hand." John replied, allowing her to undo the knot of his stock, taking one of the ends, following it about his neck in a very slow and deliberate way the tips of her fingers caressing the back of his neck and the hollow at the base of his throat. John chuckled.

"Lady Mary, are you flirting with me or do you intend upon luring me into a manner of wickedness that I am unaware?"

"You disapprove of my valet skills? It is you that intends upon luring me. I have never bathed a gentleman before. " She replied, tugging upon one end of his stock, snaking it off the back of his neck, until it puddled in her hand, she tossed it to the ladder backed chair where it landed on the rush seat.

"I thoroughly approve of your valeting skills though we should pick up the pace a bit. There will be
opportune time for wickedness when you bathe me." He said, shedding his waistcoat, going to remove his shirt, tossing both upon the same chair with his jacket and stock, sitting to remove his boots and hose pacing them near the chair looking up to smile at Mary who could not help staring at him. "Do I meet with your approval?" He teased.
"From what I have observed thus far, yes." She replied.
"Wait until you observe all of it. I trust that your Good Opinion of me will not change, quite the contrary."
"Will it?" She asked, watching as he went to undo the buttons of his knee breeches.
John flashed a devilish smirk.
That was all the answer she needed, biting her lip in nervous anticipation, her eyes riveted on him, she watched as he divested himself of his last few garments, looking away modestly when she heard them gently fall to the floor.
"Look at me." He commanded.
She obeyed, feeling her heart catch as their eyes met, his gaze smoldering. She could not resist gasping in appreciation.
"So the end result does meet with your approval, Sweetheart? Good. I am so gratified that you are not disappointed." He teased, his eyes glittering with amusement in the candlelight.
"Of course not, why would I be?"
"Of course not, indeed!" Grasping her about the waist he pulled her against his hard warrior's body, encircling her in his embrace, taking possession of her. Without preamble his mouth swooped down on hers, kissing her forcefully.
"I told you not to kiss or touch me until you had washed the smell of horse from your person!" She chided.
"Forgive my display of bad manners, Lady Mary, but you were far too tempting. You were begging to be kissed. I kindly obliged. Now if you would be so kind to assist me." John explained, releasing her, he stepped into the tub, easing down into the water.
One of the servants had left a basket of sponges and soaps on a stool near the tub, towels were spread out near the warmer by the fireplace, there was a jug of hot water on a candlestick table to add more to the bath if it had cooled.
Mary's heart was pounding in her chest, a warm heated flush covering her skin, her stomach muscles tightening as that familiar ache she felt when he was about, or she thought of him, settled between her legs. She was burning for him. There was no denying it.
She paused to watch him, unable to look away, feeling her cheeks burning, dropping the sponge and the cloth in the water.
His gaze met hers immediately ascertaining her inner torment and longing. "Come join me, Mary, there is enough room for two. We can both quench our thirsts and ease our hungers."
"Noo..." She shook her head. "I shouldn't."
"There is no shame in it. You are completely safe and protected here with me, your reputation, your person, all of it. I promise."
"I have your word?" She stood, hands going to the sash of her dressing gown tossing all caution to the Four Winds
"You have my word." He assured her.
That was all the encouragement she needed. Undoing the sash, she shrugged, letting the dressing gown fall to the floor where it landed on the carpet near the tub in a soft whisper.
John's breath caught beholding her in all her naked splendor, the candles casting a soft sensual glow against her pale skin. His gaze sweeping over her exquisite lush breasts, tiny waist, gently rounded hips, the tangled V of golden curls above long shapely legs. Feeling a stab of pure unadulterated lust
slam into him, he resisted the urge to lift her into the tub and take her there and then. One quick thrust and he would be inside her. But Mary was not the sort to be taken quickly. The joy and pleasure was in the playing and engaging in these games of seduction, the courting, the flirting, and the falling in love...

"Have you any idea how beautiful truly are and how much I want you?" He asked standing to assist her into the tub, the water sluicing down his gloriously powerful body, offering her a hand, which she took.

"How much?"

"Wash the stink of horse from me and I will explain it to you in all its excruciatingly graphic detail."

"To protect my person?"

John chuckled. "Mmmm... In a manner of speaking." He murmured, drawing her down into the water with him, grabbing the cake of soap and the sponge. "Bath tubs are for far more than washing, Sweetheart." John explained working the soap and the sponge into a later his eyes dancing with mischief.

"They are? I could not have imagined." She giggled, taking the sponge from his hand drawing it over his broad shoulders, his pectoral muscles, paying particular attention to his nipples.

"Careful! I would have a care if I were you!" He warned. Wicked Wench! She was trying his patience and resolve.

"Should I?" She flirted moving the sponge lower, over his abdomen humming the melody of a particularly risque' camp song as she did.

"Was it Captain Pitt or MacLeane that taught you that wicked ditty, Mary? If I were to venture a guess I would say MacLeane! I will have to have words with him!" John said, shaking his head with mock disapproval.

"Disappointed that you did not have the opportunity to teach it to me yourself, John?" She asked, swirling the sponge about his navel in direction of his hips and lower... "I do wonder what the opposite reaction and consequence will be to this... action..."

"If you continue down the path that you are traveling, Lady Mary, I cannot be responsible for the behavior that may ensue especially that which could be considered not becoming of a Gentleman."

"I promise not to inform General Howe of your infractions, Major, especially if you are following his strict orders." Mary teased, the sponge disappearing below the water. She grasped his engorged organ running the sponge over the length. "Is this the proper manner to tend to this portion of your person?" She asked, innocently, reveling in the sexual power that she was clearly asserting over him, watching him intently as he reacted.

"I would never wish to be the cause of your vexation or unhappiness, Mary."

"Or I yours. Does this please you?"

"Will you enlighten me?"

"Eventually." Damme! And that!

"Promise? I shall be ever so cross if you don't, John."

"I would never wish to be the cause of your vexation or unhappiness, Mary." Oh, Fuck! AND THAT!

She smiled at that. "Or I yours. Does this please you?" She asked continuing to stimulate him knowing from the expression upon his face that she was.

"Yes. Very much! Christ, Mary!" He closed his eyes briefly, hissing air into his lungs. He moaned. Good God! Who had taught her to do that?!

"Do not blaspheme!" She chided, giggling with undisguised pleasure. "Does this?" She asked leaning forward to nip and lick at his throat and chest gently.

"You know that I will have to pay you back in kind for this!" He warned.

"I should be so fortunate."

"Will you?" Tilting her chin up his eyes searched hers. "Kiss me, You Naughty Little Rebel!" He commanded things becoming frantic and furious between them, his mouth on hers, his hand covering hers that held the sponge, the increasing pace, John moaning beneath her mouth, becoming more
sensual, forceful, taking total command of the situation until he spent catching his seed in the cloth, tearing his mouth from hers. "You were magnificent, just perfection." Kissing her temple, his voice was rough and ragged with want and need.

"Did I make you happy?"

John chuckled. "Incandescently." He pressed his forehead against hers. "We had best finish before Abigail arrives to dress you for dinner and catches us." He gave her a swift peck on the mouth then grabbed for the sponge.

"Lady Mary, Judge Richard Woodhull sends his regards. I had heard that he was an acquaintance of His Grace your father's, is that true?"

"His Grace my father, when he was Marquess of Stafford though he went by the name of Charles Stafford in the Americas, did have some business dealings with Judge Woodhull, yes. If I recall he has a son named Abraham that attended King's College here in New York. I recall meeting Abraham once or twice when he was a guest of my brother, Ned's during breaks from university even though my brother and his friends attended Yale. Abraham grew up in Setauket with one of Ned's classmates."

"That classmate was?"

"One of the preacher's sons, I believe, Reverend Tallmere...Taughton..." She made a show of fudging about searching for the surname. "No that is not it, please excuse my faulty memory, Captain, I am dreadful with names." She lied.

"Tallmadge?"

"That's it. Thank you, Captain. Yes, Reverend Tallmadge." She smiled sweetly at Simcoe determined to win him over with sweetness and charm. "The Judge is an ardent Loyalist. He took great pleasure in assisting my father."

"As well he should." General Howe agreed taking a forkful of his hickory smoked ham provided graciously by Mary's smokehouse. "This is delicious!" He commented, chewing a look of bliss coming across his face. The General did enjoy his creature comforts, especially good food, wine and spirits.

"I am so delighted that you are enjoying it, General." Mary said brightly. "Have you had a chance to sample the ham, Captain?" Mary asked Simcoe.

"Yes, Lady Mary, it is delicious. What do you know of Benjamin Tallmadge?" Simcoe persisted.

"Captain Simcoe, please cease with your questions. Though I admire your interest, I sincerely doubt that Her Ladyship has many recollections regarding her brothers' guests during term breaks unless she formed an affection for one of them." General Howe said. "Was this the case with Benjamin Tallmadge, My Dear? Should Randall, Kennedy, Nicholls and Andre have cause for concern? Cannot have you pining away for some lost love, can we?" Howe teased Mary.

"No, Sir. It was not. Reverend Tallmadge did breach the subject once or twice about a possible match between Benjamin and me but nothing came of it." Mary answered honestly.

"Why was that?"

"I was too young."

"And now?"

"I honestly do not know." Mary replied. "The subject has not been broached for some time. His Grace my father is in England. I doubt that he would wish a Presbyterian minister's eldest son as a proper husband for his youngest daughter. Margaret married a marquess; I do not believe he would settle less than an earl or an incredibly ambitious man whatever his station in life."

"So I have chosen your suitors wisely then?" Howe asked. "His Grace, your father, would approve."

"Yes, General, I believe that he would." Mary replied.

"Are you a dutiful daughter? Would you adhere to His Grace's decision or would you cajole him into allowing you your heart's desire when it comes time for the decision to be made?" Howe asked taking a forkful of butternut squash and turnip.

"His Grace my father would not allow me to marry a man that would make me miserable. Her Grace my mother has him well in hand. They behave as lovers. He would wish the same sort of marriage
"Is Major Andre keeping Your Ladyship well protected?" Howe asked his gaze traveling across the table to John, who looked up upon hearing his name, the corners of his mouth lifting in a smile.

"Yes. He seeks to create various amusements to keep me well occupied so that I may not have time to brood upon missing my family." Mary said.

"What do you have planned, Major Andre?"

"This evening? A small musical, Her Ladyship plays upon the harp and I the flute, duets." John answered. "I am in the process of convincing her to allow some of the officers to venture to the Academy and make acquaintance of her charges."

"How does that stand at the moment, Lady Mary?" General Howe asked.

"As long as they promise to comport themselves as gentlemen." Mary looked across the dining table at John whose thumb and forefinger were caressing the stem of his wine goblet. His gaze locked with hers.

"Of course, Lady Mary, I would expect nothing less." He purred. "If there are any breaches in etiquette Your Ladyship has only to inform me. I will personally see to any infractions and discipline accordingly."

"Unless they use Major Andre's own behavior as an example then there shall be no cause for concern." Mary said.

John grinned raising his glass to her in a salute. "Once again I continue to be flattered by Your Ladyship's high opinion of me and my character."

"I have no cause to believe otherwise."

"Indeed!" John took a sip of his wine "Did I have the opportunity to tell you how lovely you look this evening? The apple green color of your gown is quite fetching. It gives sheen to your skin. The contrasting pink flowers embroidered upon it add a lovely touch."

Mary felt her cheeks flush with pleasure at his compliment. "You are too kind, Major. Thank you."

"My pleasure, you are an exceptionally lovely young woman. Half of the officers believe themselves to be in love with you and the other half is infatuated."

"And you?" She asked avoiding the desire to burst into a fit of giggles at his effusive compliments. "They are all jealous of me and envy me my good fortune. Allow me to escort you in town tomorrow provided that you do not have any pressing responsibilities at the Academy. We can visit the booksellers and the milliners perhaps enjoy the coffee shop nearby. We can discuss plans for several entertainments. I have several ideas that require a feminine opinion."

General Randall sighed, rolling his eyes. How were any of Mary's other suitors to get to know her if Major Andre was constantly monopolizing her time?

"Will Captain Simcoe be joining us?" Mary asked. "You can stay for at least the tea with my charges from the Academy, can't you, Captain? Do say yes, we would be delighted to have you attend. You do not have to venture back to Setauket too quickly do you? Major Andre did indicate he wishes that you meet some of the young ladies within my charge."

John shot Simcoe a warning look, his eyes narrowing, taking another sip of his wine. "Well Captain Simcoe?"

"I will be staying in New York for as long as General Howe and Major Andre have need of me." Simcoe replied looking to the Major who gave a nod of approval at his answer. Simcoe suspected that the Major was intent on courting the young lady. A day out in the city was perfect.

"Long enough to partake of our hospitality, I hope, as requested." Mary said.

"We shall see." John said shortly. Why was Mary taking such an interest in John Simcoe? Granted he was a handsome man, if one fancied the Cold Elegant type, or that was the air he gave off. Was she becoming interested in the strapping Captain? Or was she just being friendly and kind? John suspected the latter; she was just being a good hostess especially given the nature of his own relationship with Sutherland's daughter and the course he suspected it was taking.

Mary pursed her lips.

"I will require Captain Simcoe's services on the morrow so the Major can escort you, Lady Mary." General Howe stated.
"Is than an order?" Mary teased a smile playing about her mouth. Howe chuckled. "Yes, it is. Remember that Major Andre."
"Another grin split John's face. "I will. Thank you, Sir. I am most grateful." He winked at Mary.

Mary and John glowed with pleasure acknowledging the applause of the officers, Mary curtsying and John bowing for the second time.

"Such a marvelous performance calls for a celebratory sherry or brandy. Don't you think so? The pair of you plays wonderfully well together. Major Andre tells me that you are quite proficient upon the harpsichord and the violin. Is that true? We must prevail upon you to perform more concerts over the duration of your visit with us, Lady Mary. We would be most pleased to hear Your Ladyship play if you would be so kind as to oblige me and the officers. We would be most grateful." General Howe's smile was warm and sincere. He was doing his best to make Sutherland's daughter's stay a comfortable one.

"Yes, General Howe."

"I have heard that you sing?" Mary nodded, blushing.

"Come now, do not be shy. I look forward to hearing your voice. Mayhap you and General Randall or Major Andre can harmonize together. Entertain us with more duets. I hear both officers have fine voices and they aren't the only ones. Young Tarleton is rather good as well."

General Randall turned upon hearing his name. "I would be more than delighted to engage in any duet with the Lady Mary, musical or otherwise." He said with a smile. "I do hear that Captain Simcoe possesses a good voice as well. Care to join in the entertainment?"

"If Her Ladyship has no objection but I do believe that Major Andre was planning on singing with her. Isn't that right, Major?" Simcoe baited John.

"General Howe has expressed a desire that the Lady Mary and I engage in more duets for his entertainment. I most certainly cannot refuse, now can I?" John asked diplomatically eyes challenging Randall's.

"Did you hear that Lady Mary? I believe that you have several ardent admirers. Good! Good! Let us see to that refreshment, shall we?" General Howe asked.

Several hours later, Mary stood at a window in her bedchamber dressed in her cotton and lace night gown, brocaded dressing gown and slippers watching as a man wearing a Phrygian cap and what appeared to be dark clothing and boots as to not to be detected or seen in the darkness of night or in the moonlight, quickly slip through the servants' entrance to the Academy by the kitchen.

A cold stab of fear dashed down her spine when she felt the presence of someone beside her. She tensed. Had John come up already? The voice beside her was feminine. Turning her head Mary found Abigail beside her.

"Abigail, it isn't..." She began.

"Hush! No need to worry, Lady Mary. I am on your side. Your secrets are safe with me. I am an old friend of Anna Strong." Abigail whispered. "You won't tell my secrets either, will you?"

Mary shook her head. "You will not tell the Major?"

"No. I won't. What the Major doesn't know won't hurt you. I do advise you to be cautious and careful, however. He can have a temper and certainly will not be pleased to hear that you have played him false though I know that he is aware of your conflicting loyalties."

Mary tried to stop shaking, finally relaxing when she felt Abigail's hand on one of her shoulders. "Shhhh... Take a deep breath. Good! Another. Major Andre will be up very soon. We cannot have him finding you skittish as a cat. Though your trembling could be misconstrued as desire for him, play to his vanity. He is half in love with you already. My advice would be to make good use of his attraction to you. Now don't be giving me that look! It is nothing to be ashamed of. There are far
worse things that could be happening. Rather it be the Major coming into your room every night and seeing to your welfare than the likes of General Randall. He is a mean one!"
"So I have heard."
Abigail smiled. "I would imagine that Major Andre warned you about Black Jack Randall for more reasons than one?" She asked.
Mary nodded. "I hear that he is quite popular with the Loyalist Widows of the city."
Abigail gasped. "Major Andre should not be telling you such things! It is quite improper!"
"So are this sleeping arrangement and my living here unchaperoned. He does manage to get away with that without causing all the tongues of the matrons in the city to wag disapprovingly. Or they are but the women do not let him hear them. They dare not chance offending him! I could always write a letter. Have the Major send it by special courier to an incredibly highly placed Continental officer that I am well acquainted with; resolve this situation in a trice. But I am afraid General Howe and Major Andre will not allow me to leave and will become incredibly cross with me especially when they find out who the officer is. Despite the fact that our political views are generally at odds, I find him quite agreeable and wonderful company. He is incredibly entertaining. We appear to get on. I know that I will never be bored or unhappy." Mary explained. "But sometimes I feel as though my life is slipping away and there is nothing that I can do to stop it."
"You are far too young to believe that your life is slipping away. You are young and healthy. You have your entire life before you. Enjoy it! Grasp it!"
"What is this about enjoying and grasping, Abigail?" John asked. He was leaning with one of his shoulders propped against the open doorway that separated his room from Mary's, pushing off it, he walked slowly into the room. "Shouldn't you be abed asleep, Lady Mary? Or were you anxiously awaiting my arrival? You knew that I would not fail you. We cannot have the likes of Young Tarleton, Lieutenant Brandon or Captain Simcoe for that matter paying Your Ladyship untoward attention. It is bitter cold this evening. Abigail I do hope that you have made certain that Her Ladyship's bedclothes are warm. We cannot have her coming down with an ague."
"No, Major Andre." Abigail said.
"Good. You may retire for the night then. I will personally tend to Lady Mary for what is left of the evening." John dismissed the maid. "I believe we do have some enjoying and grasping to attend to, don't we?"
"Yes, Major. Good night, Lady Mary." Abigail said curtseying to Mary before she left.
"Good night, Abigail." Mary replied.
"So kind of you to wait up, were you pining long?"
"What do you think?"
"Hmmm... You were most probably finished with the yearning and were starting on the aching, weren't you, Dearest?"
"You are quite perceptive. I see that your divining skills are working once more." She bantered back finding herself unable to tear her gaze away from the expanse of his chest revealed by the open neck on his shirt. "I do find that I am rather enjoying gazing at Jean En Dishabille."
"Excellent! As well you should be." He countered, the corners of his mouth curling up in a smile.
"Are you aching to grasp and enjoy?" He asked drawing her to him, noting how their bodies fit so well together, like the pieces of a puzzle, his arms encircling her in an embrace. "Do you want me to kiss you, Mary?" He whispered softly.
"Yes!" She breathed.
"Where? Where do you want to grasp and enjoy your pleasure?"
"Everywhere! Make me blissfully and incandescently happy." She was becoming rather skilled at distracting him by playing into his desire and hunger for her. She wanted him, too!
"Please." She whispered.
"Please what?"
"Make me blissfully and incandescently happy as I grasp and enjoy my pleasure." Mary flirted dancing her fingertips over John's chest, tracing patterns, allowing them to dip beneath the neckline
of his shirt.
"Whatever you want and desire, My Darling Mary! Whatever you desire..."

Chapter End Notes

Once again, a huge thank you to those people that have been kind enough to leave kudos and comments on this story, I appreciate your kindness and praise. I am humbled by all the love shown this story.

Matters heated up a quite a bit between our heroine and hero in this chapter.

Casswell- Massey has been in operation since 1752. George Washington wore their No. 6 cologne which is still manufactured to this day. Sandalwood was a popular fragrance for gentlemen in the 18th century. Here is a link to the Casswell- Massey website:
http://www.caswellmassey.com/

A fastidious person by nature, one would imagine that Major John Andre had exhausted the supply of sandalwood soap that he had most probably brought from England. He would have sent to the Newport, Rhode Island based company for more. Or, a much more plausible scenario, had absconded it from one of the patriot homes they had raided in New York.

The information presented about Ben Tallmadge's father is to the best of my knowledge accurate. It was not uncommon for friends and business associates to discuss matches between their children. Ben was a best friend of Mary's two elder brothers, Edward and James (Ned and Jamie) having attended Yale with them. Mary would have been considered quite a good match for him, being an incredibly wealthy merchant's daughter (who was also a member of the British Aristocracy) with a large dowry/fortune of her own. She also had/has international connections through her families trading interests in the Empire connections the Tallmadges would have been fortunate to acquire.

Major John Andre had many artistic talents. He was an incredibly skilled flautist/musician.
"I will get you for that!" John declared, racing after Mary after she had volleyed a snowball at him, hitting him in the chest tossing down the gauntlet for a rather spirited battle neither caring that it was most improper and not within the Rules of Etiquette for the Daughter of a Peer and a High Ranking Officer of His Majesty's Army to engage in such a game.

"I would like to see you try, Major!" She cried, scooping up a handful of snow, packing it between her gloved hands, preparing her next assault as she ducked to avoid the snowball tossed back at her. She anticipated too late, it grazed the top of her head. "Ahhhh!" She would pay him in kind for that. She did, sending another snowball aimed at his broad chest, it met its mark, exploding near his heart sending some snow splattering onto his chin. He chuckled. "You play a dangerous game, Milady!"

Scooping up some snow, he compacted it and tossed it back toward Mary, hitting her on the back as she stepped aside to avoid it, shrieking with laughter causing several Regulars to stop the cleaning of their bayonets turn and look.

"How dangerous?" She asked, compacting another snowball, preparing for her next assault. "Should I be fearful?"

"Yes, incredibly so." He replied grinning, tossing a snowball at her. This one hit her chest while he stalked toward her across the snow covered ground. "Though I promise not to react as the 29th did." He remarked making a reference to the regiment that was involved in the Boston Massacre which had started with, amongst other things, the tossing of snowballs.

"I most certainly hope not! That was completely unfair! What do you intend to do?" Watching him, she began to take steps backward, tossing her snowball at her opponent. It hit his upper left arm before she took another step backward against a tree. Trapped!

"Was it? I look so forward to see what you will do in retaliation. It appears that you have been caught, My Pretty Ginger haired Fox." John said, still grinning. He reached her in two strides just as she tugged a snow covered branch of the tree sending snow falling down on their hats, faces and shoulders.

Mary burst out laughing while John sputtered under the assault reaching for her before she made her escape, catching her about the waist. "Cheeky Madame! Touche!" He exclaimed, holding her fast, her back against his hard chest. "I have you now!"

"Haven't you learnt never to underestimate your opponent? You do not have me for long!"

Wriggling to get out of his grasp, her chest rose and fell, the feel of his rock hard thighs through layers of petticoats, her gown and cloak, made her breath hitch with desire. She finally managed to wriggle free, ducking under the tree branch, increasing her pace, trying to move as fast as her heavy skirts would allow snaking her way through the sea of scarlet coated officers and Regulars that had paused to watch their game the Major in hot pursuit.

The officers and men called out words of encouragement and quips to the pair, the officers in favor of Mary whilst the Regulars championed John some making bets as to what the outcome would be and where, and how, it would end. The sexual electricity between the pair was palatable as the Major chased Mary through the maze of red.

She reached for a handful of snow, smushing it up into his face as she turned quickly feeling him upon her.

They both burst out laughing, John wiping the snow from his eyes, sputtering, shaking his head.

"You should not have done that, Sweetheart!" He warned, clucking his tongue in mock disapproval. Not waiting a beat, he picked her up tossing her over a broad shoulder, Mary shrieking in alarm as he started walking with her toward the stairs that lead inside, the officers and soldiers cheering their
"Give her a flourish for me, Major!" One of them called out.
"You have been caught in a snare, Lady Mary! I have no intentions of releasing you." He declared with a laugh.
"Did it ever occur to you that I may have wanted you to catch me?" She shot back turning her head to look at him, removing her hat, while he mounted the stairs walking up quite purposely to the front door to the laughter, cheers and more lewd comment from the men making Mary blush.
"Did you now?" He bantered back his attention totally focused on Mary.
"Yes! But the question remains now that I am caught, what do you intend to do with me?"
"I believe you know the answer to that, Mary!" He murmured chuckling when she gasped in shock catching on to exactly what he intended to do with her and to her. "But only after we bathe, shall we economize on the water, share a tub? I most certainly will not mind but I know it will shock Abigail and your maids." He walked through the front door and down the entrance hall toward the stairs to the upper floors.
"Put me down, you rogue!" Mary cried.
"Oh, no! I have every intention to see this through to its conclusion!" John replied.

He did not set her upon her feet until they were upstairs in her bedroom. A tub had been placed near the fireplace where a warm crackling fire blazed mimicking the steam that was rising from the tub. "Let's get you out of these cold wet garments. We cannot have Your Ladyship catching a chill. General Howe would have me hanged for certain if you were lost you to some fever that could have been prevented!" He grabbed her hat and his own, tossing them on a nearby chair, he then went to remove her cape and his, tossing them over the back of the same chair. The gloves came next.
"Nor you, Major." Mary said undoing the closures of his scarlet jacket. "Hmmm... My aim is quite good." She mused noting the wet spots indicating where the snowballs had hit their marks. "With practice you could become a sharpshooter of quite some skill." He teased, blue eyes dancing. "You flatter me!" Mary exclaimed pushing his jacket off his shoulders. "Where is Abigail?"
"I believe I rather shocked her by dismissing her and the pair of maids. I told her that I would assist and attend you." John answered a smile playing about his mouth. "Make haste now, Dearest, remove the rest of those damp clothes and climb into that tub."
They divested one another of their garments quickly.
"You are perfection." Assessing her naked form that was displayed before him, John wished to investigate and find if there were any other freckles in strategic and desirous spots about her person. He most certainly had all intentions to pay particular attention to the one of her left hip and the other in the inside of the right thigh. Mary blushed from the top of her head to the tips of her toes, stepping into the water.
"The Creator was kind when He fashioned you as well." Mary complimented finally able to take in her lover's physique in the harsh light of day. Feeling that all too familiar physical reaction she experienced when he was about or she heard him speak.
"Quickly wash then I will show you other manners in which to get warm."
"General Howe is expecting us at breakfast."
"Not for some time. He would rather have his most important guest warmed through and not endanger of catching a chill. I believe he will excuse our tardiness, Mary." John countered picking up a sponge and cake of soap. "Shall I wash you? Then you can reciprocate the kindness?"
"Is that wise? Remember what occurred when I washed the stink from you. What will happen when I wash the chill away?"
"Shall we investigate?" He asked encircling an arm about her naked torso dropping the soap and sponge in the tub.
She trembled at his touch. Her eyes fluttering closed. "John!" She whispered feeling his hot mouth pressing burning kisses along the side of her neck, tipping her chin back, his lips finding hers.
"Yes, Dearest?" He asked trailing a path of kisses from her mouth down the column of her throat, whilst the arm about her torso fell lower, his fingers skimming over the bare skin of her abdomen and
Mary's breath caught, biting her bottom lip, her eyes flying open, her body leaning into his, her lower back pressing against his enormous erection, his hand slipping between the juncture of her pale thighs, caressing the smooth flesh that inflamed at his touch. "I thought you wished our bath to be quick?" She asked.

"I lied. I am finding that I am rather enjoying your reactions to my touch apparently as much as you are mine. You are already slick and burning for me. Do you wish me to ease that ache between your legs?" He asked slipping an index finger inside her sheath, dashing it gently over that most sensitive nub of flesh.

"So eager to see to my pleasure now that you have forgotten I was to reciprocate the kindness. La, John! It is gratifying to know that I am capable of distracting you so easily." She teased, looking up at him with dancing eyes and a smile.

"When you stand naked before me wearing nothing but pearls in your ears then, yes." He said, loosening the pins from her hair, letting them fall to the carpet, the heavy cascade of red-gold waves falling about her shoulders, over her bare breasts. "Ah! My own Venus!" His finger increased the pressure against her, caressing her with slow sure strokes.

She moaned, digging her fingers into his forearm.

"Who is distracted now?" He asked with a chuckle and a wicked smile.

"You do not play fair."

"I play to win."

"So you intend to win me?"

"Indeed! I will ruin you for all the others. Once you have me you won't want anyone else. I am pretty damn good at ruining things."

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Oh, Billy! Billy! Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me harder! HARDER!"

Philomena cried, raking her nails down the admiral's back as he thrust into her. They were in his lodgings in the City, in his bed. What the admiral lacked in the fine finesse of wooing a woman such as her, Admiral Clark made up for with his sexual vigor and inventiveness between the sheets. There were no sweet flowering words like she had received from Major John Andre. Billy Clark had told her that he had learnt countless ways of how to please a woman. He even had a book from India that had illustrated pages of various carnal acts some showing more than just strictly a man and a woman. Philomena was curious about duplicating the one involving another woman and a man where the second woman was pleasuring the first between her legs with her mouth as the man thrust himself inside her from behind. At the moment the book was open to the page illustrating the pasha's consort straddling his head, presenting herself for his mouth's eager attentions as she sucked his cock.

"You have a hot hungry cunt, Philly, my girl!" Admiral William Clark ground out, tweaking one of the actress' nipples with a thumb and forefinger as he continued to move within her, releasing the nipple, reaching between their bodies, with the same thumb and forefinger to tweak the sensitive jewel between her legs as she wrapped her legs higher about his hips so he could thrust even deeper inside her eager sheath.

Philomena felt herself tightening about the admiral's enormous cock. "You have a randy cock, Billy! It fills me full to bursting! When will you let me suck it like a sweet! Duplicate the page from that book?"

"In time, my Sweet Philly! Oh, you sweet little bitch! That's it! Come for me! Oh! Oh! Grgh! Ungh! Ungh!" He cried out pouring himself inside her, collapsing on top of her.

"Oh, Billy! Billy!" Philomena felt her little hidden jewel start to throb under the admiral's expert touch. It felt so good. She shrieked her pleasure falling next to him, a sheen of perspiration covering her chest and breasts. God! He was a vigorous lover. She couldn't seem to get enough of him. They lay together afterward, Philomena running her fingers through the mess of auburn colored hair upon his chest swirling patterns within it with her fingertips. John Andre and Charles Grey had both had non-existent if minimal hair on their chests. She found that she enjoyed the roughness of Billy Clark's against her breasts it excited and aroused her. "Is Captain Nicholls still intent on paying a call
on Lady Mary Ludlow? Did the flame haired heiress make his cock twitch at the theatre the other evening?
"She made mine!" The admiral replied with a roguish smile. He chuckled.
Philomena pinched him.
"Ouch! I deserved that. They say her father Sutherland has settled a fortune of 60 thousand a year upon her when she reaches the age of eighteen which includes a sugar plantation in the West Indies, acreage and a handful of manors in England, an interest in the East Indian Company."
"Christian Nicholls has more reason to call on her. Hopefully he is successful."
"Major John Andre needs a rich and influential wife." Clark baited.
That comment hit a nerve, Philomena's face darkened, her eyes flashed with anger.
"Come now, Philly! You yourself told me that you had traded up when I fucked you that first time, an admiral in the Senior Service, you said, giggling, was more important than a mere major."
"So I did." She pouted her pretty pink lips petulant.
"Remember the perks of His Majesty's navy, Philly Love the prize money has made many an officer incredibly rich! Much can be said about men that travel about His Majesty's empire. We have a certain, erm, worldly sophistication and access to wicked and naughty books from the Middle and Far East, amongst many other extravagances." He added with a lascivious grin. "I can always ask that servant maid, Kezia, the brunette with the ample tits and pretty arse, to come and join us. We can duplicate that page you have been curious about. Have you ever feasted upon another woman's quim? Do you want her to feast upon yours?"
She didn't hesitate. "Yes!"

One of Mary's hands played with John's queue and tiny braid, the other moved frantically up and down his naked back from shoulder to hip, one of her legs wrapped about that same hip as her lover's engorged organ moved against that most sensitive part of her whilst he planted scorching hot kisses and love bites along a side of her neck. He had told her he would not take her completely, not yet, but he had been totally unable to resist sharing with her a taste of the intimacies that awaited her. She tried not to cry out as matters between then rose quickly to a fever pitch. Her breath coming in short hot pants, she closed her mouth, licked her dry lips with the pointed tip of her tongue.
"OOOOooohhhhh!" She crooned arching her back, thrusting her breasts forward, the nipples brushing against his hard muscular chest shamelessly seeking the source of her pleasure. It was sinful and immoral but she wanted it. Wanted him, she was burning for him, inflamed. It was achingly obvious he wanted her as well. He had said as much, showed her as much. She had the love bites on her inner thighs and left hip bone to prove it.
This was no longer about warming and getting dry after their outdoor romp in the snow that morning. It was about them, their lust, passion and desire for one another. If truth were told, it had been about that the moment she had volleyed the first snowball at him. About all the time they spent in one another's company. Every time he sought her out.
"The French call it le petit mort- the Little Death- shall you allow me to help you expire a wee bit and then take you to heaven?" He whispered in one of her ears.
"Oui!"
He reached his crisis a scant before her, spending his seed over her lower belly, his mouth covering hers in a fierce kiss to capture and conceal her cries of rapture as behind her eyelids her world shattered in a thousand stars as she experience le petit mort as he had promised.
He reached for a cloth on the bedside table dipping it into the basin of water set beside it.
"Did I make you gloriously happy?" He asked.
"Incandescently!"
"Of course!" He chuckled, kissing the tip of her nose. "Warm enough now? No more fears of catching a chill?"
She shook her head. "I find that I am rather hot now, near to burning."
John laughed lightly as he passed the wet cloth over her lower belly removing the evidence of his passion. He was about to answer when there came a light knock on the door, it opened.

"Lady Mary?" Abigail asked, bustling into the room holding a tray, upon it which were a pot of hot chocolate, a pot of tea, sugar, cream, cups and saucers, spoons and napkins along with a plate with some fresh bread warm from the oven, a crock of butter and some Wild Connecticut raspberry jam. "I have brought your hot chocolate and Major Andre's tea. I also took the liberty of including some fresh bread, butter and jam. I thought you may enjoy some sustenance before breakfast after that time you spent out in the fresh air this morning."

"Merde!" Expelling a vulgar oath, John quickly dove beneath the bedclothes tossing them over his head leaving a large long rather well formed mountain of man beside Mary beneath the bedclothes. Abigail approached the bed with the tray in hand, she sniffed, the unmistakable scent of sex and the sandalwood scent of the soap the Major used hung in the air. Her eyes traveled to her mistress noting Mary's bright shining eyes, gently flushed skin, her lips wet and swollen as though she had recently been most thoroughly kissed, hair loose about her shoulders and most telling of all, the fact that Mary was clearly naked beneath the down filled duvet which she clung against her breasts. Abigail could just about discern some movement beneath the bedclothes about where one of Mary's thighs would be where whomever the lump happened to be was clearing caressing her. Abigail could just imagine who that someone was. "Would you care for the tray?" She asked. Mary bit her lower lip to stop from crying out. Major Andre was obviously becoming rather frisky beneath the bedclothes. She nodded at Abigail. "Yes please, Thank you, Abigail. Place it on this side of the bed please." Mary indicated the opposite side where John was.

"Not over the lump here?" Abigail asked. She prayed that the Major knew exactly what he was doing with Mary's reputation. He was lucky that Abigail cared a great deal for Mary and would never gossip about or betray her.

Mary hesitated. "Well..." She mused a wicked smile playing about her mouth. "Tea and chocolate stains are ever so difficult to remove from cotton... Not on the lump. Not this time." She squeaked as beneath the bedclothes, John pinched her thigh indicating that he apparently was not amused that she would even ponder placing the tray over him. He would find a way to pay her back for her cheek and take great pleasure in doing so!

Abigail scowled. "I will be back with Molly and Pricilla in half an hour to help you dress."

"Thank you, Abigail." Mary said as the black woman bobbed a curtsy and the lump all of sudden obtained a pair of rather masculine hands, and some dark blond hair as the Major came out from where he was hiding having a care that Abigail did not catch sight of him. Sighing with relief when she did not, he had been fortunate. This time!

An hour later, Mary and John entered the dining room together to much loud appreciation from the officers, who all stood out of respect for Mary, bowing in acknowledgement whilst the Major received many handshakes and claps on the back as the pair sought their seats. Mary taking the empty spot that had been reserved for her next to General Howe as the Major sat in a spot directly across the table from her between Captain Simcoe and Banstre Tarleton.

"Be certain that Lady Mary receives enough breakfast to satisfy her this morning. Her Ladyship has exerted herself to such an extent in various sundry activities as to have worked up quite an appetite." John quipped looking over at Mary from beneath hooded eyes across the table a mischievous smile playing about his mouth.

"I demand a rematch if the snowball fight, Major!"

John arched a brow over an eye his gaze locking with hers. "Of course, Lady Mary, at Your Ladyship's earliest convenience. I would be delighted and honored to indulge your desire." The double entendre of his words sent a shiver down her spine. She trembled slightly.

"Still chilled?" John asked, watching her, his eyes flashing with amusement. "Do you need to venture upstairs once more? I can warm you if you like. I do not wish to be neglectful of my duty."

"Nothing is amiss, Major, just a slight draft though I do thank you for your concern for my welfare." Mary said sweetly.
"Of course! The continued maintenance of your protection and happiness are two of my primary concerns." His voice was a low seductive caress as he took a serving of scrambled eggs off a silver tray watching as Mary took some slices of bacon, toast and stewed apples and pears, passing the platters on to General Howe.

"I am quite impressed at your commitment and attention to your duty, Major! You should be commended." General Howe said, looking from Mary to John. He was quite aware of the Major's ambitions in regards to the young lady which he knew were not sitting well with her other suitors especially General Randall, who sat in his place with a black look upon his face. Howe had a mind to send the General on a patrol to put him in a more amiable mood. Mayhap some hunting of rebels would restore Black Jack's good humor? He jumped on an idea.

"General Randall, I would like you to take a company of men to search out traitors and rebels along the border with New Jersey." Howe stated. Randall nodded. "When would you like me to be prepared to leave, Your Excellency?" He asked. He wasn't pleased that he was being sending away. He would have liked to have some time to court the luscious spirited red-head seated beside the General but apparently Providence had other plans.

"At your earliest convenience, Randall, Major Andre's intelligence tells us that the rebels are stirring for a fight. Look at what they did to that safe house in Connecticut? I would like to place the fear of God and His Majesty into them before the Christmas Season is completely upon us." Howe said, taking a forkful of the stewed fruit, bringing it to his mouth, chewing. John graciously nodded at Howe's acknowledgement of his work.

"Mayhap Major Andre would care to join the patrol instead of spending his valuable time playing nursemaid and guardian to a chit of seventeen?" Randall provided, staring across the table at John his hazel eyes cold, his lips set.

"The orders to play nursemaid and guardian come personally from General Howe to keep a Peer of the Realms daughter safe and unmolested a duty that I was honored to undertake." John shot across the table at Randall.

"I do believe in your haste to bait and humiliate Major Andre that you have insulted General Howe, General Randall." Simcoe observed. "However, I do believe that there is a not an officer seated at this table that does not envy the Major his Good Fortune to have been given such an enviable order."

"Not to mention that you referred to the Lady Mary, whom you have been put forth as a potential spouse of, as a Chit of Seventeen, certainly not the kindest way to describe that young woman that you could be spending the rest of your mortal life with. My Lady, I would advise Your Ladyship to reconsider General Randall's suit and suitability as a husband." General Howe stated. John hid his self-satisfied smirk behind his tea cup, taking a sip. Apparently the Lady Mary's suitors were now down to three.

"General Howe, I do protest... I... I spoke out of turn..." Randall began.

"You should have measured your words, Randall, before they left your mouth. Your rash and reckless comments have cost you a potential bride. Search about the Loyalist widows and daughters, I am certain you will find one to your liking! I suggest you time your leaving upon that patrol as soon as you are able!" Howe would hear no more on the matter. He was rather annoyed with Randall. He wished to speak on more pleasant matters. "What do you have planned today, Lady Mary another trip to Madame Bernon's for a fitting? Attend to some shopping, a bookshop perhaps? Are there pressing duties at the Academy? Do you have to pay some social calls? I know that there have been many invitations piling up that you and Major Andre must sift through and decide which ones to accept." The General turned to Mary.

Mary looked across the table at John. "I was not aware of a fitting scheduled at Madame Bernon's."

"Oh, Gracious! Forgive me, Lady Mary! I myself may have spoken out of turn. The Christmas season is upon us!" Howe laughed trying to smooth over a potentially awkward situation. "Major?" "I believe Madame Bernon did say that we were to visit her in three days for fitting of your gowns."

In the flurry of your adjustment to your new home Your Ladyship may have forgotten about the appointment which is most certainly understandable with the losses of Majors Edrington and Graham and Captain Simcoe's arrival. The Christmas season is upon us. Your Ladyship may have an admirer
or several that has commissioned presents for you from Madame's grand establishment though their
type I cannot say." John winked across the table at Mary.
"That all sounds rather clandestine, Major, another secret mission of sorts?" Simcoe asked.
"In a manner of speaking, Captain Simcoe, for the gentleman's eyes only." John answered eyes still
riveted on Mary, who was suddenly interested in the eggs upon her plate; eyes lowered, long lashes
fanned against her gently flushed pale cheeks.
"You are rather quiet this morning, Tarleton," Simcoe observed.
"Do excuse me for not partaking in the conversation at present. I am in no condition to banter the
morning away as much as I would like to." Ban offered his apologies taking a long sip of his tea,
biting into a piece of toast smeared with fresh butter and the raspberry jam from Connecticut that
Mary and her aunt had made over that past summer the same jam that Abigail had served to Mary
and John that morning up in Mary's bedroom.
"Pity that. You are always so amusing, Tarleton." John quipped. "Mayhap when your head clears
you will avail us with some your wit?"
"Too much drink and debauchery last evening?" Simcoe asked, feeling a sudden stabbing pain
against an ankle where Major Andre had kicked him, John turning his head to glare at the Captain
indicating Mary.
"Please, Captain, such conversation is inappropriate with a young lady present." John's voice was
tight with warning.
"Of, course! Do excuse me, Lady Mary." Simcoe said.
"Some of us much seek our pleasures elsewhere, we are not so fortunate to have a beautiful young
woman to engage in spirited romps in the snow with though I would have a care, Andre, the lady
proved that she had good aim and grasp of battle tactics until she was bested. You showed yourself
to be a most formidable opponent, Lady Mary, thank Providence you are on our side!" Ban raised
his teacup, wincing in pain. His head hurt. So did his body. Those wenches had been greedy and
would not let him rest last evening.
"I thank you!" Mary said.
"Though I would hasten a guess as to what transpired once Her Ladyship was carried indoors, like a
spoil of war. Playing at the Norman Conqueror and the Saxon Maiden, Major?" Ban went on.
"Just discharging my duty, is that not correct, Lady Mary?" John asked.
"Yes, Major. To the best of your ability, I have no complaints. Quite the contrary, you have been
most attentive and meticulous." Mary stated innocently completely unaware of her double entendre.
John smiled at her across the breadth of the table, his mouth turning up at the corners. "Your
Ladyship makes it a real pleasure." His eyes smoldered. "As much as I would care to spend the
morning bantering over breakfast, I have to escort a lady to the dressmaker, milliner and booksellers.
Are you just about finished, Lady Mary? We do have your permission to retire, General?" John's
question was directed at Howe.
"That decision lies with Her Ladyship, but yes, of course! Be off, the pair of you!" Howe said with a
wave of his hand.

"Oh, Good God! There is a portion of the Fairfax Women upon the street traveling in the direction of
Madame Bernon's. It is to be my misfortune to come across them whenever I set out about the city?
"John complained as the carriage stopped.
"Do not be unkind." Mary chided. "They cannot help it if they find you irresistible." She added
teasingly.
"They do, do they? How do you know that?" John asked.
"They cannot conceal their interest. They flaunt themselves. Miss Fairfax is wildly jealous and
furious that I am under your protection. She said as much to Miss Shaw when she paid a recent call
at the Academy." Mary divulged.
"How General Howe chooses and seeks to affect the assurance and safety of a Lady of Great
Consequence is none of Mistress Fairfax's, nor Madame Fairfax's, concern!" He spat assisting her out
of the carriage, squeezing the hand he held as he helped her down, being certain that her foot did not
slip on the footplate. She landed safely on her feet, noting that the Major held onto her hand a scant longer than was considered proper. He still had not released it.

"Major Andre! Major Andre!" Jane Fairfax called. They had been spotted. Jane came bustling over, her mother and a servant trailing in her wake, smiling flirtatiously, her expression changing when she spotted Mary standing beside the strikingly good looking British officer, watching as the Major's finger slowly fell away from Lady Mary's hand that he had been holding.

"Lady Mary!" She said in a poor attempt to be cordial. It was clear that she was not happy that Mary was once more in Major John Andre's company and that he appeared to be enjoying spending time in hers. He had not been able to take his eyes from the flame haired bitch since Jane had approached the pair.

"The Ladies Fairfax! What a pleasant surprise!" John exclaimed, acknowledging the pair but not bothering to take their hands and kiss them. "If you will please excuse me the proprieties of introduction, I fear that the Lady Mary is a bit late for her fitting with Madame Bernon. We do not wish to keep the dear lady waiting." Reaching beneath her cloak he placed a hand upon the small of Mary's back, going to steer her up the stairs to the entrance to the French modiste's shop, his hand falling down slightly over what would have been her the slope to her buttocks if they were not covered with petticoats and her gown, allowing his hand to linger there.

"Oh, we have a fitting with Madame Bernon as well! Father promised me a new dress for the Christmas Ball. You will come, Major Andre, do say you will. I will be so disappointed if you do not! Mama and Papa sent invitations to all the important officers in the city. Did you not receive it?" Jane Fairfax gushed.

John paused on his way up the stairs. "Miss Fairfax, I am terribly sorry. Certain orders from General Howe have kept me from tending to my correspondence as of late. But I will be certain to have a look once Her Ladyship and I return to headquarters. If you would please excuse me, I can tarry no longer." John said sharply walking past the Fairfaxes into the shop.

"Lady Mary! Major Andre! Such a pleasure to see you!" The tiny French woman exclaimed a genuine smile lighting her face, dashing over to greet them. She grasped Mary by the hands, kissing the younger woman upon both cheeks noting a sparkle in her eyes and a certain sensuality that had not been there upon their first meeting. Major Andre was apparently keeping her well protected. She chuckled inwardly, offering her hand to John which he took, kissing it, allowing her to kiss him upon both cheeks. "The ladies will assist you, Mademoiselle Marie. Jean, if you will come with me several of the items that you ordered are complete."

John grinned. "You are a true treasure!" He followed Gabrielle Bernon to a private room off the main salon.

"Flatterer! Though it appears these garments may not be necessary. From the looks of it you will have her completely seduced by New Year!" Gabrielle exclaimed reaching for three of the distinctive dark indigo blue boxes with silver lettering and lilies decorating the tops, setting each on the counter, lifting the lids, parting the white tissue, moving aside the white silk fragrant sachet that accompanied all of her creations. "I will have the others completed in several days in time for Christmas! Look!" She commanded tilting one of the boxes up to show John a wrapper and night gown if almost transparent pale pink silk edged abundantly with silver lace at the extremely low cut neck line and upon the cuffs of the long full sleeves. The ribbon closures were a shade darker than the gown. The wrapper was the same fabric of the gown, created to be worn alone or with the nightgown, it was trimmed with the same silver lace, silk and velvet ribbons, the belt of the gown was a long piece of embroidered velvet ribbon upon which were roses and lilies.

"That will not remain on her long." The old lady chuckled. "Nor this!" Reaching within the tissue of the second box she withdrew the most luscious corset of black lace, a scarlet red ribbon bow at the center of the sweetheart top accented with gold beads.

John gasped in appreciation. "You have outdone yourself, Gabrielle! Milles merci! Milles merci!" Gabrielle graciously accepted the praise, her black eyes glittering with pleasure. "Ah! There is one
more!" She told him showing him the icy blue silk nightgown and deeper blue dressing gown, trimmed with in the same lace and velvet ribbons.

"Exquisite!" John whispered.

Gabrielle laughed. "Shall I have them wrapped?"

John nodded. "Of course! Madame, I do not know what to say. They are beyond what I would have ever imagined."

"Ah! Do not be too hasty, Jean. I believe that there is a young lady in a particular state of dishabille that would benefit from your ardent attentions. Shall I give word that you would desire some minutes alone with your belle amie? I would be most discreet. Miss Fairfax has been whining to all that will listen that Marie stole you from her. Ha! She would ruin her Ladyship with that spiteful tongue if she could. Do not fret, my boy, I have placed le petite chienne in her place! For now!"

"It disappoints me, Madame Gabrielle, but I can be patient especially with that vicious girl intent on casting aspersions upon Lady Mary's reputation. Much can be said for delayed gratification." John replied unable to hide the disappointment in his voice.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter X
Once again, a huge thank you to those people that have been kind enough to leave kudos and comments on this story, I appreciate your kindness and praise. I am humbled by all the love shown this story. Special Thanks go out to EB and RS for giving me critical feedback when asked for and needed. Mas Merci, Ladies!

I confess that a large portion of this chapter was written during the sub zero temperature New England winter days in February and Early March hence the copious amounts of naughty. Hey! A girl has to warm up! Hope you all enjoyed the romp in the snow and what occurred afterward.
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

The bookshop was the largest in the city and fortunately had not been damaged by the fire that has swept through. The cases were filled and the tables stacked with tomes on various subjects. "A Fine Good Morning to you, Miss Ludlow! Major!" The apprentice putting out books and arranging them on a front table greeted the couple as they crossed the threshold. "Good Morning, Matthew!" Mary said warmly to the young brunet smiling warmly. "It does me good to see you, Miss. It has been some time. Mister Broderick will be delighted to hear that you are still in the city and have come by to call and shop, especially after the previous unrest. The Academy is still operating?" Matthew asked, his dark brown eyes gazing down into Mary's blue ones. "Yes." Mary replied. "Though I daresay having so many officers and soldiers in the city has increased our revenue, the officers and Regulars flock here as bees to honey, seeking their books, pamphlets and newspapers. Mister Broderick cannot seem to keep the most popular items stocked. They sell out almost as soon as we get them. Then when we receive a second shipment those vanish as well. A new book on The History of Rome arrived. I took the liberty of setting a copy aside for you, Miss Ludlow, in the anticipation of when you would come in again before the Lobs... officers and Regulars purchase all of our copies. Though it is rather large to take on campaign." Matthew hoped that the Major had not heard his slip of the tongue. John cleared his throat loudly, taking a step forward. "You do have a copy of Mr. Dalrymple's memoirs?" He asked. "Goldsmith's History of England?" "Yes, Major. They happen to be on this table here." Matthew indicated a table near the one he had been stocking. "Your Ladyship may find those useful in the classroom." John offered. "Ah! I see you have received the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Does it contain all one hundred volumes?" Matthew nodded. "The set is complete, Major. Mister Broderick would not be selling it if he had not received all the volumes from England." "Ah! Excellent! Excellent! When could you have it packed and sent to the St. Thomas Aquinas Academy? You are aware of the address, are you not?" John inquired. "Major Andre!" Mary was genuinely surprised at his generosity. "I will hear no protests, Lady Mary, consider it a Christmas gift to the young ladies as a gesture of Thanks for their being so gracious in sharing their beloved headmistress with a most grateful officer in His Majesty's Army." John stated. "I thank you!" Mary said. "How could I ever repay such generosity?" "I will most certainly think of a way." John smirked. "Perhaps another spirited romp as we engaged in this morning? That was most invigorating as what occurred afterward..." He paused. "That was most delightful!"

Several Days Later
Near the Connecticut/New York Border

"Holy Shite! Christmas seems to have come early for you, Tall Boy! Did you see what Wee May Ludlow sent from New York all tied up with a pretty red ribbon? I would bet a bottle of good Madiera that there is salt petre in this keg!" Caleb Brewster said, cradling it in his arms like a precious newborn baby, grinning from ear to ear. "She came through again! God Bless her! This
doesn't seem to be the sum of it either, Benny Boy! There is a ham, some molasses, several bottles of rum and one of the Ludlow Ladies' famous fruit cakes and your favorite walnut tarts!" He stated as one of the soldiers came in balancing two bottles of rum and the fruitcake. "If you drop and damage that cake you're a dead man!" Caleb warned.

"Be easy on him, Caleb!" Ben laughed, his expression turning somber taking the fruit cake, tarts and the bottles of rum from the soldier, moving aside a checker table on a nearby camp table to make room for them. "Thank you, Corporal Joslin."

"Is this to be the last of it then? Is she done? Is that what she told you when you saw her, Ben?" Caleb asked.

"She cannot very well be carrying on given the circumstances now can she? I cannot with good conscience ask her to do that. Ned, Jamie and I were close as brothers with Nathan at Yale; we trusted each other with our lives. I cannot break that trust. They asked me to look out for their sister if I could."

"What the hell are you talking about? The fact that her Pa is the Fucking Duke of Sutherland that is she is hobnobbing with the Lobsters! Damn it! She could probably boil up and serve on a platter to Washington, Howe and all his high ranking officers and that Bastard Rogers to boot!"

"Howe plans to marry her to one of them. Major John Andre is quite taken with her." Ben explained.

"So you said. Leading that half Frenchie about by his cock, eh? His Sweet Little Dove?" Caleb chuckled, grinning wickedly. "More's the better for us, Benny Boy! Get Wee May in his bed! Christ knows what secrets Major Andre will divulge when he's fucking her!"

"Would you ask her to risk hanging if she is discovered, Caleb? She isn't one of us now. Ned and Jamie would string me up if I placed her in more danger. Andre would know where the intelligence was coming from. He would not be the sort to divulge army secrets when he is fucking his wife. Then, if she is discovered, most likely even with her wealth and connections, her marriage will be annulled, she will be given to the officers and the soldiers as a whore, raped within an inch of her life and then hanged as a traitor. Do you really want that to happen to her? Because if you do, then you are more heartless than Black Jack Randall! "Ben stated.

"Well, hell and damnation! I thought her connections to Washington, the blunt she has and her Pa would get her out in time. I am sorry that I did not think the plan through. But we would be foolish not to consider making use of her living within that snake pit. Where do your loyalties lie?"

"You know where my loyalties lie!" Ben snapped becoming irritated. "Anna's maid, Abigail is at headquarters as well. Depend on her. I will not have Mary Ludlow's death or what otherwise may happen to her on my conscience. We already place her in enough danger with the Academy being used as a safe house. We cannot arouse anymore suspicions."

"I don't believe that suspicions are what she is arousing in Major Andre! Alright! We will find someone else with far less to lose than Wee May to bring us our secrets from New York. I know some whores that would be willing to fuck Lobsters and tell their secrets."

"Caleb! Use the whores. From now on Mary Ludlow is off limits. It is far too dangerous."

"Whores it is! Regret possibly losing May to the Major? That your father didn't pursue the match? She's grown into quite the beauty hasn't she? Beauty and brains, eh. Scholar boy, quite the potent combination! She also remembered to send your favorite walnut tarts."

"If she heard you talking just now she would not have sent the salt petre, ham, the rum or the fruitcake. We both know that Howe would have gladly taken the salt petre off her hands and paid a handsome sum for it! As for the fruitcake, you won't get a crumb until you think over what you told me you expected Mary Ludlow to do because you wouldn't place any of your female relations in that sort of danger and would go after any one that would suggest as much! I would like an apology. If I do not received one in an hour the Christmas bounty will be given to Corporal Joslin to distribute among the officers and soldiers!" Ben threatened clearly avoiding the other question which, much to his consternation, had hit a nerve.

"You wouldn't dare!" Caleb cried.

Ben arched a brow at his friend indicating that he was serious.

"Oh, fuck! You would!" Caleb cried.
Back In New York

"Do you believe that we have enough to feed them all?" Mary asked stepping back to survey the long table in the Academy dining room laden with sweets and savories. Her brows furrowed as she studied the centerpiece, several tiers of winter fruits and festive greenery accented with red and white ribbons. The crowning glory at the top was a pineapple which was quickly becoming the symbol of 'Welcome' for New England sea captains. John had helped her with the design, quickly sketching it one evening as they had sat after supper chatting with Tarleton, Kennedy, Simcoe and some of the other officers. John's hot whisper in her ear reminding her that he still hadn't sketched her in only her pearl and diamond necklace, as he had handed it to her, had sent a delicious shiver down her spine. The memory still made her cheeks flame. Turning her head, her eyes fixed on Rachel Alton, one of the Academy's instructors and the older daughter of Brigadier General Isaac Alton of the Continental Army. Like Lottie Shaw, Rachel and her younger sister, Melissa were childhood friends of Mary and hailed from Massachusetts. Nicknamed 'The Adorable Altons' in their home town of Quincy for their pretty looks and impeccable manners, the pair shared Mary's love of learning and her ginger colored hair.

"There are still more platters in the kitchen." Rachel stated.

"How many, are there enough walnut tarts? They are always the first to go. The guests become disappointed that they are not able to have any. I do hope we made enough." Mary fretted.

"It is not my fault that walnut tarts and fruitcake are Ludlow Lady Specialties. There would be more if Captain Kennedy and Major Andre hadn't taken at least a half a dozen each off the tray especially after they found out who had made them." Rachel replied.

"Half a dozen a piece?" Mary was incredulous.

"To have with their tea and sherry whilst working I was told. Many a lady has captured a gentleman's heart with her culinary skills, May. Though I believe a certain someone is far more interested in more than if you make the best walnut tarts in the Colonies." Rachel teased. "However, he did try to wheedle a complete tray out of Lottie when you were speaking to Captain Simcoe about the molasses cookies."

"A complete tray?! I will have to have words with the Major!" Mary said, shaking her head. Rachel looked about to be certain that there were no Redcoats present. "Did you send some of the tarts along to our particular friends?" She asked referring to Ben Tallmadge and Caleb Brewster. Mary smiled. "Of course! They were Ben's favorites. Mother always made certain that we made some when he came to visit."

"Sent more than six, I would warrant." Rachel teased. She nudged one of Mary's arms with one of her own.

"Rachel! It is not like that and you know it!" Mary protested. "We are friends. That is all."

"Friendships have a way of changing and turning to romances. People behave rash and recklessly in uncertain times like these." Rachel posed.

"So says the Continental general's daughter." Mary countered.

"He is wildly good looking, May! Yale educated. Tall and strapping with those gorgeous blue eyes. Just the sort you fancy!" Rachel teased.

"Are you hell bent on getting us into trouble?" Mary asked. "You know I cannot even consider him now."

"You cannot consider him as a husband. It doesn't mean that you cannot have him if you want him. I suggest that you marry Major Andre and take Ben Tallmadge as your secret lover." Rachel posed.

"This way you have the best of both worlds. Come now! Don't look at me that way! The officers have mistresses! Your Major did before you came along."

"I know that. He is not my Major!" Mary shot back becoming irritated. She could not believe Rachel was suggesting such behavior.

"He isn't your major, not yet! Who is to say that he won't take another one? Not that he would, of course, I have heard the soldiers gossiping about how mad for you Major Andre is!" Rachel said. "Mayhap General Howe will be generous and add to your list of suitors when the prisoners are
exchanged? That is if Major Andre doesn't growl fiercely at them all so they do not even have a chance to get close to you."
"Jo...Major Andre told me that there was to be a major several captains and lieutenants in this lot." Mary said.
"John is it?" Rachel teased. "Getting incredibly familiar, I see? More suitors or not I believe that you should still consider a certain delicious Continental officer! One can never have too many beaux, May!"
"You have been reading far too many romances between your preparations for Geography lessons. I should search your bookshelves and take them all away! If any of the officers, especially Major Andre, overheard you speak in that manner we'd both be strung up for certain!"
Rachel rested an index finger on her lower lip pondering what he friend had said. "I have noticed how possessive the Major can be where you are concerned." Her eyes glinted with mischief. "A wee bit of competition, whether he is aware of it or not, will do him good!"
"A wee bit of competition will do who good, whether the gentleman is aware of it or not, Miss Alton?" An all too familiar voice asked.
Mary and Rachel turned to see John swaggering into the room.
"Major Andre! We did not hear you announced." Rachel exclaimed.
"I did not wish to disturb the servants. They are all busy with final preparations for the tea. What is this about stringing people up, Lady Mary? I would never string up anyone unless it was a traitor. Your Ladyship need not worry because you have so ardently professed your allegiance to King and Country. Any doubts that I may still harbor as to the measure of your loyalty can be discussed and attended to in private between us. I have told you that I do have manners and means in which I can rid Your Ladyship of those rebellious tendencies. I will employ what tactics I must if need be."
"Yes, Major. When do you plan on discussing and attending to this matter with me?" Mary asked.
"Later this evening once the tea has concluded. Come to my private office." John said.
Mary glanced sideways at Rachel trying to catch her eye. Praying that John had not overheard what Rachel had said before Mary had reprimanded her for her rash words, especially the name Ben Tallmadge. "At what time? Or shall I seek you out?"
John smiled. "I will seek you out, Lady Mary. Not that I will truly need to, seeing as when you are in the vicinity you appear to draw me as a bee to honey. I cannot manage to stay away."
"Then don't." Mary said.
"I will be by your side the entire tea." John assured her.
"I am the most fortunate of women." Mary flirted, gazing up at the Major through lowered lashes. John laughed preening under her frank appreciation. "Indeed!" He said. "Your Ladyship will be certain to dazzle the officers in that most becoming green gown." He complimented.
"And what do you think of Miss Alton's gown, Major?" Mary asked knowing the pair only tolerated each other for her sake. Andre having refused Rachel's pleas that she and her sister be sent to an aged aunt in Connecticut for safety.
"Miss Alton's gown is quite pretty." John replied diplomatically his answer more to please Mary than Rachel.
"Thank you! If you will excuse me, I will see to the final preparations in the Music Room." Rachel said excusing herself, curtseying to the Major, hastening from the room. She did not wish to be in his company any longer than was deemed socially appropriate without chancing offending him.
"Miss Alton made a hasty exit. I do hope that she finds a young charming officer to distract her. My refusal to allow her to travel was a necessity. She is fortunate that my deep affection and desire for her dearest friend was the catalyst in my denial that the officers dice for the opportunity to, erm, protect, her and Miss Melissa though I have yet to receive the promised reward for my efforts. " John whispered in one of Mary's ears his hot breath ruffling her hair, a hand going about her slender waist his thumb drawing back and forth across the velvet of her gown in a sensual caress making her breath catch, Mary's skin heating at his touch, her body moving instinctively into his warmth, captivated by his sheer sexual magnetism. Unable to deny the power it exerted over her. "I see that I may have to employ more methods to rid you of those rebel tendencies. I wonder which of them I
His thumb stopped caressing her, allowing his fingers to skim down her waist to her thigh reaching about behind to grasp a buttocks through the layers of gown and petticoats, squeezing hard. "Oh, yes, I see now which ones will be absolutely perfect." His voice was a hot ragged caress in one of her ears, she felt the tip of his tongue flicking along the edge of her ear, her lobe, nipping it gently with his teeth, having a care to avoid the pearl drop earring she wore, the tip of his tongue finding the hollow behind it, passing against it gently, his lips pressing against the taut skin of her throat, planting burning kisses down the exposed creamy flesh, chuckling as she lifted her chin, moaning softly as her eyes fluttered closed.

"Johnnnnnnn. Please! Not here! Not now!" She pleaded, pressing her body into him for support, her tongue snaking out to moisten her lips. He could feel her trembling with anticipation and excitement of what he would do next. It aroused him.

"When and where, then? You could always claim a dreadful headache, Sweetheart. Ridding you of those dreadful treasonous tendencies is far more important that serving as hostess to a group of officers. We do have their safety and security to think of, don't we? Ridding you of said tendencies will aid in their assured safekeeping. Miss Shaw would deputize for you, would she not?" His voice was a low seductive caress in her ear.

"May, there you are! Rachel said you were checking on final preparations in the dining room. Major Andre! What a pleasant surprise I did not expect to see you here so soon." Lottie exclaimed, coming into the room.

At the sound of her voice, John released his hold on Mary but did not move away from her.

"Miss Shaw! What a pleasure to see you again! I was just helping Lady Mary with the closure of her pearl necklace it seems to have become caught on the lace of her dress." John lied. "There! All better now!" He made a show of checking the pearl necklace she wore, pressing a scorching kiss on the back of her neck before drawing away, seeming to brand her.

Lottie's eyes narrowed slightly. The incredibly charming British Major's inability to hide his fierce attraction to her friend was beginning to cause a scandal. Word of their spirited and flirtatious snowball fight had spread all over the city and was being gossiped about in drawing rooms in the best of homes. It was probably common fodder within the Continental camp by now as well. When word reached Washington, Lottie suspected that the general would be furious. She did not believe that he would be angry at the fact that Mary had been tossing snowballs at a British officer but that the same British officer had caught her, picked her up and tossed her over his shoulder like the spoil of war that Mary invariably was, and then had carried her inside to do heaven knew what to her!

"Is there something amiss, Miss Shaw?" John asked noting the pretty blonde's expression.

"I do not know. You tell me, Major. How would you feel knowing that one of your closest friends was being gossiped about in houses all over the city all because of a spirited snowball fight she engaged in three days past, that her reputation and good name stood in the gravest danger of being ruined because of it and what occurred afterward?" Lottie shot at him.

"Lottie!" Mary gasped.

"It is true, May! Jane Fairfax told me about it when I met her in the booksellers yesterday."

"Miss Fairfax should mind her tongue!" John spat. He was becoming angry.

"It wasn't just only Jane, May. Lydia and Melissa said that they heard your names being bandied about by two officers in the coffee shop. They were laying wagers as to how quickly the Major would, erm, make it impossible for you not to have to marry him." Lottie provided.

"Quite honestly, Miss Shaw, I am surprised that it took them this long to gossip about us!" John replied.

"What are you going to do about it?" Lottie asked.

"What are they saying about me, Lottie? What are they saying about the Major and me?" Mary asked. She would get to the bottom of this. "That we are lovers? Is that what they are saying? Because it is a lie! What happened is true. I told you as much but I have only been treated with the utmost respect and decorum by Major Andre and the other officers since I came to live there. Those women are letting their imaginations run wild and are fabricating stories out the scantest bits of evidence and heresy. As for the officers, they should not be speaking of their betters in such a
fashion. It will do horrible for morale. The pair from the coffee shop will be indentified and dealt with accordingly."
"Do you recall what they looked like, Miss Shaw?" John asked.
"Who were they, Lottie? Tell me their names! I would like to see them court martialed!" Mary spat. 
"You and I will have words about this in private later, Major Andre!"
"What am I going to do about it, Miss Shaw? Quiet the tongues that are wagging by behaving in a much more decorous and gentlemanly fashion toward Her Ladyship. I am quite distressed and dismayed that a harmless playful romp in the snow was misconstrued and has had horrible consequences for Her Ladyship. I will do all that I can to see that the rumors are ceased and whatever damage that had been done to her reputation is repaired and her Good Name restored." 
"One of them was Lieutenant Brandon, Major." Lottie answered.
John sighed, pursing his lips in disappointment. Brandon was a good officer, he would just have to learn not to let his imagination get away with him and speak in public places. John made a mental note to speak to him and advise him on discretion.
"Excuse me, Lady Mary, the guests are arriving. Your Ladyship and Major Andre are needed in the Entrance Hall to welcome them all." The butler stated.
"Thank you, Mr. Hudson." Mary said, smoothing the silk of her gown, taking a deep breath, trying to calm herself.
"Shall we?" John asked too brightly, the corners of his lips quirking in a smile in an attempt to quell her anger. He knew she was upset and distraught at what had happened. He was desperate to make it right. "I still have every intention to employ certain methods to rid Your Ladyship of those rebel tendencies." He reminded her whispering for her ears alone. 
"Rogue!" She whispered back, unable to repress a smile, swatting his arm. He was outrageous! 
"There is that smile! Do not fret, My Sweet Little Dove, I will slay those viperous tongued she-dragons." He assured her. He would not see his ambitions destroyed by one ill advised indiscretion and the spiteful wagging tongues of jealous women. She would be his. 

"Lady Mary Ludlow, may I make known to you Captain Edward Kent? Captain Kent is a Coldstream man returned to us in the recent prisoner exchange. Captain Kent, the Lady Mary Ludlow." Major Andre made the introductions.
Mary was struck by the Captain's boyish good looks as he took her hand and kissed it. "Lady Mary, an honor and a pleasure." 
"Welcome, Captain Kent." Mary replied feeling the pad of the captain's thumb caress her palm as he released her hand. "I am certain those under your command are glad to have you safely returned." 
"It is good to be back amongst my fellow officers. I owe my release to Major Andre, for which I will be eternally grateful." 
"Thank you, Captain." John said graciously accepting the appreciation for his efforts. "We are delighted to have you back amongst us."
"I was anxious to get back especially upon learning of the horrible losses of Lords Edrington and Graham, the rumors that were flying about." 
"About what, Captain?" Mary asked.
"General Howe's guest, Milady, the rumors and stories were true. You are as lovely as the pictures were being painted about Your Ladyship," Edward Kent said earnestly clearly intent on making a good impression. 
"Certainly gossip of women is not your chief concern, Captain?" Mary asked. 
"When the lady in question is such as yourself it becomes one." The young captain countered. 
"Captain Kent, you flatter me!" Mary exclaimed her cheeks flushing. The blond captain grinned. "Your Ladyship makes it a real pleasure." He let his eyes sweep over her, pausing to linger on her creamy breasts which swelled over the low-cut neckline of her gown. 
"Would you do me the honor of riding with me one morning?"
Mary looked from the officer she was presently in conversation with then to John Andre and back again. It was clear that Edward Kent was intrigued by her. He was one of the officers that General
Howe had been considering as a replacement for Edrington or Graham as a potential spouse for Mary. He was the third son of an earl, whose immediate elder brother, a naval officer, had died of dysentery on the ship over to New York. The viscount, the heir, was the only one that separated Edward Kent from the prospect of inheriting the earldom from his father though given the oldest of the Kent brothers penchant for dueling and debauchery, Edward could find himself the heir much sooner than anticipated when his brother would be most likely killed or found dead in some Den of Iniquity.

"Yes, Captain, provided Major Andre comes along as chaperone." Mary accepted the Captain's invitation.

"Of course." Kent could not hide the thread of disappointment in his voice.

"We ride out early, Captain Kent, before breakfast. Her Lady is an expert horsewoman and enjoys an invigorating gallop." John warned.

"I am used to arising early, Major. Even if I weren't, I would make a point of doing so for the honor of enjoying several hours in Lady Mary's company. I am an expert horseman. I will be able to keep pace with Her Ladyship." Kent answered.

"We shall see." John challenged arching a brow over an eye as servant approached with a tray laden with molasses spice cookies, another with mugs of hot mulled cider.

Glancing about, Mary spied Captain Simcoe and an officer that looked vaguely familiar walking toward them, maneuvering through the crowed room, the pair them laughing, Captain Simcoe waving a half eaten molasses spice cookie in the air for emphasis at the point he was making. His eyes meeting Mary's, he smiled motioning for the officer beside him to navigate through the other officers to get to her, John and Kent.

"Lady Mary, may I make known to you Major Arthur Stephens?" Simcoe made the introductions.

"Major Stephens, the Lady Mary Ludlow." Major Stephens' eyes lit with recognition. "Mary Ludlow from Boston, of course, such a pleasure to see you again! Does Your Ladyship remember me? I used to attend soirees and dinners at your parents' mansion on Beacon Hill."

"Yes, I remember. You were one of my first proper dancing partners. One of the select few that Mama would even allow to engage me in conversation. She was always so protective." Mary recalled.

"With good reason, Lady Mary, many of the officers did not have the most proper intentions. It is a wonder that she allowed you to open the Academy." Stephens said.

"My father overruled her objections and trepidations. He paid the fines to the authorities. It is against the law for women to receive university educations." Mary explained. "But he indulged me. That is what happens when one has a daughter after six sons."

"That is what happens when the daughter is charming, winsome and fiercely intelligent." Stephens observed. "Remember, I have known you since you were twelve years old. I saw you grow from an inquisitive mischievous hoyden into a beautiful young woman."

"What manner of mischief did Your Ladyship engage in?" Simcoe asked. He was intrigued.

Mary eyes widened in mock horror. "I was the model of Young Bostonian Womanhood. I have no idea what Major Stephens is speaking about!" She declared.

"That is what we are afraid of!" John quipped, catching Mary's eye. He grinned.

"If you must know, Mrs. Hutchinson deserved the ink in her tea. How was I to know that it would stain her teeth for a month? I placed frogs in, that time, Lieutenant MacLeane's bed after my brothers encouraged him to put salt in my tea! Turn about was fair play. Then I placed live lobsters in a friend of my brothers’ bed when he came to visit us during one of the term breaks when they were all attending Yale. That was on a dare. All harmless pranks truly. I was very young. Mama saw that they were ceased when several officers and gentlemen began asking permission to call when I turned fifteen." Mary had been cautious not to mention who the friend had been. Poor Nathan Hale! His execution as a spy that past September still rankled her. What a waste of a talented bright handsome young man.

John nearly choked on his mulled cider with laughter upon hearing Mary had placed live lobsters in a
bed of one of her brothers' friends and frogs in MacLeane's. He hope that those tendencies to get up
to childish pranks had matured out of her or she had channeled her mischief into more mature
pursuits.
"That was also when she told me that Lottie, Rachel, Melissa and I could no longer go swimming in
the Charles River! It was improper for Young Ladies of Quality to engage in such pastimes. Heaven
forbid some of the British officers and Regulars see us and get the impression that we were free with
our favors though Papa did allow me to still swim in the sea, under strict supervision. Papa also
 taught me to sail. He said that since he had made our fortune from shipping and the sea that I should
learn those skills, that they could be valuable in the future."
"Swimming and sailing, what other manner of pastimes did you learnt growing up in Boston?"
Edward Kent asked.
"Riding, archery, my brothers even taught me how to play cricket but I did not develop a taste for it.
I left it to them and their friends." Mary replied, looking toward the doorway to find Rachel and
Melissa standing there, motioning toward Mary. "Ah! I believe it is time for the Carol Sing to begin,
if we could all gather in the Music Room." Mary announced to her guests.
John took a step forward offering his arm. "Lady Mary, I would be honored to escort you." He
offered gallantly, the hint of a smile dancing about his mouth.
"Thank you, Major Andre." Mary replied taking his arm, her fingertips gripping it gently, her heart
beginning to race, desperate to hide how fiercely attracted to him she was. Praying that the blush that
stole up over her chest and face could not be discerned by the other officers.
Simcoe arched a brow over an eye at Captain Kent. If the young man had intentions to pursue the
lady he had best know the lay of the land, he hoped the other officer had caught how Lady Mary had
reacted when she had taken the Major's arm. Noted how intensely attracted to her the Major was.
"When do you believe he will offer for her?" A Loyalist matron whispered behind her fan to another
as Mary and John passed by them, leading the guests into the other room.
"By the spring if not sooner, it depends upon how long Andre can restrain himself from seducing the
girl. Care to make a wager?" The other woman replied with a wicked smile.
"Ten guineas says that he has her wed and quickening with his child by the first of May." The first
woman said.
"Twenty guineas says he has a betrothal ring on her finger and the wedding date set by the
fourteenth of February." The other countered.
John led Mary to the harpsichord as people filtered into the room crowding about the instrument as
books of music, the cover specifically designed by the Major for the event, were passed about by
servants.
"You and Major begin, Lady Mary." General Howe said.
Mary looked to John. They had been spending the last several days practicing several of the carols in
two part harmony together in secret. Mary began playing Ding Dong Merrily on High.
Ding dong merrily on high!
In heav'n bells are ringing,
Ding dong verily the sky!
Is riven with angles singing!
Gloria,
Hosanna in excelsis
Gloria,
Hosanna in excelsis
Ee'n so here below below
Let steeple bells be swungen
And i'o i'o i'o
By preist and people sungen!
Gloria,
Hosanna in excelsis
Gloria,
Hosanna in excelsis
Pray you dutifully prime
your matin chime ye ringers!
May you beautifully rhyme
your evetime song ye singers!

Gloria,
Hosanna in excelsis

Gloria,
Hosanna in excelsis

The Major's fine baritone blending with her clear soprano as the pair sang together.
"Lady Mary and Major Andre sing so well together," Tarleton said over the din of applause. "I would wager that the major wishes more than his singing voice to blend so perfectly with Her Ladyship."
"What are you suggesting?" Lieutenant Brandon asked playing the fool. "From what I understand those matters, are, erm, well in hand..." He allowed his voice to trail off. "Well in hand, indeed! You do realize he cannot stop looking at her?"
Brandon's eyes traveled to where Mary and the Major were. She seated at the harpsichord, he standing directly behind her. Close, quite close, a fraction more and it would be considered most improper. His cobalt blue eyes riveted to her, clearly enchanted.
"I don't think many of us can! Do you think she is as fiery as that glorious hair would suggest?" Brandon asked.
"Do not let Major Andre hear you speak thusly. If he had a mind to, he would call you out! As far as I know, he hasn't completely snared the vixen. One does not dally with the likes of her and well you know it, Brandon! She is a proper lady. That is a sort of quality that a man marries and makes the mother of his children. Once he has her he won't want anyone else!" Ban explained. "Ah! 'tis our turn to sing for our supper." He added as the pair of officers were motioned to take their place with some of the others for the next song.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XI
The books described in the bookshop scene were all published in 1776. They would have been shipped over from England.
Salt petre is used to make gunpowder.
Rachel, Melissa and their father, The Continental General are all fictional.
Sad but true, the British Officers would dice for the 'protection' of certain women. Being the daughters of a rebel general the Alton girls were 'prizes' hence the reason Mary used her social position, Major Andre's affection for her and her wealth to secure their safety.

Joe Frogger cookies are from New England and were made in Colonial Times. They are a cookie made with molasses and rum (which Mary would have had shipped from a family sugar plantation in the West Indies). They are the Molasses Spice Cookies described in the story.
Joe Frogger Cookies
Ingredients:
• 1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon hot water
• 2-1/2 tablespoons dark rum, such as Gosling's
• 3-3-1/2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface
• 1-1/2 teaspoons table salt
• 1 teaspoon baking soda
• 1-1/4 teaspoons ground ginger
• 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
• 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
• 1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
• 1/2 cup (1 stick) salted butter, softened, plus more for baking sheets
• 1 cup granulated sugar
• 1 cup unsulphured dark molasses

Instructions:
In a small bowl, combine hot water and rum. In a large second bowl, whisk together 3 cups flour with the baking soda, salt, and spices. Set aside.
In another large bowl, cream together butter and sugar until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes.
Add water and rum to creamed mixture and beat well. Add one-third of the flour mixture and stir, then stir in half the molasses, scraping down the sides as you go. Repeat with an additional third of the flour mixture and the remaining molasses. Finally, add the rest of the flour mixture. If dough seems too loose, add the extra 1/2 cup flour.
Divide the dough into two balls, cover with plastic wrap, and chill at least 45 minutes and up to overnight.
Preheat oven to 375° and grease two baking sheets or line with parchment.
You have two options for shaping the cookies: On a floured surface, you can roll the dough out to a 1/2-inch thickness and use a floured 2-inch cookie cutter or drinking glass to cut the dough into rounds. Transfer the cookies to the prepared baking sheets, leaving about 2 inches between cookies. Alternately, you can skip the rolling and instead break walnut-sized pieces of dough and roll them into balls between your palms. Arrange the balls on the baking sheet and put some granulated sugar into a bowl. Press the bottom of a drinking glass into the sugar, then press it onto each ball of dough, flattening it before baking.
Bake the cookies until they have set but still seem soft in the middle, about 10 minutes. Cool on wire racks.

A recipe link to the walnut tarts that Major John Andre, Benjamin Tallmadge, Captain Lord Archie Kennedy and others in this chapter have found irresistible:
http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/walnut-tart
Fruitcake would have been prepared earlier in the year and then doused with spirits (rum, whiskey, brandy) periodically to keep it moist. Obviously Caleb Brewster would have enjoyed the cake because it was loaded with alcohol. Well preserved, it would travel well on campaign, too! A fruitcake recipe:
http://britishfood.about.com/od/recipeindex/r/yorkfruitcake.htm

Ding Dong, Merrily on High is an old Christmas Carol and would have been sung in the 18th century.

Do let me know how you are enjoying the story. Once again thank you for all the kudos and comments. I am sincerely humbled by all the praise. Quite frankly, I am surprised that a story told from the British side has been so popular. Thanks again to EB and RS.
Several Days Later

When he entered the room, Mary was seated at the harpsichord, an English setter pup, quite obviously an early Christmas gift from Major Andre, curled at her feet, dozing. He could see the golden lights shining in her fiery hair where the sun hit them through the window as he got closer. How it dappled against her face. Reaching her, he silently sat beside her upon the bench, inhaling the faint scent of roses and jasmine perfume that clung to her skin.

Sensing someone near her, Mary looked out of the corner of her eye at the man beside her. "Good George!" Mary whispered to the dog.

"Benjamin Tallmadge!" She whispered. "What do I owe the honor? You have an uncanny knack of finding me wherever I may be. Don't you know the grave risk you take coming here? Are you mad? Have you lost your senses?" At least his disguise made him unrecognizable.

"I came to wish you a Happy Christmas, Mary. Thank you in person for the provisions and gifts you sent. Caleb Brewster sends his regards. He has just about finished the fruitcake. I was also curious to ascertain if you were still getting on incredibly well, which I see you are. Major Andre has been good and kind to you? He still holds you in the highest regard?" Ben asked.

"Shhhh... Mayhap we should take this conversation to some place more private. Yes, Major Andre continues to behave in a most respectful manner." Mary stated it would be death to them both if he were found here, she motioned for Ben to move off the bench, Mary following, being careful that she did not disturb George and his nap, walking out of the Music Room with Ben beside her down the Entrance Hall, having a care to be certain that there were no officers or Regulars about, walking down the servants' stairs to the cellar where she drew him into a store room that contained several benches. Taking one of his hands she pulled him down beside her upon one of them.

"I am afraid that I may not be able to be in contact for some time. We are being sent to New Jersey. I had to see you for what could be the last time before I left." Ben explained.

"Go with God, Ben. Rest assured that I will be praying for you and your safe return." She was touched that he had risked so much to come and see her and say farewell.

"May God grant you Godspeed. I know that Ned and Jamie would wish you the same. That they would appreciate that you have tried your best to keep your promise to them about seeing that I am safe. I am." She added her lips brushed his cheek, her mouth hovering there, her breath warm against his face. She could feel her heart begin to race at his close proximity. She could smell the scent of cloves that he chewed to sweeten his breath, the scents of leather, wool and the shaving soap he used swirled about him.

He turned his head to look at her, the two of them staring at one another, moving closer and closer to one another as if pulled by a magnet, inch by inch, until their lips met. What was she doing? She was falling in love with Major Andre, what was drawing her to this man? Why was she allowing him to kiss her? She would never play John false romantically. Ever. Their passion and attraction was built on trust. She would never break it.

"No, Ben. I can't. I won't." She pulled away immediately after her mouth gently brushed his. Ben Tallmadge was a handsome man, he always would be. She was fiercely attracted to him but whatever could have been between them was probably gone, finished. She wanted someone else.
Knew for her own safety and well-being to be assured in this war she had to have someone else. Ben's head dipped to kiss her once more, one of his hands coming up to attempt to grasp her chin, but she turned her head away, she wouldn't allow it. "Is there something amiss, Mary? Don't you like my kiss?"
"Ben, no, I cannot. It's... It's..." She stumbled over her words search about for a viable explanation. "Someone else holds my heart. I would never betray him. You need to go." She told him in no uncertain terms.

Ben passed his hand over his mouth, his eyes flashing with jealousy, clenching his fists in frustration. "It is clear that Major Andre holds far more than your heart, Mary!" He spat his meaning all too clear. "What do you explicitly mean by that?" Mary asked her voice cold and hard, her eyes flashing back at him.

"It was clear to me when I visited you earlier when I overheard him call you 'His Sweet Little Dove'. How long after that did you find yourself seduced into his bed, Mary or did you allow him into yours? What about the rumors we hear of him purchasing a dog? Which are clearly true! That English setter pup I saw in the Music Room was from him, wasn't it? What was that for? Clearly he wants you protected when he is away! Why? Staking his claim on what he believes is his? Not wishing another of those Damned Bloody Backs to attempt to steal it from behind his back? A present of a dog is a clear path to a presentation of something else and a most important question in the future!"

SLAP! The sound of Mary's palm hitting one of Ben's cheeks reverberated in the room. "How dare you! You have known me since I was ten years old. Do you think so little of me that you would believe that I would not go to my marriage a virgin? What manner of woman do you take me for? To think that our fathers ever considered a match between us, I admit I felt something when you kissed me. You are a handsome man; I would be lying if I didn't admit I find you incredibly attractive. But I could never marry you! Ever! Not after you have insulted me in such a fashion! He did ask me to marry him." She shot at him wanting to hurt Ben as much as he had hurt her. Major Andre hadn't proposed... yet. But she knew he probably would quite soon. Ben didn't need to know that.

Ben's face fell; he felt tightness in his chest. "Have you given him an answer?"

"Only that I would think about it." Mary replied, looking at him for a reaction. "It was kind of you to come and say farewell. You need not worry about my safety, it may not be what you wish but I am secure and happy. What could have been between us is over, that was dream that could never be and certainly could not happen now."

How it made her heart ache to utter those words. But they were true. Her future lay with a British officer, most specifically Major John Andre.

The evenings of the next several days were filled with receptions, dinner parties and dances. Captain Christian Nicholls came to call several times during the day, speaking to Mary several times in the parlor at the Academy. Once escorting her to a coffee shop chaperoned by Major Andre where the trio drank hot chocolate and ate scones with clotted cream.

Captain Edward Kent proved to be true to his word, he was an early riser and an expert horseman accompanying Mary, Major Andre and now, George the English setter puppy, on their morning rides before breakfast.

Captain Kennedy paid court to Mary by partnering her at dances and seeking her out during tea and the receptions.

Major Andre continued his courtship of Mary in earnest, partnering her at the dances, engaging her in conversation at receptions and always beside her as a dinner partner. When not caught up in the Holiday Social Whirl of the City, he could be found in his study during the evenings reading Richard II and playing chess with Mary, sketching and playing musical duets.

After the gossip about them, Mary would not allow John the liberties that he had enjoyed before, which he regretfully understood, teasingly complaining that his bed was now cold, threatening to steal the puppy away. The dog having taken to sleeping curled up at the foot of her bed at night or
beside her depending upon how cold the evening proved to be. If the Major made an attempt to sneak in bed with his mistress for a cuddle after she had fallen asleep, George would growl at his master, making it clear that John was not welcome.

British Headquarters, New York
One Morning at Breakfast

"We found the General hiding in a tavern after we had been enlightened to his whereabouts by several of those loyal to His Majesty." Ban explained. "We surrounded it, firing through every window and door."

"Did you meet with much success?" Mary asked. "What did General Lee do then?" Reaching down, she skimmed her fingertips over George's head. The pup had settled at her feet beneath the table anticipating some treats from her breakfast and others. George was quickly learning which officers were soft touches and would succumb quickly to a pair of soulful brown eyes and a swishing tail. Major Andre, Ban Tarleton and Captain Lord Kent were the worst.

"After threatening to fire the house if the general did not surrender within five minutes, I did agree to let everyone go if Lee would give himself up. I had to threaten everyone before he would emerge." Tarleton continued his tale.

"What did you say?" Mary asked, looking down at George who made to advance toward the dragoon. 'No!' She mouthed. George sat down with a heavy sigh.

"That the house should be burnt and every person, without exception, would be put to the sword!" Tarleton replied.

"Quite an ominous threat." Captain Kent observed looking across the table at Tarleton. He took a sip of his tea.

"Lee finally did emerge and Colonel Harcourt placed him on a horse taking him to Brunswick to be interrogated. Where the traitor was treated with cold contempt as a betrayer of king and comrades." John added to the story dramatically. Taking a small piece of bacon off his plate clucking his tongue twice peering beneath the table. "George? There is a good lad!" He said smiling as the pup got up and padded over.

"Major, I wish you wouldn't." Mary admonished from across the table.

"This from the lady that allows him to sleep on her bed?" John asked, cocking his head to one side, his lips quirking in a playful smile.

"It gets cold at night. He keeps me warm!" Mary protested.

"When you marry that delightful privilege will be your husband's." John stated as George took the treat from his master's fingers, looking up at the Major with adoring brown eyes.

"You spoil him!" Mary complained.

"You don't? He has a basket set by the fireplace in your bedroom with a down filled pillow to lie upon and a woolen blanket to keep him warm. That is when he isn't nesting in your bed! You accuse me of spoiling him?" John asked.

"Yes, I do. If I recall, you were the one that insisted on bathing him using your fine sandalwood soap!" She volleyed back.

"Only after her rolled in horseshit and the dead carcass of Lord knows what!" John parried.

"I believe we will be seeing quite a lot of this in the coming months. Wait until they marry and the children start to come. It will get much worse!" Ban Tarleton whispered to Lieutenant Brandon, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

"And the belly rubs?" Mary accused.

"What about the kisses, Lady Mary?" John tossed back. "If it distresses Your Ladyship, I can always pay like attention to you!" John teased a corner of his mouth quirking up in a wicked half-smile. "I wouldn't mind some of those kisses in exchange..." He winked at her. "I could catch you under the
kissing bough!"
Several of the officers chuckled.
"Had best pray that reprobate older brother of yours died in a duel and you become a viscount. It will be the only way that she will consider you now!" Lieutenant Brandon remarked to Captain Kent.
"I would not be so certain. The Major likes to flirt and tease. The Lady Mary is his favorite target." Kent said. He was confident in his wooing and his noble lineage.
"He is determined to have her." Ban opined watching as the Lady and the Major verbally sparred across the table.
"Not unless someone else gets there first, Tarleton." Kent countered.
Ban almost visibly cringed. The lad did not know what he was dealing with going against Major Andre. "Captain Lord Kent, you may want the lady but is she aware that you wish to have her? Courting is all well and good but have you made your intentions clear?"
"If I allow myself to be caught, Major." Mary bantered back their conversation continuing.
"You will." John said with firm conviction.
"So certain and assured. Any more news regarding General Lee?" She asked desirous to change the subject peaking beneath the table looking for George, who had lay down, resting his head against John's polished black boots, his eyes at half mast, content to be with his master.
"He is kept under close confinement in Brunswick, Lady Mary." Ban replied.
"The presumption in his correspondence! Giving advice as to how the rebels may be defeated. A considerable coup for us to capture the man! General Howe said. "These infernal rebels are a nuisance but we must cease the plundering and other more unsavory aspects of war. Those suspected will be hanged on the spot. The Hessian officers and soldiers will also be tried. Major Andre, you speak and write German please convey that order to the appropriate officers on our behalf."
"Yes, Excellency."
"Unsavory aspects?" Mary asked curious as a cat.
"Nothing to concern yourself with, My Dear! Just some vicious American propaganda of goings on in New Jersey. Your Ladyship's virtue and honor are not at all at risk nor need your charges be in fear."
Several officers seated around her looked decidedly uncomfortable. Mary tried to catch John's eye across the table but he wouldn't look at her. What was he ashamed of?
Mary was clever enough to read between the lines. The officers, raised as gentlemen, would never brooch or discuss such a subject of such indelicacy in front of a lady of her breeding, wealth, status and influence. What was happening to those women was no different than what Mary was forced to employ to survive under the occupying British army. Unfortunately those women and girls in New Jersey were being forced in horrifying ways. She was being slowly and expertly seduced by a handsome and charming officer that clearly had the most honorable intentions as to the eventual outcome of their liaison. Given her present circumstances it was the only safe course to take. She was virtually alone. Her godfather had not lifted a finger to see to her safety when the British had taken New York. He must know through intelligence how she had been getting on over the past several months since General Howe had landed on Manhattan Island that September. How would he react if he discovered that she had captured the heart of the British spymaster? Ben Tallmadge, or someone, must have reported to him what had transpired. He probably would be gravely disturbed but then laugh when the irony of the situation revealed itself to him, Mary thought taking a sip of her hot chocolate suddenly no longer interested in her breakfast.

Later that same day

"Aren't all of us stuck with the choices we make?" Mary asked Abigail looking up from where she was cutting the ends off or greenery for a centerpiece as the maid lay the table for that evening's
"Milady?" Abigail asked not knowing where the young mistress was going with her question. She had been a bit subdued all day since after breakfast.

"When the British invaded I didn't leave the city. There was virtually no time to gather all the girls and find safe places for all of us. We could not evacuate. Communication was cut off from...him." She whispered the last word having a care that none of the officers would overhear her knowing that Abigail knew exactly who 'he' was. "Lot... Mistress Shaw and I made the decision to stay hoping that we could go about our business unnoticed."

Abigail nodded in understanding. "You did realize that your rank and wealth would have protected you?" She tried reassuring the younger woman. "As far as going about your business unnoticed, Your Ladyship could never travel about unnoticed especially with young men such as officers of His Majesty's Army living a door away; young women like you are not ignored by men. Not to mention Major Andre collecting intelligence as to what and who was near the army's headquarters. I do not believe that an academy filled with young women would be ignored especially by lusty young officers and Regulars! Beg pardon, Lady Mary, but Major Andre would have searched you out and come calling eventually had he not made an acquaintance of Your Ladyship at the van Leiden's dinner party. He would have seen you leaving the academy and his interest would have been piqued. He would have placed himself in a position for an introduction to be made or boldly made one."

Mary blushed knowing what Abigail said was true. "But had I..." Her voice faltered.

"Oh, Lady Mary, I dare not presume, but I know that you are missing your family especially now at Christmas. I'm missing my boy, I had to leave him with Mrs. Strong in Setauket. We have each other." Abigail reassured her young mistress seeing a tear trickle down one of her cheeks.

They heard the front door open.

"Where is your mistress?" The sound of that familiar voice, the footfalls of a dog and the soles of boots on the wood floor and carpet. "Go find Lady Mary!"

Mary quickly wiped her tear away with the pad of her thumb taking up a sprig of holly gasping as she pricked her finger, quickly popping it in her mouth to stay the bleeding.

"Good Lad!" John approved as the pup rushed over to Mary his tail wagging furiously, the pair entering the dining room. "Let me see!" He demanded indicating her finger. Mary withdrew her fingertip from her mouth slowly holding it up for the Major's inspection. "I pricked it on a sprig of holly, there, on the tip." She explained.

"Don't fret. I will make it all better, I promise." He said bringing her fingertip up to his mouth, slashing the tip of his tongue over her wound, drawing it into the warm cavern, sucking upon it gently, his gaze capturing hers.

Her eyes widened in surprise and shock at his action, reading the naked desire in his eyes. He clearly wanted to be engaging in more than tending to her injured finger.

"Abigail would you please check on the final preparations for dinner?" John asked withdrawing Mary's finger from his mouth, his eyes never leaving hers, lost in her.

"Yes Major Andre. Lady Mary." The maid said curtseying leaving the pair quite alone in the dining room.

"Don't move. I am not through with you."

"The centerpiece..." She protested indicating the holly and other greenery lay out on the sideboard with her free hand.

"Let me help you." He said still not releasing her hand as George circled about his master and mistress finally lying down beneath the dining table. The major came up behind her, finally releasing her hand, brushing his fingertips sensually down one of her sides to rest against her waist, peaking over her shoulder, planting a feather light kiss on the side of her neck beneath her ear pressing his front against her back leaving her nowhere to go. "It is beautiful start." He complimented looking at the scarce amount of holly and pine boughs she had placed in the vase.

"Thank you! What do you think of several more pine boughs and then some of the sprigs of holly with berries for color?" She asked turning her head slightly.
John reached in front of her, grasping bits of greenery quickly arranging them in the vase as she had described. "Like this?" He asked when his work was complete. "I have been ever so remiss on tending to your infractions, Lady Mary. You never did come to my study. We do have at least an hour before dinner. A bit of repayment for help with the centerpiece and tending to your pricked finger?" His voice was husky with longing his breath hot against one of her ears.

"It does take me about an hour to dress for dinner, Major. Another time perhaps?" She asked sweetly, undulating her hips against his groin in an attempt to extricate herself. She felt his organ swell beneath his breeches. He was quickly becoming incredibly aroused. "Would you please help me place the vase upon the table?"

"Yes, of course." He replied, stepping back from her, his eyes inquiring. Had she just issued him a subtle invitation? Christ! She was a combination of innocence and recklessness. It was going to be fun teaching her to be wild and wanton in his bed. She had already proven how passionate she could be. "Then shall I escort you up to your room?" His voice was low.

"I know where it is."

"You are safe and secure here, Lady Mary!"

"From all but you, Major."

We had best find a remedy for that. You know what I want."

"What is that?" She asked as they lifted the vase bringing it to the table setting it down.

"A flame haired Celtic Beauty!" He answered staring at her.

"I thought that you preferred blondes?" She countered, tilting her head flirtatiously.

"No longer, not upon making a particular acquaintance."

"Truly?"

"Indeed. You have my word."

"Do I?"

He nodded. "Gave her my heart but she took my soul."

"She did?"

"Yes!"

"Then Abigail was correct."

"About?"

"She told me that had we not met at the van Leiden's that you would have seen me about and placed yourself in a position for an introduction to be made."

John chuckled. "You have no recollection of my attempts to catch your eye those several times we passed on the street and outside, here, between headquarters and the Academy weeks before the van Leiden's dinner party?" He asked.

"I was in mourning, if you recall. Mayhap several." She admitted.

He grinned. "Including the one on Guy Fawkes' Day?"

"When you flirted outrageously with me? I do recall a wink, a wicked smirk and a most inappropriate remark." She accused.

"How could I resist?" He defended himself. Ruefully remembering that was the night he had met and seduced Philomena, partially in an attempt to ease his burgeoning lust for the fiery haired young beauty residing next door?

"How could you?" She flirted knowing that she was flattered by the attention but had been warned of the Major's reputation as a rogue.

"I couldn't. If you had whistled, I would have come." He explained.

Mary made a face. She did not truly believe him. "Would you?"

"Try me! Whistle!" He commanded.

"This is not proper!" She protested.

"You are curious. Do it! Whistle, Sweetheart."

Mary put her lips together and blew, whistling. Immediately John closed the gap between them.

"See? I told you, Oh Ye of Little Faith." He teased. "Still struck with that bad case of scarlet fever?"

He asked using the euphemism often applied to young women who had succumbed to the charms of
a Redcoat soldier. Mary laughed. "Burning with it!" She revealed looking up into his face, her eyes suddenly soft and tender, her lips parting as if she wished to be kissed.

"You are, are you? Excellent! We must find a way to ease that fire within you!" John remarked, a wicked smile playing about his mouth. "Whatever shall we do?"

Mary laughed, again. "What do you suggest, major?" She asked, running an index finger down over his Regimental coat, his buff colored waistcoat, enticing him. She knew she shouldn't but she missed their intimacy, his hands and mouth on her, the feel of his hard warrior's body in her arms. Her Good Name had been completely restored after the pair had exhibited behavior that was beyond reproach at the social entertainments they had attended together. The gossip had ceased. Damn it! She was so innocently reckless! He bit his lip. We could begin your education in becoming wild and wanton, He thought to himself. "Oh, hell!" He growled, yanking her to him drawing her into his embrace forcing her arms to travel up over his chest grasping his shoulders. "This!" He ground out just before his mouth crushed against hers in a burning kiss, his lips gliding over hers, his tongue slipping from between his teeth tracing along the seam of her mouth, eager to gain entrance.

"Open for me, Love!" He coaxed. Her lips parted allowing his tongue to slip inside, fencing with hers as the kiss intensified, a brief fleeting image of how Ben Tallmadge's mouth had felt on hers all those days ago forming in her mind, she quickly brushed it away focusing her attention on the British officer that held her in his strong embrace and was kissing her so fiercely. This was where she belonged, she thought moving one of her hands from his shoulder to grasp the back of John Andre's neck, her fingers digging into the white stock, a finger curling about his queue.

"Let me escort you upstairs. Whatever happened to the urge to change for dinner? Caught up in your treatment for scarlet fever, hmmm? Is it working?" He rasped, his breath hot and ragged against her swollen mouth, plump and wet from his kisses.

"It is working though not as well as expected."

"Still burning?"

"Yes!"

"Whatever shall I do with you?"

"I do have to change for dinner."

"I said I would escort you. Help tend to this fever in another more private venue." He offered.

"What about my dressing for dinner? Abigail and the maids will be waiting. General Howe does become so cross when any of his officers or guests is tardy. We daren't keep him waiting regardless of the service that you will be attending to."

"He will understand. It is in the interest of His Majesty's Army."

"Persistent, aren't you, Major? Singular of mind and purpose."

"That is why I am so successful."

"As flattered as I am by your eagerness to help me tend to my present malady, we dare not chance setting the birds to chirping once again."Mary said sweetly. "You know more so than I how they adore to sing."

John sighed resignedly. She was right. "Meet me in my study after supper then. We have been neglecting Mr. Shakespeare as of late."

"This is the first evening in several weeks that there has not been some manner of ball or other entertainment to attend though the officers will wish to play at cards after supper."

"Gorge themselves on those delicious molasses cookies and walnut tarts you have been baking." John provided.

"Rachel said a way to winning a man is through his stomach, is that true?"

John stopped to ponder her question for a moment. "When the lady baking the said sweets is a Paragon of English Womanhood such as you, the answer is a resounding yes."

Mary giggled. "You are in possession of a quite the Silver Tongue!" She commented swatting at one of his forearms. "So effusive with your compliments, Sir!"

"How will you reward me for my efforts?"
"Wait until after supper!"
"After supper? I will be counting the hours!" He said, looking past her to see Abigail waiting impatiently. "Ah, Abigail, please do not be cross with Her Ladyship it is me that makes her tardy. I cannot seem to extricate myself from her company." John said brightly.

Chapter End Notes

Notes for Chapter XII

The gift of the English setter puppy to Lady Mary from Major Andre as an early Christmas gifts is quite important. The conclusions that Benjamin Tallmadge comes to in that scene are spot on. The pup would have been purchased from another officer or a Loyalist gentleman that lived in New York or nearby.

Alone, in a city that is thousands of miles and an ocean away from her beloved family at Christmas (the first in her entire life without them), Mary is feeling incredibly lonely and homesick. John senses that, one of the many reasons he purchases the dog is to cheer her. It is also a rather intimate gift and most certainly a precursor to something else much more important as Ben Tallmadge mentions.

As we can see, Mary and Ben's relationship is getting complicated and conflicted. The gossip about Mary and John caused by the snowball fight has vanished due to the Major's expert Damage Control.

The Capture of General Charles Lee as written here is best to my knowledge historically accurate and was taken from page 149 of David Hackett Fischer's book, Washington's Crossing. (Oxford, 2004) Banastre Tarleton did capture General Charles Lee in the manner described on 12-13 December, 1776. What was portrayed in the show was done for dramatic effect and entertainment. The truth was so much more interesting and gives me a chance to showcase more of Tarleton. All of this as George the English setter pup makes a wee bit of a nuisance of himself at the breakfast table and incites an exchange between Mary and John.

General Lee was presumptuous in his correspondence to General Howe which irritated Howe no end.

The unsavory bit of the conversation that the soldiers would not address in front of Mary is the reports of British and Hessian soldiers raping and pillaging in New Jersey. Historically, General Howe did believe it to be Rebel Propaganda but the junior officers did indeed know it was true. To his credit, General Howe did try to stop it, ordering hanging on the spot of those complicit. Andre did speak fluent German therefore he was used to dispatch word to the Hessian commander. (Fischer, pgs. 178-179)

More of our heroine and hero's interactions before the van Leiden's dinner party are revealed in the last scene.

As stated in previous notes, Thank you all once again for all the kudos, comments and readers. I am sincerely humbled by all the love shown this story. Once again, thanks to EB and RS.
"Not all water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm off an anointed king. The breath of worldly men cannot depose the deputy elected by the Lord." Mary read from the Third Act of Richard II, her voice sounding clear and strong in John's study. The pair was seated upon the settee. They created a cozy picture as George dozed in front of the fireplace making periodic noises as he chased rabbits and squirrels in his sleep, her head resting upon one of his shoulders, one of his arms wrapped about her waist, his hand resting against her ribcage, a thumb stroking the fine silk brocade of her gown. A fire snapped and crackled merrily in the grate of the fireplace. Using his free hand, John reached for his brandy from the candlestick table at his elbow bringing it to his mouth he took a sip, letting the fine amber liquid settle on his tongue before swallowing, setting the snifter down. He clucked his tongue disapprovingly. "No irreverent comments, Mary! I would have a care this evening, Cherie. I do have means and the time to rid you of those damned rebel tendencies. I have yet to receive my promised reward for my chivalrous behavior regarding the Misses Alton." His voice was low and seductive, smooth and hot as the brandy he was drinking. "I would never insult His Majesty the King..." She protested. "Luscious Little Liar!" John chuckled turning his head to plant a tender peck on one of her temples. He knew differently. "Are you going to continue to flirt with me or shall I go back to Mister Shakespeare? Captain Lord Kent did invite me to play faro."
"No. You are mine tonight." John growled. "I have all intentions to cure your rampant case of scarlet fever."
"Do you now? Is that an order, Major?" She teased. "Could I please continue?"
"I do, I have a proven remedy. Yes, if Your Ladyship was in a position to be under my command, it would be. Please! Do continue."
She began again, "For everyman that Bolingbroke hath pressed to lift shrewd steel against our golden crown, God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay, a glorious angel. Then if angels fight, weak men must fall. For heaven still guards this night. Lift shrewd steel against our golden crown..." She repeated wrinkling her nose. "Mary..." John warned. "Am I skating about the edge once again?" She asked.
He nodded. "It is time to apply that proven remedy for your malady."
"You are a soldier does that mean that you are going to lay siege to my defenses?" She flirted. John grinned. "Would you care that I do?" He countered.
"That depends upon which manner of tactics you will employ."
"Shall I show you? You know that I am a master tactician."
"So I have been told." She returned falling into their all too familiar flirtatious banter. "Should we not be joining them at the faro table?"
"Not tonight. That malady needs to be tended to before you become more ill."
"Captain Lord Kent will be so disappointed. We should make an appearance at least." John shook his head, studying her. "Would you marry him now, that Setauket boy, if you were in a position to? Could he make you happy that Benjamin Tallmadge?"
"What nature of question is that?" Mary asked.
"Merely curious. Could you?" John asked reaching once again for his brandy he took a sip, his eyes
searching Mary's over the rim of the glass.

"It is impossible now. His Grace, my father, would never approve the match no matter his status as a close and trusted friend of my brothers. He is the son of a clergyman. I am the daughter of a peer."

Mary tried to placate him.

"Indeed! No backwater clergyman's boy for the Lady Mary Ludlow."

"He is well-educated. He went to Yale."

"You are defending him. Do you still harbor a bit of affection? What did he become?"

"A school teacher."

"Ah! A school teacher." John mocked. "Not the sort of man that marries a well traveled heiress."

"He knows Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Do you? I told you, His Grace, my father, would never consider the match now. There is no reason to be so cutting. If you persist I am going to retire." She threatened.

"He must cut a fine figure in his Continental blue uniform." John offered reaching for one of the walnut tarts his hooded gaze on Mary watching her intently.

"Stop it!" Mary snapped, smacking one of his forearms, jerking up to a sitting position. "You are being petty! He may but remember I have an advanced case of scarlet fever so what does it matter to you?"

"Indeed."

"Still intent on laying siege to my defenses, Major?" She asked dancing her fingers down the same forearm she had recently smacked. What was the matter with him that he was jealous of Benjamin Tallmadge and the fact that her father could at one time considered him as a potential husband for his youngest daughter? What did Captain Simcoe tell the major about Ben and what had transpired when Simcoe was held captive?

"You have no idea." His voice was dangerous. If she still harbored any manner of affections for that Tallmadge boy he would certainly make her forget them, he thought as he chewed the delicious tart.

"It is prudent to learn the lay of the land and all manner of potential competition. Excuse my curiosity and interest in a childhood family friend who is a Continental captain. The same captain under whose capture Captain Simcoe suffered. I am prepared to forego putting forth the many questions I have for Your Ladyship if, I, in turn, were granted certain favors, a quid pro quo. My bed has been ice cold as of late. We face a long winter."

"There are many women that would be willing to warm your bed."

"I do not want any of them, Mary. I want you, only you. I am more than willing to tend to your sickness but you will also have to tend to mine. No fear of ruination, My Dear, I have all intentions of having you. We both know that you would be miserable and bored with anyone else. No sense in potentially creating a scandal by cuckolding the wrong man when the right one will, and is, in a position to have you and is most desirous to."

"If His Grace, my father, approves the match." Mary stated.

"He will. General Howe anticipates correspondence from His Grace of Sutherland any day now indicating his approval of all your potential suitors with the exceptions of Captain Lords Kent and Nicholls, of course, also permission to act on His Grace's behalf to secure and bring about the marriage as his proxy. The present circumstances in the Colonies necessitate that Your Ladyship make a match soon for the assurance of your continued safety." John stated. "I would imagine that Your Ladyship will be married by Spring." He wanted her! Oh, God, he wanted her. With an intensity he hadn't ever imagined before. But even as his blood raced with desire and need, and the beginnings of a fierce long lasting love, his mind was sharp and calculating, and he knew that if he was to bind her to him he would have to act fast. She had captured his heart and soul, this courageous, resolute, rather mature young woman who possessed more common sense and intelligence than was good for her. A man used to being pursued and having his pick of women, he did not care for these feelings of jealousy that she and her romantic prospects were arousing in him.

"To whom? The only officers on the list His Grace my father apparently approved are Captain Lord Kennedy, General Randall and you, Major."

"We both are aware of Kennedy's shortcomings and Randall is out of the running. Your Ladyship
needs a husband." John pressed.

"Do not my rank and wealth protect me?" She asked.

"That is what needs protecting, Mary, that same rank and wealth by an officer of His Majesty's Army. We dare not chance attempting to send you home back to England on a naval ship, daren't chance it being taken by rebel privateers or pirates. You are far too valuable to risk such a dangerous prospect. Admiral Lord Howe and General Howe made the decision you would be most safe and secure in New York under British protection." John explained.

"They did not even seek to consult me!" She felt her anger rise.

"Would you even stop to consider your possible fate at the hands of those rebels or pirates? A beautiful young woman such as you?" He posed. He was genuinely concerned.

"What are you suggesting? You informed me the morning after the van Leiden's dinner party it would be best that we enter into a Marriage of Convenience. Are you still of that mind?" She asked him.

"I most certainly would no longer consider it a Marriage of Convenience, Mary. Any gentleman would have insisted upon it after the intimacies we have shared. But yes, I do wish to marry you."

"If you were a gentleman, John, it all would not have happened. You should have left me alone at the Academy. Not bothered with me."

"Damn it, Mary! You know that General Howe would have never allowed that! Never! We have been over this countless of times. Do not be foolish! How could I have ever left you alone at the Academy? You are the most beautiful young woman I have ever laid eyes on!" John protested. "It would have happened, eventually. What has occurred between us, you know that as well as I do and not once did you say no to me!" He reminded her.

"I know." She said. "If I do accept you, I do wonder if you will make a good husband."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean? I will do all that I can to make you happy. I have said as much in the past. I don't want anyone else, Mary, only you will do."

She wanted to believe that he was sincere. Was she the woman that was going to reform this notorious rake? She knew that he had not taken any women to his bed since she had been refusing him access to hers after the scandal that had resulted in regards to their snowball fight. If he had indulged any sexual urges she imagined they were done solo. Having heard odd moans, groans and the odd call out of her name in the middle of the night coming from his room, she knew this to be true. She knew men took care of their urges in that manner as did women. Masturbation was the best way to take care of one's passions than playing one's lover false. The fact that she was the one that he thought of whilst doing it made her flush. "Could you please allow me to think? Muddle it over?"

"You know that you will, you know that you want to. No one else will make you as happy as I will. None of them could." His voice was so full of conviction. Most of all that Continental Benjamin Tallmadge, John added silently to himself, lest of all him!

Later That Same Evening

"OOhhhhh! Mmmm... Yeeeesssss! Suck it, My Sweet Little Dove!"

Mary sat up in bed with a start being certain not to disturb George who lay dozing at the foot of her bed, curled up, nose to tail. She cocked her head to listen.

"OOOOHHHHH, GOD!"

A loud groan was coming from John's bedroom. What in heaven's name was going on in there? He was engaging in it once again, that nocturnal pastime when he thought she was fast asleep. If he only knew how many nights she lay in bed thinking about him, the memories of what he did to her vividly coming to her as she attempted to drift off to the land of Morpheus. How her fingers would travel beneath the bodice of her nightgown, caressing her own breasts, a hand then lifting the hem, traveling up her legs, her fingers finding their way between her thighs, caressing her in the ways she remembered he had, becoming hot slick and wet with her need, her desire for him, until several times she had reached her crisis imagining that it was his hands that were caressing her so intimately, that it was his mouth upon her.

Mary listened for a moment further. She tossed the covers off, her bare feet hitting the carpet, making
her way toward the doorway that separated their bedrooms, gently pushing it open a bit more, peering around it, a hand flying to her mouth to stifle a gasp, her mouth closing as curiosity took hold. He was seated in a wingback chair near the fireplace, dressed only in what appeared to be his breeches, the buttons undone. John holding his engorged erect organ, his hand moving up and down it rhythmically, his head tossed back against the chair, his eyes closed, and the sound of his hoarse ragged breathing filling the room. Oh God! He was pleasuring himself! Just as she had suspected when she heard those noises all those other nights before.

"Oh, Mary! Mary!" She heard him moan her name over and over, watched completely fascinated as he stroked himself that much faster, clearly it was she he was making love to in the fantasy that was playing out in his mind as he pleased himself. There was no other woman! She thought intensely relieved. It was her that he thought about. It was her that haunted his erotic dreams at night!

She felt heat stealing through her limbs as she watched him, transfixed, mesmerized, unable to turn away, her core beginning to ache with need, her stomach muscles tightening, mouth becoming dry, one of her hands traveling down her hip to nestle between her legs, stroking herself through the cotton of her nightgown, closing her eyes, her hot breath escaping in a soft whisper. Hearing and watching him as the flames in the fireplace danced against a nearby wall, his silhouette showcased, his gasps and moans becoming louder as he repeated her name over and over like a sacred litany finally spending catching his seed in a handkerchief, one of the several of hers that he had taken as favors.

She clutched the handle of the door that separated their rooms to steady herself, her knees becoming weak, the hinges creaking softly. Releasing it as though she her hand had been scalded when she saw his head turn toward the direction of her bedroom. Staggering on her trembling legs to the bed, her eyes fixated on the doorway waiting for any moment when his head might peer around it and he would come striding into the room. If he did she knew that she would be incapable to deny him. Whatever he wanted from her she would gladly give him!

She waited several agonizing moments but he did not come, her body throbbing with need from the erotic vision of him pleasuring himself seared to her mind, a hand tugged at the hem of her nightgown, spreading her legs, settling against the pillows, yanking the gown up about her thighs, her fingers skimming through the curls covering her sex into the heated wetness, an index finger moving over her sensitive numb of flesh, tossing her head against the pillows, she moaned loudly startling herself praying that he had not heard her. Pressing her buttocks into the mattress as her fingertip continued to stimulate her sex. Her other hand frantically yanking on the closures of the bodice of her nightgown, exposing her breasts, the hand slipping inside to caress one of the two orbs whilst her other hand continued to work its exquisite magic between her legs, her eyes fluttering closed.

"OOOOOOHHHHHHH! OOOOOOHMMM!" She exclaimed, biting her lips to stifle her increasing cries of pleasure not hearing the sound of someone pushing a door open. The sound of a floorboard creaking caused her eyes to fly open. Oh, God! He was here! Turning her head, her cheeks flaming with shame and passion when their eyes met she could read the raging lust and intense hunger in his as he stared at her.

"Let me help you, Sweetheart!" He said, smiling lasciviously as he approached the bed, his eyes riveted on the sensual tableau, snatching the hand that was fingering her sex when he reached her, plunging her fingers in his mouth, sucking on them, his tongue licking her essence from them, tasting her. The fingers of one of his own hands replacing hers, as his other hand pulled her up into a sitting position, forcing her legs to fall further apart, Mary gasping, her breath becoming ragged with un concealed longing. "What is it that you continue to do to me?" He asked her when her fingers hand fallen from his mouth.

"I...I..." She stammered at a loss for words.

"Still have that raging case of scarlet fever?" He asked.

Mary's fingertips tracing from his lips down over his chin, the column of his throat.

"I cannot stop thinking about you, Mary."

"You invade my dreams at night, as well!" She confessed, her hips undulating against his hand.

"John..." She pleaded. Oh, God! She was on fire, inflamed! "Ohhh!" She breathed. His fingers!
What were they doing to her? She asked feeling them drag with agonizing slowness over the floor of her passage, the walls tightening about them as she tensed and burned.

"I will catch your cries, Cherie!" He reassured her, his mouth covering hers in a scorching kiss just as he sent her world shattering into a thousand glorious stars with his expert manual ministrations, marveling at her capacity for passion the intensity of their attraction. She would never have found such scorching desire in Ben Tallmadge's bed nor would he ever allow the boyishly handsome Captain Kent the opportunity. That lad would not so much as steal a kiss from Lady Mary!

John did not allow her orgasm to subside before he had torn his mouth from hers and was leaving a trail of burning kisses down her throat, chest, belly...

"That's it. Yes, Cherie! Come for me, Mary!" He encouraged, as he settled himself between her legs, his tongue slashing against her clitoris, drawing her thighs onto his broad shoulders, reaching beneath to grasp her buttocks, his fingertips digging into her smooth firm flesh.

"Oh, God! John!" His tongue! What was he doing to her with his tongue? Then his teeth? Did he just nip at her? What was he going to do with his hands now? She asked herself, feeling them release her buttocks, his fingers dancing up over her thighs to her hips caressing with feather light strokes, up to her hips, holding her fast, yanking her that much closer to him, her hands reaching down the tangle in his hair, pointing the toes of a neat foot, skimming it down his muscular back, her head falling upon the pillows, her eyes widening as her lips pressed together to stifle a loud moan that threatened to tear through her throat, her free hand clutching at the bedclothes, arching her back, wantonly, her breasts thrusting upward, neck falling back, her long mass of red-gold curls falling about them. He was driving her wild with want and need, a fierce all consuming carnal desire overtook her as he drove her closer and closer to her climax- until she shattered on a sob- her body spasming over and over until she was spent.

"Marry me and I promise to give you this every night for the rest of your life, this and far much more." He vowed coming up, his eyes dark with lust. "Do you truly need more time to think about it?"

"I am giving it careful consideration." She replied, her eyes meeting his, noting all the emotions contained in them, lust, desire, love, obsession, it thrilled and scared her at the same time. Would Ben Tallmadge ever look at me this same way? She asked herself.

"What is there to consider now?" He asked. "Do not even think of allowing another man to touch you!" He warned, yanking her close, rolling them about on the bed until he was upon his back and she was straddling him, her knees on either side of his hips. "No touching, caressing, no petting, grazing or stroking!" With each word his fingers demonstrated each upon her person until at the last he was stroking her inner thighs. "Promise me!" He demanded.

"I promise..." Christ! He was so damned desirable when he was forceful and demanding.

"Good!" He smirked. "Are you still burning with your fever?"

"Is your bed still ice cold?" She countered.

"I am not in my bed. I seem to have been lured once more into yours, Sweet Siren."

"Siren?"

"You are incredibly beguiling. You have charmed, enchanted and captivated me." He stated his hands traveling further up her thighs to her core, her bare backside nestling against his rock hard organ.

"Just charmed, enchanted and captivated?" She probed, swirling her fingertips in patterns over his bare-chest, enjoying in her power of him.

He chuckled. "Well, those and bewitched, mesmerized and dazzled."

Mary laughed lightly. "Truly?" She asked.

He nodded. "Shall I demonstrate?"

"Demonstrate?"

"How I have been charmed, enchanted and captivated."

"And bewitched, mesmerized and dazzled." She provided, her eyes dancing with mischief.

He laughed. "Indeed. Those as well, you have taken my soul, My Celtic Enchantress." He confessed. "Lured and enticed me once more to the promise of the delights found in your bed.
Wicked, wicked Mary, you know that I cannot resist you."
"I would never had suspected, John." She teased, leaning over him, her face a scant few inches from
his. "Don't resist." She whispered seductively against his mouth.
"I have all intentions not to. I want you." He said fiercely smoldering eyes searching hers in the dim
candlelight before he pounced, grasping her, moving about on the bed and in the bedclothes once
again, switching their positions.
Mary gasped in surprise, giggling as he rose up, placing his palms on either side of her, leaning
forward to touch the tip of his nose to hers. "Patience, you cannot have me yet."
"What if I lay siege to your defenses? My tactical skills are quite good."
"We shall see about that, John, my defenses are rather strong and well fortified." She replied.
"Indeed? Rest assured that I will persist in my siege until you surrender." He countered. "I will have
your heart, body, mind and soul no matter long it takes." As if to emphasize his point, he allowed
one of his fingertips to travel down with agonizing slowness from breast to hip, she shivered with
anticipation fire-hot beneath his touch. Her breath catching when he reversed direction, swallowing
to moisten her suddenly very dry mouth, the tip of her tongue snaking out to dash across her full lush
lower lip.
"Are you ticklish?" He asked.
"What?"
"Are you ticklish? Will you shriek with laughter if I tease you here?" He inquired dancing his fingers
over the indentation of her waist.
"John, would you seek to wake the house? It is the middle of the night!"
"Wake the house? Many of the officers are presently being entertained by their intimate friends and
others are paying for the privilege at this hour, Siren. There is no to awaken but the poor fellow that
is not engaged in some manner of amusement."
"Not the sort of discussion a gentleman engages in with a lady." Mary remarked.
"Are we not past that? We did say that we would be honest with each other no matter the indelicacy
or unpleasantness of the subject." He reminded her.
"Do you wish to make me shriek?" She asked.
"If I had my way, I would have you screaming with ecstasy in the throes of passion. But I will settle
for you shrieking with laughter as I tickle you. The other we will engage in at another time in the not
too distant future."
"You told me previously you would leave that to my husband."
"Indeed!" He grinned. "I will. Now what must I do to make you laugh? Shall I touch you here?" He
asked teasing her ribs.
Mary giggled. "John, please!" She cried letting his comment pass.
"Or here?" Fingers drew her nightgown up further about her hips tickling the bare skin.
Mary squirmed. "Ah! You are!" He chuckled eyes dancing with mischief.
"Devil! Rogue!" She exclaimed swatting playfully at his wickedly naughty hand, undulating her hip
in a vain attempt to get away. To no avail, he had her trapped.
John laughed smiling, his dimples showing. "Devilish rogue? That is a rather accurate assessment."
He whispered against her mouth as if he were sharing a particular confidence, the tip of his nose
nuzzling hers, kissing her lightly upon the mouth, his teeth nipping the side of her neck sending
delicious thrills through her, her blood white-hot, John planting raspberries against her heated flesh.
"John!" She pleaded through her shrieks and giggles of mirth, the pair rolling about within the
bedclothes like a pair of errant and playful puppies tangling the sheets about them. When they
stopped both were breathless, staring at one another in the candlelight, chests rising and falling as
they strove to catch their collective breath.
It was John who broke the intense sexual tension, his mouth claiming hers in a searing kiss, fingers
traveling between her legs, finding her slick, wet and burning stroking her until she was writhing
beneath him, virtually melting into the mattress.
"Do you know how beautiful you are at this moment? All flushed, your luscious lips swollen and
gently bruised by my kisses, your skin warm and lush, your body teetering upon the precipice. Shall I take you there again, My Sweet Siren? Once more, My Love." He murmured, his breath hot, his fingers working their magic, her orgasm slamming into her with an intense force that stole her breath. She clutched at him, her nails digging into his bare shoulders and down his muscular back, leaving little crescents, as the spasms washed over her like waves upon a stormy sea. "Next time I promise to use my tongue." He assured her with a wink and a wicked smile, confident that he had exorcised any desire that remained for that Setauket preacher's boy from her with his expert skills and attentions.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XIII

Not too many notes this time:
The passages that Mary is reading aloud are still part of Shakespeare's Richard II whose plot parallels the American War of Independence.
Faro is a gambling game that was popular during the 18th c. Several officers lost fortunes playing it leaving them to have to look for wives with fortunes. Captain Lord Kent is not one of them.
Once again, thanks to everyone who is taking the time to read, leave kudos and comments on this story. It is greatly appreciated.
December 24, 1776
Continental Army Encampment

"Hellfire and Damnation!" Ben growled slamming his fist against the camp table sending the walnut tarts bouncing off a plate; he captured several before they hit the ground. "Damnation!" He shouted in a fierce temper, grabbing for the plate before more tarts fell upon the ground, kicking the same table with the toe of his boot, toppling it over scattering all the other items over the floor of the tent.

Caleb jumped, whipping his head about. Something was not right with his usually even-tempered friend.

"What flea bit your arse, Tall boy?" Caleb asked, shaking his head assessing the mess that Ben had created in his pique of anger. "Did you see May Ludlow in New York? I reckon your farewell did not go as well as planned? Did you bring back anymore fruitcake?"

Ben nodded his blue eyes dark and stormy. "God Damn my misfortune! That Bloodybacked Bastard has given her a dog!"

"Shite! A dog, eh? Some wee lady's lap dog that pisses and shits everywhere?" Caleb asked. This did not bode well.

"No! A proper hunting dog- a guard dog! She holds affection for me, Caleb. She told me herself but in my rashness I insulted her. Damn fool that I am." Ben confessed.

"What'd ye say?" Caleb asked.

Ben ran his fingers through his thick dark brown hair pushing it back from his forehead, clearly still incredibly agitated. "I implied gross improprieties in her relationship with Major Andre."

"You asked her if she's fucked him, didn't you? What idiot possessed you?"

The look on Ben's face said it all.

Caled exhaled, whistling. "What happened, Bennie-boy?"

"She slapped me." Ben said sheepishly.

"Ouch! What did you expect accusing her of not being a proper lady?" Caleb reminded him.

"I let my anger get the better of me."

"You were a complete arse! So you finally figured out you want something that you can't have?"

Caleb chuckled.

"I could have." Ben protested. "Damned Lobster's proposed though."

"Sorry, Tall boy." Caleb sympathized. "You could always sneak back into New York and steal her away out from under Andre's nose."

"She would hate me."

"Would she? You said she has an affection, whatever the fuck that means. It could all be sorted with several hours of her flat on her back with you between her thighs, give her a rollicking good time in bed, Ben, she will forget about the Major." Caleb explained crudely.

"Only after I have married her, which is clearly impossible, His Grace of Sutherland would never consider an Officer in the Rebellious Continental Army as a husband for his youngest daughter."

"She still cares for you; you were one of the best friends of her brothers. Certainly that still counts for something?"

I believe I destroyed my prospects by acting rash and reckless." Ben sighed, pursing his lips.

"Nothing a sincere heartfelt apology cannot rectify. Besides, knowing of his reputation with women, Andre is probably riddled with the pox. Lady Mary Ludlow is not going to be happy with the likes of that rogue in her bed regardless of how smitten he is with her!" Caleb explained.
"She is thinking about his proposal, Caleb? She may take him." Ben stated. "He is more than smitten, Caleb! Our intelligence says as much!"
"Then you have to make certain she don't!" Caleb countered.

New York City
That Same Day

"Jerusalem, my happy home, When shall I come to thee? When shall my sorrows have an end? Thy joys when shall I see?" Mary's clear soprano voice sang out, her hands playing the accompaniment on the harpsichord. "Oh, happy harbor of the saints. O sweet and pleasant soil. In thee no sorrow may be found. No grief, no care, no toil."
"That is a rather solemn song to be singing at Christmastide, Lady Mary. A voice as lovely as yours should be raised in a joyous carol." John commented entering the Music Room.
George, who was lounging at his mistress's feet, got up and rushed over, tail wagging furiously, his body wiggling in greeting. His Lord and Master was here!
John grinned, chuckling at the pup's antics. "There is a good lad!" He said, scratching the pup behind the ears with one hand as he pet the dog with another. "Please excuse my lack of manners, Mr. Hudson, was otherwise engaged when I arrived, so I took the liberty of letting myself in. Are you truly that unhappy? When shall your sorrows have an end? I can help you there, Sweet May. Send your servant for your cloak and gloves; we are going for a sleigh ride!"
"A sleigh ride?" Mary asked.
"Yes, much more delightful than singing maudlin hymns, wouldn't you say?" John asked. "I sent over word to Miss Shaw requesting that Your Ladyship be otherwise engaged today. She, in her kindness and the spirit of the Season, was kind enough to agree. You needn't worry or fret about your charges today. They can manage without you for several hours where I cannot."
"Unchaperoned?"
"We are courting, Mary. Consider the nature of our friendship..." John implied. "What of the nature of our friendship? The intimacy?"
"Given the beginnings of our association, I would dare to believe there is deep affection there. I genuinely enjoy your company and I believe that you feel the same. We would have gravitated to one another regardless of the circumstances. I do hope, but daren't presume, our tenderness and devotion to one another has made your stay with His Majesty's army more enjoyable." John stated. "It has, John. I am most grateful that we do get on so well."
"The ease of our friendship does not diminish the other ways that I regard you, Mary. I am still completely enchanted." John reminded her with a wicked smile. "No what about that sleigh ride?" Mary flashed him a sweet smile. "I am so gratified to hear that." She laughed lightly lowering her lashes. She was becoming quite the accomplished flirt with him about. "I would love to." She added making to walk past him.
He caught her by the arm pulling her beneath the kissing bough, looking up. "Lady Mary, you have been caught under the mistletoe. I must insist on claiming a forfeit." John whispered his mouth dangerously close to hers.
"I thought I was to claim mine." She countered. "Do you not wish to kiss me?"
"Always. Your question is rather forward, Milady."
"Does it vex you, Sir?"
He pondered her question for the briefest of moments. "No!" He replied drawing her into his embrace.
"Then kiss me." She demanded coquettishly a flirtatious smile playing about her lips, drawing attention to them, the lower one lush, pink and inviting.
He did not have to be told twice. How he ached for a taste of her sweet mouth, he thought lowering his head, capturing her mouth with his, pulling her closer, their bodies molding together in an intimate embrace.
The kiss was raw and carnal; there was no other way to describe it. The way his lips ravaged hers so
intensely. She felt her blood rush through her veins, white-hot, her cheeks flushing and burning, her body melting into his embrace, her arms twining about his neck. She was all fire and desire and he could not get enough of her! He thought his mouth slanting over hers tempted to pick her up in his arms and carry her up to her room to ravish her even in broad daylight.

George danced about, wiggling, wagging his tail, whining, his head insinuating itself between the lower portion of Mary and John's bodies, seeking attention forcing them to break their kiss and embrace.

John laughed trying to hide his annoyance. "What are you about?" He asked kneeling down to stroke the dog's ears. "Are you jealous? Is that what this is all about? You are, aren't you?" He grinned. "You and probably all the unmarried men in His Majesty's Army and several of the married ones as well, you will have to be disappointed as they all are."

"Hush! That is not true!" Mary admonished him.

John arched a brow over one of his eyes. "I beg to differ. Even George knows of your allure and he is only a dog."

"You invited me on a sleigh ride." Mary reminded him.

"So I did. Do excuse me, Lady Mary, I became a bit distracted. But how can Your Ladyship fault me?" He asked with a glint in his eyes. He winked making her giggle.

"Attending to your duty, Major?" She flirted.

"No, I am allowing my heart to guide me." He said baldly honest, his eyes capturing hers. "Mr. Hudson would you please retrieve Lady Mary's cape and gloves? She is going out."

"That should keep you warm, Mary." John said brightly tucking woolen blankets and fur throws about her, pausing for a moment, his expression darkening, watching a carriage pull up to the entrance of the Academy. "Were you expecting visitors?" He asked.

"Not to my knowledge. Who is it? Miss Shaw and the Misses Alton will extend hospitality on my behalf and that of the Academy."

John's eyes widened in surprise watching two elderly white haired matrons exit the carriage. "It is the Madames Richmond and Stewart, that pair of ancient hens. Delivering a personal invitation, I would wager. I have heard that their Twelfth Night ball is one of the Social Events of the Season. That or have they come to offer congratulations on your upcoming Natal Day. It is no secret that Your Ladyship becomes one of the richest and most independent heiresses in the Empire when you turn eighteen."

"Seeking to catch us out together?" Lady Stewart drew me aside at the Fairfax's ball and opined that I should take you if you asked for my hand. She is quite your champion, John."

"Is she now, even with my merchant origins?" John asked with a rakish grin. "She has impeccable taste. Who does Madame Richmond favor?"

"Madame Richmond is quite imperious. She favors Captain Lord Kent. She is convinced that he will succeed to the earldom, seeing me as a countess. I think she is half in love with the captain and his boyish good looks."

"His Lordship was injured upon a patrol last evening. He will be confined to headquarters for a time to recuperate. Do not look so stricken, Darling, he just has a nasty sprain and a bayonet gash upon his chest. The physician was tending him when I left. He should make a full recovery. Fortunately for Madame Richmond there was no damage to his visage just a few minor cuts and bruises that will appeal to the ladies, young and old." John remarked settling in the seat, taking up the reins, giving them a jerk, setting the horses walking. "They are bound to make a horrible fuss over him."

"Are you jealous at the prospect?"

"Now why would you ever believe that? I have enough to fret about, what with trying to persuade a most enchanting young lady to accept my most respectful inquiry." John teased, clearly referring to Mary.

She laughed. "Good things come to lads who wait."

"You make me most hopeful then even though it appears I may have to exercise some patience."
"Patience is a virtue." She reminded him.
"Indeed! Unfortunately not one of the virtues that I possess in abundance."
"It may be worth your while to..." She offered, her voice trailing off.
"Oh?" He could not masque his delight at her unspoken implication.
"If one does not pester and cajole one may receive the answer one seeks," She offered, her voice trailing off.
"But I so delight in pestering you, My Sweet May." John teased.
"I would never had thought." Mary countered. "Captain Simcoe is on his way back to Setauket."
She added changing the subject.
"How kind of you to send him off with those, erm, provisions. He was still singing your praises as he rode away. How many of those molasses cookies were in his saddle bags and that wagon or did you allow him to catch you under the Kissing Bough as well?" You did not send him along with any walnut tarts, did you?"
"He did not capture me under the Kissing Bough, John. I only sent a dozen walnut tarts."
"Good, has Tarleton? A dozen too many, I suppose Major Hewlett is receiving a fruitcake?" He added grudgingly. "You are aware that General Howe will be quite cross if several are not held aside for him?"
"Tarleton did, once. You saw and did not take umbrage with it then. I have set several fruitcakes aside for the General though His Excellency has others to see to purveying his favorite culinary delicacies, other ladies..."
"Mary, it is not proper for you and me to discuss Elizabeth Loring." John stated referring to Howe's married mistress.
"If His Grace, my father, knew how the General conducts himself in private he would have demanded I be sent home on the next available ship, threat of Americans and pirates notwithstanding. Though, despite his vices, General Howe has been incredibly kind and solicitous keeping those unsavory portions of his life secret."
"There is enough gossip in the city regarding His Excellency and The Sultana. Howe daren't chance damaging your reputation by association. There has been enough speculation regarding the nature of our relationship and which suitor you will choose, as well. We dare not give the rebels more ammunition for ridicule and derision. There has been enough speculation regarding the nature of our relationship and which suitor you will choose, as well. We dare not give the rebels more ammunition for ridicule and derision. It is understood that His Grace of Sutherland and General Washington had an amiable acquaintance, if not a friendship, during the French War and that Washington has extended that affection to His Grace's children. Given his reputation for rather strict morality, Washington would not hesitate to indicate his displeasure if he felt that Your Ladyship's honor was being compromised in any fashion whilst you were under the protection of His Majesty's Army. Though given your social status he does have quite the presumption to believe that he is entitled to offer an opinion." John explained, turning his head briefly to read Mary's reaction.
"The correspondence from my father is due any day now. A ship from London docked this morning. I would hasten a guess the necessary documents are upon that ship to effect the conclusions to so many pressing issues, chief among them the approval of my marriage and the man my father approves as my husband. Yes, my father and General Washington did form a friendship during the French War and that Government has extended that affection to His Grace's children. Given his reputation for rather strict morality, Washington would not hesitate to indicate his displeasure if he felt that Your Ladyship's honor was being compromised in any fashion whilst you were under the protection of His Majesty's Army. Though given your social status he does have quite the presumption to believe that he is entitled to offer an opinion." John explained, turning his head briefly to read Mary's reaction.
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"What if the one His Grace approved is now dead?" John asked. So Sutherland and Washington were friends? John would have to explore how deep the childless Washington's affection for Sutherland's children went? If it were an affection that could be used to the British's advantage which apparently from what Mary had just told him, it most probably could. But was he willing to risk his own future happiness with a young woman he was desperately in love with to incite the Rebel Commander?
"Did you not mention that the choosing would be left to the discretion of General Howe? That is, if my father decides to give him that right which I am most certain he will since the General did write and explained the circumstances, but enough of that, what of the here and now?" She wished to
discuss more than her marriage. A prospect, which the impending reality of, was beginning to frighten her, she was going to be spending the next forty, fifty or sixty years with the man. She hoped that her father or the General would make the right choice.

"What of it? What wish or desire do you want to fulfill?" John asked smoothly.

"You are planning on attending Midnight Service this evening? I know that there is a party planned with a fencing exhibition for the officers but should we not celebrate the birth of the Lord with attendance in church?" Mary asked.

"Yes, of course, Darling." John lied. He had originally intended upon drinking a vast amount of champagne, gambling, dancing, presenting her with several of her gifts and then finding his way into her bed, spending the night doing everything but making passionate love to her. "Whatever you wish." He knew the attendance of the high ranking officers and members of Howe's staff would send a message. The idea of coming in from church and possibly straight upstairs to her bed did have a certain wicked appeal. He would give careful consideration to altering his plans. He was not so profligate that he did not find solace from time to time in faith though he was not generally a religious man but he was finding he would do anything to please her. Anything! He had been enjoying attending service with her in the Anglican Church every Sunday morning. He would do it for her.

"Did you enjoy your sleigh ride, My Dear?" General Howe asked with a smile as Mary, her cheeks flushed from the cold of the outdoors and several hours in a sleigh with Major Andre, came into the library where the general was reading some papers and enjoying a glass of sherry. He noted that Andre was not far behind the young lady. "I have had correspondence from His Grace of Sutherland." The general announced flashing the papers in his hand, smiling at both of them.

"Good news?" John asked, entering the room, taking a glass of sherry off the tray.

William Howe nodded. "His Grace, understanding full well the extenuating circumstances, has signed over the discretion of the choice of a husband for the Lady Mary to my care but no wedding will occur unless Your Ladyship approves of the match. His Grace was kind enough to include the Marriage Contract in which he leaves you a rather independently wealthy young lady. Besides your person the only other item to come to your future husband will be a dowry of 30,000 pounds per annum, a substantial sum. All the other properties, business ventures and goods are to remain in Your Ladyship's name and under your sole control per this contract for the duration of your natural life."

"You Excellency has been designated In Loco Parentis?" John asked looking up from the Marriage Contract that the General had handed him.

Howe nodded, a smile playing about his mouth.

"Who would Your Excellency recommend that I choose?" Mary asked getting to the heart of the matter.

"The officers being considered have changed since I had first corresponded with His Grace. From the first group, having weighed and vetted the lot, His Grace chose the Late Major Lord Graham and, surprisingly..." He paused for effect. "Major John Andre! His Grace writes that he.... Where is the passage? Ah!" Howe scanned the letter attempting to find what he sought. "Here it is! His Grace is quite effusive. Quote: Having been quite possessed of an inordinate fondness and finding myself well favored by the fairer sex in my bachelorhood, until my dearest spouse tamed my wayward ways and secured my heart, body, mind and soul for her alone (what with her beauty of face and form, sweetness of nature and superior intelligence) I am of the opinion that reformed rakes make the best of husbands. That being shared, I am assured the Major will never give my dearest child any cause for unhappiness. That he will be constant, faithful and true to all that she and all that she shall be and in turn to him until Almighty God may seek to part them. End quote." Howe finished, his eyes looking from Mary to John and back again, letting the pair absorb what His Grace had written.

John's eyes flickered to Mary to gauge her reaction to what Howe had just read. "Captains Kent and Nicholls are rather green..." He offered.

"Your Ladyship, I do hope that I have not offended you in any fashion by being so frank and forthright but such a delicate matter requires dispensation of the usual proprieties." Howe explained. "Captain Lord Kent is a mature twenty-two but he has not gotten the devil or the rashness of youth
completely out of him. He could be inclined to wander. I would not chance the potential of a scandal when Your Ladyship sought to find solace for your pain at the discovery of his peccadilloes in the arms of a particular officer upon my staff."

"Your Excellency does not hold Captain Kent in the highest regard or me for that matter, believing that I would retaliate in such a fashion." Mary asked. The General certainly was being quite bald and honest with her.

"No, My Dear, just familiar with the ways of handsome young officers and that particular officer's affection and regard for Your Ladyship. I would not cause you any untoward anguish by allowing you to make the wrong choice."

"He could inherit an earldom." Mary protested.

"Then take him if he asks." John spat. "But before you do, ask yourself, would you rather be an unhappy countess or an incandescently happy officer's wife? Provided Kent lives through the war!"

"You are not being fair!" Mary shot at him.

"I am being realistic!" John countered.

"You know that marriage isn't about happiness. It is a business arrangement between two suitable parties."

"Considering my position as Your Ladyship's protector and guardian and the perceptions of such an arrangement, it is only proper to keep your Good Name and Reputation unsullied that I offer marriage, Lady Mary. Anything else would be seen as an impugn to my honor and yours. Not the behavior of a gentleman, which we are both all too aware, we have spoken of the possibility several times, now is the time to take the next step and make your decision."

"Captains Kent and Nicholls are still courting me."

John sighed in exasperation. "Lady Mary..." He began. She was intent on making this incredibly difficult for him. "General Howe has made clear Captain Lord Kent is lacking in certain attributes that a lady such as you would require in a spouse. Given what has transpired between us and the gossip it behooves Your Ladyship to consider..."

"Major Andre, you promised not to push my decision, to let me think about it. Can you not give me the time?"

"No, Lady Mary, I cannot. We are at war. You are an unmarried young lady of great consequence that the Rebels would not hesitate to capture and exploit hence the urgency. I am certain that Major Benjamin Tallmadge is most eager to fulfill his father's wish especially when he learns that His Grace of Sutherland has settled 30,000 pounds per annum upon Your Ladyship as a dowry! His Majesty's Army will not allow your person or that vast sum of money to fall into enemy hands!" John snapped.

Mary braced her back against the door, closing her eyes, taking a deep breath, blinking several times, letting the tears finally fall unchecked down her cheeks. She would have to decide soon, the prospect terrifying and exciting her at the same time. Choose wisely! She could hear her Scots grandmother's voice in her head. Would she fancy the boyishly handsome Kent or the dashingly rakish Andre? Would she concur with Howe's assessment of Kent? He was near to perfect on paper. Who would she choose?

She did not hear the door separating her room from the Major's gently creak on its hinges. "Lady Mary, are you quite well?" John's voice was intense with concern. "I heard what appeared to be sounds of distress and came to...Oh, My Darling!" He was upon her in a trice enveloping her in his strong comfortable embrace. "Whatever vexes you so?" He whispered into her hair, planting tender kisses along her brow. "What brought about this torrent of tears? This won't do. This won't do at all. Come now! It is not that horrible. I had thought that you were quite fond of me. Let me make you feel better. I cannot bear to see you so distraught. Let me ease your distress."

"Regardless of the scandal it will create? A wealthy heiress of marriageable age and a bachelor, alone, in her bedroom..." Mary asked through sniffles.

"Isn't it too late to be worrying about that, Mary?" John asked. "You know I am quite capable of distracting you in the most delightful ways." He added with a playful grin, gazing into her face, seeking to change her mood. "There's that smile." His palm cradled her chin, tilting it up, his cobalt
blues eyes staring into her sapphire colored ones, still shining and wet with her tears.  
"Shall I make you shriek with laughter once more, My Sweet Siren?"
"How would you propose to do that? Do you not wish to have me screaming in ecstasy? Seek to corrupt my Fine New England Moral sensibilities. You are rather good. I will allow you that."
"Your Ladyship makes it a real pleasure though I do have much more to show you."
"Why don't you then?" She whispered feeling a bit reckless.
"Is that an invitation?"
"Do you wish it to be?"
"You know I do?"
"Do I? In what wicked ways will you corrupt my Fine New England Moral Sensibilities and breach my defenses, intent on another siege, Major?"
"I could show you." He offered his lips becoming precariously close to hers.
"My reputation..."
"Is safe and secure within my keeping, you do trust me, don't you?"
"Trust you to do what?" She countered.
"The most deliciously wicked and exciting acts that you could ever imagine." He explained.
"That all sounds incredibly exciting."
"Are you curious, May?" John asked using the familiar name he had her Lottie, Rachel and Melissa call her. He rather liked the intimacy of it.
"As a cat."
"Shall I make you purr, My Ginger-haired Puss?"
Mary giggled, her good mood restored. "You are so very tempting..."
"How can I persuade you to give into that temptation?" He asked passing a thumb tenderly across one of her cheekbones, caressing the smooth skin.
Mary felt her flesh heat beneath his touch.
"Seduce me." She challenged him tossing all caution to the wind. "With your words, your body, make me feel as though I am the most Desirable Woman in the World and you want me! Seduce me, John." Her voice was husky with desire against his mouth.
"Do you truly wish me to? There will no turning back. Is that what you want? We will have to marry you know. Have you finally reached the decision that I will make a good husband? Or does the thought of being bored to tears with Captain Lord Kent for the next fifty years terrify you and you are seeking a way out?"
"I would find ways to amuse myself." She stated.
John chuckled. "Naughty Lady Mary, how long after you wed him would we find ourselves engaged in an illicit affair? Would it take days or weeks for me to become your lover?" John asked.
"I would never cuckold my husband!" She protested.
"Why am I not convinced? If it were me, most certainly not because I would ruin you for anyone else, you would not wish to have any other man in your bed but me after you had me." John assured her.
"Are you so certain?"
"I could show you, if you'd like, you asked me to seduce you."
"So I did."
"I pray that you are giving careful consideration as to what His Grace wrote: Reformed rakes make the best of husbands. Honor your father; it is your duty and one of God’s Sacred Commandments. Marry the rake that has begun to change his ways since he met you. Let him seduce you, Sweet May. You will never have to find ways to amuse yourself once you take him as your lover and then your husband."
He was wearing down her resistance with each argument he unraveled using incredibly practical and pragmatic logic. She knew that her future and safety lay with him, that he was the one to make her happy. She would have to let go of any remaining dreams she had about Benjamin Tallmadge. The physical relationship between her and the Major was intense and passionate. She was all too aware of his virility and the power it commanded over her. The air between them was thick with sexual
tension. He was so incredibly tempting, so devastatingly handsome and charming. Her resolve was quickly crumbling.

"Well, what do you say? Shall I leave word that you are indisposed at present?" John asked his eyes glittering with mischief.

"I dismissed the maids." Mary replied.

"He grinned. "Clever." He teased drawing her into his arms, his hands snaking down from her waist, cupping the round flesh of her bum through her gown and petticoats, yanking her close. He was hard with arousal, his erection straining against his breeches.

"I am delighted that you have such a high opinion of my intelligence, John." Mary bantered back.

"Indeed! It is one of the many reasons that I find you irresistible. I am smitten."

"Are you?"

"Completely!"

"Good! I have not gotten over my case of scarlet fever. I am experiencing a dreadful relapse. You will have to administer a remedy."

"I have just the cure but I will have to remove your gown and my uniform, Sweetheart."

"Will you now?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh!"

"Yes, Sweet Siren."

"Mmm... I do so enjoy when you call me that. I enjoy being beguiling, bewitching and enchanting." She said her arms moving up to his shoulders, her finger quickly removing his stock, unfastening the closures of his scarlet coat, then the buttons of his buff colored waistcoat.

"You are becoming quite proficient at undressing me." He observed.

"I get quite a bit of practice with one particular major." She provided.

"Excellent! Is he to your liking?"

"Very much so, I am rather fond of him. He has the most talented hands and fingers. Then his kisses..." Her voice trailed off.

"What about his kisses?"

"Delicious!"

He arched a brow over an eye. "Truly?"

"Oh, yes! What he can do with his mouth."

"What can he do with his mouth? Tell me, Mary." He prompted. He was enjoying this little game. Mary felt her cheeks burn, flushing a pretty pink. "All manner of roguish and naughty things, the most delightful things, I come near to swooning with pleasure just thinking about them." She confessed.

"As well you should." He approved. "What of his teeth and tongue?" He asked as items of clothing began falling on nearby chair, his jacket, stock, waistcoat as John's adept and skilled fingers began working at her gown.

Mary lowered her eyes, the dark lashes fanning against her cheeks, flushing to crimson. "His tongue..." She trembled remembering the pleasures his tongue afforded her. "Oh, joy beyond one's imagining."

He chuckled. "Beyond imagining you say?" He teased unable to conceal delight, feminine garments joining masculine ones upon the chair.

"Oh, yes! He is capable of taking me to Paradise. It is most extraordinary."

John smirked. "I can just imagine."

"Can you?" She asked wrapping her arms about his neck, drawing his face down to hers. "Take me there once again, John." She whispered against his mouth before her lips captured his, kissing him fiercely, offering herself to him.

He instantly reacted, growling low in the back of his throat, taking possession of her, yanking her body even closer against his, his hands all over her, touching, seeking, caressing. His mouth devouring hers, losing control, she was his blind passion, he would have her, make her his.

He trailed a path of scorching kisses from her lips down the side of her neck. Mary almost screaming
when the kisses turned to nibbles, his sharp teeth nipping the length of her throat up to an earlobe and back down again, her silken skin utterly intoxicating against his mouth and teeth.

"Oh, God," Mary's voice was breathless; her skin fire-hot beneath his kisses and nips. The crescents of her nails digging into the hard muscles of his arms and shoulders to keep her from swooning. "John, please!" She whimpered looking past him to the bed.

"What is it, Mary?" He asked turning is head following her gaze. "Do you wish me to make love to you?"

She nodded totally incapable of resisting him anymore, her body trembling with anticipation. "Yes!"

"Who am I to refuse such a pretty request?" He asked with a roguish smile, picking her up in his arms, walking the scant few feet to the large four-poster, depositing her upon it.

Mary watched as he removed the rest of his remaining clothes including his boots which he kicked across the room.

He stood over her, watching with undisguised pleasure as her eyes took inventory of him.

"Do I meet with your approval?" He asked with a smirk, knowing that she had seen in all before but enjoying her naked admiration, climbing onto the bed. Lying beside her, drawing her into his arms, quickly divesting her of the remainder of her gown until she was as naked as he, pulling back for a moment to admire her. "Perfection! Sheer utter perfection!" He declared.

I am so delighted you find me to your liking." She teased, giggling then gasping when he rolled her onto her back, his weight pressing into her.

John chuckled. "That is not the half of it." He countered, drawing a tendril of hair away from her temple gently with the pad of his thumb.

"No? Care to enlighten me?" She asked.

"Care to be enlightened?" He cocked a brow over an eye, his eyes sweeping over her beautiful body. "Oh, yes!" She breathed reaching up twisting her fingers into his pale braid. "Do we have enough time?"

"We have all the time in the world if you wish. To do things like this..." He dipped his head, nuzzling the side of her neck, leaving a trail of kisses down a pale shoulder, collar bone, to the swell of a perfectly shaped breast. "And this..." The tip of his nose passed back and forth over the fevered skin, feeling her heart beneath beat a wild tattoo of excitement, his lips pressing burning kisses over a breast, mouth closing over the nipple, laving it with his tongue until it was a hard taut peak.

"Oh, John!" She moaned on a sob, heat coursing through her veins, her skin scorching hot. She reached down, tangling her fingers in his hair, gently guiding it toward the other breast, arching her back slightly off the bed in invitation. "Please!" She pleaded.

"Of course, My Darling May, whatever you want." He whispered, blowing on the damp skin where his mouth had been, feeling her tremble as his hot breath fanned against her. "Give into the desire; tell me what it is that you crave. I will give you whatever it is. Do not be hesitant and shy be as wanton as you wish, May."

"Only wanton with you, John."

"Hush, Love." He whispered thickly his lips closing over the other nipple, the tips of his fingers skimming down her torso with feather light caresses making her shiver, her breath becoming shallow.

"John!" She breathed biting her lower lip.

"MMMmmm... Would you like my lips to replace my fingertips? Do you enjoy this, May?" He asked his mouth moving over her torso, the pointed tip of his tongue licking her satin smooth skin, trailing paths this way and that down toward her navel, skirting about the perimeter, Mary keening and moaning, undulating her hips, pressing them into the mattress her thighs moving apart to accommodate him as he moved down her body, his palms cradling her hips, holding her steady as his tongue plunged into her navel, grazing her with his teeth.

Mary's stomach roiled, the muscles tightening , her gaze capturing her lover's, her breath coming in short, hot pants. "Ooooooh.... Ohhhhhhh! John, please! Oh, John!"

"What is it that you want? Tell me what you crave, May?"

"Yo...Your tongue!"
"Where? Here?" He asked drawing her legs over his shoulders, burying his face within her red-gold curls, kissing her, chuckling against her when she sighed in obvious pleasure. Then smiling to himself when he heard her sharp intake of breath when the tip of his tongue touched her little sensitive nub of flesh already plump and swollen with her arousal. Mary could not restrain herself; she moaned and cried out as he gave her pleasure beyond her wildest imaginings, drawing her closer and closer until she came, the waves of pleasure washing over her, until they slowly subsided.

John released his hold on her gradually, kissing a path up her body, each press of his mouth against her heated flesh feeling like a burning brand, moving upward over her stomach, pausing to tease her breasts with his tongue, to hold her. He nudged her legs apart with a knee, moving himself between them, lowering him down to cover her body with his, guiding his erection to her entrance. "This will only hurt for a moment." Thrusting his hips forward he pierced her innocence. She was so bloody tight, he thought hearing her gasp as she felt the searing and burning pain of her first invasion. "It hurts!" She complained, panting as John pulled her closer against him. "It will get better. I promise." He said, thrusting and withdrawing several times, striving to ease her pain and distress as he accustomed her to his length and the pleasure that he could afford her. She arched her back up against him, as the pain gradually subsided to be replaced by ecstatic pleasure, wanting more of him, crying out each time he drove into her, arching her back to meet him her body tensing and tightening with each thrust of his cock inside her.

She was made for this, just as he knew she would be, he thought, watching her facial expression change into one of unadulterated bliss as he continued to make love to her, increasing his pace. "Come with me to Paradise," He encouraged her, thrusting deep and hard, making her tense even more and more until she cried his name experiencing another climax, this one far more intense than the one before, her world seemed to shake and rock with the force of the pleasure spasms coursing through her body.

John coming moments afterward, groaning and panting, crying out her name, collapsing against her, taking in large gulps of air in an attempt to calm himself, his body slightly damp with a thin sheen of sweat. No lover had ever made him feel like this. The pure raw sexual passion between them was flame-hot, scorching, all consuming. "How do you feel?" He asked, brushing a curl away from one of her temples with a forefinger, flexing his hips, his cock still imbedded inside her, it throbbed. "How was Paradise?"

Mary purred like a cat. "Amazing! After the initial pain it was amazing. Is it like that all the time? The burning hot passion, the feeling of my soul being torn from my body when you take me to Paradise this way?" She asked him.

He chuckled, grinning smugly. "We will have to continue to explore and find out, won't we? Now you will have to consent to marry me!" He stated, moving gently within her, making her gasp, feeling him on all sides of her, as he dragged his cock against every sensitive nerve of her.

"Oh, John! So soon?" She breathed, feeling the fire and heat begin to stir inside her, curling about her belly, sear through her limbs, arching her back up to him, her breasts crushing against his hard chest, a leg trapping one of his calves against the coverlet, the pair of the them moving together, slowly this time, in an erotic dance.

"Yes! I do not hear you objecting!" He countered, rocking his hips back and forth against her, his cock easing in and out of her wet and burning sex this time, a hand slipping between their bodies, dancing down her belly, tangling within the curls covering it, slipping inside her, finding her little hidden pearl of flesh, dashing the pad of his thumb over it in a quick steady rhythm, feeling her thighs tensing, the pads of her fingers gripping his shoulders tightly as he brought her closer and closer to the precipice of passion, drawing her nearer and nearer to Paradise once more. Oh, Sweet Christ and All His Saints and Martyrs! She thought remembering the oath one of her Catholic Grandmothers had taught her, her breath coming in short shallow pants, feeling herself about to shatter once more, she was almost there, so very close, her eyes capturing his, reading the expression of sheer triumph of possession in his eyes. Now she was well and truly his in every sense. Both of them knew it. He had branded her. They would marry.
"A few more moments, patience... Oh, yes!" He said, hoarsely, on the brink of Paradise himself, his body tensing feeling her quim on all sides of his cock, like a velvet clad vice, the pressure increasing with each stroke of his organ inside her until they virtually came together, John crying out once again, capturing Mary's scream of fulfillment with his mouth, crushing his lips against hers in a searing kiss, the pair shuddering within each other arms with the intensity of their desire for one another.

John waited until they both had calmed before easing his organ out of her, rolling over upon his back to lie next to her, panting and chuckling by turns, trying to regain his composure.

"Is there more?" She asked, rolling over onto one of her sides, nestling close against him, the index finger of a hand tracing patterns over his chest down his hard abdominal muscles and then higher to dip in the hollow at the base of his throat, her finger tracing patterns southward.

"You have no idea, Darling. Not in your wildest imaginings! We are just getting started! We do have the time." He answered, capturing the wrist of her exploring hand in his guiding it to his belly, placing it near his navel, in such a way that her pinky grazed precariously close to his hipbone, looking at her out of hooded eyes, his mind racing about, deciding what he was going to do next, as he manipulated her hand, forcing it to trace patterns about his navel and hip, near his cock, which quickly went from its flaccid state to lengthening and hardening, John drawing her closer to him, his free hand cupping her chin, kissing her, forcing Mary upon her stomach as he kissed a path from her lips, down over her jaw, the wee hollow beneath her ear, moving her hair aside, his lips touching the back of her neck, trailing down the line of her spine as he moved his body over her, his legs straddled on either side of her.

"John!" She cried out in alarm.

"This is a portion of the more you were so curious about, Sweetheart." He explained, his lips moving further down the line of her spine, his pale braid falling forward, tickling her skin, the tips of his fingers moving with tantalizing slowness down either side her to the indentations of her tiny waist, grasping the swells of her hips whilst his lips traveled down to the small of her back, kissing past, to one of her taught buttocks. "You do have the most beautiful arse! Two perfect moons!" He stated, one hand releasing a hip, trailing over the swell of her buttocks, tracing the line of her buttocks with his fingertips, scooting his body down the bed.

"Easy, Darling." He soothed, his fingers moving southward, edging her legs gently apart, his fingers delving between her legs. "Don't be afraid. Whatever I do will only give you pleasure."

Mary bit her lower lip, feeling his fingers stroking her sex, rubbing against her, the flames of the fires he fed within her licking up her spine. She moaned, arching her back up, shamelessly offering herself to him, plump, wet and waiting to be taken once again, his other hand, caressing her thighs sending thrill after thrill through her, feeling his lips touch a plump mound of her buttocks, the hand caressing her thighs trailing up to her stomach, hitching her hips up slightly, his head moving between her legs, Mary jumping when she felt the tip of his pointed tongue enter her passage.

He growled, low in the back of his throat, like the predator he was, pulling her closer, darting his tongue in and out of her, slick with desire and need, withdrawing it, the flat of his tongue pressing against her pearl, his teeth nibbling at it, biting her ever so gently, making certain she was forever on the precipice of pleasure and pain, working at her for several minutes until she was poised on the brink, moaning and writhing.

"Tell me you want it! Tell me you want my cock inside you, Mary!" He rasped in one of her ears when he came up, his hard organ rubbing against her sex, teasing her. "Filling you to the hilt, moving inside you, giving you the most delicious pleasure..."

"Yes!" She pleaded. "I want it!"

"Then you shall have all of it!" He stated, his rock hard length plunging deep. Making her gasp at the invasion, feeling him on all sides of her, the head of him virtually touching her womb.

"So tight! So beautifully tight!" He groaned, thrusting within her; as far as he possibly could, to the hilt, filling her completely full of him.
Mary pressed her hips back against him, moving with him, grasping handfuls of the counterpane. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" She moaned. John's hands grasping her hips, his fingertips digging into her skin, she was on fire, her limbs aflame, every nerve and fiber of her pulsing with want and need, feeling him sink deep inside her with a single long stroke, driving into the fullest depths of her again and again and again.

The feverish heat, the restless excitement, so sensitive, her heart racing, her body trembling, her breathing coming in quick hot pants, feeling him release his iron grip on her hips, leaning forward over her back, reached about to cup her breasts with his hands. Finding her nipples, he began to pinch and pull at them, causing her to move her hips more quickly.

"That's it, Mary!" He whispered hotly in her ear. "Yes, my Sweet Siren! Come onto my cock! You have the most beautiful breasts. Perfectly sized to fit in my palms, two luscious handfuls." Her nipples were rock hard now in their arousal, her mass of red-gold hair falling about her shoulders, tickling his chest, leaning that much further over her, the fingertips of his long fingers caressing down over her ribcage to the indentations of her tiny waist, marveling at the smooth softness of her skin, feeling the gooseflesh break out upon it. Mary shivered, still trembling with desire. Oh, Sweet Mother of God! This delicious torture! The feel of him on all sides of her!

"Yes, May, yes! Give over to the pleasure!" He encouraged her, nipping her earlobe with his teeth, playfully, dancing his fingertips down her flat belly, tangling them into the thatch of curls covering her sex, his index finger slipping between her cleft, finding her hidden pearl of flesh, passing over it adding fuel to the fire that already raged within her.

The tip of his finger moved against her clitoris as he furiously moved inside her, feeling her immediate response to the firestorm he was creating inside of her as her softness was racked with spasms of pleasure, her world exploding around her for the fourth time that afternoon. John roughly grasping her chin with a free hand, turning her face about to him, kissing her fiercely as the intense orgasm tore through her body, her cries of ecstasy captured by his mouth as moments later he exploded inside her, pressing her into the mattress as his organ pulsed and throbbed inside her overly stimulated flesh, spilling his seed for the second time that afternoon.

Chapter End Notes

Jerusalem My Happy Home: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ngW_dibtWU

The hymn that Mary is playing when John comes to find her.

In Loco Parentis: Latin for In place of the father. Sutherland gives Howe permission to secure Mary's marriage provided she approves of the groom. Her marriage portion is unusually large. The contract, securing her lands and titles in her own name was not the norm. Upon marriage, all the woman's worldly goods and person would belong to her husband. Sutherland wishes to secure Mary's independence knowing that men could gamble away a lady's fortune within an evening. He is being cautious.

Sutherland is an indulgent father, though not of the means and breeding, he may know that John would be the best choice of a husband for Mary, being, as he was, a rake (Sutherland has clearly reformed). Howe is right in having reservations about Captain Lord Kent's youth but we may not have seen the last of the boyishly handsome captain. But then again... After the last scene...

Many thanks to those that have left comments and kudos on this story. The fact that you are continuing to read and enjoy it makes me very happy.
Many Thanks to BC, my "DAR Mom", who was kind enough to act as the Plausibility Meter for the plot up to this point and what may come after. Your knowledge of the history of this period is vast and varied. I am happy to have been able to tap into only a fraction of what you know.
An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XV

She opened her eyes, stretching, an edge of the down filled duvet that covered their bodies falling away, slipping down to reveal a breast. She shifted in the large bed, having a care not to awaken her lover who had also dozed, wincing slightly, her flesh still raw and tender from their many bouts of love making. She blushed remembering the deliciously wicked things that he had done to and shown her, how many times that she had cried out as he had brought her to heights of ecstatic pleasure over and over. So there were delights to be found in the Marriage Bed? If this was what she was to expect as John's wife she would certainly welcome his frequent carnal attentions! Her mother had been mum about some of the pleasures when her duties as a wife were explained to her as a young woman. Only that the Duchess prayed Mary would be as happy with her husband as the Duchess was with Mary's father, the Duke. The emphasis had been on the begetting of an heir not the joys in creating it. John had been incredibly skilled and attentive, concerned that she received as much pleasure from the act as he did knowing that her screams, moans and pants of ecstasy reflected on his skill, flattered his vanity and stroked his pride even though no one had heard them but him.

"Stay right where you are. Don't you dare move!" He stated, reaching out a hand for her, grasping it about her waist, pulling her close against him.

"John, no! Please! You have to leave! Abigail and the maids will here with my bath any moment. If they were to find you here..."

"And if they were?" He asked. "Come now! Abigail, I am certain, is well aware of what transpires between us in the dark. She did catch me in your bed, albeit as a rather large lump, after our snowball fight in the broad light of morning or have you forgotten?" He pouted his lower lip thrust out like a petulant child, his eyes mockingly sad.

"If I have, it is because there are other more recent memories that have replaced that particular morning in my mind, others that will be seared in my memory."

"Seared, you say? I do enjoy the sound of that." He murmured kissing one of her bare shoulders, his lips gradually moving up a side of her neck nipping her earlobe. "Very much, indeed!" He approved, a hand grasping her chin, turning her head, his mouth finding hers. "Sweet! So sweet!" His lips tasted hers, Mary turning about tangling in the duvet, facing him, winding her arms about his neck.

"If you don't leave soon you will cause a dreadful scandal." She said, tracing a finger seductively along his face.

"Tosh! Abigail and the other two maids are discreet. I want you once more before they arrive. I can be quick!"

"Again? I believe that you are utterly insatiable, John." She teased. "Not that I mind. When we are married, I will expect you to make love to me at least three times a night and that is only the beginning."

"You have it in your head to kill me, you little rebel! Don't you?"

"After your performance earlier I am confident that you are most capable of satisfying my demand for your attentions."

He preened at that, laughing lightly. "Shall we find out?" He asked, a grin splitting his handsome face. God! He was hot for her once more! Bending his head, he playfully nuzzled her neck, making her giggle.

"John!" She squeaked, her skin tingling, feeling his hardness thrust deep inside her supple flesh, on all sides of her, his hips flexing, drawing back ever so slightly, thrusting even deeper.

"Oh!" She gasped as he drew her legs up about his hips, moving a fraction more inside to the hilt, sheathing himself within her.
"Oh, God!" He moaned, she was burning hot, ever so tight and sweetly tender. It was driving him near to madness with the desire to possess her totally, completely, his mouth finding hers, splaying his fingers against the side of her neck, to hold her steady. "You have captured my heart and taken my soul. Do you know how much I truly desire you? How you excite me?"

"What? No... I..."

"Well, you do," He declared. "All the time." He drew back for a moment to gaze down at her. "You are so incredibly beautiful, so exquisitely beautiful. You take my breath away."

Leaning up off the bed she kissed his jaw line from the small hollow behind one of his ears to the center, up his chin to his mouth. "You, John, are a shameless flatterer." She accused, punctuating each word with a kiss.

John laughed, kissing her back. "No! A man bewitched." He declared moving expertly inside her. Oh, Good Gracious God! Mary gasped once more at the purely delicious sensation of his hardness deep within her, giving her the most exquisite pleasure. "Yes! John! Yes!" She whispered urgently, clawing her nails down his muscular back, marking him as hers, peeking up at him, meeting his hooded eyes, dark with fierce passion longing and lust.

"Christ, May! Dear Sweet Darling May!" He ground out, slipping his hands beneath her delectably plump arse, drawing her closer, thrusting deeper to the hilt, heightening her pleasure as he continued to thrust within her, drawing her closer and closer, feeling her body slowly tense about his as she got nearer and nearer to her orgasm.

"MMMMM..." She moaned, her breath coming in short hot pants, her lily white thighs clutching tightly about his hipbones holding him steady, the toes of a fine arched foot pointing and sliding with sensual slowness down the line of his spine, as Mary climbed higher and higher, their gazes never breaking.

"I want to see into your very soul when you reach your peak, May." He stated, increase his pace slightly, his shoulders tensing, he was so close that he could reach out and touch it, he could feel the walls of her sheath tightening about him, clamping down as a velvet clad vice.

"John! Oh, Johnny!" She crooned, licking her lips with the pointed tip of her tongue, pursing them together as an intense orgasm hit her, her entire body pulsing and throbbing, John following her a scant few moments afterward.

"I do not wish to leave." He confessed gazing down into her face, his cobalt blue eyes soft and tender, tracing her lower lip with the pad of a thumb.

They were standing by the door that separated their bedrooms; John pristinely dressed once more in all but his scarlet coat which was draped over an arm.

Mary smiled. "I am certain that you will find an excuse to come and inquire of my welfare whilst I am soaking in the tub."

"I will have to resist a fierce desire to join you!" He confessed.

"And ruin your fine uniform?" She teased, her eyes sparkling with mirth. "You may look but you cannot touch."

"Until later this evening." He was hopeful.

"Perhaps. If you promise to behave."

"I was under the distinct assumption that you enjoyed it so much more when I decided to misbehave."

"Whatever gave you that impression?"

He arched a brow over an eye. "Shall I take you back to that bed and refresh your memory? I would be more than willing to oblige you, May."

There was a gentle rap on Mary's door.

"Lady Mary?!!" Abigail called out opening the door, peering about it, her eyes looking about the room for her mistress. "Lady Mary! Oh, there you are! Major Andre!" She bobbed a curtsey in their direction her eyes widening slightly in alarm and shock. She stared for a long moment unable to tear her eyes away from the pair before her. Lady Mary had the duvet from her bed wrapped about her, clearly covering her nakedness, her long red-gold hair loose about her bare shoulders, tumbling
down her back. Abigail watched as Major Andre ran his hand in a possessively intimate gesture over Lady Mary's rib cage through the duvet, to her tiny waist, skimming down over one of her hips, gradually drawing his fingertips away quickly upon hearing the maid call out to them. 

Good Gracious! Abigail thought worried. What had happened? Her eyes darted to Mary's bed, the sheets in disarray. She did not want to even think what she might find on those sheets when she went to tend to the bed. It was clear that the Major had not allowed the Lady Mary to nap for the last several hours. No! There had been far more intimate acts then napping occurring in Lady Mary's bed. "Pardon me, Your Ladyship, Major. The tub and the water are on their way up. Your valet is awaiting you, Sir." Abigail said.

"Thank you, Abigail. I will see Your Ladyship at the festivities in an hour. I will be counting the minutes until then." He said, grasping Mary's hand in one of his, kissing it and then each of the tips of her fingers in turn, turning it over to press a reverent one against the center of her palm, the tip of his tongue licking sensuously at her skin. "Adieu, Mon Coeur!" Slipping beneath the door he shut it behind him not before turning to blow her a kiss, leaving Mary staring after him.

She sighed, unable to move for a moment, staring at the closed door, then turning to Abigail, a myriad of emotions flashing across her beautiful face.

"I had best put on a dressing gown. I daren't chance a creating a scandal or untoward gossip." Mary stated. "Could I please have my brocaded dressing gown, the blue silk?" She crossed over to the wardrobe where Abigail was.

"Yes, Milady!" Opening the wardrobe, the maid reached inside, retrieving the garment. "Let me help you. Are you quite refreshed?" She could smell the mingled scents of Lady Mary's and Major Andre's perfumes, the distinct scent of sex swirling about her young mistress.

"Yes, Abigail. Thank you. Quite refreshed." Mary replied assisting Abigail in removing the duvet from about her person, exposing her naked skin to her maid, desirous to keep her from discovering the love bites John had left on her lower belly, left hip and top of her right thigh. Abigail belting it just in time as a half dozen Regulars came in with the tub setting it by the fire which blazed in the hearth several others entering with buckets of hot water to fill it.

Humming Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, Mary stretched out a shapely leg, propping a highly arched foot against the opposite side of the tub, squeezing the soapy fragrant sea sponge over her shin, the suds and water hitting it, the bubbles incandescent in the fading winter day and candle light, running the sponger up and down her shin and calf, venturing toward her knee. She shifted in the tub her movement slightly uncomfortable. The hot water had not thoroughly eased the aching rawness between her legs. There had even been a wee stain of blood upon her inner thighs, stains upon the sheets. What was worse is that by tradition she should be standing, one always stood when one sang the Hallelujah Chorus but it may take a tiny bit of effort though not much. Stopping abruptly, Mary bit her lower lip in vexation; she was not truly singing but humming. God Forbid a not so unexpected gentleman came through the connecting door between their bedrooms unannounced, heard her, and chided her. She knew that he would think of some manner of punishment for her infraction- real or imagined. Fortunately she had heard that General Howe required John's presence in His Excellency's study on a matter of some urgency. She hoped that they would not be called away without enjoying some Christmas Festivities but the business of war waited for no man, on either side. She was desperate to get a message to her godfather and inform him how she truly fared but she dare not! He must have heard from Benjamin Tallmadge and the intelligence he received from the double agents that were in the British camp. He would not set her about to compromise herself, risking hanging and worse. He had left her to her own devices in New York when the British had invaded as she was so clear to remember. For her own safety she was assured. General Howe and John knew that General Washington harbored a particular affection for her and her brothers and sister. However, John had been kind enough not to ask her to manipulate Washington's affections in obtaining certain valuable intelligence from him. But what would happen when they married? She knew she must accept the Major. He would stand for nothing less. He had made that abundantly
clear. She would be his wife. There was no turning back now since she had allowed him into her bed and they had become lovers! He had been at wearing her down since they met recommending a Marriage of Convenience. He would not marry a provincial girl no matter her station in the society of Boston, New York or wherever the army happened to find themselves. She knew he was ambitious to advance his career, he had told her as much and he could not do that married to some local girl. He needed her political and social connections. It was also quite evident that he wanted her! That he had fallen in love with her! What would happen to Captain Lord Kent and Captain Lord Nicholls? If John were to ever die in battle she may have to accept one of them in his stead but for now... She had never imagined that she would be facing the prospects of marriage to an officer in His Majesty's Army at the age of eighteen let along Major John Andre.

He was standing in the Entrance Hall deep in conversation with General Howe when he sensed her presence, looking up to see her descending the staircase, all the officers eyes turning their attention to her.

"Exquisite!" John exclaimed, a charming smile transforming his handsome features, his eyes riveted to her, unable to tear his gaze away. He was transfixed.

"A Happy Christmas, Lady Mary!" Held up by two other Guardsmen, Captain Lord Kent's face beamed up at her, his appearance as impeccable as a chest would and severely sprained ankle would allow.

John glowered at the Coldstream Guardsman, gently maneuvering his way through the sea of officers. He was there beside her when her foot stepped off the last step, grasping one of her hands in his, bringing it up to his mouth for the obligatory kiss.

"May I tell Your Ladyship once again how absolutely beautiful you look? Absolutely enchanting! I am of the mind not to let you from my sight this evening. I will not be leaving your side." He stated.

"La, Major! Fretting that one of these dashing gentlemen will try to steal me away?" She teased.

"Perhaps, I must be assured."

"Must you?"

"Yes, Captain Lord Kent has not taken his eyes from you since you descended the staircase. He is clearly smitten and he is not the only one. The lad approaches." John whispered near one of Mary's ears. "Captain Kent, so good to see you up and about." John said smoothly as Kent made his way to Mary and John helped by his subordinates.

"The thought of beholding Her Ladyship's face once more and enjoying her company is what gave me strength especially after the damned rebel major scratched me with his bayonet. Was you I prayed to get back to, Lady Mary." Kent enthused, he grinned, his eyes sweeping over from top to toe, lingering on her breasts and the swell of her hips, his gaze hungry.

"Was it? I am delighted to see you are back amongst us with only minor injuries, Captain." Mary said.

"Would that you were my nurse." Kent was hopeful.

"I am certain that the women attending you were quite agreeable." John offered.

"They were not Her Ladyship. I would have been more amiably disposed if she had been able to attend me but she is forever occupied elsewhere, always to be found in your company, Major Andre!" Kent complained.

"We should find you a chair. It must not do you good to stand with that sprain." Mary said a bit too brightly sensing the tension between the two officers. "Captain Kent, please do not be cross with Major Andre. It is not is his fault we are constantly within each others' company. He cannot disobey a direct order from such a superior without facing dire consequences, you know that! You would not want the Major to risk court marital because I most certainly believe that he would not wish it of you if the situation was reversed."

Kent glared at John pursing his lips.

"Oh, come now, Neddie, cease your pouting!" Mary cajoled touching his forearm gently. "Let us see about that chair and a glass of sherry." She made an attempt to soothe Kent's ego. "Jo...Major would be kind enough to help me?"
"Of course! I believe that Tarleton and Brandon have beaten us to it, Lady Mary. Ah! Tarleton has commandeered two Regulars to bring it in." John exclaimed as the chair was brought forward.

"We are all to gather for the fencing exhibition in the parlor. Is that truly necessary? Could we not see about settling Captain Kent on one of the settees? He would be most comfortable there." Mary said.

"With Your Ladyship seated beside me!" Kent said.

"My place is with His Excellency but I will be nearby. I promise." Mary said, her eyes meeting John's.

"Place Captain Lord Kent's chair beside the settee in there! It will all be sorted out." John directed the two Regulars. "May I have the honor, Lady Mary?" He asked moving to close to her, a fraction closer that propriety allowed, instinctively placing his hand at the small of Mary's back in an intimate gesture which was not lost on Kent whose eyes flashed at the Major with jealousy.

"Yes, you may, Major Andre. Seeing as General Howe is still engaged in conversation. Thank you!" Mary said, a delicious shiver dashing down her spine where he had touched her. His elegant fingers splayed on the small of her back precariously close to the swell of her backside.

"Though not His Excellency, I do hope that I am sufficient enough of a deputy to act in his stead."

"It is kind of you to be so attentive." She said. "I do ever so appreciate the diligence in which your discharge your duty, Major."

"Your Ladyship makes it a real pleasure." John's voice was a silky caress as he gazed down into her face, his cobalt blue eyes tender and intimate.

"How pleasurable?

"I believe you know the answer to that, Lady Mary."

"Are you absolutely certain that I do, Sir? You may have to refresh my memory in private." She whispered, holding his gaze for a moment, then lowering her lashes, the corners of her lush mouth lifting in an inviting smile.

"It would be a most welcome diversion to remind Your Ladyship. I will be at your service and assistance to offer all and any that I may."

"I am honored by your desire to attend to my constraints and fancies."

"What do you fancy?"

"What is it that you fancy?" She countered.

"You know what it is that I want, Lady Mary."

"Patience, John." She lowered her voice.

"I do want an answer." He whispered. "What more do you have to think about? I promise to do it properly, down on one knee, if that is what you wish. I will do anything."

"Lady Mary, a Happy Christmas to you! Major Andre! Captain Kent is well settled though a bit discomforted." Banastre Tarleton observed coming to join them, sketching Mary and elegant bow, grasping her hand to plant a kiss upon it. "Your Ladyship is absolutely radiant this evening, you are sparkling as the stars."

Mary flushed prettily under his praise. "A Happy Christmas, Colonel Tarleton. You are too kind! I would be remiss if I did give the Major some of the credit. He did have me out in the bracing fresh air earlier today."

And spent several hours with you in sweet carnal combat in the afternoon! The Fortunate Bastard! Ban thought to himself. "Nothing like time spent in the bracing fresh air with an agreeable companion." He agreed.

"I am delighted that you approve, Ban." John bantered with his friend.

"Of course! Whatever it is that you have done to the Lady Mary please continue, John. We other officers are most grateful for it. She shines more radiantly, if that is at all possible, as the sun. We cannot take our eyes from her. If you would do me the honor of dancing with me later this evening, Mi'Lady, I would bask in the sun's warmth." Tarleton commented.

"Only after Her Ladyship honors me." John staked his claim.

"Thank you for the invitation! I would be delighted, Colonel. Such effusive compliments, Sir, you
had best have a care that they do not make me insufferable."
"Memories of a night in the company of a beautiful woman will serve as a pleasant diversion whilst we are out on campaign. Certainly not! One could never accuse Your Ladyship of Less than the Most Proper and Amiable Behavior." Tarleton went on.
"You have been called away?" Mary asked.
"Yes, General Howe received intelligence from one of our contacts in Washington's headquarters. We move out at first light tomorrow."
"Then we shall make merry and celebrate this evening including the Birth of Our Lord." Mary said brightly.
"That we shall, Lady Mary!" General Howe agreed from behind her, smiling graciously. "This wee scapegrace insisted I carry him!" Howe added with a good natured chuckle holding George in his arms, stroking the pup's silky ears.
Upon seeing his mistress and master, the setter's tail began wagging enthusiastically.
"Ah, laddie! I would be anxious to get to your mistress if I were a young strapping boy such as you." Howe set the dog down who hurried over to Mary his tail wagging, eyes soulful. "There's a good lad!" Howe approved taking the empty seat beside Sutherland's daughter.
"What of my protection, Your Excellency?" Mary asked.
"I will make arrangements for your continued safety. We cannot have some pesky rebels sneak in and steal you away. The men that we can spare will be posted as guards here at headquarters and outside the Academy. Captain Lord Kent will be here convalescing."
"With a nasty sprain, he can only get about with assistance. Your Excellency, I could..." John began.
"You know that I cannot spare you, Major." Howe said. "Though I appreciate your eagerness to offer your services they are not needed at this time."
John nodded, defeated. He did not relish leaving Mary alone with Kent whilst he went to fight but he understood his duty to King and country.
"I promise you, Major; Lady Mary will be quite safe." Howe assured his spymaster.
"Thank you, Excellency." The tension and worry that had coiled within John appeared to unravel as he visibly relaxed.
The fencing exhibition commenced, two Regulars displaying their skills to those assembled. Seated beside Mary, John feigned interest in the pair of fencers, a hand slipping discreetly to one of Mary's thighs, tracing patterns against her fevered skin setting her heart to racing. Leaning slightly forward, his hot breath rustling the soft tendrils near her ear, "Let me come to your bed tonight." He whispered unable to help himself. His rock hard thigh pressing against hers making her all too aware of his virility and sheer sexual power, the effect it had on her. Indicating with one gesture what he desperately yearned for and desired.
"Shhhh! Someone may hear you!" She hissed over the din of applause. "Have you lost your senses?"
"Perhaps, I may have surrendered them along with my heart and soul which you stole away." He teased with a smile. His fingers still swirling intimate patterns upon her thigh. "I have no intentions of returning either." She teased back capturing his hand in one of hers, John taking the opportunity to lace their fingers together.
"Ah! See how perfectly your hand fits within mine." He whispered. "As if they were made for each other."
"You are insufferable!" Mary laughed.
"I will cajole and tease until I get my way and that which I want."
"Measure your words with discretion. Captain Kent is watching us." She whispered.
"Let him watch. Let them all watch and believe what they will." John stated. "My courtship has a purpose which I am confident will be achieved."
"So assured and hopeful, Major."
"It is a matter of if not when. I will make it formal, go down on one knee, seek the proper permissions, do whatever it takes, but in the end, when all is said and done, you will be mine, May. As I have stated several times before." He squeezed her hand as if he were making a pledge, which
he was, gave her a reassuring smile.
"I have not accepted you. Yet." Mary replied wanting to hold onto that thin thread of independence for as long as she could knowing what her fate was to be.
"Curious, My Lovely May? Tsk! Tsk! I was unaware that you possessed a wicked streak though I should have known after your performance this afternoon. So deliciously wild and wanton, cherie! Which one of your other suitors shall I call out?" John asked.
"John, please! Stop! I would never..." Mary protested her voice trailing off.
"Do you have all the answers that you need? Are you certain I will make a good husband? Because I am assured that you will make a most delightful and perfect wife." He whispered, his eyes twinkling half teasing. "If you are uncertain you could feign an indisposition. It would be my pleasure to escort you upstairs..." His meaning was clear.
"Do you have the stamina?"
"For you? Why, of course! Why don't you try me? You could arouse any man, Dearest May." Mary blushed. "General Howe..." She began hoping the commander had not heard their wicked banter.

The exhibition progressed apace. There was a dinner afterward with toasts and a lively carol sing afterward, Mary's fine soprano blending well with the officers' voices. Soon it was time for Midnight Service.

John assisted Mary into one of the carriages, smiling in self-satisfaction watching her settle gingerly upon the comfortable upholstered seat. "Are you sore, Sweetheart?" He asked moving beside her after the door was shut, one of his gloved hands hammering upon the ceiling indicating the driver to move on. John's eyes searched hers in the moonlight. "I want you to be reminded every time that you move in the next several days that I was there. Only me. I want you to remember what we did together. How I can arouse you with a glance, the slightest touch. How I can drive you to the peaks of ecstasy the pair of us losing all sense and reason when I explode inside your exquisite tightness." He whispered in the moonlight as the coach began to travel down the street toward the church. His bald honest naked words set her heart to racing. Mary becoming fiercely inflamed with desire, such wicked and lascivious words to be said on the way to church. "Is that a confession, John?" She asked feeling his rock hard thigh press against hers through the layers of cloak, gown and petticoats. She bit down upon her lush pink lower lip.

"In a manner of speaking, do not fret, you know that I would never behave in public in a way to tarnish your reputation though I must confess that I have entertained thoughts of playing the Norman Invader and the Saxon Maiden once again especially since our relationship has ventured to a particular level of intimacy beyond the realms of propriety. Not that I find our attachment repugnant in any way. Quite the contrary, I look forward to instructing you in how to be wild and wanton in our private moments when we romp in Cupid's Grove together."

"Romp in Cupid's Grove together?" Mary asked. "Oh, John! The poet in you does know how to turn a phrase! We have been spending far too much time with Mister Shakespeare. He has influenced you, I fear."

"I can think of other ways to spend our evenings, May. If you are entertaining abandoning the Bard." John offered with a wicked grin.

"And you thought that I was of a mind to kill you by demanding your carnal attentions." She teased. "Liar!" She playfully swatted his forearm.

"Ah, you found me out! I will have to make you pay for that insult. You calling me a liar, no, darling, it just won't do. Impugning my honor, wicked naughty May, I may have to spank you!"

John declared.

"Will you accept an apology?" She asked.

"Since we are on the way to church, I would suggest an Act of Contrition for your venial sin." John posed knowing that Mary's Anglican faith veered toward Papist.

"Performed?"

"On me. Believe me; I do have a particular act in mind that will absolve you, one that would be mutually beneficial and pleasing to the pair of us."
"Acts of Contrition are not meant to be pleasing." Mary protested.
"Who says?" John asked.
"Allow me to apologize."
"I would rather that you perform the Act of Contrition though I would accept an apology in the interim until such time as you can perform the act."
"Was calling you a liar such a horrible insult that I have to apologize and atone for my sin?"
"You will enjoy the atonement. Trust me. Considering the nature of our relationship and where it may lead, yes, I do believe that calling me a liar was a horrible insult. I would never lie to you. We did agree to trust one another implicitly, did we not? When our intimacy and relationship ventures to the next level I would expect and demand that you honor and obey me as the vows contained in the Book of Common Prayer state."
Mary was taken aback. "Another version of the Norman Invader and the Saxon Maiden?" She asked ignoring his words about marriage and marriage vows.
"Perhaps." He decided to address the other issue at another time.
"You are an incorrigible rogue." She shot at him.
"So you have told me several times but you would not have it any other way, Sweetheart. You are rather fond of your rogue, are you not? Though I would wish that you were rather enamored of him instead but I suppose that will come in time." He mused.
"My rogue?"
"Yes, May. Yours."
"My rogue that makes me perform Acts of Contrition and apologize for slights to his character, one that I am curious to know what it will be. That will demand my strict adherence to the honoring and obeying portion of the Marriage Vows if he gets me to the altar."
"Oh, Sweetheart, I promise that you will enjoy it. I am confident that I will. If I get you to the altar? You must be mistaken, the question is when."
"Will I?"
"Absolutely, I told you that we would never be bored. We are well matched you and I, my Flame-haired Rebel."
"We do make quite a pair. The Incorrigible Rogue and the Flame-haired Rebel."
"A match made in Heaven." John stated.
Mary laughed out loud at that. "Much to God's infinite amusement."
It was John's turn to laugh. "I believe that He is well pleased."
"Do you?"
"Yes! Who but me could tame a wayward vixen such as you?" He teased.
"Wayward?" Mary made a face. "You are skirting the edge to perform an Act of Contrition yourself."
"Am I?"
"Oh yes, John."
"What would you have me do? What do you desire? What is it that you want? What do you wish me to do?"
"Are you contrite and truly sorry?" She asked.
"Contrite and truly sorry for calling you a wayward vixen? You are, are you not? Passionate and sensual? The blood runs hot through your veins though you reserve all your affections for me, as well it should be."
"Is such conversation proper?"
"Has anything about our relationship ever been so?" He asked. "Our association has always been frank and honest. I am not contrite for stating what is true but if I have offended you in any way I will do whatever I must to rectify my insult. Your continued high opinion and regard mean the world to me. I would never jeopardize or alter it in any way. I would have you hold the deepest affection for me. Always." He stated as the coach came to a halt. "Ah! We have arrived!" He added, pulling back the heavy curtains that covered the window nearest to him, peering out at the sea of coaches, horses and other conveyances that crowded the entrance to the Anglican Church.
The door suddenly opened, the cold winter air swirling into the coach. John held his hand out to Mary. "Shall we?" He asked as she took his gloved hand in hers knowing that he was not just inquiring about their attendance in the church but something far more important.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the long wait but I have been incredibly busy with events for several organizations that I belong to. This chapter coincides with the episode, Epiphany in season one of the show. The one that in the opening first few minutes has a scene where Major Andre is clearly manually stimulating Philomena as they sit watching a Fencing Exhibition beside General Lee. Of course, the Major would never engage in such behavior with Lady Mary in public. In private is another matter entirely! I did want to pay homage to that scene, however. My homage is the opening scene of this chapter. The traditions regarding Handel's Hallelujah Chorus are true as anyone who has sung that lovely piece of music can attest. One does stand. Captain Lord Kent is getting a bit cranky and insistent. General Howe is clearly becoming enamored of George the English setter. :) Romp in Cupid's Grove is a reference to the song 'Dear Mister Adams' from the musical, 1776. Adams and Jefferson's conversation regarding their want for their prospective wives whilst attending the 2nd Continental Congress.
An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XVI

"Oh, Major Andre! Oh, Major Andre!" Mary and John paused on their way up the steps of the church to see Jane Fairfax and her mother pushing their way through the officers in an attempt to reach the Major. Jane frowning when she spied Mary's arm linked with John's, who was clearly escorting her rival into church. "Oh, Major!" Jane squealed causing many to stare. "Oh, no!" John muttered under his breath to Mary. "I am sore tempted to take you into my arms and kiss you full on the mouth in front of her. What must I do to show her that her affections are not returned? That her overt and persistent attentions are becoming troublesome and embarrassing? She is skirting toward gross impropriety. Then Madame Fairfax's not so subtle innuendos..." He pressed his lips together sighing.

"You are 'The Handsomest Man in the British Army'. You must be used to the feminine attention. I cannot fault the Ladies Fairfax's appreciation for an attractive man. Do promise me that you will be cordial and kind." Mary said.

John bit his lower lip. "Must I? Her outward charms masque her true nature which is none too pleasing, then the mother, I feel for Mister Fairfax, her open pursuit of other gentlemen is scandalous."

"Hush! Here they come." Mary whispered gripping John's forearm with a gloved hand.

"We should have feigned deafness." John whispered back.

"John!" Mary hissed in warning.

"I do so enjoy it when you are improper and overly familiar in public, Lady Mary." John said in an attempt to restore his good humor. "Addressing me by my Christian name? Tsk! Tsk!"

"Mayhap she will be distracted by Captain Lord Kent's arrival in the sedan chair?" Mary posed as two large Coldstream Guardsmen carried the said chair up the church steps people parting as the Red Sea in his wake, opening the door, assisting the injured captain.

"OOOh, Captain Lord Kent!" They heard Jane gush.

John burst out laughing. "Clever girl!" He approved of Mary's astuteness.

"Thank you, Sir!" Mary smile back. "Your assessment was correct. The ladies are swooning and making a dreadful fuss over the Captain's injuries and his cut and bruised face. He will be quite the threat in that scarlet coat. I foresee several more young women succumbing to that particular malady that appears to be sweeping through the city's female population."

"A scarlet fever epidemic?" John asked.

Mary nodded.

"Do not despair, Lady Mary, I will remain your personal private physician." John reassured her. "I do expect that your case is confined to me alone."

She nodded, blushing. "Of course!"

"As well it should be." He shot back, the pair bantering as they walked up the stairs. John highly amused with Jane Fairfax and her mother's fawning and fussing over Captain Lord Kent, other young marriageable New York ladies and their ambitious mamas crowding about him as well. Kent appeared to be enjoying the attention but his head would discreetly move this way and that clearly searching about for something or someone.

John reached down grasping Mary's hand in his.

"John!" Mary cried in surprise.

"If we hasten we can avoid the over inquisitive mamas and their ingratiating daughters." He whispered.

"I thought that you enjoyed the attention."
"Not when the mamas push their daughters upon me and make inappropriate insinuations and inquiries regarding our association." John complained rushing Mary up the stairs.

"Ah, Major Andre! So quick to get the Lady Mary Ludlow into church." Madame Stewart declared, her black eyes glittering with amusement, a wicked smile playing about her mouth.

"Madame Stewart, A Happy Christmas to you!" John said bowing over the lady's hand drawing it to his mouth to kiss it.

"A Happy Christmas to the pair of you!" The eccentric old woman greeted the pair, kissing Mary upon both cheeks, looking past her. Her eyes alert, spying Tarleton and Brandon with the aid of her lorgnette which hung from her waist on a chain. "Banastre, Darling boy, come and amuse Lady Mary whilst I speak privately with the Major, bring along that adorable Brandon." The old lady instructed.

Tarleton excused himself from the coterie of ladies that surrounded him and Brandon, dashing over with Brandon close behind to attend the Lady Mary.

"Do not look so distressed, Major Andre. I will return you to her forthwith. I just wished to have a few moments of your time. You will be interested in what I have to say. She is in safe and most capable hands. Any woman can see though as charmed by Tarleton as she is, she is not attracted to him though I would warrant that Dear Banastre would desperately wish her to be." Stewart observed. "Lieutenant Brandon, good lad that he is, will not entertain thoughts of a marriage with a lady so far above his station. You know you will be fortunate if she accepts you."

"Madame Stewart, how dare you presume...? I..."

"Protest all you wish, Major. It is clear your courtship is not a mere dalliance. Not that I fault your ambition. Be warned though, the Ross women are known to be willful, stubborn, fiercely intelligent and stunningly beautiful. I knew the Lady Mary's grandmother in London when we both came out; she is the image of Catriona at that age. Same sapphire colored eyes and red-gold hair. You will have your hands full. I warrant that she is hot-blooded and beguiling though, Bless her! She still is not fully aware of her effect on gentlemen. Though I daresay she is beginning to grasp it. I can see that she has you captivated, that you are under her spell." She laughed a low sensual sound. "Though if you ever cause her any measure of distress or hurt her in any way I will see to it that life here in New York, and wherever else you happen to find yourself, becomes incredibly difficult for you."

"My Dearest Madame, I would never endeavor to cause the Lady Mary distress or hurt in any fashion. I hold Her Ladyship in far too high regard to cause her any untoward injury. What do you know of the match with the minister of Setauket's son? What do you recall of the Lady Mary's association with Benjamin Tallmadge?" John inquired. "I am aware that he was a classmate of one of her brothers at Yale College, it was either Lord Edward or Lord James, I am not certain. What else can you tell me?"

"Captain Nathan Hale was a classmate of theirs' as well, the young man that General Howe hung in September for spying? Ah! I can gauge by your reaction that she did not make you privy to that bit of information. Given the circumstances that the poor dear girl finds her in can you truly fault her? Not a relative in the Colonies to chaperone her, having to depend upon the protection of His Majesty's Army, a young lady of marriageable age thrown into that deplorable situation? Do not be cross with her, Major."

"That information may..."

"What would you care to know about Benjamin Tallmadge? Was she is love with him? Is she still? At fifteen, sixteen it may have been an infatuation. Most clearly her first unless Lady Mary developed a tendre for one of the young British officers that were quartered in the Ludlow home in Boston but I heard no gossip linking her to anyone though many officers were desirous and eager to court her. I believe Tallmadge was the first young man that stirred romantic ideas within her. He is strikingly handsome and intelligent."

"He is an officer in the Continental Army." John groused.

"An incredibly handsome officer in the Continental Army, I had the opportunity to observe them together on several occasions. Tallmadge has courted several young ladies during his time in New Haven whilst attending Yale and when he was teaching in Wethersfield but I am of the opinion that
he would marry Lady Mary Ludlow if presented the opportunity and the means to do it. He appeared quite taken with her."

"Even now, Madame Stewart? Certainly that is a most gross impossibility. His Grace of Sutherland, her father, would never approve of the match! He could not! Having a treasonous Continental Major marry his precious youngest child? No, it could never happen!" John was becoming agitated.

"His Grace and Reverend Tallmadge were dear friends; but for certain circumstances, her youth being one of them, I believe that there would have been a match! But I am certain that you are aware of all of this!" Madame Stewart stated partly to bait the Major. She was enjoying making John squirm far too much even though she thought he would make Lady Mary an ideal husband. A wee bit of uncertainty could do him good before winning the girl. Women tended to fall into his lap and bed like snowflakes did on the ground during a winter storm. Mary was leading him a merry chase; she thought her lips curving up into a small smile. The young lady clearly had the upper hand.

"But now, given the present situation, I do not believe that His Grace would entertain such a union or give his permission for such to take place. They cannot have one another now. They both must be content with the memories. Truly major, the jealousy that you harbor toward Major Tallmadge is foolish, if I may be bold enough to say so. You have the girl, Tallmadge does not. Be content."

"That is true." John agreed. It was true. Whatever affections that Mary still harbored for Tallmadge, he was determined to exorcise out of her with another bout of passionate love making before the army left at first light tomorrow and continuously thereafter when he returned until his rival was a distant memory. He would also be certain that Tallmadge got word of his plans to marry the lady and that it would be occurring in the not too distant future. If the Continental officer still harbored affections for Mary it would certainly pain him.

"Do not do anything foolish. Though if I may warn you, Captain Kent is desirous to affect a match with the lady but I sincerely doubt that she will accept him. Captain Lord Nicholls does have the sailor's charm and swagger. I would have a care with him. He appears to be as slippery as an eel! Captain Lord Kennedy, fortunately for you, I believe, has fallen head over heels for Miss Rachel Alton in spite of himself. Fortunately, Lady Mary is not the fickle sort. Once she gives her heart she will remain faithful. Just be certain she gives it to you or you are certain that it is yours for the taking and no one else's."

John's smile broke out into a grin. He chuckled. "My Dear Madame Stewart rest assured that I will vanquish Her Ladyship's other suitors. Lady Mary Ludlow will be mine."

"Promise me! Madame Richmond will be furious!" She chirped with undisguised glee, clapping her hands.

"I assure you that Madame Richmond will be incensed and irate." John stated half serious humoring the wily elderly matron.

"You naughty rogue!" She laughed causing several heads to turn, people whispering behind their hands. "See that it happens!"

"I will do my best to please you!" John dipped his head.

"Escort me to my box pew then find Her Ladyship! Ah! There she is! Up near the front seated in own box, General and Admiral Howe have joined her, Tarleton and Brandon. Is that Captain Lord Nicholls entering the box?" She asked.

John turned his head, his lips setting watching as the naval officer made a decided effusive fuss over Mary.

"Seeking to charm the lady." Madame Stewart observed.

"That is all he will be doing." John grumbled.

"You had best escort me to my box and then attend the lady."

"Oh, Major Andre there you are! Do please come sit beside me. I reserved a place." Mary exclaimed moving closer to General Howe and away from Captain Lord Nicholls creating room for the major.

"Thank you, Lady Mary." John said slipping inside the pew box side stepping about several other officers in the packed church as others sought their seats. "In my haste, I seem to have left my prayer book in the carriage would you be adverse if I shared yours?" John asked feeling about his person
for the Book of Common Prayer he had purchased when he had began accompanying Mary to the Anglican Church several weeks ago.

"Yes, you may look on with me. Now come take your seat." Mary said as Captain Lord Nicholls glanced sideways at John not believing Andre's excuse for a moment. He imagined it had been a calculated move on the major's part. The army officer was certainly clever.

"I am most grateful." John said gallantly sitting beside Mary beside her the Howe brothers exchanged knowing looks. The Admiral scowling.

"Oh, Dick! Give over!" His younger brother William, the general, prompted. "I cannot be faulted that your captain was indisposed the evening of the van Leiden's dinner party."

"It will be a race to the finish, Billy. Nicholls is quite smitten with the lady! His Grace of Sutherland would certainly approve of the match." The admiral whispered back.

"We shall see!" The General countered looking about the sea of faces. "Where is Clark this evening? Too foxed or exhausted from too much merry making to attend?" He asked changing the subject hoping that he and his brother had not been overheard as they all stood. The service had begun.

Back at Headquarters: After Christmas Midnight Service

"In dulci jubilo, Nun singet und seid froh! Unsers Herzens Wonne Leit in praeSepio, Und leuchtet als die Sonne
Matris in gremio, Alpha es et O, Alpha es et O!" John and Mary harmonized together loudly in the combination of Latin and German amidst much merriment as the major hustled her up the stairs pausing for a moment to steal a kiss from her under the Kissing Bough.

"A Happy Christmas to all!" John sang to the melody, pausing for a moment on the stairs, bowing with a flourish to the applause of the officers, then hastening up the stairs after Mary who waited for him in the corridor.

He paused when he reached her, drawing her into his embrace. "Can I kiss you?" He asked his eyes searching hers in the dim candlelight, tilting his head down toward hers. "Because I need to, very much."

"In the corridor?" She inquired.

"We could retire to your bedchamber..." He posed the corners of his mouth lifting in a roguish smile.

"For several hours, General Howe did give me leave to affect my Farewells."

"You had best carry out His Excellency's orders." Wriggling out of his embrace she grasped one of his hands pulling him the few feet to her bedchamber door, opening it.

John hustling her inside, slamming her up against the back of the door the force causing it to close with a resounding thud. "Can I kiss you now?" He demanded his voice thick with need and arousal, his body sinking into hers. His hands reaching about cupping her buttock, mouth descending upon hers, slanting over it in a fiery kiss that stole her breath not waiting for her to respond. He took what he wanted, his kiss carnal, consumed with naked desire and lust.

"More!" She begged when he tore his mouth away for a brief moment. "Please, John!"

"What is it that you want, May?" He asked feeling her trembling with excitement.

"I want to be wanton and wild." She stated boldly.

He felt his heart leap in his chest. She was asking him for it, she wanted him clearly as much as he wanted her. He chuckled wickedly. "I will be delighted to show you how to be as wantonly wicked as you wish. In turn, I will see that you are fabulously satisfied."

"Oh, yes!" She agreed.

Later that same evening

Mary arched her back, the pads of her fingers pressing into the carved headboard, biting her lower lip to stifle her cries as he soothed the throbbing ache centered between her thighs with his talented mouth.

The tip of his pointed tongue darting against her clitoris, drawing the knot of her pleasure center into
his mouth, sucking upon it, whilst her hips rocked and bucked, John pressing a hand against the smooth skin over her lower belly to hold her steady, his fingers splayed. His other hand reaching beneath to grasp a buttocks, drawing her closer, forcing her legs to straddle his broad shoulders, chuckling in satisfaction when he heard her moan. "John! John!" She encouraged in a breathless whisper before a sharp intake of breath, then groaned. "OOOOOOoooh!" As one long digit slipped inside her, withdrawing it with agonizing slowness along the floor of her tender sex, her hips jerking forward to meet the source of this new and exquisite pleasure, grasping the headboard that much tighter, her breasts thrusting upward gracefully arching her spine, tossing her head back against the pillows, gasping, whimpering and moaning by turns, drowning in the delicious sensuality of their pleasure and passion feeling his finger move inside her. the addition of another digit filling her, the walls of her passage clamping down the pair when he drew them out ever so slowly once more, seeking out and finding that special place that aroused her to another peak of excitement until she was pleading with him to bring her to another shattering climax as he devoured her, the spasms bursting over her. Mary arching and twisting beneath him, whispering his name over and over like a Sacred Prayer calling upon him to ease her torment, satisfy the ache inside her.

He came up, covering her lush form with his hard warrior's body, his cock entering her with a slow deliberate motion, sheathing to the hilt. "Is this what you crave, Sweet May?" He croaked, his voice hoarse with desire, his eyes dark indigo with lust and passion, beginning to move within her, their gazes locking and never wavering. "Have I succeeded in ruining you for anyone else?" He asked a devilish smile playing about his mouth, eyes twinkling in the candlelight. "Utterly and completely." She replied, giggling, feeling his fingertips dancing up and down her ribcage to the indentation of her tiny waist, sending a delicious shiver up her spine, Mary wrapping her legs about his hips, twining her arms about his neck, drawing him closer to her, her breasts grazing his chest. "Good!" He approved, his mouth finding hers, kissing her with great passion allowing her to taste herself on his lips, the intimacy of the act, knowing where they had been exciting her as she was drawn down into a vortex of ecstatic indescribable pleasure, John gripping her hips, pulling her with him, rolling onto his back. "You are an expert horsewoman. Ride me, Mary!" He commanded as she suddenly felt herself impaled on his rock hard organ, feeling him on all sides of her as he pressed deep. She gasped. "Oh, John!" She whimpered as he raised her hips and drew her down onto him with sinuous slowness, once, twice, a third time, setting the pace. "Come Sweetheart! Ride me!"

"How?"

"Splay your hands on my chest for leverage. Yes! That's it! Now move your bum up and down, mimic the movements when you see me post in the saddle when the horse trots." "Like this?" She sat up straighter, feeling him sink deeper inside. "Oooh!"

"Yes, May Love! Exactly like that!" He smirked, chuckling. "How do you feel?"

"Amazing!" She replied looking down at him, feeling heat stealing through her from the top of her head to the tips of her toes, flushing her skin a pretty pink. John's hands snaked up her body, making her shiver with delight, skimming up over the petal soft skin to cup her breasts, caressing her nipples in two taut peaks. "Oh! Oh! John! John!" She breathed, her whole body inflamed as she continued to ride him furiously, impaling herself on his cock to the hilt, the walls of her passage tightening about him. Christ! She was becoming uninhibited, brazen and wild just as he suspected she would be, a young woman comfortable in her innate sensuality, unafraid to entice and beguile him. He would enjoy teaching her to listen to the dictates of her passion and carnal pleasure, what she wanted, to not be afraid to ask for whatever she desired from him. He would be more than happy to oblige and satisfy her.
"Yes Sweetheart?" Oh, God! The pair of them were close, teetering on the brink, several more thrusts and he knew he would ejaculate as matters became fast and furious between them.

"Oooooh! Ohhhhh! Ohhhhh!" She breathed, as she climaxed the walls of her vagina rhythmically contracting against his cock as he pulsed within her flooding her with his seed. Mary collapsed against him, as he twisted her about in his arms, their bodies still joined; sinking her into the down filled feather pillows his hard body covering hers.

"How can I leave you after that?" He asked planting a tender kiss on the slope of her shoulder that quickly turned to kisses as he traced a path to the hollow at the base of her throat laving it with the tip of his tongue grazing it with his teeth. "How can I?" He repeated. Mary shivered with desire. "Your king and country require you." She murmured. "I do not wish you to go but you must, John Dearest." She ran her fingertips across one of his cheekbones gently down his cheek; he captured it in one of his hands kissing her fingers, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. It was the first time she had called him 'dearest'.

"Duty calls so we must obey. Before I leave I will require a token."

"You have abscended with most of my handkerchiefs. There are the sketches you made."

"If we are to be married I require a more formal token of your esteem."

"I have not accepted you. No formal announcement has been made."

"You are my sweetheart. After the last several hours could you doubt I would allow you to slip through my fingers? Enjoy your independence for the good it will do you, My Love, for when I return I will make you mine! Therefore, I would desire a substantial token." John stated.

"I have a miniature..." She began.

"You do?"

"Yes, it was painted by John Trumbull when I was sixteen. I have it in my jewel case." John laughed. "I do wonder how Governor Trumbull's son would feel knowing that you gave the miniature as a love to token to your Bloodybacked lover?" His eyes danced wickedly, finding the irony of the situation incredibly amusing. Mary swatted his arm. "You wouldn't?" She asked.

"Mayhap I should. Major Andre has upon his person a miniature of the Lady Mary Ludlow painted by John Trumbull of Connecticut, son of said rebel governor, Jonathan, executed when Her Ladyship was in her sixteenth year and said to be a true likeness of the young beauty." He teased waxing on as he was quoting from a dispatch. He dipped his head to kiss her when he finished, their lips meeting in a fiery kiss.

"What will you give me as a token?" She asked her eyes searching his, words left unspoken between them but hanging in the air. I would that I have planted my son inside you, My Sweet Lovely May! He thought. Then you would have to be mine and I would be the Happiest Man in the Empire having secured my Chief Desire. Major Benjamin Tallmadge can stew in hell!

"What would you want? A button? That is far too common. A verse? A self portrait?"

"You have given me those!"

"So I have." He agreed. "You do not have a lock of my hair. What if I gave you my braid?"

Mary grasped it, twirling it about between two fingers. "That would be most delightful." She laughed using it to draw him down to her, eliciting another kiss, undulating her hips, his member still inside her. He quickly became rock hard.

"Would it?" He bantered back.

"Mmmmm... Aroused again, so soon?" She purred one of her knees capturing one of his hips. "I intend to be sent off to battle with the most deliciously wicked memories of what transpired between us in your bed."

"Do you now?" She teased running an index finger down his chest to his abdomen.

"Oh, yes! You naughty little rebel!" He teased back, pulling her to him causing her to gasp in alarm at first, the gasp quickly turning to laughter.

"John!" Oh, God! It felt so good, him inside her, his hips flexing as he thrust deep.
Mary moaned. "Yes, John! Please! Oh, please! Don't stop! Don't stop!" She crooned digging her nails into his shoulders, leaving little crescents branding him, her hips meeting his with each stroke of his cock inside her, her limbs on fire. Molten heat coursed through her veins making her tingle. Her world exploding in a thousand stars behind her closed eyelids as she experienced another intense climax. John capturing her screams of rapture with his mouth as he reached his own fulfillment a scant few moments after.

"I must send Mr. Trumbull and note commending him for his efforts and execution. It is a very good likeness!" John stated looking down at the miniature in his palm, letting the light from the candles and the flames of the fire illuminate it. "John..." Mary warned from her perch on his knee. The pair was seated in a wing backed chair, cozy and warm near the fire. "He would certainly not be adverse to a message extolling his talent as an artist from another that is quite proficient. War or no, it is most proper to compliment such talent. He may be interested to learn where and with whom such a fine example of his work resides." John explained. "Please, I wish you wouldn't."

"No? But the likeness will be a fine diversion at night in the dark hours when I would desire to be in your arms and will reside next to my heart at all other times. Where is should be because you do possess mine."

Mary blushed prettily, her long lashes lowering, sweeping against her cheeks. "Do not look away. You should never be ashamed of the sorcery you affect over gentlemen, My Titian haired Enchantress. Especially me!" He admonished her, lifting her chin with his fingers. "I wish you did not have to leave." She whispered. "Moi aussi, mon coeur!" He replied. "Do not fret. It will all be over soon enough and I will be back." John reassured her knowing that there was a chance he may be killed. His luck had held out this long. He dare not tempt fate, be too cocksure. "And you will be content that I will be pining and missing you most horribly."

"Of course! Won't you? Shall you be taking my braid to bed with you every night?" He asked teasingly. "Possibly, I may steal one of your banyans." Mary confesses. "I quite rather fancy the black brocade."

John grinned, laying the miniature on the candlestick table beside the chair, drawing her close, her back nesting against his chest. "General Howe is being particularly indulgent. I had best see how preparations are progressing for our leaving. Duty calls and I do wish to stay any wagging tongues. You will come and see me off?"

Mary snuggled close in his embrace. "Yes!"

Mary settled in the chair across from General Howe, her puppy, George, curled up with his head resting upon one of the toes of the General's boots, gently dozing, the General having just come in from taking the dog with him as he inspected the troops before their leaving. Howe was clearly forming an attachment to the English setter. George certainly was proving to be an amiable diversion for many of the officers at head quarters. He would be a good guard and companion for Mary when John was away which was one of the reasons the major had purchased the dog in the first place. "A Happy Christmas to you, Lady Mary! You are looking particularly fetching this morning! "He complimented appreciating her attire. "How clever and kind to have Major Andre's uniform adapted for feminine wear down to the facings on your waistcoat and the tricorn. Lovely! Simply lovely!" He approved. "It pleases me that you appear happy here. I know that the adjustment has been rather difficult."

"Your Excellency has been most kind. I have everything I want, everything I need."

"Good! Your presence has done much to boost morale, Lady Mary. I am gratified that you and Major Andre have, erm, become particularly close." Howe told her. "Major Andre been the perfect gentleman and a fine example of the high caliber of the officers in His
Majesty's Army particularly those under your command, Sir." Mary stated a bit too quickly feeling the heat begin to burn in her cheeks as she flushed her eyes looking at him expectantly.

"Can I give you some advice Lady Mary? I am well aware that your relationship with Major Andre has progressed beyond the realms of propriety. I am not one in a position to judge but with us being called away to engage the rebels I will say this: before Major Andre leaves for battle tell him what's in your heart, the degree of your affection for him. If you care deeply for or love him let him know, because if he is killed, and he may be, you won't be sorry. If matters are left unspoken between you, if he dies unaware of what he truly meant to you, you could regret it all your life long."

Major Andre paused to watch a sergeant flirting with a housemaid in the early morning light the pair far from the war. One of the Regulars held is horse, waiting for him to mount.

"Thank you, Private! I can manage from here!" He stated arranging his cape about so it would not choke him when he vaulted into the saddle.

"Sir!" The private began pointing toward the direction of headquarters.

John's eyes widened in surprise then pleasure, the Lady Mary was dashing across the field of scarlet coats toward him, her cape swirling about her in the morning breeze giving him glimpses of what she wore which he could ascertain was a direct replica of his own uniform. His brow furrowed slightly wondering what this all meant. They had said their good-byes several times inside. Did she have something else for him? The corners of his mouth lifted into a smile, his dimples showing delighted with her tribute to him and her inability to let him go.

"Lady Mary what a lovely surprise! You have come to see me off!"

"I know we said our Farewells inside but I wanted to give you this." Lowering her eyes from his, the long lashes fanning against her pale gently flushed cheeks, she opened the embroidered pouch she was carrying, withdrawing something from it, and holding it out in her gloved palm. It was a crucifix hanging from a delicate gold chain that her grandmother had received after her Papal Audience from the Holy Father when the family had visited Rome when Mary was a baby.

John frowned slightly but he took it, the contact of his gloved fingers brushing ever so slightly against her equally gloved palm sent a bolt of pure desire up his arm, he could not manage to conceal his reaction or the intense fierce attraction he had to her in front of the Private.

"It is my lucky charm. I've had it always. My grandmother gave it to me. So you must promise to bring it back without a scratch." She instructed him, with a smile, tucking a lock of red-gold hair behind an ear, nervously.

"Wont you need it?" John asked, looking down at the object in his gloved palm, then at Mary his cobalt blue eyes questioning. It was obviously something incredibly precious to her that she had hidden away in her jewel case. He already had her portrait to hold close to his heart, several of her handkerchiefs and now this.

"Not as much as you. So look after it. Please." She told him. She did not know what she would do if he perished. God, keep him safe! She silently prayed.

"I will try not to be a hero, if that is what you're afraid of." He replied. He had already survived imprisonment by the rebels when he was captured at Fort Saint Jean but he knew how quick luck could change if one did not keep one's head down and got on with it.

"Just come back, safe and sound." Mary said.

"Mary, if I don't come back..." John said. There was always the possibility... Unlike when they were up in her bedchamber seated in the chair together he was a bit uncertain now faced with the bald reality of leaving.

"But..." She was having none of it. He had to come back!

"No. If I don't, then do remember how very glad I am that I was able to make your acquaintance, that we had several glorious months together, that we formed this intense attachment to one another. You send me off to war a happy man." John said, his glance taking her from top to toe, committing her to memory, something he could think back upon with great fondness when he was out on the battlefield, when he could not gaze at her picture or caress one of her handkerchiefs. "Would you do something for me? Will you promise me that you will marry only someone that will make you
"Of course I will! But it won't. You have made it this far, John... I promise I will give you the answer you seek when you come back! We will have many things to celebrate!"

"The drums and fifes are sounding." He said with a rueful smile, wanting to spend as much time with her as he could hearing the drums began to beat out a marching cadence signaling it was time for the officers and soldiers to move out.

They took each other's hands.

"Good bye, then. And such good luck. I will be waiting for you." Mary said, leaning up to kiss one of his smooth cheeks, inhaling the scent of soap, leather, wool and that which was just John, confident, fiercely brave and courageous.

"Goodbye, Mary. And God Bless you." He replied, kissing her cheek in return, releasing her hands. "Come back to me so we can begin to plan our future." She whispered almost inaudibly as he turned to mount the horse.

Stopping in his tracks, he turned about, trying not to grin like a fool. He had heard every precious word, reaching up; he removed his tricorn hat from his head. "I promise you." He stated, looking down into her face, her eyes shining with unshed tears. His heart leapt suddenly within his chest at the realization that Lady Mary Ludlow had formed a much deeper affection for him than she had hitherto let on that she possessed. One could not feign that sort of emotional attachment. She had fallen in love with him! In a roundabout way had she just accepted his proposal?

On sheer impulse, going up on her toes, for he was about eight inches taller than her, she leaned up and kissed him full on the mouth knowing it would be more gossip that she would incite within the soldiers and officers but not caring. Let them talk! "Come back safe and sound to me, John." She whispered against his mouth when their lips parted and she settled back down on her feet. "Now get on with you!"

They broke their embrace, he mounted his horse settling his great cape about him, she watched him walk the animal into formation beside General Howe, pausing for a moment to salute her one last time, blowing her a kiss, the soldiers marching off taking John to New Jersey and the violence of war.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XVI

Many thanks to the lovely administrator(s) on the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) that were kind enough to read the story and put a link to it on their page so other fans of JJ and Major Andre could read and enjoy it.

I am eternally grateful.

Jane Fairfax is determined to land herself a British officer as a husband. Having set her sights on Major Andre and, now, possibly Captain Lord Kent (who is the Lad of the Moment because of his injuries!).

Madame Stewart is a Scottish lady with long standing ties to the Ludlows. She knows where many of the family skeletons are kept and she provides Major Andre with some valuable information. Including Mary's connection to Captain Nathan Hale remember Mary placed live lobsters in his bed on a dare! He may make use of that information at another time.

John clearly harbors some jealousy toward Major Benjamin Tallmadge being as Our Darling Ben was probably Mary's first love/romantic attachment (more of her emotional attachment may be explored in a forthcoming chapter if need be). Major Andre knows many young women do not forget their First Infatuation.

Admiral Lord Howe is clearly pushing Captain Lord Nicholls as a candidate for Mary's
hand but she clearly is favoring Major Andre as we can see in the pew scene. Those two clearly cannot keep their hands off each other. John is clearly enjoying teaching Mary about sensuality. Honestly, I do not want to give too much away as to where this is going but we all know the inevitable conclusion. Quite frankly he is clearly being extremely kind letting her a bit more freedom and time before she accepts him. He knows that she would hate him if he forced the issue (which he has every right to do!). Lady Mary is stubborn and willful. Andre deserves props for his patience with her. Mary got the braid!!! :)

John Trumbull was from Lebanon, CT (1756-1843), the son of Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull. He was educated at Harvard College and studied under noted 18thc painter, Benjamin West. He entered Harvard in 1771 and graduated in 1773. He was appointed second person aid to General Washington in 1776. He would have painted the miniature of the Lady Mary when he was just starting out as a painter in 1775. He is most famous for his paintings of Revolutionary War Personages and Events. Many of his paints are in the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, CT.

Many Thanks to Downton Abbey and some other period dramas for inspiration for the last bits of this chapter.

General Howe is giving some fatherly advice which Mary heeds. The prospect of losing John in battle really tears at Mary’s heart forcing some of the feelings that she had kept hitherto hidden to the fore. Major Andre goes off to Trenton a happy man! As well he should, the Darling! Brave lad fighting for King and Country! :)

Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
Crossing the Delaware, Traveling to Trenton, A Large Mouse in the Cupboard and a Lusty Lieutenant

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XVII
Christmas Night 1776
Delaware River with the Continental Army

"Watch out for the ice in the river, Tall Boy!" Caleb warned Ben as Tallmadge dipped the blade of his oar in the freezing water of the river, chunks of ice floating by appearing as uneven jagged crystals in the moon and torchlight.
"I will take heed!"
"Always calm and cautious, eh, Ben?" Caleb teased with a grin, his white teeth flashing through his moustache and beard, laughing lightly.
"Someone has to be!" Ben replied dryly winking at Caleb an equally cheeky grin playing about his mouth. "It will be grand to engage Howe and those Hessians!"
"Aye! Bless Woody for that bit of intelligence all because of cabbages and that damned sauerkraut." Caleb stated. "Bless General Howe and the Hessians." Ben rejoined. The friends laughing together the boat rocking back and forth in the river's strong current as they tried to navigate through the snow and ice that because of the strong flow was slamming against the riverbank, other large pieces hitting against the boat making the deck unsteady, so much so that several times Ben almost lost his footing and plunged into the icy depths.
"Whoa! Watch it there!" Caleb cried as Ben staggered backward the soles of his boots slipping on the deck, pushing a chunk of ice aside with his oars blade sending it beneath the surface of the rolling river.
Ben struggled to regain his footing planting his feet apart.
"Do not fall in and drown on me." Caleb demanded chuckling nervously.
"I will do my best not to! I do know how to swim so all will not be lost." Ben reassured his friend.
"Good! Because I don't relish fishing you out of the depths of the Delaware." The whale boatman bantered back.
"You won't have to." Ben reassured him.
"Are ye certain? Because I am counting on the pair of us killing quite a few of those damned Bloody backs!" Caleb said, digging the blade of his oar in the icy water, the force unsettling is footing.
"Fuck!" He swore quickly regaining his balance when he almost fell overboard.
"Not exactly the ideal conditions to be traveling." Ben observed.
Caleb laughed at the irony of his friend's statement. "Amen to that, Ben!"

"I pray that this engagement is decisive and short lived. I am all too aware that we all wish to be back in New York celebrating Christmas." General Howe murmured to no one in particular as the officers rode along toward Trenton.
"Duty calls, Sir. Mayhap this exchange will crush the rebels once and for all. A victory!" John assured Howe from his place riding beside the general.
"Mmmmm... War waits for no man or woman for that matter. I would warrant that you are quite eager to return to New York duty or no. There may be more to celebrate than a victory over the rebels, eh, Major Andre?" Howe grinned, chuckling. "I know that there is a particular young lady that you are most desirous to return to."
"If Your Excellency is referring to the Lady Mary Ludlow, she has not accepted my proposal." John
"Is there anything I can do to help affect the desired conclusion as Her Ladyship's loco parentis?" Howe offered.

"I would be most grateful, Excellency, but it appears that the Lady Mary Ludlow must arrive to that realization on her own that I will make Her Ladyship an Ideal Husband. I have learnt that is quite independent and stubborn of character. She will not be forced to the altar." John explained.

"Ah, a spirited young filly that must get used to the Bridle of Matrimony. I trust that you will curb her independence and that stubborn streak when you marry, apply a gentle but firm hand, Major. Keep her satisfied in your marriage bed. The conjugal relations between the pair of you blissful and passionate, she will be honoring and obeying soon enough." Howe advised. "I have no desire for you to lose her to Captain Lord Nicholls. The Lord Admiral has it in his head that the navy will prevail over the army in this matter."

"No, Excellency, they will not." John assured his commanding officer.

"You know that Captain Lord Kent will propose?" Howe asked. "Arrogant young lord has it in his mind that he must have her."

"He will be gravely disappointed." John stated his voice strong with conviction. "She is unaware of his exploits? What occurred after church last evening?"

"Yes! Was she in the parlor when Tarleton and Brandon helped carry him in after their night of drunken debauchery?" Howe asked.

"They did not confine their revelry to a tavern Tarleton told me."

"I reckon they would not. Rumor has it that young Coldstream officer enjoys a bit of discipline as part of his pleasure and watching as much as participating in the act." Howe said his voice low enough so that only Andre could hear, sharing some of his subordinates sexual proclivities. "A range of tastes that many Ladies of Easy Virtue are desirous to accommodate."

"Especially when the young man is as appealing to women as the captain." John added. "The Lady Mary would not stand for such behavior if they were to marry."

"I trust that you would be there to mend the lady's broken heart, Major Andre when Lady Mary was made privy to her husband's activities outside the sanctity of their Marriage Bed."

"In a trice!"

"Howe laughed. "The whole episode causing a dreadful scandal!"

"I would be the epitome of discretion." John reassured him.

"As well you should be. I will not have scandal touching that young woman. It does not bode well for the army. If word reaches Their Graces of Sutherland that their precious child has become notorious for some indiscretion or aspersions are being cast upon her name for perceived untoward and blatantly licentious behavior with another officer under my command that is not her husband there will be hell to pay! I am gratified that you have taken your orders so seriously and have done what you must to carry them out. But for the snowball fight incident you have kept the tongue wagging to a minimum. I applaud your circumspection and prudence."

"I am honored by Your Excellency's continued confidence in my capabilities though I must confess protecting the Lady Mary's virtue was proving difficult."

"What manner of trouble? She is a lovely and charming young woman. No one can fault your inability to resist temptation and find yourself being captivated by such as her."

"I am afraid I was and am not the only one. Some did not have honorable intentions though they claim the titles of gentlemen. I received several inquiries if Her Ladyship's innocence could be purchased for a price and how much I was willing to accept if I orchestrated and was complicit in her seduction. Obviously I was appalled at so dishonorable and deplorable suggestions and made my feelings clear on the matter. Only my threats to call them all out kept them from taking the issue any further since the resulting duels and the reasons behind them, once they were made known, would have caused a most horrible scandal."

"Desirous to protect and preserve the Lady Mary's honor, hmmm? I wish that you had come to me. I would have seen that officers involved were severely reprimanded. Who were they?" Howe asked.

"General Randall, the late Majors Lord Graham and Edrington and Admiral Lord Clark." John
replied. "Admiral Clark has become your former mistress' new patron."
"He will not get near the Lady Mary." John spat. "I am relieved to hear that Miss Hallam has moved on."
"She has found a new patron- I understand that she has set her sights on two certain captains. I do not know much in the ways of women but I believe that she is determined to make a conquest of one of the Lady Mary's suitors. A payback of sorts for your defection? Admiral Lord Howe told me that she was flirting outrageously with Captain Lord Nicholls. Who, as the story was relayed, refused to be seduced into a menage a trois with Admiral Clark and Miss Hallam. However she did succeed with one of the other captains. A Lord Guilford. The trio being caught in flagrante delicto by another of Miss Hallam's paramours, which I am told is a woman!" Howe relayed the deliciously wicked take.
"Truly?" John asked his eyes widening in surprise. He would not have thought that Philomena was the sort to require two gentlemen to satisfy her or that she enjoyed Sapphic pleasures. Had he not been enough?
"She eagerly joined in, I am told." Howe replied matter of factly. "Enjoying Miss Hallam and the two officers. I trust that since the advent of the Lady Mary Ludlow being placed under the care of His Majesty's Army that you have become celibate or have been taking complete advantage of the position that I placed you in. The wolves do tend to prowl at night. I am grateful for your vigilance, Major regarding Her Ladyship's protection. I trust in your methods. What can you tell me of this Tallmadge fellow? Another misguided school teacher out of Yale College like Captain Hale?"
"Apparently, Tallmadge was employed in a town outside of Hartford Connecticut called Wethersfield before he joined the Continental army."
"He was the young man that was to marry the Lady Mary, is that correct?" Was there not talk of it? Came to naught?"
"Yes, Sir."
"Much to your profound relief one would imagine."
"I was made privy to some intelligence that indicates there was far more to what occurred between Benjamin Tallmadge and the Lady Mary Ludlow than I was originally led to believe, something that could be used to..." John explained.
"Would you jeopardize your future happiness by drawing that young lady into your web of deceit? You know as well as I do that she will hate you for it, may cause her to work against you like Margaret Gage. You will be sore miserable if she must be sent to England on another Charming Nancy." Howe stated referring to General Thomas Gage's wife and the fact that she was sent to England under suspicions of spying for the rebels. "If you are intent on using the connection do it delicately. I would rather that you make use of her ties to England and her wealth, approach that matter of Tallmadge with great care."
"Yes, Excellency."
"Wait until we return to New York City. Perhaps encourage the Lady Mary to write a message to her former suitor detailing some of what has been transpiring in the city without giving away valuable military secrets, details of several of the parties, Her Ladyship's admirers or something that will spark his curiosity and get him to reply in the same fashion. Assure Her Ladyship that the message will be sent by a special courier under your direct instruction so she needn't worry about it falling into the 'wrong hands'." Howe advised.
John nodded pursing his lips, his mind racing about a mile a minute. He could find a way to get intelligence from the Lady Mary without placing a strain upon their relationship. He knew she was harboring secrets that he was determined become privy to. Her loyalty would be to him once they were married in the eyes of God and Man. She would honor and obey him. "I understand..."
"I detect a bit of discomfort, Major Andre. What do you know about this Benjamin Tallmadge?"
Howe probed.
"Nothing, truly. I am being foolish." John attempted to brush Howe's question off.
"If he favors the unfortunate Captain Hale in looks, I would imagine that you would be harboring a
thread of jealousy. Do not make your desire to vanquish your foe personal. What is it that you were made privy to that unsettles you so? Out with it! I would have you focused on the coming engagements not just one Continental officer! One would believe with your reputation in regards to women, major, that you have the wear with all to destroy any harboring affection the Lady Mary would have for this rebel. You are being foolish. I would take it as a compliment that you and this Tallmadge both appreciate and desire the same young lady. That your intelligence, as well as your handsome visage, has turned her heard." Howe advised, smiling. "Now what did your spies have to tell you about the rebel presence in New Jersey?"

New York City
27 December 1776

Mary bit her lower lip in vexation. "When did he arrive, Lottie? Why is he not on his way to engage the Regulars in Trenton?" Mary asked her friend as they mounted the back stairs to the attic. "He escaped before he could be exchanged." Lottie explained. "So he is on the run and has a price on his head? Are you mad allowing him to stay here? What if Robert Rogers pays us an unwanted visit? With Major Andre away he is more apt to be sniffing about for rebels. You know that Henry Phipps has been arrested under suspicion of treason?" Mary fired off question after question as the pair paused on the stairs for a moment. "What would you have me do, May? He said he had no place to go. I could not have turned him out into the street."

"So you decided to jeopardize our safety instead? You know what would happen to us if Major Andre and General Howe found out?"

"That did not seem to bother you before, jeopardizing our safety!" Lottie's voice was heated. "What happened to your dedication to the Cause, your loyalty to liberty and independence? Are you so sick with Scarlet fever that you have lost where your allegiance lies?"

"How can you speak so? Major Andre and the officers have always behaved as gentlemen. They have been kind, courteous, gently flirtatious, seeing to it that we were not molested. Joh... the major made certain that the officers that were desirous to were not permitted to gamble to 'protect' you, Rachel and Melissa." Mary said. "He is such a gentleman! He did it because he knew that you would be eternally grateful and when you expressed your gratitude that he would be duly rewarded. How did you express your profound appreciation?" Lottie asked.

"That is none of your concern! I did what I had to. I am not ashamed. John is attentive and kind."

"I can just imagine. He does his best to be discreet but he cannot manage to conceal his desire and lust when he looks at you. His eyes follow you everywhere unable to tear his gaze away. It has been noted and remarked upon." Lottie observed.

"I would not challenge my allegiance if it keeps you undamaged." Mary warned Lottie. "I am well aware that my relationship with Major Andre is a source of great speculation and gossip."

"Your disease has reached the critical stage!" Lottie shot back. "I do hope that you find a remedy and soon, mayhap in the guise of a certain tall and striking officer?"

"Perhaps, but the officer in question may not be whom you believe him to be." Mary replied, flushing, she sighed. "We have to be incredibly careful. The risks are too great. Give the soldier what he needs and then send him on his way before anyone becomes suspicious."

"Oh!" Lottie was intrigued. "Who is it? I promise that we will take great care that no harm will come to us or the Continental soldier. Franny was the one that brought him in, he told her that he had heard that there was a lady in the city that harbored affection for liberty. He said he was all the way from Massachusetts. We could not turn away one of our own lads, May."

"What is his name?" Mary asked.

"Sergeant Moses Jeffords. Franny, Chloe and Cecily tell me that he is quite good looking, he has the most arresting blue eyes and roguish smile."

"My head has already been turned by a soldier with blue eyes and a roguish smile." Mary retorted.
"His coat is the wrong color."
"I am finding that I have become rather fond of the color red and a certain officer over the last several weeks." Mary confessed.
"Have you?" Lottie teased. "You may change your mind."
"Doubtful. I am not as a fickle and changeable as you though I do concede that Captain Lord Nicholls is rather raffish."
"Rather raffish? But the navy captain does not compare to the army major."
"In what manner?"
"Does Captain Lord Nicholls have the same effect on you when he gazes at you that Major Andre does?"
Mary flushed scarlet, her cheeks burning. She looked away from Lottie memories of the look in John's eyes when they were intimate flooded her mind - the deep tenderness mixed with raw carnal passion and naked desire. "No!" She whispered her voice suddenly rough. "I did not imagine he did. Shall we see what Sergeant Jeffords requires?"
"Yes! Mary said as they reached the landing making their way down to where they hid the rebels. The door to one of the rooms was ajar. Lottie knocked on it gently.
"Sergeant Jeffords?" She inquired in a low voice pausing for a moment before gingerly pushing the door open, the pair of young women stepping inside.
He was standing in a darkened corner of the room by the window clearly having a care not to be seen. The remains of his breakfast were on a tray that was placed on a table nearby along with a small pot of hot chocolate and a Wedgewood china cup and saucer. He looked up from what was obviously a dispatch when he heard them enter folding it quickly, tucking it within his waistcoat.
"Live free..." Mary began using one of the passwords she hand Ben Tallmadge had agreed upon to discern if the young soldier was friend or foe.
The sergeant turned, his blue eyes meeting hers. "Or die!" He replied providing the other portion of the password indicating that he was a patriot and friend.
"Welcome to New York, Sergeant Jeffords. I trust that you have been sufficiently fed?"
"Best meal I have had in weeks, Mistress. I thank you. But I had heard that the young ladies at The Nunnery kept an excellent table. Please extend my thanks to the Mother Superior." Jeffords stated using some of the code names that the Continental soldiers had adopted for the Academy and its proprietor. "How clever and extremely dangerous to have a safe house so close to British headquarters, I commend your ingenuity."
"We manage despite the differences of our politics to get on extremely well. Many of the officers and soldiers are consummate gentlemen." Mary provided.
Jeffords made a face. He did not generally hold a high opinion of His Majesty's army or the men within its ranks. "Keen to steal away our young women those Bloodybacks are!"
"Many a young lady has come down with Scarlet Fever." "Mary provided. "What can we do for your sergeant besides provided a warm bed, a bath and a hot hearty meal?" Do you require more provisions? Lucky for you the items that arrived from the ship from London via the West Indies has passed through customs. I have rum and molasses available to start. How do you propose to get it through British lines to the Continental army?"
"We need smoked meat, corn meal if you can spare it, Mistress. There are provisions coming from Connecticut, vegetables, flour, perhaps some fresh meat." Jeffords provided. "We need money not just food, ready cash." His eyes were pleading in his handsome face.
"Oh, May! Please!" Lottie asked.
"No! Absolutely not! Not now! I cannot nor will I risk it!"
"Why not? Major Andre and General Howe will never know. I promise to cover for you and collaborate a story. Mary, you know that they are desperate; you know how dire conditions can be in the winter. Please! You come into your inheritance in less than a week. Can you not spare some coins? It will not be a mark of disloyalty. You are promised to no one. Yet." Lottie made her case. Mary sighed looking at the pair of face both so hopeful she closed her eyes wanting to block them out it would be much easier to say no if she could not see them. "I will give it careful consideration."
She was torn between her feelings for John and the cause of liberty. The provisions were one thing. It was the Season of Giving. She could justify that in her mind. She would have to ponder the request for funds.

Sergeant Jeffords frowned, looking disappointed and defeated. "If Miss Shaw will make certain that Andre and Howe will never know what is there to consider, Miss Ludlow?"

"It is not Miss it is Lady Mary, sergeant. I may harbor rebel tendencies and believe in independence from Great Britain for the Colonies but I will not commit treason. It is dangerous enough that we provide food and other items to help sustain the Continental army, hide soldiers. This constitutes treason within itself. That must stop. It being the Christmas Season is the only reason I am being generous. I am placed in a very precarious position. You will understand why I am inclined to be cautious."

Jeffords had the courtesy to nod. "Yes, Lady Mary, I do but the army does need the money. If it will help to assuage your guilt might I suggest Your Ladyship think of it as a New Year's Gift to the Commander in Chief? I have been informed that General Washington and his lady have a special relationship with the Ludlow family Your Ladyship in particular. His Excellency does harbor profound regrets that he could not assist you last September when the British took this city."

"My situation and loyalties are complicated, Sergeant Jeffords, I will need some time to consider the matter. His Excellency can certainly understand my hesitation. He would not wish to place to his own child in a similar situation, daughter or son."

"Time is of the essence."

"I will not be pushed. How much were you anticipating? Fifty pounds?" The additional mention of Lady Washington and the General's profound regrets had weakened her resolve.

"One hundred."

"Seventy five!" Mary countered.

"Done!"

"Seventy five pounds sterling, Sergeant Jeffords, I would request that you take it and your provisions to New Jersey before I have time to change my mind!" Mary stated vowing to herself that this would be the last time she would help the Continental army. She would honor all of her marriage vows once they were made. There would be no place for deceit in her union with Major John Andre.

Despite the British officers and soldiers being called away the Christmas Season was still filled with balls, dinners and receptions. Mary, Lottie Shaw and the Alton sisters were high in demand.

John's absence affording Mary to become better acquainted with Captain Lord Nicholls under the benevolent watch of Admiral Lord Howe, who was her escort for many of the events. Since he had left on Christmas Morning, Mary had been writing news filled letters to John addressing him as 'My Dearest Friend', she was also embroidering several handkerchiefs for him so he would have his own, ceasing to abscond with hers. Blasted man had taken them all! She had not a one and had to borrow from Lottie.

Captain Lord Kent's ankle still on the mend though the guardsman did manage to get about insisting on escorting her to many of the events himself. He could not dance much to his chagrin sitting on the sidelines as the object of his affections spent the good portion of her evening dancing with the naval officers gently discouraging several bold flirtations claiming that she had contracted a dreadful case of Scarlet Fever. Many of the officers were aware that Major Andre had made clear his intentions toward the Lady Mary Ludlow and were disinclined to tangle with him over Matters of Honor no matter how tempting the ginger haired beauty was. Her outward appearance the initial attraction, it was her personality that kept them enthralled, Mary, Lottie and the Alton sisters using the officers' fascination with Mary and the other young women to engage the officers in the young ladies charities.

On this particular morning the four young women accompanied by Captain Lord Nicholls and Abigail were in the book shop.

Matthew the apprentice looked up from the books he was stacking on a table near the door when he heard them open the door, crossing the thresh hold, closing it behind them. "A fine Good Morning,
Lady Mary!" He said sketching her a neat bow. "Ladies." He added acknowledging Lottie Shaw and the Alton sisters. "Captain Nicholls what a pleasure to see you! What may I help you with today? Mr. Broderick received quite a few books on that last ship from London; there are many new and interesting titles." He offered.

"I am looking for a book on the natural sciences, Matthew." Mary said.

"To use at the Academy, Lady Mary?"

"No, a book that a gentleman would read, Matthew." She answered. "The book can be in English, German, French or Italian. The gentleman reads and is fluent in all four languages."

"Yes, Your Ladyship. Mr. Broderick has received some books on astronomy and chemistry many of which are newer editions of older works. If you would care to follow me, please." Matthew gestured to Mary to follow him to a table near one of the windows at the far front corner of the shop; Captain Lord Nicholls following close behind. "The astronomy is here. The chemistry is there. I will leave you to browse." Matthew stepped away as the door to the shop opened, a very tall lanky British officer entering, removing his tricorne, revealing his wavy dark auburn hair tamed into a queue wrapped with a black silk ribbon brushing the large collar of his grey military cape. His eyes, piercing and ever watchful, were the color of the ocean found in the West Indies, neither green nor blue but somewhere in between.

"Kit Nicholls is that you?" The tall officer called to Captain Lord Nicholls, a smile splitting his handsome face upon recognizing him. "Of all the places..."

Nicholls eyes lit up, turning about at the sound of the voice. "When did you sail into port, eh? What manner of business do you have in New York?"

The tall army officer strode over to where Nicholls and Mary were. "Your manners, Nicholls." He chided. "You've not introduced me to your companion yet. Where has my older brother gone off to? New Jersey? Fighting the rebels in this cold is madness. I thought he would be hunkered down for the winter by now."

The navy captain flushed. "Your pardon, Lady Mary, may I present Lieutenant William Andre of His Majesty's Seventh Foot. Lieutenant, this is the Lady Mary Ludlow, the youngest daughter of the Duke of Sutherland and an honored guest of General Howe. I am one of the officers charged with protecting her whilst the army is out fighting the rebels."

Mary slowly extended her hand, William kissed it. "Lieutenant Andre."

"Lady Mary, a pleasure, I assure you. I find it most reprehensible of Kit to have the most extraordinary luck."

"Luck, Lieutenant?"

"To be escorting quite the loveliest young woman I have ever seen in the Colonies about this city." Mary laughed as she blushed. "Lieutenant Andre, I fear that you will quite overwhelm me with your flattery. Please, do come and meet my friends." Mary added trying to ignore the way that John's younger brother kept stealing bold glances at her in a clear attempt to flirt with her, his intent all too clear and quite insulting as she brought him to where Lottie, Rachel and Melissa were browsing through stacks of romantic fiction and history to introduce him. The introductions were quickly made.

"I shall leave you ladies to your selections." William said moving away, offering his arm to Mary. "Allow me." He began keen to engage her in private conversation to further their acquaintance.

"Thank you, Lieutenant, but I believe that I can fend for myself. I am only venturing over to look at selection of books on the sciences." She rebuffed him trying to step past him but he intentionally blocked her path so she had no place to go. "If you would please stand aside, Sir, and let me pass." "Give over, Will." Nicholls said. "Let the lady choose a book for the major." He added baiting the younger Andre.

"Not before the lady promises to share some conversation and refreshment with me." William stated. "Will you, Lady Mary?"

"Only if Captain Lord Nicholls and my friends accompany us, Lieutenant." Mary replied, for John's sake she knew that she should make an effort to get on with William, in a few short months he would most likely be her brother by marriage but she did not care for the way he was gazing at her, like he
would a tray of walnut tarts. It made her exceedingly uncomfortable.
William pursed his lips. "Very well." He sighed. If that was the only way she would grant him a few
hours with her then so be it. He would have time to figure out ways to catch her alone in the future
which would be quite simple seeing as he was to be billeted at the British Headquarters. "After you
select several scientific tomes for my older brother you must help me select something far less
tedious."
"There are various pamphlets on several topics if you are so inclined." Mary offered, sweetly. "Why
are you not with your regiment?"
"I was given a few days respite before I am to join them." William replied.
Mary nodded, turning her attention back to the table and the selection of several books for John.
William stood beside Mary for a moment or two waiting for her to ask his opinion upon which books
his brother would favor but there was no such question forthcoming. He was not used to being so
clearly rebuffed by a young woman. In his experience they flirted outrageously to gain his attention.
But not the Lady Mary Ludlow, she seemed quite disinterested and immune to his charm perhaps his
brother, John or another officer had already had the pleasure of captivating her? No matter, the
young woman attracted and intrigued him. He was not adverse to stealing away women that John
fancied. He had successfully done it in the past. He looked forward to the challenge of seducing this
one.

The Same Day, Later That Afternoon
British Headquarters

Abigail lay the tea tray down in front on Mary upon the low table.
"Thank you, Abigail." Mary said sweetly. "That will be all."
"Yes, Your Ladyship." Abigail bobbed a curtsey, backing out of the room leaving Mary with
Captain Lord Kent.
"I suppose you know why I wanted you to take tea with me privately this afternoon, Lady Mary?"
Kent asked.
"To be certain that you received more molasses cookies and walnut tarts, Captain?" Mary teased.
"That. And something else."
"But Captain Lor-"
"Edward, please. Call me Edward or Neddie. I find that it would be most appropriate. Seeing as we
may soon be much more intimate with one another. I want you to marry me."
"Why?" Mary asked.
"You truly have to ask that question, Lady Mary? We come from the same social class, you are the
daughter of a duke, I am the son of an earl, and you have the impeccable qualities that a young man
in my position looks for in a wife."
"Impeccable qualities? Goodness." Mary replied.
"I mean it. I think we would rub along well together you and me. We could be quite a force together.
I want you and I wish you to be the mother of my children, if I may be so bold as to say so." Kent
stated.
She knew in her position that marriage was a business arrangement but she had already received a
marriage proposal one that she was poised to accept. "I see. I am flattered that you think of me so
highly, Captain." She replied, remembering the discussion that she, General Howe and John had
before the two of them left for New Jersey regarding Kent's youth and potential for waywardness.
Mary and John's personalities were more compatible than Mary and Edward Kent's. Mary and John
had always had that ease in their relationship from the first where they could joke, tease and make
one another laugh, they shared a genuine friendship. Mary and Edward Kent would never have that.
She could not marry him.
"We could truly build something together, Lady Mary, if you will let us." Kent offered.
Mary stared at him. "Captain Lord Kent, Edward, I am flattered by your proposal, I sincerely am but
I cannot accept you." Mary stated flatly.
"What?" Kent had not expected her refusal certainly she would take him over that half- French merchant's son? "You cannot be serious? Major Andre's proposed to you, hasn't he? Or has he placed you in a position where you must accept him?" His voice raised in anger.

"His father was a wealthy merchant. Major Andre sought to advance himself in the army which I find quite admirable. He is ambitious." Mary defended the major calmly leaving the captain to draw his own conclusions.

"I can imagine how ambitious he is! How well he has been protecting Your Ladyship!" Kent's blue eyes clouded his voice still raised his insinuations clear; reaching for his cup filled with hot tea he tossed it to the carpet where it landed precariously close to Mary.

"What do you specifically mean by that? I will not sit by whilst you engage in a tantrum because I have refused your proposal nor will I have such untruths spoken of me and Major Andre, if you will please excuse me!" Mary cried, glaring at Kent, her blue eyes snapping with anger. She stood. "I would never have even considered tying myself to someone who behaves as though he has never left the nursery when he does not get his way!" She shot at him storming out of the room almost colliding with Lieutenant Andre in the hallway.

He went to go after her but Abigail, who was waiting nearby, stepped out to block his path. "The Lady Mary is in quite a temper. If only the major were here. He is an expert at restoring her good humor. Best allow me to handle this, Lieutenant." She mused with a sigh rushing after her young mistress who had dashed into the library.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XVII
Once again, many thanks to the lovely administrator(s) on the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) that were kind enough to read the story and put a link to it on their page so other fans of JJ and Major Andre could read and enjoy it. I am eternally grateful.

There was a lot of ice in the Delaware River that night of December 25, 1776. (Source: Washington's Crossing by David Hackett Fischer, 2006 which I have referenced before in this story)

General Howe and Major Andre have a rather in depth discussion as they ride to Trenton. Howe gives Andre the 'How to Handle a Woman' lecture-sort of. (cue the Camelot song- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U55m_TzM7jw - yes, I was listening to it when I wrote that portion of the chapter)

We learn that Captain Lord Kent is a healthy young man but not the man for Lady Mary. He has a few kinks-ahem! Major Andre had to do some protecting of Lady Mary's virtue himself. Inquiries of bribes from bachelor officers to gain a rich titled heiress as a bride not unthinkable the major being principled nipped the inquiries in the bud. Not all officers were like that, mind, but we would reckon that some of those fellows were not as scrupulous as their titles would suggest they would be. Notice how two of the officers that Andre names are dead- Graham and Edrington- the other is General Randall and a Navy Admiral? I have dealt with the gambling of the protection of certain young women in a previous chapter.

Philomena has taken up with Admiral Lord Clark and apparently is having a rollicking time with him. Good for her! She did have her eye on Captain Lord Nicholls but that went nowhere. We may see more of her later...

It gives me great pleasure to say that I live in what was a portion Wethersfield, Connecticut in 1775/76 when Benjamin Tallmadge was here! I imagine he would have walked by the Webb-Deane-Stevens Homes as I have done many times. Wonder if he
ever got over Cedar Mountain? I also grew up in a town not far from Coventry, Connecticut where Hale was born.

The information regarding Margaret Gage, General Thomas Gage's wife is to my knowledge historically accurate. She was indeed sent home on Charming Nancy. Howe gives Andre a talking to about how foolish his jealousy of Benjamin Tallmadge is just as Lady Stewart did in church-John is vulnerable and feels threatened by a suitor especially one that he views as Mary's First Love/Infatuation.

Captain Nathan Hale was reputed to be a handsome young man. Here is link to a statue of him. Judge for yourself. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_Hale - I am not a fan of wikipedia but the image of him is rather dishy.

Lottie brings in another Continental officer to hide in the attic of the Academy. Moses Jeffords was my sixth great grandfather and served in the Massachusetts Militia. He was much older than the character I created but he certainly shared the same ideals.

The discussion as the friends mount the stairs becomes a bit heated. Mary knows that she cannot be aiding the rebel cause any more no matter what her political inclinations if she is to marry Major Andre. As a devout Anglican/Catholic, she knows that her loyalty will be to her husband once they marry. She tosses some choice words to Lottie reminding her friend that her relationship with Major Andre has kept her trio of friends safe and unmolested. Lottie observes that Mary's scarlet fever has reached the critical stage (can we really blame her?!)

Jeffords is given a meal a bath and asks for money. Which Mary reluctantly agrees to give him as a New Year's Gift to General Washington. Mary vows to herself this will be the last time she will help the rebels. Seventy five pounds was a lot of money and would have help feed the soldiers for months. As armies run on their bellies it was a most generous gift along with the provisions she sent along.

Captain Lord Nicholls takes the young ladies to the book shop where we meet John's younger brother, William. John Andre did have a younger brother who served in the 7th Foot (and in other regiments). He was nine years younger. I have aged him up to where he is 24 to John's 26. Care to hasten a guess as to who my inspiration for him is? Or is it too easy? William is fiercely competitive with John and also has an eye for a pretty face but Mary isn't succumbing which frustrates the heck out of him. She is focused on selecting books for the major much to William's consternation and Captain Lord Nicholls' amusement.

Just as General Howe predicted, Captain Lord Kent makes his marriage proposal which Mary politely declines sparking off a temper tantrum from the Guardsman where he makes some insinuations that incite her temper. The whole thing ends badly.

Thanks once again to my dear readers, your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
Playing Fetch with George and a Lieutenant, Comparisons, Temptations and Yearnings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal Chapter XVIII
29 December 1776
British Headquarters, New York

Mary tossed a ball for George, who tore after it across the frozen snow dusted grass, catching it, trotting toward her his tail held high in victory, dropping it at her feet anticipating when she would toss it next.

"Good lad, Georgie!" Mary praised the setter, stroking his silky ears, bending down to pick up the ball catching sight of Lieutenant Andre who paused on the front steps clearly watching her.

"Lady Mary, a Fine Good Morning to you!" He called. "You are up rather early." He observed hastening down the last few steps striding toward her, the buttons on his scarlet coat gleaming in the early morning sunlight.

"I enjoy exercising before breakfast. A ride." She explained.

"Truly?" He could not help smirking his mind conjuring the most wicked images of her that most certainly did not involve a horse but something far more intimate. "Your Ladyship never mentioned it." He could not conceal the disappointment in his voice as he reached her, standing beside her.

"You never inquired." She retorted flatly.

"You do not venture out alone?"

"Certainly not! Captain Lord Nicholls accompanied me this morning since Major Andre is presently unavailable being in New Jersey. "Mary explained.

William arched an eyebrow over an ocean blue colored eye. "He does?" He asked thinking his brother the most fortunate of men, a thread of jealousy snaking through him. "Where is Captain Lord Nicholls now?"

"Every morning! We have a standing engagement. He is a most delightful and amusing companion, the consummate gentleman. Captain Lord Nicholls, alas, was needed by Admiral Lord Howe this morning otherwise he would have joined us for breakfast."

"That my brother is. A standing engagement, you say?" William asked, his eyes sparkling with amusement the corners of his mouth curling up into a smile.

He only has a pair of dimples on either side of his mouth, Mary noted. John at least has a trio, she thought in comparison and his eyes gaze into mine with myriad of emotions not just amusement along with something else I dare not place a finger upon. "I did, weren't you listening, Lieutenant? Or did Georgie, here, distract you?" Mary asked breaking eye contact with William focusing all of her attention upon the setter pup, stroking the pup along his back as the dog waited patiently. "Of course, he accompanies us, as well. Don't you, Darling?" She asked squatting down ruffling George's ears and planting several loving kisses upon his head and muzzle, the pup watching the ball intently held in her other hand.

"No, Lady Mary, not the pup, though I will concede he is quite engaging, someone else entirely." William stated as she looked up at him, her eyes narrowing in an attempt to block the sunlight. It took a moment for her to ascertain who he meant.

"Oh!" She said, lowering her eyes and her chin, her cheeks flushing gently. He was trying to flirt with her and she did not care for it. His smile broadened into a grin. He had made her blush. "Your cheeks are red." He teased.

"Are they? It must be the cold." She replied. "I should really be venturing indoors."
"The color suits you."
"It does?"
"Yes, fine alabaster tinged with rose."

Mary made a face. "You flatter me, Lieutenant. If you would excuse me, George is becoming restless. He will be so terribly cross with me if I do not toss the ball for him at least half a dozen times before breakfast."

"I would be honored to help, Lady Mary. Allow me."

To not accept his offer would be incredibly rude. "Take the ball then." She acquiesced handing it to him.

William went to brush his fingers against hers in the exchange but Mary was having none of it. The ball fell on the snow covered grass as a result; George was there to grab it within his mouth as William turned his head, frowning at her. She had done that on purpose!

"Oh, Lieutenant! I am so very sorry!" Mary exclaimed, sweetly.

He pursed his lips sucking in his cheeks. "Right!" He sighed.

Mary did not wish to be rude but she did not want to encourage him either. Her chin lowered, she looked up at him, their gazes locking for a brief moment. He took a step closer as she turned her attention to George wrestling the ball from his mouth, tossing it across the lawn, George tearing toward it, catching it, sauntering back to his mistress proudly.

"Clever lad!" Mary praised the dog smiling broadly ignoring William. She clapped her hands as the dog dropped the ball at her feet, swishing his tail back and forth waiting for her to toss it for a third time.

They stood there for several moments in awkward silence until William took another step toward her, his boots crunching on the grass and snow, his hard body brushing against her back, making her start.

"Do pardon me, Lady Mary!" He apologized bending down to grab the ball delighted that he had made her react. Mayhap all was not lost as he was beginning to believe? Mayhap she was not completely immune to his charm or his physical attractions. But was it enough? They were certainly other young women eager to dally with him. A certain Jane Fairfax had been quite forward as they had danced at a ball last evening, allowing him to steal a kiss later. She had certainly made it clear to William that she was available. Miss Fairfax would most certainly be a convenient vessel to slack his lust upon whilst he pursued the finer quarry of this ginger haired vixen.

"Of course!" She said watching him toss the ball for George, who dashed after it.

"He is quite the handsome lad." William commented as George raced back to them.

"That he is! He knows it!" Mary agreed. "Like his master." The affection in her voice was unmistakable a wistful smile played about her mouth.

William felt his heart constrict with jealousy. How he ached to kiss that lush tempting mouth! Hellfire and Damnation! He had suspected as much when he had received his brother's letter where he had written about a young lady that there was more to this one than the others! It was painfully obvious that the affection was reciprocated, he thought noting how her eyes began to sparkle and a gentle flush tinged her cheeks when she referred to John. William hoped that there would be a time and place where she would react in that manner when he was referred to or mentioned. Blast his brother! He had suspected as much when he had received his brother's letter where he had written about a young lady that there was more to this one than the others! It was painfully obvious that the affection was reciprocated, he thought noting how her eyes began to sparkle and a gentle flush tinged her cheeks when she referred to John.

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William wanted to kiss her. But was it enough? They were certainly other young women eager to dally with him. A certain Jane Fairfax had been quite forward as they had danced at a ball last evening, allowing him to steal a kiss later. She had certainly made it clear to William that she was available. Miss Fairfax would most certainly be a convenient vessel to slack his lust upon whilst he pursued the finer quarry of this ginger haired vixen.

"Yes, it was a Christmas gift. Was that not incredibly kind of him?" Mary asked brightly.

"Presenting a young lady with a pet is a most serious gift, especially a dog of George's caliber. It was incredibly kind." William agreed feeling rather ill all of a sudden, anxiety washing over him. He had suspected that the English setter had been a gift from John. To have it confirmed was another blow. It was clear that the Lady Mary had stolen his brother's heart. He had not given Honora a pet and she had broken it.
Sitting down, George barked at the pair of them. He wished to play some more. Mary laughed. "Be patient!" She admonished him watching the pup's tail wag furiously, leaning down to nudge the ball to her with his nose. "Are we not the intelligent lad? Just like your master as well!" Her smile broadened, she giggled, grasping the ball, tossing it across the lawn for George for a fourth time. The pup racing across the lawn, retrieving it and bringing it back. "I believe it is time for breakfast, don't you?" She asked when he came back. At the sound of the word breakfast, his ears perked up looking up expectantly at Mary, he made a noise in the back of his throat something between a bark and a growl indicating that he wished them to venture inside. The walk and additional game of fetch had made him work up quite an appetite.

"Lady Mary may I have the honor of escorting you to breakfast?" William asked offering her his arm, smiling down at her.
"Yes, you may." She replied grasping that which was offered to her. She had no choice. She could not very well refuse. It was not so horrible, she reasoned walking across the snow covered lawn with him, George following along behind.

Flames leapt up his arm where she held him. His heart began to pound in his chest. "There is a soiree at Lady Richmond's this evening. May I have the honor of escorting Your Ladyship?" He asked. "Captain Nicholls asked me earlier this morning and I accepted. I am so sorry, Lieutenant." She answered.

"I envy him his privilege. Would you do me the honor of allowing me several dances? At least the last?" One always saved one's favorite partner for last. "I insist." He watched her hesitate. "What is it?"

"I promise to save you several dances, Lieutenant Andre but, alas, Admiral Lord Howe has claimed the last dance of the evening."

"I will content myself with several dances then and the pleasures of breakfasting with Your Ladyship. I pray that Captain Lord Kent will be in better sorts this morning than the last."

"Such matters are not to be discussed in polite conversation." Mary admonished William.

"My apologies, Lady Mary but the Captain was incredibly loud when he came in this morning, calling and crowing. I heard that he had to be carried to bed. The army probably heard him all the way in Trenton."

"Lieutenant..." Mary warned, gently blushing remembering the raucous Kent had created when he had come in at four o'clock waking her and probably most of the house, having had enjoyed a night of drinking and she dare not think about what else.

"For all the wine and spirits he consumed one would imagine his head is rather thick this morning. Remind me to clatter my cutlery against my plate and be particularly loud." William teased grinning wickedly. "It is only fair since he has particularly ghastly these last two days, incredibly rude to Your Ladyship."

"I appreciate your concern but I believe that in his present temper, Captain Lord Kent is best to be avoided." Mary said as they walked up the steps to the front door of the British Headquarters. Abigail was there to greet them unable to resist smiling when George made a dash for the dining room as the capes; gloves and William's tricorn were removed and taken.

"Is Captain Lord Kent in the dining room, Abigail?" William asked after thanking her.

"No, Lieutenant. The Captain is not awake. The pair of you will be dining alone. I thought it best to set out a buffet, Lady Mary, if that is agreeable?"

"Of course, Abigail, we can serve ourselves this morning, that is if Lieutenant Andre has no objections."

"No objections at all, Lady Mary. William said looking like the cat that had got the cream as he followed her into the dining room, sending up a silent prayer that Captain Lord Kent was still indisposed and would not be joining them.

"There!" Mary exclaimed snipping the end of the silk embroidery floss, she lay the scissors in her lap holding up the handkerchief. "Do you believe he will like it?" She asked no one in particular. The quartet of friends sat about in a sewing circle in a corner of the parlor their charges being instructed to
spend the morning reading quietly in their rooms. Lottie looked up from where she was making a French knot in a pineapple that she was embroidering on a piece of fine China blue silk. It was to be a pillow when she was finished. "May, you have crocheted a lace border about the edge and monogrammed it. What is there not to like?" "True!" Mary agreed. She smiled focusing her attention on John's initials expertly stitched on the fine fabric. "Oh, Lottie, I miss him so very much!" She exclaimed. "Lieutenant Andre is not proving to be a Welcomed Temporary Diversion?" Rachel asked. "Absolutely not! I cannot help comparing the two and the Lieutenant always comes up wanting." "They are both incredibly dashing for British officers." Melissa offered being certain that she clarified her statement remembering where her loyalties lay being the daughter of a Continental General. "All the girls have been twittering and sighing over the prospect of there being two Andre men in New York." "Wanting? Are you being serious, May?" I am not enamored of Redcoats but even I will concede the Lieutenant cuts an elegant and smart figure in that scarlet coat and those boots His legs go on for miles!" Rachel stated. "Good Gracious! He has managed to charm Mistress Rachel Alton!" Mary gasped. "You all know that he is a pale imitation of the Major?" "They both fancy you! Do not give me that face, May! They do! I would be careful with the Lieutenant." Lottie warned. "I have been discouraging him any and every chance that I can without being incredibly rude. I am not encouraging him at all. I would never..." "He is quite charming." Melissa sighed. "Not as charming as John. I believe you have gotten lost in the Lieutenant's ocean blue eyes, Melissa." "Come now, May, you must agree that the Major can be arrogant, formidable and intimidating." Lottie said noting that Mary knew exactly what color eyes William Andre possessed. "Not generally in my experience." "Liar! You complained fiercely about his arrogance when he broached no argument when he told you that you would be moving into The British Headquarters. That his mind was made up and that he would not change his course or listen to your entreaties." Lottie reminded her gently teasing. "Have you forgotten or do you have him wrapped so tightly about your wee little finger that those early battles have slipped your mind?" "I would not call them battles." "Skirmishes then." Lottie conceded. "He is wrapped rather snugly, isn't he?" She teased. "Lottie!" Mary admonished her friend blushing. "Has a term been coined for a British officer that has lost his heart to a lady that favors independence and freedom from Great Britain? What manner of disease did Major Andre develop if you came down with Scarlet Fever?" Lottie posed. "Continental Consumption? Patriot Pox?" Mary asked. Rachel laughed. "Patriot Pox! It is perfect!" She exclaimed. Mary bowed her head accepting her friend's compliment. "I am so delighted that you approve, Miss Alton." "Of course!" The girls all burst out laughing. "Getting back to the Lieutenant..." Melissa began. "What about the Lieutenant? If the Major is arrogant, formidable and intimidating then the Lieutenant is irresponsible, impish and far too spirited." Mary stated. "We can use a bit of Lieutenant Andre's impishness and high spirits to keep us amused. He is rather quite fun, May. Except for Captain Lord Nicholls and some of the other naval officers calling it has been far too dull without the army officers about." Lottie said. "Is the Captain coming for tea? I heard that you accepted his officer to escort you to Lady Richmond's soiree this evening. She is ever so disappointed that you refused Captain Lord Kent. I believe she may take a shine to Captain Lord
Nicholls since her other horse is now out of the running. He certainly has a better chance against Lady Stewart's favorite, Major Andre." Lottie said.
"Lady Stewart is a dragon. I do not believe that Captain Lord Nicholls will stand a chance even with Major Andre away fighting." Rachel said.

"More tea, Captain? Lieutenant Andre?" Mary asked Captain Lord Nicholls and Lieutenant Andre lifting the pot to pour. The pair of officers was seated in the parlor of the Academy with Mary and her three friends.
"Not yet. Thank you, Lady Mary." Captain Lord Nicholls said. "These walnut tarts are delicious. Admiral Lord Howe will be ever so grateful if several can be spared for him."
"I had thought that the Admiral enjoyed the Ludlow Ladies' Fruitcake as does his brother, His Excellency the General."
"No, Milady. The walnut tarts are his favorite. Those and the lemon shortbread dusted with the coarse sugar." Nicholls provided.
"I will see that some of each is sent back with you for the Admiral's table. I am so terribly sorry that pressing business kept him away." Mary said disappointed.
"I will let the Admiral know that he was sorely missed. He was so looking forward to a respite from his duties but alas he could not manage to get away at this time."
"But he could spare you, Captain?" Mary asked.
"I was sent as a messenger and envoy of sorts." Nicholls said with a smile.
"And to spend time with a beautiful eligible young lady." Lottie whispered to Rachel. The pair of them exchanging a look staring from Mary to Nicholls and back again then allowing their eyes to stray to the Lieutenant.
"Were you Captain?" Lieutenant Andre asked. "I had thought that you had come acourting? Taking advantage of the Major's absence to parade the virtues of His Majesty's navy?"
"The virtues of His Majesty's navy and the officers that serve within its ranks speak for themselves, Lieutenant. I do not have to take advantage of Major Andre's absence. Lady Mary is well aware of my attractions." Nicholls replied. "I am following Admiral Lord Howe's orders since Captain Lord Kent has been indisposed." The handsome officer sipped his tea, took a bite of his lemon shortbread savoring the combination of tart and sweet on his tongue.
"He is shirking his duty." Melissa stated. "What if some rebels came in the dead of night seeking to steal the Lady Mary away? Who would protect her?"
"I would Mistress Alton, seeing as Captain Lord Nicholls would be unavailable." William reassured her.
"I would be most happy to step in and serve as Her Ladyship's protector until Major Andre returns." He added smoothly his eyes still on Mary gauging her for a reaction.
"Do accept his offer, Mary. You do need someone far more reliable than Captain Lord Kent has been proving to be." Lottie advised.
"I will give it my careful consideration." Mary stated.
"What is there to consider? Your safety is paramount." Lottie retorted.
"I concur, My Lady, Major Andre would be furious in anything were to happen to you. There would be hell to pay." William said.
"Not only the Major but Admiral Lord and General Howe, as well, if we do not carry out our orders to the letter there will be dire consequences," Nicholls put in.
"Do the pair of you have anything to say?" Mary snapped at the Alton sisters.
Both girls shook their heads.
Mary sighed resignedly. She did not wish to but she had no choice in the matter. "I have been persuaded to accept Lieutenant Andre when Captain Lord Nicholls is unavailable and only until the moment Major Andre returns." She looked between all five faces. "Now that is settled would someone please pass the lemon shortbread?"
"Lady Mary? Ah, there you are! Mistress Shaw said that I may find you here. What are you searching for? Mayhap I can be of some assistance?" William asked coming up behind Mary who stood in front of the bookcases her eyes scanning the titles.

"Major Andre and I have been reading Shakespeare's Richard II when we can. I just finished Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. I was searching for The Vicar of Wakefield to read next, by Oliver Goldsmith. Joh... The Major recommended it. He said that it would keep me amused and distract me whilst he was away so that I would not miss him as much." Mary explained.

"You miss him?" He asked.

"Most dreadfully." She confessed feeling her voice catch slightly.

"I see." William said vainly attempting to conceal his disappointment. He took a step toward her. "I could be an amusing diversion if you would but let me." He reached out to touch her skimming his fingers down one of her sides with agonizing slowness.

"No!" She was adamant.

"No? I promise to be most entertaining, Lady Mary. Do give me the opportunity. I promise that you won't be disappointed. I will be more than delighted to help ease your yearning."

"I will forgive for your forwardness, Lieutenant, if you cease your prattle immediately." Mary said attempting to move away but where she went he followed.

"Oh, I could not possibly do that."

"Lieutenant, if you were a gentleman you would stop this." Mary said turning about to face him her front brushing against his. He was so very close. She was cornered, trapped.

"But Lady Mary, I am not, I am a wicked scoundrel so I will not be stopping." His head dipped reaching out, yanking her roughly to him her body slamming against him. He went to kiss her.

Smack! The sound of flesh hitting flesh reverberated about the room, as her palm met one of his cheeks. "Lieutenant!" She shrieked, completely mortified. "How could you?"

He instantly drew away, fingers going up to soothe his stinging face, seeing the disgust and pain in her eyes that were shining with unshed tears. "I regret most profoundly that my brother, John, met you first. He is most fortunate to have secured your deep affection that he most obviously possesses. I envy his position." William said.

"He's asked me to marry him." Mary stated baldly.

William blinked in surprise at that revelation. "Oh, Christ! Have you given him an answer?" He asked feeling like he was going to be ill making a concerted attempt to conceal his anxiety.

"Not yet. I promised him I would when he returned." Mary replied.

"Do you plan on accepting him?" William probed.

Mary touched her chin with a well-manicured forefinger. "That is private business between the Major and me. Be assured that when he comes back seeking my answer and I give it to him that you will be one of the first to know if he has been accepted."

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"Lady Mary how kind of you to come, you are looking particularly lovely this evening. That shade of blue compliments your coloring. All the gentlemen will not be able to take their eyes from you this evening!" Lady Richmond stated indicating the peacock blue of Mary's robe a la Francaise. "No Captain Lord Kent, I see. Is he still indisposed, the poor lad? Do send along my felicitations. Good Evening to you, Captain Lord Nicholls and who is the dashing officer?" She asked indicating William. "Have we met, Sir?"

"Lady Richmond, may I present Lieutenant William Andre of His Majesty's Seventh Foot? Lieutenant Andre, our hostess, Lady Caroline Richmond." Mary made the introductions. "I will be certain to relay your kind words to Captain Lord Kent, Madame."

William took the older woman's hand placing a kiss upon it. "A pleasure, Milady." He murmured gallantly.

Caroline Richmond giggled, completely charmed, boldly taking an inventory of the young lieutenant's assets, delighted with what she saw, an image fleeting quickly through her mind of what
was beneath that uniform he wore so expertly. His brother, the Major had refused the middle aged widow's advances and had made it clear he was not interested. Wounding her pride! How dare he! She would be certain to get the lieutenant in a position where he would be unable to refuse her. "The pleasure is all mine, Lieutenant Andre. Lady Mary, I see where you would wish to hide this delicious young man away. When did you arrive? I do not recall seeing you about. I do know Major John Andre, that dashing rogue who was constantly in the company of Lady Mary until he was called away. Are you the temporary diversion, Lieutenant? If you are, how fortunate for Lady Mary! Or has that task fallen to this adorable naval captain?" How Lady Richmond enjoyed making trouble and creating intrigues.

"I should be so fortunate, Madame. Alas, I have not been afforded the same privileges." William confided to Lady Richmond who drew him gently aside for a moment.

"If you were my escort I would afford you all the privileges that you were entitled to and allow you any liberties that you wished. Do not mind Lady Mary, she was raised in Boston, they do not subscribe to the merry morality of us here in New York. She possesses Fine New England Sensibilities. I believe it is the Massachusetts Bay Colony's Puritan morals along with a fierce independent streak though I know that Lady Mary was raised in the Anglican faith with a Papist bent. Some of her antecedents are rumored to have been Jacobites. As the youngest girl after half a dozen lads, her parents were apt to indulge her." Lady Richmond confided.

The woman was clearly flirting with him, William thought. She was not bad looking for what he guessed to be about fifty. Her black hair heavily peppered with silver arranged in the Parisian style, puffed and curled. But he was not the sort to engage in affairs with wealthy older women preferring bored matrons and young women of marriageable age.

"Thank you for that information, Madame. If you would please excuse me, I must go and join my party." He said moving off feeling slightly uncomfortable. He would certainly have to think of a way to gently put Lady Richmond off it was quite apparent that she wished to get her claws into him. He wondered what John had done that was so effective that got rid of her. He followed the others who were moving off into the ballroom.

A group of dancers was already engaging in an allemande. It was far too late to ask the Lady Mary to join him. William made a mental note to ask her for the next one once the music had stopped. He watched her through hooded eyes as she smiled at some quip Captain Lord Nicholls made, laughing lightly. She was making an effort to be an amiable companion this evening but it was clear to William that her heart and mind were in New Jersey with John. God Damn his brother! He thought clenching one of his fists in frustration, eyes scanning the crowd for a servant with a tray of champagne and that Fairfax girl or some other female that would be willing to accommodate his needs otherwise he may have to seek out the services of a fiery haired whore.

Somewhere Near Trenton/Princeton, NJ
Between Christmas and New Year's Day, 1776/1777

"In need of a wee bit of comfort, Major?" The pretty blonde whispered seductively giving him a clear view of her ample breasts that threatened to spill out of her low-cut bodice, catching sight of the miniature cradled in the dashingly handsome British Officer's palm, totally oblivious to what she was offering. His eyes riveted to the face of the young lady staring out from the small portrait.

"A mug of flip or hot mulled cider if you have it, please!" John asked, tracing Mary's fine features with a forefinger, his breath catching in this throat. How he missed her! His free hand absent touching the breast of his uniform where within a pocket sewn in the lining three of the letters she had sent were kept. He had read each of them at least a dozen times or more, a gentle smile curving his thin lips as he recalled how she had addressed him, borrowing from the rebel traitor, John Adams, using the patriot's salutation of 'My Dearest Friend' which was rumored to be how the man addressed the letters to his wife, Abigail of whom he was unusually fond. The missives Mary had sent were filled with news and romantic sentiments, expressions of a genuine fondness and tenderness that had kept his spirits buoyed during the long nights out in the New Jersey chill.
"A mug of flip. Is that your Sweetheart, a lady that you left in England when you came to fight the rebels? She is an ocean away. You must be so very lonely."
"She is my Sweetheart. I left her in York City. I am quite anxious to return to her." John replied, the affection in his voice for the young lady in the miniature plain. He kept his eyes still focused on Mary's features noting how Trumbull had done an exquisite job of capturing the exact shade of her sapphire colored eyes which was no mean feat. The rebel artist was certainly talented. "I can help you ease the pain of missing her. Someone as fine as you, Major, I will be happy to suck your cock and give you a good jogging for free."
John could not resist smiling. My God! The drab was brazen and forward! He chuckled shaking his head in the negative. "No, Thank you, Meg." He refused. "You can close your eyes and imagine it is your beautiful red-head that you would be fucking, Sir." She persisted. She was not going to be so easily put off.

The blonde whore was not even tempting, he made a mental note to steer her in the direct path of Tarleton and Brandon. The pair would certainly keep her happily occupied for several hours. "Not tonight. I do have a pair of friends, two randy young officers, that would be more than delighted to enjoy what you are offering, Meg. That is, if you are inclined to entertain two at once." John would be content to spend the evening drinking flip, sketching, reading and, of course, thinking of Mary who was never far from his thoughts. That was, if he was not needed to attend up General Howe. "Are these officers as handsome as you, Major?" She asked placing the mug of flip in front of him. John nodded taking a sip of his drink, the heat of it and the bite of rum warming him. "Well..." He began, grinning cheekily. "I can assure you that you will not be disappointed."

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XVIII
Not too many notes this time - everything truly speaks for itself.
Once again, my sincerest gratitude to the Administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story.
Mary makes certain that William is aware of the nature of her relationship with his elder brother which doesn't seem to put him off.
We learn that Captain Lord Kent is still taking Mary's refusal of his proposal badly-taking to drinking and whoring.
The trio of Mary's friends express their appreciation of Lieutenant Andre even Lottie and Melissa (who, as long time readers know, is the daughter of a Continental general) find him rather agreeable. Mary senses that the Lieutenant's intentions toward her are less than honorable and does her best to discourage him. There is also discussion of Major Andre.
The ladies also coin a term for the reverse affliction of 'Scarlet Fever'.
The Vicar of Wakefield was a sentimental novel written by Oliver Goldsmith.
William makes his move but he quickly sees that it was the wrong one.
Lady Caroline Richmond is a wicked lady and has an eye for a younger man!
John is clearly missing Mary on campaign and is anxious to get back to her. Which will happen soon.
Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
"Is he dead?" Major John Andre asked gazing down at the bloodied face of Captain Lord Kennedy who lay prone on a makeshift cot.
"He is breathing, Major, but it don't look good." The doctor replied.
The Major took Captain Kennedy's hand. The Captain did not look well at all. His color was parchment white and his blond hair was caked with blood. That of several rebels that 'Killer Kennedy' had killed in hand to hand combat or his own, John was not certain. In the heat of the battle, Andre had witnessed Kennedy kill a Massachusetts sergeant who lay nearby. Correspondence found on the rebel had identified him as Moses Jeffords.
"Captain? Archie? Can you hear me?" John asked staring into the other officer's blue grey eyes. "Johnny..." Archie rasped, he coughed, drawing the cold air into his lungs. "Is all lost?"
"All is never lost, Kennedy, just a minor setback. Cornwallis is routing some of the troops to New Brunswick. We have been ordered back to New York." John offered relieved that his friend was still alive. He turned his head, feeling someone staring at him. About twenty yards across the battlefield a strikingly handsome Continental officer was looking at him through his spyglass, his face appearing impassive. There were streaks of blood and mud scattered across the rebel's finely sculpted face and upon his blue coat reminders that the man had participated in the recent foray. John recognized his rank as a major, his eyes narrowing slightly to take an inventory of his opponent.
Benjamin Tallmadge peered back through the glass at the dashingely elegant British officer assessing his enemy, his stormy blue eyes steady. From what he could make out from distance that separated them, the Bloodyback's features were classically formed, his eyes alert and ever watchful. He was overly tall close to the height of Washington and Ben, himself, it gave him a commanding and intimidating presence that must serve him well whilst engaged in battle.
"Come on, Tall Boy! His Excellency's been lookin' for ye!" Caleb exclaimed coming up to stand along beside Ben, following his friend's gaze across the field. "Who's the Lobster?" He asked indicating Andre.
"Is that Lady May's Major? He's a pretty bastard!" Caleb observed bringing the spyglass to one of his eyes to have a look, noting the fine figure the enemy officer cut in his uniform.
"You think so?" Ben retorted still staring at Andre. "He does fit the description that I have heard so he could be..."
"If he is he ain't as pretty as you, Bennie boy. Has Lady May's preference changed to blonds or Redcoats? I don't know who is more the fool, her or you for not pressing for the match when you had the chance. You could save yerself a lot more heartache if you just took out your gun and shot the fucker." Caleb stated bluntly still looking across the field at the British Officer.
"Risk the wrath of Washington? She loved me first, we cannot be together now but she wanted me first." Ben murmured his voice low and rough with regret. From across the field at his vantage point on the cot, Captain Kennedy tried to rise up on an elbow wincing slightly in pain; his ribs bruised spotting the two rebels that were staring at the Major. Upon
examination and several sips of spirits from the doctor's flask, matters were found to be not as grave as were originally believed. "Who's the Continental Major? Is that Benjamin Tallmadge by chance? If it is he is incredibly handsome for a school teacher from what I can view from this vast distance." He quipped unable to resist. John pursed his lips, his eyes cold. "Here, Captain, take a closer look!" He spat, handing Kennedy his spyglass watching as the Captain brought it to one of his eyes, training it across the field to take a better look at the Continental officer examining Tallmadge through the field glass. "My first opinion still stands, Johnny! He is a fine looking fellow whoever he is." Kennedy commented. "For a Continental officer, of course." He added having a care not to offend. He knew how touchy Andre could be about the Lady Mary Ludlow's Childhood Friend and First Infatuation. He knew the history of the pair quite well. He also knew the Major. John Andre was a goner. He was completely smitten with Sutherland's youngest child. He had been the moment Lady Mary had laid those sapphire colored orbs on him at that dinner party at the van Lieden's. "Of course!" John grudged. "When you finish admiring the rebel officer may I have my spyglass, please?" He held out a gloved hand. Kennedy chuckled. "If it is any consolation, remember the Lady Mary Ludlow anxiously awaits your return to New York City." "Trust me, I have not forgotten." John replied his features softening thinking of Mary, absently touching the spot upon his person where her miniature was kept. "I am anticipating our reunion with the greatest pleasure."

New York City
A Brothel
A Day or Two Later

"Ooooooh! Fuck me! Yes! Yes! Yes! Harder, Lieutenant! Fuck me harder! MMMMMMMmmmm! OOOOoooooh, yeeees!" The fiery haired whore cried encouraging the young officer in his efforts, her legs hitching about his narrow hips, whilst he pounded his length deep inside her. She could feel him on all sides of her the sensation making her toes curl as the well-worn counterpane slipped from their heated bodies. William Andre shut his eyes tightly. A vision of that Ginger-haired Siren forming behind his closed eyes, it was Lady Mary that he imagined himself fucking, moving his cock deep within the whore's hot wet depths, slacking his lust upon her, hearing Mary's voice, not the whore's, whispering foul and lascivious words of encouragement into one of his ears, gently nipping at his lobe. "Oh, Christ! May!" William murmured tightly into the whore's flaming hair while he continued to thrust deep in a vain attempt to satisfy his deep burning craving for his brother's Sweetheart. She had partnered him in three separate dances that evening, two of which he had cut in on, using his superior rank to chase away two naval midshipmen. Inciting his passions with her witty repartee and gentle teasing, behaving in a most proper and diplomatic fashion totally unaware that she was provoking his lust and desire, thirsts that he tried to quench by imbibing several glasses of Lady Stewart's fine champagne. To no avail, once back at headquarters, after the ball, he had made a vain attempt to coerce her into John's study for a glass of hot brandy but she was having none of it, graciously declining, Abigail materializing to escort her young mistress to her bedchamber. Cursing his misfortune, he stumbled into the study, finding the decanter of sherry his brother kept on a side table, he had poured and downed at least four glasses in quick succession before heading up the stairs to seek out his quarry, finding her bedchamber door firmly locked against him, he had then decided to venture out looking for more amenable company leading him to the brothel and into the arms of this red-headed harlot. Poll did not care what name he called out in the midst of their coupling, he could call out the name of that fancy young lady as much as he wished as long as he continued to ram his enormous cock into her greedy cunt, as he was doing now, bringing her closer and closer to coming apart, a few more
thrusts and she’d be soaring.
"Oh, Will! Harder, Lieutenant! Harder!" She encouraged him.
"Oh, God! May!" He rasped, his buttocks flexing and tensing, slipping out of her as his seed spilled over her lower belly. Panting, attempting to catch his breath, it coming in hot bursts as he strove to calm himself, rolling off the whore, opening his eyes, feeling empty and cold inside, unfulfilled. Poll was a poor substitute for the woman he truly wanted but he knew he could never have.

Mary snuggled beneath the down filled duvets of the large bed, caught within the most deliciously erotic dream. He came to her, her gallant warrior, spattered with mud and blood over his cape and his scarlet coat, replete with the lust of battle, seeking her and the comfort and intense pleasure she could afford him, calling her 'His Wicked Little Rebel' smiling that charming disarming devilish smile when she crooked one of her index fingers to him, beckoning, inviting him into her bed. Tossing the duvets aside, giving him a tantalizing view of her lush and sumptuous body clad in a frothy lace and silk confection that left nothing to one's imagination.
She tore at his cape, his uniform, quickly divesting him of his garments, tossing his boots across the room, letting her gaze devour his magnificent naked body before he sank into the bed beside her, drawing her into his arms, his mouth finding hers, devouring it, his kisses leaving it bruised and swollen, his fingers sought her, caressing, pleasing, awakening her to pleasures and desires that she had never known existed but now craved with every fiber of her being, leaving her writhing and trembling, calling his name, pleading with him to ease her exquisite torment.
He did not comply right away, teasing and taunting her, chuckling and smiling in that disarming way he had that fired her blood and set her heart to pounding, drawing her down into that vortex of rapture and hunger, deeper and deeper, until he went to ease her distress...
She awoke with a start, her trembling body on fire, she could feel the brand of his kisses all over her fevered skin, smell the faint sent of his sandalwood soap, the taste of his kiss upon her mouth. She looked about in the darkness of the bedroom, blinking several times. What had just happened? Her dream had been so eerily real. She could feel John's presence in the room but she knew that he was not there. Rubbing her forearms up and down with her palms in an attempt to calm her thundering heart, she stared into the dying embers of the fireplace. Praying that he would be back safely in her arms quite soon! Ignoring the sounds coming from the floor below as either Captain Lord Kent or Lieutenant Andre returned from an evening of drunken debauchery and worse, matters that a young woman of her class and breeding should have no knowledge of. She cared not to entertain thought of such occurrences or travel down that path even though she and John had engaged in intimacies that no unmarried young woman or bachelor should.
He had ruined her that first night. A highly principled man, he had broached the subject and necessity of entering into a Marriage of Convenience- they both knew that propriety dictated that it had to happen- the issue remaining unspoken as their relationship had become more intimate and passionate, their friendship developing, the pair sharing a genuine ease and honesty. He could make her laugh until her sides ached and tears stung her eyes. Something she had never experienced with another gentleman with the exception of Benjamin Tallmadge but Ben had never made her laugh so hard to make her stomach hurt. Though her Childhood friend had stolen a piece of her young heart and had kept it, the first man to turn her head.
But John Andre was the man that almost made her cry with mirth. He had been the one to have her screaming in ecstasy. The memories sending a delicious shiver down her spine. Their Marriage Bed and the intimacies that occurred there would never ever be cold or distant. Quite the contrary, it was fiery hot, fierce, passionate and scorching as he had promised it would be and claimed to keep it so for every night for the rest of their lives. What sensible woman could refuse a man that promised such delights? They were also very well suited to one another, she added in her mind as an afterthought, smiling to herself. After hours of extensive thought she had come to the conclusion that he would suit her well as a husband. Hopeful that their relationship would mature into something as deep and meaningful as her parents, the Washingtons and Adamses shared.
When he returned she would accept him- she would not shame her family name. By allowing him
into her bed she knew that she risked conceiving a child. If he had made her pregnant, they would seek a Special License and be married with due haste. There was no alternative. There never had been. She was not so unconventional that she would ever think of circumventing the social rules and risk a dreadful scandal- there was much at stake. The abyss that she risked falling into was great and vast- perhaps worse because of her position in society. John would also settle for nothing less than becoming her husband. He had made that evidently clear.

She broke free of her inner thoughts and musings, listening to the officer mount the stairs, hearing him finally hit the upstairs landing, his fine deep baritone voice softly singing a naughty camp ditty, she cocked her head to listen, it appeared to be the same one that Captain MacLeane had taught her when he had been quartered with her family in Boston.

William sang softly and slightly off key, striding down the dimly lit hallway mentally counting doors from the landing to be certain that he reached Lady Mary's, pausing before it, rapping gently upon it. Beyond the closed door, Mary tensed beneath the bedclothes, hearing William trying the door knob finding it still locked against him. He muttered a vulgar oath, trying the handle to see if it would give way but to no avail.

"Poor Darling, your bed must be ice cold and so very lonely," He stated, heaving a heavy sigh. I miss John dreadfully but I am not so very lonely. I have his braid, his banyan and his letters, Mary thought. They have sustained me thus far.

She knew that William was beginning to cut a quite a swath through New York Society. He would leave a trail of broken hearts just not hers, when he left to join his regiment, which was not soon enough as far as she was concerned.

"Lady Mary! May!" William called rapping his knuckles on the hard wooden door, pressing his ear against it, to discern if she was awake.

Damn it! She was more than likely asleep. How he yearned to be allowed entrance to her bed chamber, to awaken her, clear the sleep clouds from those lovely sapphire colored eyes in the most intimate fashion. Alas! He would have to wait until morning.

He paused for one more beat before walking down the hallway to his cold bed and a fitful sleep filled with erotic dreams of her.

Mary walked into the dining room early the following morning with George gambling along beside her. The pair having taken their morning exercise with Captain Lord Nicholls, who, once again had been needed by Admiral Lord Howe so he would not be joining them for the morning meal. She was alone in the large room and took advantage to enjoy the rays of gentle morning sunlight peeping through the windows casting patterns upon the table and in the room, enjoying her solitude whilst George found a spot on the rug underneath General Howe's chair, settling in, resting his head on his forepaws.

Abigail had taken the liberty once more of setting out a wonderful buffet on a side table, all the items in silver chafing dishes some of which Mary recognized having belonged to prominent rebel families that had fled the city upon British Occupation. There was scrambled eggs with cream, tarragon and freshly grated nutmeg, rashers of bacon and various varieties of smoked fish from the Academy's smoke house, stewed apples and pears with brown sugar and cinnamon, Loaves of freshly baked bread wrapped in embroidered cloths, still warm from the oven with freshly churned butter and jars of the Connecticut raspberry preserves.

She stood at one of the windows watching as two squirrels chased one another across the snow covered grass up and about a tree, giggling at their antics.

"Would you be delighted if I chased you, Lady Mary?" William's voice was a husky whisper behind her. He was so close that she could smell the citrus scented cologne he wore, felt the heat of his body against her. "What would you allow me when I caught you, a kiss from that luscious mouth?" He murmured feeling her tense with fear. "Don't be frightened of me, Mon Ange. There is nothing to be afraid of. What is a wee bit of affection between too individuals that will soon be family? There is no shame in it. I won't tell my brother. I promise. It will be our little secret. Are you not curious to compare us?" His long elegant fingers reached out to splay against her tiny waist.
"No! How dare you speak to me in that fashion and insult me! Don't touch me!" She warned. "You, Lieutenant, are no gentleman! Leave me be! There are many young women that would welcome your attentions, turn your regard upon one of them!"

"I do not want one of them as I do Your Ladyship." William countered.

"You are well aware that my affections are engaged with another, expressed your regret when I told you. Does your regiment not require you? Have you not prevailed yourself upon the hospitality of this house long enough?"

"You seek to get rid of me?" He pouted.

"Such steadfast loyalty, a pity that. Major Andre, my brother, is most fortunate." William said, taking a step closer to her, his front pressing against her back, trapping Mary up against the window. She had no place to go, she tried stepping aside but he wouldn't let her.

"Where are you going?" He asked, his hot breath ruffling the tendrils near one of her ears.

"I would like some breakfast, please. Aren't you hungry?" She asked.

"Starving but not for food. Not yet." He replied, his meaning clear still blocking her path.

"Please let me by, Lieutenant, cease this nonsense!" Mary exclaimed attempting to take a step around him but he still would not allow it, one of his hips brushing against the slope of her back, a shiver dancing down her spine in nervous anticipation of what he would do next.

"For a forfeit, I will." William stated. "You know what it is that I want, Lady Mary." William stated.

Mary pursed her lips in exasperation.

"If I pay the forfeit will you step away and leave me be?" She asked.

"Yes!" He replied, the corners of his mouth curling up at the corners in a small smile, delighted that she was allowing him to breach her defenses.

She managed to turn about in the tiny space he was allowing her, her body brushing against his in the process, further awakening and sharpening his senses, increasing his desire, her breasts crushing against his scarlet coat. "Well then." She murmured standing up on her toes, brushing her lips gently against one of his smooth cheeks, inhaling the clean scent of his shaving soap, pulling away quickly.

"I have paid the forfeit. Now, may you please allow me to pass?" She asked, her gaze meeting his.

"That was not a proper kiss," William replied.

"I kissed you, Lieutenant. You did not indicate where you wished it to be." Mary snapped.

"I grow weary of this game and wish to eat." William offered, his ocean blue colored eyes dancing, eager to receive another kiss, this one upon his mouth but the lady was having none of it.

"Eheheheh! Care to play another?" He flirted, chuckling lightly.

Mary shook her head.

"I promise that you will enjoy it." He offered, his ocean blue colored eyes dancing, eager to receive another kiss, this one upon his mouth but the lady was having none of it. He sighed defeated, moving to let her pass.

Mary walked to the large table where the buffet was laid out, William's eyes riveted on the feminine sway of her hips as she moved unable to tear his eyes away, watching as she filled her plate.

"Would you send me off with a jar of those delicious raspberry preserves when I leave to join my regiment?" He asked.

"I am sorry but I cannot. It is the Major's favorite. He may become incredibly cross if I sent along a jar with you despite knowing that you would share it with the other officers. There are strawberry preserves but General Howe and Captain Lord Kennedy enjoy them." Mary mused.

He had been an absolute beast. She was not inclined to send him off to his regiment with anything but why should the other officers and Regulars suffer because of his deplorable manners?

"So nothing for Poor Will?"

"I would not be that cruel to the men of the Seventh Foot." Mary exclaimed taking her place at the table.

George got up from his place beneath General Howe's chair to sit beside Mary, rearranging himself
at her feet to wait for treats.
Mary poured a cup of hot chocolate.
"The men? Am I included?" He asked taking the seat across from her where his brother usually sat after he had filled his plate. She noted that besides a large helping of eggs, stewed fruit and bacon, he had heaped it with slices of fresh bread slathered with butter and the raspberry preserves. He was not going to deny himself the luxury of enjoying the delicious fruit when he could.
"Unfortunately, yes." She replied, fixing him with cool stare across the table.

Later that Morning
They're coming! They're coming!" A small boy cried from his perch in a nearby tree. They could hear the deep roll of the kettle drums that made the ground beneath their feet shake, the distinct sound of the snare drums, the piercing notes of the fifes; the cadence of the boots of the Regulars, the clop of the horses' hooves and the jingle of bridles, a sea of red being spotted as the British Army returned to New York.
The streets were filled on either side with Loyalists and city folk keen to see the power and might of the most powerful military force in the world on display.
Mary stood between Captain Lord Kent and Lieutenant Andre on the steps of British headquarters watching intently doing her best to behave with the upmost decorum. Attempting not to make it painfully obvious that she wished to be craning her neck seeing if she could spot John mounted upon his horse within the sea of scarlet.
"Can you spot him yet?" William shouted as to be heard over the fifes and drums playing 'The British Grenadiers' and the roar of the crowd noting Mary's barely concealed excitement, jealousy curling about his heart. If only... Damnit! He inwardly cursed.
"No! Not yet!" She replied, standing up on her toes, her eyes scanning the soldiers and officers as they approached. "OH! There he is!" She shrieked with excitement forgetting for a moment who she was, pointing to the row of officers riding toward them which included John, General Howe and Banastre Tarleton amongst others.
John Andre scanned the crowds looking about anxiously for the Lady Mary, a huge smile splitting his handsome face upon spotting her standing beside Captain Lord Kent and it appeared to be his younger brother, William.
His breath caught at the sight of her, his heart hammering in his chest. She was lovelier that he remembered dressed in the same replica of his uniform that she has seen him off in on Christmas Morning. The rebellious, willful young woman that had managed to twist him about her wee finger, he watched her come down the steps as he rode closer and closer until she was standing beside his horse, looking up into his face watching him dismount, her heart in her eyes.
"Thank God! You came back to me!" She breathed, utterly relieved and overjoyed that he was here now, safe and sound, reaching out a gloved hand she ran it down the front of his Great Cape over his chest, plucking an imaginary bit of fluff off of it, not caring who saw knowing full well her intimate gesture was indiscreet and improper.
He grinned, unable to resist, delighting that she could not manage to keep her hands from him. Reveling in the display of affection.
"Christ! How I have missed you! I read your letters each at least a dozen times, gazed at your miniature, but to see you now. Is it possible that you have grown lovelier in my absence though a bit pale? It suits you. I so wish to kiss you! Those rosy luscious lips are calling me, begging to be kissed." The words tumbled out of his mouth in a torrent like a Confession. He gazed into her eyes, his brother and all about him completely ignored. All he saw and cared about was her at this moment. Only her.
Midway through the chapter, Lady Mary dreams of the Major and awakens bereft. In the dark, she seriously thinks about her relationship with him and the course the two must take. They both know the rules. All of which, to my knowledge, are historically accurate. Quite simply, there were social rules and conventions that a young woman had to adhere to or she would risk the ruin of her reputation and that of her family's Good Name to do so would be social suicide for the young lady and her family especially if she was living at home with her parents- or a male relation- young ladies had to be chaperoned. Hence, if Lady Mary's parents or a male relation was living in New York City, Major Andre's courtship of her would follow the strict conventions of the time. My readers are all too aware of the situation that Lady Mary has found herself in given her status. The Army would have taken her under their wing but they also would have been quick to find her a husband so that the responsibility of her would no longer be that of the army's but of her husband. Hence, General Howe's eagerness to get her safely married to an appropriate candidate -which is what we have seen played out in the story. Nice girls of Good Families would not have been aware of birth control- which methods were rather sketchy at this time and used primarily by prostitutes. An Excerpt from Jude Knight's article on the Regency Sex Trade posted on Madame Gilflurt's lovely website (link: http://www.madamegilflurt.com/2015/08/the-regency-sex-trade.html) details this and the consequences for both the woman and the man: "The risks were great. Contraception was very hit and miss, if used at all. Pregnancy must have been a constant worry. ‘Pulling out’ was the most common method for avoiding unwanted children, and was as effective then as it is now (which is to say, not very). Protective ‘Machines’—condoms made from oiled cloth or the intestines of various animals—were available, though men were more likely to use them to avoid disease than to prevent pregnancy. And they were probably better at the second, since water could go right through them and they tended to tear. Various methods were used to abort unwanted pregnancies, many of them just as likely to kill the mother. A baby could be born alive but then killed, or put out to a baby farmer so that the mother could return to work. A mistress of a single protector might be in a slightly stronger position if the child’s father was willing to keep the mother on. Some men—and not just royal princes—had quite large families by their mistresses. Disease was the other big fear, for both the sex workers and their clients. Gonorrhea and syphilis were treated with ointments containing mercury, the toxic effects of which could be as dangerous as the diseases. Side effects included kidney failure, severe mouth ulcers, nerve damage, and loss of teeth. On the other hand, untreated syphilis ends in abscesses, ulcers, severe debility, and madness or death. And gonorrhea can spread to the blood and eventually kill. So not good choices." While she is musing, William comes back from his night of debauchery, feeling empty after slacking his lust on the red-haired whore, he attempts to see in the lady of his obsession is amenable to his attentions. Finding that she has locked her door against him, he ventures off to a cold and lonely bed. Not to be put off that quickly, the rogue tries yet again the following morning. Mary is having none of him! Even stating that when he leaves to join his regiment that she would not be too inclined to send him along with provisions/treats. Can we blame her? Mary is anxious to see John as much as he was anxious to see her. I hope that you enjoyed their chaste reunion. Fear not! A more intimate one will most likely show up in a subsequent chapter.
Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
Please also consider taking the time to read some of the stories in this fandom that I have bookmarked- if you enjoy An Indecent Proposal you most certainly will enjoy their work.
"Lieutenant Andre, the Major will see you now!" One of the Regulars stated coming through John's private office out in to the small alcove where William waited, pacing back and forth. He stopped when he heard his name called, walking past the young Corporal.

John was seated at his desk, papers strewn about. He looked up when William entered. "Do sit down, William, care for refreshment? A sherry perhaps?" John poured two glasses from the decanter on the tray at his elbow handing one across the desk to his younger sibling.

"Thank you."
"Of course. I trust Mother and our dear sisters are well?" John inquired.
William nodded. "Quite."
"Good! She indicated as much in her most recent correspondence. You had a fair crossing?"
"Most fair for November and December though it was bitter cold on the Atlantic. It was most certainly worth the discomfort." William answered.
"Truly? How so?" John asked.
"The prospect of adventure and glory not to mention coming across that divine ginger-haired vixen in Broderick's Bookshop! Bloody Hell, Johnny! The Lady Mary Ludlow!"
John eyed his younger brother warily across his desk. "Do not even consider it!" His voice was tight with warning.
"Oh, I have, most thoroughly!" William shot back.
"Bastard!" John growled his cobalt colored eyes snapping with fury. "Stay away from her, Will!"
"So you intend on getting leg-shackled to this one, eh? Not that I blame you. One of the richest heiresses in the Empire, a true titled lady though I would warrant that she is a wildly wanton in intimate moments in the bedroom and otherwise."
"Don't you dare!" John's voice was low and dangerous.
"I did my best. I asked if she fancied comparing us but she would have..." William's words were cut off as John rose out his seat like a shot, stepping around the desk, pulling William out of his chair, slamming him up against the nearest wall, one of John's hands clenched about his brother's throat.
"What did you say?" He spat, his face a fraction of an inch from William's. He was poised for a fight.
"Easy, Johnny." William soothed. "The Beauty will have nothing to do with me. Not like that wench in Geneva." William reminded John of a previous lady that he had stolen away. "Mayhap I should exert more effort?"
"I would not consider it." John stated his eyes darkened to almost black with fury. "I intend to marry the lady if she accepts me." He snorted in derision, his mood changing. "If the situation were reversed, I would have been successful. I take what I want. I want her! I hear that she locked her door against you at night."
"How could you?" William still did not fathom how his brother knew what he did.
"I have my methods, Will." John replied thankful that Abigail had developed an intense dislike for his brother and a deep affection for the Lady Mary. The maid would do anything to protect her young mistress including telling her employer the mischief his younger wastrel of a brother had got up to when the Major was away.
William scowled. "Have you stopped to ponder that she may have locked her door for another purpose?"
"Come now! You flatter yourself, dear brother. She does not want you and it is eating you up inside." John chuckled, easing his hold about his brother's throat.
"This one appears to be faithful and loyal, and, oddly, harbors a great tender affection for you, that makes her Forbidden Fruit. More the sweeter if I steal her away from you, Johnny," William said. "I would suggest that you cease your game whilst you are ahead and apologize to the lady for your ungentlemanly behavior as will I on your behalf. The Lady Mary is stubborn and willful; she will never succumb to your charm. Find another young lady to woo, Will, this one is mine."

"Not unless I wear down her resistance." Will countered.

"You will not be about to attempt it nor is the lady inclined to succumb. I am sending you to join your regiment as soon as possible."

"Afraid of the competition?" William asked.

"No! I do not wish to have a nervous and skittish young woman under my protection worrying about when my cad of a younger brother will attempt to compromise her virtue once again when I am not about. The Seventh is expecting you!"

"I am certain that you have methods to employ that will soothe her nerves." William implied. "I suggest that we allow the lady to decide. If it were any other woman I would be inclined to share but I believe a lady as exquisite and magnificent as the Lady Mary a man wants to have all for himself."

"There is nothing for the lady to consider. It is clear that she does not wish to entertain a flirtation or any other manner of acquaintance with you, William. She has proven completely immune to your famous charm!" John volleyed back, smiling smugly, he chuckled. "Do be a good boy and admit defeat."

"I am not a boy!" William protested.

"You most certainly are behaving as one wanting what your elder brother does, seeking to snatch it away as you would a favorite toy when we were children. Not that the Lady Mary is a plaything by any means but the analogy is most certainly an apt one to apply in this situation. We are playing for a far more important item than a wee childish trifle. Not that I am inclined to engage in the game that you wish to play but rest assured that if I do I thoroughly intend to win!"

"Major Andre left word to tell Your Ladyship that he regrets he cannot attend Milady in the parlor at present for tea being otherwise engaged." The orderly standing in front of John's private office informed Mary.

"Thank you, Corporal Fraser." Mary could hear John's voice raised in anger through the closed door. Vulgar oaths and the words spendthrift, debts, tavern, brothel and rake filtered through. She could hear William protesting in vain only to be set down by John's counter verbal attacks. He was having none of William's excuses. It was one of the few times that she had experienced a display of John Andre's formidable temper albeit through a barrier of solid oak.

"Please advise the Major there are walnut tarts to be had with tea baked especially anticipating his safe return." Mary added with a smile.

"I will be most certain to inform the Major, Milady." Corporal Fraser replied returning her smile, his deep chocolate brown eyes twinkling his expression suddenly changing as he heard Major Andre bite out a particularly nasty oath which made the corporal blush. He hadn't thought that a gentleman of John Andre's class would know such words but apparently he did. The Major was rather worldly and incredibly well-educated. Apparently one learnt such manner of phrases upon one's travels abroad, Corporal Fraser reasoned.

Mary's eyes widened in shock hearing the oath through the door, her eye brows shooting up in alarm. "Do tell the Major that his tea grows cold!" She hastened to the parlor.

Lottie, Rachel and Melissa were seated about the low tea table.

"What has the Major in such a fierce temper?" Lottie asked taking a sip of her tea, her eyes meeting Mary's over the rim of her cup.

"Apparently Winsome Will has managed to incite his ire!" Melissa provided, looking across the table at Lottie.

"Winsome Will?" Mary asked, scowling.

"His sobriquet. Lady Richmond coined it." Melissa replied. "Given the gossip surrounding her one would..."
"Such gossip that a Young Woman of your Social Station should not be paying any mind to."
Rachel reprimanded her younger sister.
"That is a bit hypocritical seeing as what the quartet of us have discussed and speculated about since we were children, Rachel." Melissa defended herself.
"I just do not wish you to develop a reputation akin to that of Jane Fairfax, Melissa. All that she fills her head with are the latest fashions, flirtations and gossip. I do not believe there is a guinea's worth of sense in that girl." Rachel shot back.
"This coming from the mouth of the young woman who reads romance novels and harbors such notions." Mary said with a smile.
"Upon consideration, I do have to admit that it does fit him. He is incredibly charming," Rachel mused.
"Really Rachel! Does this mean that you are beginning to warm to Major Andre?" Mary asked.
"Goodness, no! I will only continue to tolerate him for your sake, May, I have grown to respect him since he has been so courteous and gracious to you but I still do not care for him."
"Do not care for whom, Miss Alton?" Major Andre asked from his position in the doorway, crossing the thresh hold into the room. "The anticipation of spending time in your charming company and the prospect of walnut tarts were incentives to conclude my interview with due haste." He added smiling roguishly at Mary.
Rachel flushed scarlet caught out. She did not have a proper answer that would not offend. "It is of no matter, Major Andre," She replied.
"So you say, Miss Alton. Now where are the delicious walnut tarts?" He asked turning his complete attention to Mary, his eyes only for her.
"Will Lieutenant Andre be joining us?" Melissa asked.
"Perhaps, Lieutenant Andre is pondering the ramifications of his indiscretions, Mistress Melissa." John explained absently his cobalt blue eyes still staring into Mary's, lost in the Ceylon blue depths. "Indiscretions?"
"Matters that would corrupt your Fine New England Moral Sensibilities, Lieutenant Andre has been a very wicked young man which is all that I am at liberty to tell you." John's voice was such that Melissa Alton knew that the Major would not make any of the young ladies privy to the nature of the Lieutenant's misdeeds.
"Would you care for tea?"
"I would love a cup. Thank you." Mary advanced to the table John behind her; she sat on the settee beside Lottie, John in a wing backed chair that was situated beside them. Mary poured his tea, preparing it as he preferred it handing the cup and saucer to him, his fingertips caressing her knuckles in the exchange sending flames of desire through her fingers up her forearm, making her gently shiver, vainly attempting to mask her purely physical reaction to his powerful sexuality and virility, her senses awakening, sharp and acute.
"Delicious!" He exclaimed after taking a sip his gazed locked with hers, smiling wickedly.
Mary lowered her lashes, blushing furiously, her cheeks stain a rosy pink, she felt them burning. "I am delighted that it is to your liking, Major. Walnut tart?" Mary asked handing John the plate filled with one of his favorite sweets.
"Thank you." He replied taking one confection between an elegant thumb and forefinger, bringing it to his mouth, biting into it, his eyes closing, savoring the flavors as they exploded on his tongue, the sweetness of the sugar, the bite of the spices, the crunch of the walnuts. "Oh, perfection!" He stated.
"My Lady you are a Goddess of the Culinary Arts."
"And you, Major Andre are a consummate charmer. Mary countered giggling at his effusive compliment.
The other girls laughed.
"Captain Lord Nicholls does not stand a chance. How can he compete with Major Andre's allure?" Melissa asked watching the officer flirt outrageously with Lady Mary.
"He cannot, poor fellow." John mocked. "Though I am to understand that he was courting Lady Mary whilst I was off attending to my duty for King and Country not that I find fault with his efforts
though they will prove futile. Ah, Captain Lord Kent, how kind of you to join us. I see that Your Lordship is quite recovered."

"Major Andre." The Coldstream Guardsman glared at the other officer, his voice cold and clipped. "I am."

"Though a bit worse for wear, eh, Neddie?" Lieutenant Brandon asked with a leer. "Begging the ladies' pardon." He added bowing with a flourish just as Tarleton, Lieutenant Andre, General Randall and several other officers entered, crowding the parlor. The rumor of lively lovely feminine company, a hot cup of tea or perhaps something stronger and the promise of delicious baked confections prepared by the Academy's kitchen drew them as bees to honey.

Mary called Abigail to bring more pots of the hot beverage and any other manner of libations the officers required, cups, saucers, plates, platters of sweets and baked goods were all placed on several tables that were hastily put next to each other, covered with a cloth to create a makeshift buffet. The officers filling their plates, finding spots to perch as they drank, ate and flirted with the quartet of ladies. John preening with pride as the officers paid court to Mary.

"Is My Lady delighted to have your coterie of admirers back safe in the city? Did you miss their attentions?" Lieutenant William Andre asked looking down at Mary, his ocean blue eyes twinkling as his brother glowered at him. "I pray that I did not neglect my duty. I hope that I may serve and continue to be of service, Lady Mary." The argument and subsequent dressing down in Major Andre's office had done nothing to tamper his desire for the young lady.

"I thank Providence for seeing to their safe return unscathed, Lieutenant." Mary replied ignoring his other query.

"My duty?" He persisted, grinning broadly, showing his flashing white teeth. "If I require your service I will be certain to make you aware of my demands, Sir." Mary replied. "Not as long as I live and breathe." John vowed under his breath. "Lady Mary, if I may, a turn about the room if you would honor me?"

"Excuse us, Will." John stated offering Mary his arm, pausing for a moment to allow her to place her cup and saucer down upon a nearby table.

"Are you delighted to have me back safe, Mon cherie?" He asked with cheeky grin. "You insufferable man! You know that I am. I told you as much." Mary retorted.

"I know. I just never tire of hearing of it" John countered.

"Is that so, Major?"

"Most certainly though I would be most obliged if you expressed your regard in a much more private fashion. How I still ache to kiss and caress you. I burn, May." John whispered so that only she could hear. "You have an answer for me?"

"La Major! A more private fashion? I will give you your answer if you ask me properly."

"Did you not ache where I had been? Were you not reminded of the exquisite pleasure that I can afford you? Let me come to your bed tonight. I will ask you properly whenever and wherever you wish."

"Hush! Someone may overhear you!" She admonished him, blushing.

"They are all prattling on about how marvelous the offerings of the Academy's kitchens are and the young women that will be attending this evening's soiree, present company excluded, of course." John offered. "No need to fret. They were totally unaware of my indecent proposal."

"Are they?"

"Oui, Mon Ange. So what is it to be, Sweet Darling May? Oui o no, Mademoiselle? I would like an answer would you be so kind as to oblige me?"

Oh, God! He was so deliciously tempting. She had missed him desperately. What harm was there in it? She could not deny herself her burning passion for him, it was fierce and constant. "Yes! Come to me! I will be counting the hours." She breathed shamelessly.

"Wicked and naughty, May." He teased, grinning wolfishly ecstatic with her answer.

"It is you that makes me so!" She retorted.

"Do I?" He asked.

"Tempestuously!" She answered feeling rash and reckless. Is this what love can do to one? She asked herself her eyes sweeping over him from top to toe, taking him in. How she ached to kiss that
wonderful mouth, bury her fingers into his silky hair, feel his hard warrior's body sinking into her softness as he did unspeakably wondrous things to her!
"Is that true?"
She nodded, blushing scarlet. "Yes!" She whispered feeling the heat of his gaze, so hot it scorched her.
"I will ask you properly, Lady Mary."
"I look forward to it, Major Andre."
"As well you should." Leaving other words unsaid between them but understood. He was so certain to protect and preserve her reputation. He was also desirous to fuck any and all feelings that she may still harbor for that raffish Continental Major out of her. He would take great pleasure in exorcising from her any desire that Mary still had for that Yale educated school teacher.
Mary smiled. Despite his reputation, Major John Andre was one of the most principled men that she had ever met. He was chivalrous and honorable. The antithesis of his brother, William, who was watching her intently as a predator would his prey, stalking her with his eyes whilst she moved about the room.
"I may require a brief respite before this evening's festivities. I have all intentions of dancing until dawn." She told John.
He nodded. "My felicitations upon the recent celebration of your Natal Day. Eighteen! Gracious! We must give careful consideration altering your spinster state. I would be honored if you would allow me to attend My Lady during her respite. I have been remiss in carrying out my orders of protecting Your Ladyship and seeing to your welfare. I am desirous to make amends."
"There were other duties that you had to attend to."
"To King and Country, yes, but I sincerely regret that certain officers of His Majesty's Army did not comport themselves as they ought causing unwarranted anguish and distress, Lady Mary." John stated clearly referring to his younger brother, William. "I will do whatever I must to restore your Good Opinion of His Majesty's officers if it has suffered due to boorish behavior. I will make it up to you, do whatever you wish."
"Major Andre, you are far too kind. I am most grateful for your continued meticulous attentions to your duty in regard to my protection. I would welcome your company during my respite." She said brightly.

Mary giggled watching George chase after the stick that General Howe threw for him. Watching the pup race after it across the lawn, several Regulars taking a moment to stop their tasks, turn and watch him, smiling. "I do not know who is more captivated with the other, George or His Excellency." "I believe that the jury is still out on that deliberating." John said coming up behind her, wrapping his arms about her, pressing his front against her back, nuzzling her neck playfully with the tip of his nose.
"John, please! That tickles!" She laughed leaning back into his strong protective embrace.
"Does it now?" He asked. "I do recall other spots upon your person that are, erm, rather sensitive and tender. Shall I seek them out and refresh your memory or would you care to receive your presents? If I recall a certain luscious young lady celebrated a birthday whilst I was off in New Jersey engaging the rebels, it was on New Year if I recall."
"You remembered!" She was incredibly happy.
"How could I ever forget? Come, let me spoil you with gifts, My Darling Girl."
"Dare I accept such from a bachelor who is not related to me?"
John chuckled. "No, Sweetheart. But remember I will be your husband. There is no shame in it."
"I have not...
"Shush! Shall I silence those protests?"
"I want my presents!"
"Wicked greedy lass! Will you be mine? Do you accept?" He whispered hoarsely punctuating each question with hot scorching kisses against the smooth slope of her neck. John's arms tightening about her. His palms snaking up her tiny waist over the taught skin of her silk covered abdomen drawing
Mary closer to him, the swelling in his breeches nestling in the small of her back. "Be mine, My Sweet Little Dove! Forever! Say you will." He coaxed, his honeyed words so seductive and tempting whilst his fingertips began working at the sash of the robe that she had changed into to rest comfortably quickly discovering she wore nothing beneath, groaning with pleasure when the inquisitive tips of his fingers encountered the burning satin smooth skin of her abdomen, chuckling when he felt it flutter beneath his feather light caresses, his teeth nipping an ear lobe. "Will you be mine?" He asked again, a hand skimming down, swirling about the perimeter of her darling little navel, feeling her begin to tremble with desire and need.

"Yes! I will be yours!"

"You will marry me?" His voice was hot against her ear thick with want. He was burning for her. How he ached to possess her, fuck her senseless, make love to her until the pair of them were exhausted.

She gently nodded. "Yes!" She whispered feeling his fingers tangle within the golden curls at the apex of her thighs, dipping between her legs, finding her slick, wet and scorching.

"You have made me the Happiest Man in the Empire, My Dearest Friend. Let me show you just how much."

"My presents?" John burst out laughing. "Greedy May! I promise that you will enjoy this far more than receiving presents." He assured her. Christ! He was hot to make love to her! "Will I?" She flirted.

"You will be incandescently happy afterward. You have my word." He bantered back, his teeth grazing the side of her neck. He felt her pulse leap beneath his touch. "Are you not eager to have me, Sweeting?" He asked guiding her toward the bed.

She turned about in his arms, drawing him close, twining her arms about his neck, gazing up into his handsome face. "My bed has been ever so cold since you left."

"As well it should be. Ever so cold and lonely?"

"Yes." She answered brushing her breast provocatively against the black silk of his banyan, tracing the hollow at the base of his throat with the tip of a forefinger down the naked expanse of his smooth chest, enticingly, watching his cobalt colored eyes darken with passion and lust.

"Come warm it, Johnny!" She breathed seductively, lifting her chin inviting his kiss.

His mouth claimed hers, lifting her up into his arms, his lips still slanting over hers hungrily, taking all she had to give him and more, drinking of her sweetness, devouring her, his kisses carnal, primal, seeking to brand her and mark her as his. He deposited her on the bed, breaking their passionate embrace, the pair of them breathless. The sounds of ragged breathing mingling with that of the crackling of the fire that burned merrily in the hearth. "Remove your dressing gown, Sweetheart, then straddle my head." John instructed untying the sash of his banyan, shrugging it off, tossing it at the foot of the bed, his fingers working at the buttons of his breeches, releasing his enormous erection, drawing them off, his gaze never breaking hers. He watched intently as she removed her dressing gown, unable to mask his admiration as her body in all its glorious form was revealed. Christ! She was perfection and she would soon belong to him.

"Straddle my head facing toward my feet." He said.

Mary did as she was bid, moving her knees on either side of his head.

"May, Darling, take me in your mouth." He instructed, offering his cock to her. "Suck upon it like a sweet."

Mary trembled with excitement, flames of passion leaping through her limbs. She opened her mouth, closing her eyes, drawing the head of his engorged organ to her lips, snaking her tongue out swirling it about the tip, feeling him shudder with desire, gasping.

"Christ, Mary!" His voice was muffled between her thighs. She was an incredibly adept pupil, a quick learner! She was certainly made to pleasure a man in the most wicked and carnal ways and certainly had a body that was made to arouse his baser instincts. She did John's. "Does that please you? What if I did this?" She took more of him in, sucking upon his length, dancing her tongue about.
John's hips rose up off the bed. He moaned, clearly indicating that what she was doing was perfect. She laughed in triumph, sucking harder, moving her mouth up and down his length, feeling him react, reveling in the knowledge that that she had him in her complete control and at her mercy for the moment. Until...
Oh, Gracious! She squeaked, feeling the pointed tip of his tongue plunge inside her passage then move up to tease her clitoris the intense feeling making her toes curl as the flames of passion he had ignited within her threatened to consume her.
He would not be outdone, chuckling when she moaned. "You like that, Darling?" He asked hotly against her.
"Mmmmm." She responded continuing to suck him as he did the most deliciously and wondrously wicked things to her between her legs, making her squirm against him. Her sensitive nipples brushing periodically over his rock hard abdomen, tightening into taut peaks, her stomach muscles contracting as he brought her closer and closer to Paradise, teetering on the precipice for several agonizing moments until she came on a cry, the orgasm slamming into her with incredible force.
John was almost there himself, on the edge, however he decided to prolong his pleasure. He moved her about on her back, his erection slipping from her mouth, covering her body with his plunging his cock into her throbbing tightness, to the hilt, hitching her legs about his hips, moving furiously within her.
Mary twined her arms about his neck holding onto him for dear life. She was going to die! He was going to kill her with his passion, she thought as the fierce heat between them threatened to consume the pair. They were burning up the sheets! She could feel it! Oh, Holy Mother of God! She gripped him even tighter, the tremors of the first orgasm not completely subsiding before she was hit by another.
"John!" She pleaded, catching her lower lip between her teeth, whimpering softly.
"Jooooooooohhhhhhhhhnnnnnn!" She moaned his name once more feeling him thrust inside her to the hilt, pull back ever so slightly, then thrust again, his pace increasing as things became even more fast and furious between them.
John rolled her with him, switching positions, so that she was now on top, the one in control, he on his back.
She released her hold on him, gasping when she felt his length impale her, tossing her head back, her glorious cascade of golden curls falling down her back to sensuously brush against John's thighs as she rode him pressing her palms against his smooth chest to steady her.
"So you will be mine?" He asked their gazes locking. He had her answer but he wished to hear it once more- especially now- in the throes of passion- whilst making love to her. Her Ceylon blue eyes dark with desire, her pale skin flushed and heated with her intense lust for him.
"Yes! You will be mine?" She answered his question with one of her own, the walls of her passage clamping about his organ like a vice as he moved inside her getting closer and closer to spending with each thrust.
"Forever! Only yours, you wanton and wicked little rebel!" He assured her. After having her in his bed he did not want anyone else. She had ruined him. Only she would do!
"Your wanton and wicked little rebel!" Mary corrected.
"You are mine! All mine! Every precious inch of your wantonly wicked person! It belongs to me!"
He declared just before exploding inside her, claiming her completely. She was his!

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XX
Yet, still again, because one can never be too courteous when someone does one a good
turn, my continued gratitude to the lovely administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story. Not too many notes this time just some insights.

The brothers finally have a chance to have a chat which rather rapidly ventures downhill into an argument. Their long standing rivalry comes to the fore. John literally going after William when he begins to bait and taunt his elder brother about Lady Mary. Afterward, John is heard giving his brother a right good dressing down regarding his behavior and spending habits which is historically accurate. William Andre was rather fiscally irresponsible and John had to pay his younger brother's debts.

John is clearly delighted to be back in New York with Mary and is terribly chagrined upon hearing that two officers took the opportunity to seek His Sweetheart out: Captain Lord Nicholls and his own brother, one behaving as gentleman and the other being a complete rogue and wastrel. Being the Officer and Gentleman that he is, John reassures Mary that he will do whatever he can to restore her Good Opinion of the Officers in His Majesty's Army and him in particular. He also missed her terribly, having refused the offers of the available women whilst on campaign; he is dying to be welcomed home from battle in a more intimate fashion. He also tells her that he will pose that VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION to her, properly (read: going down on one knee).

What ensues later is... Let's just say that the Major is back in a BIG WAY after being a bit off stage for the last few chapters. I do hope that you are happy that has returned.

Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!

Please also consider taking the time to read some of the stories in this fandom that I have bookmarked- if you have enjoyed An Indecent Proposal you most certainly will enjoy their work.
"Happy Christmas and Birthday!" John cried carrying several indigo blue boxes with the distinctive silver letting and packaging of Madame Bernon's into the room, his chin resting on the box on top hold the stack steady.
"Ooooh! Presents!" Mary exclaimed clapping her hands in girlish enthusiasm.
"Yes, presents, My Darling!" John said grinning broadly at her obvious delight, showing his dimples. He laughed, walking toward the bed laying the boxes upon it.
"What could have possibly come from Madame Bernon's? Not more gowns. All the gowns that were ordered arrived on time." Mary speculated.
"Who said anything about gowns? Why don't you open each of the boxes and sate your curiosity? Though I must tell you that I do expect you to model them all for me, perhaps not all at once, that depends upon what my reactions are to seeing you in each of Madame's alluring creations." John told her, his eyes dancing wickedly, a roguish smile playing about his mouth.
"It was completely improper and presumptuous of you to order such intimate apparel. Were you so certain that our relationship would become so affectionate and fond that such gifts were warranted?" Mary asked.
John's grin broadened. "From the first moment I saw you on the street." John confessed, resting a palm on top of the stack of boxes. "I knew that we would be far more than mere friends. You enjoy it when I am improper and presumptuous, My Dearest Friend, do not deny it. Even you cannot mask your delight, your eyes are sparkling and a wickedly exquisite smile is playing about your luscious mouth. How I ache to devour your sweetness once more."
"Patience, Johnny. I will be most generous in my gratitude." She told him.
"Do we have the time? Or shall we create a scandal when word gets out as to why the pair of us comes down rather late to greet the guests this evening? Shall I leave word with Abigail that we are indisposed? "He offered.
"I would rather not create another scandal. There is enough talk about us in the parlors, ballrooms and on the streets of the city." Mary said.
"Nothing disparaging about your reputation, I had thought the nature of that talk had ceased after my efforts to behave with the utmost propriety whilst the pair of us were seen in one another's company soon after our romp in the snow." John said, handing her the box on top. "What caused them to begin their gossip?"
"I believe that Madame Stewart is to blame. She is one of your biggest champions. She speaks our names together at every opportunity so that those within her hearing cannot help but draw their own conclusions as to the nature of our continued association and they have." Mary replied.
"Not to the detriment of your reputation most certainly, I have taken every care to behave in the most respectful fashion though I do apologize, most sincerely, if the tendency for my gaze to linger upon you for a far longer than is appropriate. I cannot refrain from admiring you. Though you must be used to it, I am not the only officer that quite fancies you. Now then, are you not curious to find out what is in that box?" John asked changing the subject diverting her to more pleasant matters than worrying about her reputation and gossip.
"As a cat!" Mary answered.
"Well then, My Ginger-haired puss, remove the lid and sate your curiosity." Mary did as she was bid, balancing the box in her lap, removing the lid, laying it beside her, parting
the white tissue, gasping in surprise and pleasure withdrawing a deep blue silk lady's banyan. "Oh, John! It is beautiful!" She cried, peeking down in the box. "There is something else? Oh, Gracious!" She exclaimed, releasing the lady's banyan from her fingertips, letting it fall against one of her thighs, reaching in to withdraw the icy blue silk night rail trimmed with lace and velvet ribbons. "Oh, it is darling! I love it!" Laying the garments and box aside she crooked her index finger at him. "Come here so I may thank you." She demanded.

He smirked, coming to her. "So you like them?" He asked, his cobalt blue eyes sparkling with amusement. "Are you happy?" He lifted her chin with his fingers, his eyes searching hers. "Gloriously!" She replied, her mouth a scant inch from his.

"I fear we will be incredibly late to the soiree, create a dreadful scandal." John mused, his hot breath fanning against her before his lips captured hers, kissing her feverently, deeply, moaning low in the back of his throat drawing her close against his aroused hard male body making her totally aware as to how she excited and inflamed him.

Mary opened her mouth at the gentle coaxing of the pointed tip of his tongue, traced along the seam of her lips, entwining hers with his as they engaged in an erotic dance, their bodies moving with the rhythm of the kiss, locked in a passionate embrace, lost in one another.

"You have several more boxes to open." John whispered hoarsely against her lush mouth now swollen with his kisses. "Shall I open the rest and show my profound gratitude at the end?" She flirted.

"I do not know if I have the patience to wait that long." He returned. "I promise that it will be worth it." She stated gently attempting to withdraw from his embrace but he held fast reluctant to let her go.

She had aroused his lust which was riding high on him. He was impatient to have her. He knew, however, to exercise patience no matter how much he did not wish to. "Do you now?" He asked finally releasing her with great regret.

"Do you doubt me, John?" She shot back pouting prettily, looking up at him through lowered lashes still playing the coquette. "Oh, Darling! Please don't be cross with me. I would never doubt you or your ability to please me and make my perseverance worth my while." He said running the back of his fingers down her face ever so slowly from a cheekbone to the corner of her mouth in a tender caress.

"Shall I open the other two boxes?" She offered. "I believe you should." John agreed.

Mary took the second box off the stack, treating it as she the first, removing the lid, parting the white tissue paper. "Oh, my! How scandalous!" She exclaimed. "If we were not to be married, I would be insulted by such a gift. Your intentions to me, Sir, are far from honorable, quite the opposite. You wish to and have compromised my reputation. Madame Bernon clearly knows it!"

"She is the epitome of discretion, Mon Cherie, and knows all the mysteries and allures of amour. Do you like it?" He asked with a rakish smile, staring at the black lace corset she held in her hands his gaze traveling to her face to gauge her reaction.

"It is quite wicked!" She answered at a loss for words. "It is that. Do you fancy it?" He asked once more. "I may have to try it on and see." She answered seriously. "I would be most grateful if you would be gracious enough to offer me your most sincere opinion."

"Of course! Whatever you wish, it pleases me that you hold my opinions in such high regard." John said.

"Considering the intimacy of our association, it is prudent that I seek your feelings and impressions upon such matters, such as your inclinations as to what I am to wear during our cherished private moments with one another, especially in the future, I do not wish to irritate or offend you. My duty will be to enchant, satisfy and indulge you in all affairs and concerns between us." Mary stated. "I sincerely doubt that you would ever irritate or offend me with what you choose to wear in our cherished private moments, May. But your sincere concern with making me happy gladdens my heart. I am incredibly touched." John said. "Though I am impatient to see you in that confection I can
wait until another time. Do open the other box. I am anxious to see what you will react to this gift. I do hope that it is your favorite." He told her nudging the last box toward her with an engaging smile.

"Because it is yours?" She asked, placing the corset in its box, handing it and the lid to John, who placed it on a nearby chair, along with the box containing the blue lady's banyan and night rail.

"Possibly." He teased. "Open it! If it pleases it as much as it does me I would insist that you try it on and model it for me though I cannot be responsible for what may happen when you do."

"Hmmm... Dare I chance it? I am wildly curious as to what it may incite you to do." She mused removing the lid, setting it aside, parting the white tissue paper. "Oh, John! It is exquisite!" Mary exclaimed drawing out the near transparent pale pink silk lady's banyan edged with silver lace, pulling it up to herself.

"So it pleases you?" John asked with a smile.

"Yes! Very much!" She replied.

"The color suits you. It is most flattering. It gives a lustrous sheen to your skin." He complimented.

"But that isn't the sum of it."

"There is more?"

"Of, course! A night rail. Look inside the box."
Mary lowered the lady's banyan reaching in the box to withdraw the night rail, which was as exquisite as the lady's banyan, the pale pink silk so sheer it was indecent, clearly made for John's eyes alone and not intended to remain on her long. The pair of garments made to incite his ardor and inflame his passion and desire, instruments of seduction. She felt her cheeks flame. "Goodness!" She whispered at a loss for words.

"Put it on."

"You are insisting, aren't you? How can I refuse when you gaze at me like that? I am completely at your mercy and command." She stated slipping out of the bed, removing her dressing gown, untying the belt, letting it fall open, giving him a tantalizing view of her body, shrugging it off her shoulders, it fell in a soft whisper to the floor, her eyes never leaving his watching them darken with fierce lust when her nakedness was revealed.

He had seen it all before but she never ceased to excite and arouse him.

"You are a goddess! Your skin is virtually flawless. Your form would make Venus jealous." John complimented.

Laughing lightly, Mary shook her head, sighing. "Here I was expecting you to quote several lines of poetry, a few couplets of your own devising. All I receive are effusive compliments. Have I bored you so soon?" She pouted, thrusting out her lower lip, reaching for the night rail.

"Or does the sight of me reduce you to sputtering nonsense? Do I hold that power over you?"
John could not resist smiling at her flirtatious teasing.

"Shall we find out? Put on that night rail and come over here!"

"I was not aware that a Military Inspection of my person was warranted, Major." She continued her banter, slipping the night rail over her head, letting it fall about her body, the sheer silk hugging all of her young woman's curves and enhancing her in all the improper places.

"Which requires intimate familiarity of my person."

"Absolutely." He agreed taking a step toward her, closing the narrow gap between them drawing her
to him, running a hand down her back to the swells of her buttocks yanking her that much closer to him, allowing her to feel how hard he was, how aroused.

"Does the inspection require that level of intimacy?" She asked referring to his erection which was pressing against the soft, smooth skin of her abdomen covered by the thinnest slip of silk.

"It is required to the best of my knowledge." John informed her clearly bemused. "The highest level imaginable."

"Carnal and erotic?" She inquired, the air between them crackling and snapping with sexual tension. He nodded, his gaze burning hot.

"Your eyes make love to me." She observed flushing all over, flames of desire licking up and down her spine.

"I assure you that far more that my eyes will be loving you soon enough."

"All part of that most proper and intimate Military Inspection?" She inquired once more, her breath hot against his lips, her own lush and inviting.

"Yes!" He agreed just before his mouth crushed against hers, claiming them in a searing kiss, seeking to brand her once more. The kiss quickly turning to kisses, John drawing her up in his arms, his mouth never leaving hers, kissing her with deep wild abandon, his fingers drawing up the hem of her night rail, dancing up her legs, over her shapely calves to her knees, making her squirm in his embrace as he inflamed her even more if that were possible, her skin burning beneath his touch.

"Is it the objective of the inspecting officer to render the subject inflamed and most desirous of more of the intimacy that he, clearly, can only afford her?"

"One of the objectives, yes, shall I demonstrate the others?" He whispered against her wet and swollen mouth, as he laid her gently upon the bed, John's body covering hers, having a care to press just enough of his weight against her to tease and titillate her.

"I clearly have no choice in the matter, you will do what you wish under the auspices of His Majesty's army, but yes, I am anxious to know what the others are." She replied.

"How anxious are you?" He flirted.

"Extremely, extraordinarily, terribly... Shall I go on?" She countered, tilting her chin down, gazing at him through lowered lashes.

John chuckled lightly. "If you wish, Sweetheart, but it is clear that you are terribly anxious that I demonstrate the others. Are you prepared?"

"It is very gentlemanly of you to ask, Sir. I would hasten to say yes, I am prepared, though I am completely unaware as to what constitutes the parameters of preparation." Mary said.

"Do not fret, you are more than ready." He assured her, the fingertips of one of his hands moving with agonizing slowness up one of her thighs, caressing the smooth skin, marveling at its softness, he had never felt anything so fine.

Mary giggled.

"That amuses you?" He asked with mock severity, his fingertips continuing to caress her thigh, swirling patterns over the heated flesh, slipping between her legs.

Mary's breath caught within her throat, her eyes widening. "Yes!" She breathed, watching him intently, mesmerized, his expert touch radiating pleasure to the tips of her toes.

"I will demand a bit more respect when we are married, Mon Cherie! Such cheek!" He teased.

"If I displease you will you spank me, John? Take me over you knee and smack my bare buttocks?" She asked her words creating a rather naughty picture in his head.

"I am not one for corporal punishment, but if you displease me, I will chastise you."

"Then I shall endeavor to be a wicked and naughty wife." She flirted moving in such a way so his fingers danced precariously near her sex. He could feel her heat. "In the nicest possible manner, of course but my inspecting officer will ascertain if my actions merit punishment. I promise to endeavor to be a fine example of a most improper British matron, set an example for all the other officers' wives."

"As to how they must satisfy their husbands in private."

John's lips curled up at the corners. "Truly? If this is any foreshadowing as to when we are married, I will be the most fortunate of husbands." He continued to tease. "I have fallen in love with a rather
wayward young lady. I see part of my duties as your husband will be to reform your behavior."
"I will look forward to the correction. I will obey." She told him.
John chuckled. "I will count on it." He said, his fingertips caressing her sex.
Mary sucked in her breath as he touched her there, shifting her legs apart to accommodate him.
"Oh!"
"Did I tell you that I wrote you love poems whilst I was on campaign?" He asked.
"Love poems?"
"Oh, yes, but I do not believe my eloquent description of comparing you form to that of Venus is quite adequate. I do need to take a closer look to see if I got the phrasing correct. Consider it part of the inspection." He whispered, his breath hot against her neck, nuzzling it with his nose, planting fevered kisses on her heated flesh. "You smell divine."
"Divine for you." She said. "I prayed every night for your safe return. You were never from my thoughts." She confessed.
"Nor you mine." He said through his kisses. "Dare I hope that you have fallen in love with me?"
"Yes!" She breathed. It was the truth. The constant fear of him dying in battle had forced her true feelings for him to the fore. There was no longer denying that she loved him!
"Never doubt that I love you, May." He stated his mouth trailing a path from her neck down her chest, his free hand undoing the ribbon bows at the neckline. "I always will." He added, parting the sheer fabric, exposing her beautiful breasts, his mouth pressing more burning kisses against her skin, scorching her.
She cried out softly when his lips closed over a nipple, laving it with his tongue, drawing it into his mouth as the fingertips of his other hand continued to work exquisite magic between her legs, Mary undulating her hips, whimpering quietly, fierce heat melting through her legs all the way to her toes.
"John..." She pleaded grasping two fistfuls of his banyan, frantically pulling at the fabric. "John..."
"Oh, Sweetheart, you are so ready." He whispered against her breast blowing on the damp skin sending delicious shivers down her spine, moving back for a moment, slipping his fingers from her. She whimpered again this time in disappointment. "John, please!"
"Patience!" He untied the sash of his banyan, shrugging it off, coming to her in all his masculine glory, his body covering hers, his chest crushing her breasts. "What do you want, May? Tell me. What is it? Do you want this?" He asked finally sinking his cock inside her.
"Yes! This!" She cried wrapping her legs about his hips as he began to move inside her in that exquisite rhythm that always led to Paradise.

Princeton, New Jersey
January 5, 1777
General George Washington raised his glass, a bag of gold and silver coins spilled out over the table, covering the map. His eyes glittered with pleasure. The seventy-five pounds Sergeant Jeffords had presented him before the young man perished in the subsequent battle, was a welcomed addition to the Continental Army's dwindling coffers. That money could purchase valuable provisions, pay the troops or feed them for months. "To Victory! And to the Continued Good Health of Our Angel of Mercy!" He cried out to the officers assembled in the crowded room.
"Victory! And the Angel of Mercy!" The officers crowding the room echoed, downing their drinks.
"A fine New Year's Gift from my beloved godchild, the money is not the sum of it, is it Major Tallmadge?" The General of the Continental Army turned to the officer hovering at his left.
"No, Excellency. There are provisions-flour, rum, molasses, several cones of sugar, smoked meat of all kinds-bacon, hams, turkeys."
"We will have a fine feast at her expense!"
"Yes, Excellency. I have correspondences here from our contacts in New York that the Lady Mary Ludlow has refused Captain Lord Kent's proposal of marriage." Ben held several letters out to the General.
"Good! No viscount for Lady May. She has come into her inheritance. General Howe will wish to see her safely wed to one of his officers as soon as possible. I understand that Major Andre is still
intensely courting her. Intent on marriage, I hear. God help him if that termagant accepts him. She will lead him a merry dance!” He mused, chuckling lightly, noting how Benjamin Tallmadge flushed and lowered his eyes at the mention of Major Andre. "What is your opinion? I understand that you know the lady in question, quite well. There was talk of a union between the pair of you, was there not? Did it progress beyond mere talk? There was no pre-contract?" "Pre-contract?" Ben asked. What was the general getting at? "Yes! Something, anything in writing that would invalidate her marriage with Andre or any of those British officers for that matter." Washington probed.

Ben's face fell. "No, there is not. We courted for a short time in the most proper manner."

"Nothing we can manipulate to our advantage?"

Ben shook his head.

"Because if there is, you must divulge it, Major Tallmadge." Washington went on.

"No, Sir. There is nothing."

"Pity!" Washington sighed clearly disappointed.

British Headquarters

He was leaning up against a wall, seemingly at ease, arms crossed over his chest, his eyes ever watchful, scanning the hallway, his gaze flitting periodically to the Kissing ball suspended beneath the chandelier anxiously awaiting a pair to pass beneath it, requiring that they share a kiss.

"You are looking quite enchanting this evening, Lady Mary. I trust that you enjoyed an agreeable respite—that you are well rested and refreshed, My Lady?"

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Yes, I am feeling very well." She replied attempting not to blush. John's fevered lovemaking had done much to restore her spirits and energy.

"I do hope that you will stand up with me for at least one dance, an allemande or a jig?"

"I cannot promise..." Her voice trailed off watching warily as Lieutenant Andre pushed himself from the wall, walking toward her.

"Where is my brother? Not about I see."

William asked relieved.

"Major Andre is attending General Howe at present."

Mary replied.

"A wee bit of business before the soiree?" He asked, getting closer.

"One would imagine, yes." Mary replied, trying to keep her composure as he stalked nearer.

"Perhaps we should attend to our own wee bit of business before the soiree? I never received my proper kiss."

He said, moving in such a way so that they found themselves beneath the kissing bough. "Oh, Look! We have been caught beneath the kissing ball!" He cried brightly, his eyes glinting mischievously, staring down at her, expectantly.

She was trapped. She had no place to go! She had kissed other officers beneath the kissing ball, even received a chaste fatherly kiss from General Howe all in the Spirit of the Season, but William Andre did not wish to engage in a friendly kiss during this time of Goodwill. He wanted her.

William could only imagine where and with whom she had spent the last several hours. The realization of where, with whom and what they most probably had been doing to fill the last hours, made his heart constrict with pain. He would take complete advantage of his opportunity no matter how brief.

"I believe tradition requires that we kiss." He said, taking a step toward her so that their bodies were almost touching. "Not on the cheek! A proper kiss is required, Lady Mary."

"I am aware of the rules, Lieutenant." She snapped, a bit more sharply than she intended, angry with herself that she had been caught.

"Do not be cross, My Lady. Rest assured, you will enjoy the experience. I will make it a real pleasure." He said, drawing her into his arms before she had the opportunity to protest, his hands encircling her tiny waist, splaying his fingers against her ribcage. "Lift your chin, Darling." His warm breath fanned against her temple.

She could feel his gently leashed excitement as she was forced to lean into him, grasp his shoulders with her hands, the scarlet wool of his officer's coat rough next to her fingertips, inhaling the citrus scent of his cologne-limes and a spice that she could not place her finger upon—one found in the West...
Indies or the Spice Islands, of that she was certain, lifting her chin, her gaze meeting his. The pure naked lust she read in his eyes sent a shiver of fear down her spine.

"How incredibly beautiful you are. If you were mine!" He murmured before his mouth captured hers.

His lips tasted of sherry, cinnamon and nutmeg, she thought feeling his mouth slanting over hers. William's tongue snaking out to tease along the seam of her mouth, eager to gain entrance, running over her lower lip, as he became rather bold.

Mary tore her mouth away, shocked at his boldness, looking up at him her eyes were accusatory. "You take far too many liberties, Sir! Release me at once!" She exclaimed pulling out of his embrace, glaring at him, forcing his hands to fall away.

"Such spirit! I envy the man who has the opportunity to be allowed to tame you. That is, if he can!" William quipped with a rakish wink.

Mary pursed her lips. "I will be tamed by no man! He will accept me as I am or not at all!" She declared.

"What is that Lady Mary? Not be tamed? Well then, I do prefer vinegar to sugar. A bit of a bite is most agreeable." John said, coming into the corridor, looking between the pair through hooded eyes as a hawk, noting that Mary had stepped from under the kissing ball and was attempting to hide her intense discomfort.

"I am so delighted you are of that opinion, Major! I have never been a biddable young lady."

"So you say? I would have never had thought." John teased. "Ah! Well, that is another matter for another time. General Howe sent me to search you out. His Excellency would be honored if My Lady would greet the guests with him."

"Old Billy not of the mind to flaunt The Sultana in the face of New York this evening?" William asked.

Lieutenant Andre! Your manners, Sir!" Mary cried genuinely affronted. John glared at his younger brother, his eyes flashing with anger. "Apologize to the lady! You have clearly given offence."

"I beg, Mi'lady's pardon. It was not my intent to offend." William was contrite. "Do allow me to make amends."

"I will think upon it." Mary said. "If you would excuse me, His Excellency desires my presence."

"Lean forward, Captain! Your pillow needs fluffing." Mary said to a reclining Captain Lord Kennedy. "Should you not be standing up, Lady Mary? Are you not in high demand as a dancing partner this evening?" He asked preening slightly. It pleased him to have a lovely young woman make a genuine fuss over him, though it was not the one he truly wished. His eyes scanned the dancers where the object of his affection, Miss Rachel Alton was dancing with Major Arthur Stephens.

"I will always have time for you, Captain Lord Kennedy."

"You are far too kind."

"It is my pleasure."

"Or Major Andre comes to claim you." The Captain quipped. "Though it was most kind of him to ask Miss Allerton to dance. Hopefully the strategy will cause Lieutenant Brandon to take notice of her. I am well aware that the quartet of you Matchmaking Schemers are intent on pairing them off. I am not surprised that Major Andre has been embroiled into your plan. He will do whatever he must to make you happy, Lady Mary. I must confess a preference for Ginger-haired young women but Miss Allerton is lovely. She and Lieutenant Brandon will complement one another marvelously."

"Miss Allerton is an independent and spirited young lady."

"Another of your Massachusetts Beauties?"

"No, Miss Georgiana Allerton is from New Haven, Connecticut. Her father is a wealthy merchant. He owns several whaling ships. He studied law at Yale College. Her antecedents go back to the settles of Plymouth in the early part of the last century, she is from an old, established and rather
prestigious New England family. Lieutenant Matthew Brandon, being the son of a merchant, himself, could do much worse."

"A fine looking brunette!" Kennedy stated.

Mary smiled, watching as the figures of the dance caused John to switch partners with Lieutenant Brandon. He was now dancing with one of Jane Fairfax's friends whose name escaped Mary at the moment. The insipid blonde was practically fawning over him, flashing Mary smug looks when the dance permitted.

Mary kept her face impassive, unable to resist catching the Major's eye, using her fan to silently communicate with him, flirting with him outrageously until she achieved the desired effect. Every time John turned his head toward her, his eyes smoldered and a wicked smile played about his mouth.

John could not disengage himself from Anne Jones fast enough, leaving her alone on the dance floor, striding across the room to where Mary sat with Captain Lord Kennedy.

"I do beg your pardon, Captain, but could I please steal the Lady Mary away if she is willing and would be kind enough to oblige me?"

"Of course, Major Andre." Captain Lord Kennedy replied. "I believe the lady is willing, are you not?"

"I was hoping that you would take some air with me, my lady. The heat has become a bit oppressive." John said to Mary. "I hope not to be but a few minutes." John said offering Mary is arm, which she took, hastening her out of the ballroom.

"What manner of naughtiness were you conveying with your fan? Let me recollect the communications. Firstly, you tease me! How could ever be jealous of Anne Jones? I saw the impetuous close of your fan. Then the touch to the right eye; you are allowed to see me now, Mon Cherie! Miss Jones became quite agitated when she saw you place the fan near your heart. You have won my love, as well!" John said guiding her into his private office, backing her up against his desk.

"Though the public declaration may have distressed some of the young ladies present."

"Does that vex you?" She teased.

"Certainly not! If truth be told, it relieves me that I will no longer have to endure the not so subtle innuendos from the likes of Miss Anne Jones and Miss Jane Fairfax without it causing them profound embarrassment once the nature and future of our relationship is made public knowledge, of course, after I do what you require of me." John chuckled lightly. "I have not forgotten."

"I am certain one of your waspish set downs will send them scurrying away with all due haste."

Mary observed.

John looked down into her flushed face his eyes searching hers, his gaze tender, ignoring her comment. "Has the dancing made you flush so prettily or our flirtation?" He asked gently brushing his knuckles along one of her cheekbones.

"What do you think?" Mary asked.

"Hmmmm... I would hasten a guess that it was our flirtation." John mused, his eyes dancing with amusement, taking a step or two closer to her so that their bodies were touching, reaching down, he placed his hands about her waist and hips lifting her up, setting her upon the desk.

"Whatever happened to your insistence that we venture to take some air?" Mary whispered, looking up into his handsome face, tracing an index finger seductively, from the stock at his neck, down over his waistcoat.

"It is rather cold outside, Sweetheart." John whispered. "There will be severe consequences if you catch a chill. General Howe would never forgive me if something happened to you whilst under my care. You are far too precious to lose!"

"I trust that you will be most mindful of your duty, that you will see that I am kept cozy warm by any manner at your disposal, major, whatever it may be." Mary whispered back, tilting her chin up, the tip of her nose brushing playfully against his chin.

"Whatever am I to do with you?" He asked tilting his head down, his mouth precariously close to hers.

"At this moment?" She wound her arms about his neck drawing him close into the space she created
for him between her thighs one foot wrapping about one of the gilded legs of the desk to brace herself as she perched on the edge. "What would you like to do with me? Take me out for some air. There will be reason for you to warm me when we return inside if only to carry out your orders from General Howe."
"You know that there is far more to it than that, My Love!" He said. "One kiss then we will do as you wish."
"Are you certain that it will only be just one, John?"
He paused for a moment seeming to ponder her question. "Absolutely not!" He replied right before his mouth claimed hers.

"Good Evening, Lady Mary, Major Andre." Corporal Fraser greeted John and Mary as the major led Mary down the steps of headquarters.
"Good Evening, Corporal Fraser. There is hot brandy for the soldiers. See that one of the servants brings you out a glass. There is apple crumble, as well, but not as much as I would have liked. I tried to save as much as I could for you but the officers enjoyed it far more than I anticipated they would, especially Lieutenant Andre and Admiral Lord Howe. Please do not let on that I saved the last bit for you. They will be incredibly cross." Mary said conspiratorially.
"Never, My Lady!" Corporal Fraser said with a smile. The Lady Mary's genuine care and consideration for the Regular soldiers sometimes at the small expense of their officers, had done much to boost morale. She always had time to inquire after their welfare and ways to ease their comfort. So many of them being a vast ocean away from their families and loved ones as she was.
"Major Andre, Sir?"
"Yes, Corporal?"
"The men, sir, they asked me to extend their profound thanks to you for being certain that we were sent out a platters of cakes, pies, pastries and what not. God Bless you, sir."
John smiled. "Platters of food sent out? You must be mistaken. I..." John brushed it off like it was nothing, embarrassed that his thoughtfulness was called out, preferring to have it remain anonymous.
"The officer who brought them let us in on your secret, Sir." Corporal Fraser said. "Do not be angry with him."
"He did, eh? I won't. Not this time. Good Night." John said moving off with Mary beside him.
"What?" He asked seeing Mary's proud smile in the moonlight. "Please do not mention it."
"I promise not to breathe a word." Mary assured him.
As in the Biblical Passage that was read at Ash Wednesday services, John Andre preferred that his good deeds and thoughtful gestures to go unremarked upon preferring them to remain private. In her own charitable efforts in the city, she had heard of a mysterious benefactor that was paying for the schooling and upkeep of several orphaned boys in the Anglican parish. She suspected the generous gentleman was him. It was another aspect of this complex man that she was finding easy to love.
"Thank you." He said grasping one of her hands in his bringing it to his mouth, kissing it. "There will be many sore heads in the morning. The lads have certainly earned it."
"What is it like, out there, in battle?" Mary asked concerned.
"I would rather not talk about it." John replied not wanting not to give her more reasons to worry when he was away fighting.
"I have tended to the wounded after Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, I know of the affects..."
"I pray that is all you have to observe, May." He said. Not many young women of her social standing and age would have wanted to be in a field hospital or wherever she had been, tending to the wounded and dying, most of them, in John's experience, had their heads filled with beaux, courting, parties, gossip and the latest fashions. "Did you attend with Dr. Warren after Concord and Lexington?" He asked.
"Yes." Mary replied as they walked along holding hands.
"I would imagine that the rebels appreciated having such a lovely nurse attend them, an incentive to get better. You must have been a great comfort as you have been to me, the officers and the Regulars these past several weeks since you have come to live with us." He paused near the rose bush where
he had plucked that winter rose the night Edrington and Graham had died, another single bud
bloomed there defying the elements as had the first. John plucked it, holding it between his thumb
and forefinger. "Such a comfort that I do not know what I would do without you. I have asked you
several times. "He went down on one knee, arranging his great cape about him, his boots crunching
on the grass and snow. "I promised you that I would do it properly!" He added grasping both of her
hands in one of his, holding the rose bud out to her in the other, his deep and abiding love for her
shining in his eyes. "Lady Mary Ludlow, would you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"
She did not have to hesitate or think twice. "Yes!"

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXI
Once again, because one can never be too courteous when someone does one a good
turn, my continued gratitude to the lovely administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page
(https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story.
Many thanks to Truth Universally Acknowledged for the great discussion.
Not too many notes this time- some insights.
John finally gives Mary her presents which she thanks him for most properly.
General Washington is delighted to receive the incredibly generous New Year's Gift that
Mary sent via Sergeant Moses Jeffords (who was killed that the Battle of Princeton by
Captain Lord Kennedy) which earns her the sobriquet 'The Angel of Mercy'. Ben
provides intelligence which prompts Washington's questions regarding if there was pre-
contract between Ben and Mary that would have invalidated her marriage to any of the
British Officers, seeing that she was promised to another (see the matter of the reasons
for the annulment of the marriage between Anne of Cleves and King Henry VIII of
England for historic reference- Anne was originally promised to another before she
married the king). Tallmadge could have also sued her for breach of contract which
would have created quite the scandal had the two become engaged. Mary is one of the
richest young noblewomen in the Empire having come into her fortune on her
eighteenth birthday (a provision of inheritance her father made).
Washington knows that
fortune would help the Continental Army immensely.
Much to her distress, William catches Mary underneath the kissing ball which is not a
pleasant experience for her. Fortunately John appears before his younger brother can
take any more liberties.
Mary attends to Captain Lord Kennedy who was injured at the Battle of Princeton.
Kennedy has fallen to Rachel Alton. Mary and her trio of friends have set to match
Georgiana Allerton with Lieutenant Matthew Brandon (Michelle Dockery and Theo
James, respectively). The Allerton comes from Isaac Allerton , a passenger on the
Mayflower (and one of my paternal ancestors) who did settle in New Haven, CT.
The inspiration for the insipid blonde, Anne Jones that Major Andre is forced to dance
with whilst Mary flirts with him with her fan is Christina Cole in her Augusta Elton
incantation from Emma with Ramola Garai in the title role. We may see more of her
later.
The Language of the Fan can be found here: http://www.donnamacmeans.com/the-
secret-language-of-fans/
As well as other websites.
The lovely Georgian desk from season one in the scene where Andre interviews Simcoe
is the one that Andre lifts Mary upon in his office. I love that desk! It may appear in
future chapters.
We see that John Andre is an incredibly complex man- in a very good way. He *FINALLY* does it properly!
Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
Please also consider taking the time to read some of the stories in this fandom that I have bookmarked- if you have enjoyed An Indecent Proposal you most certainly will enjoy their work.
"Captain Lord Nicholls, the Lady Mary will see you now." Abigail said leading the naval officer into the parlor, noting the special care the young man had taken with his appearance that morning. A strikingly handsome man, he looked particularly dashing—having taken particular care that every aspect of his person from the arrangement of his hair in its queue to the shine of his boots was perfect. Abigail could only imagine why he had come to call after Lady Mary and Major Andre had cancelled their morning ride with him. He could not hide his concern as he walked past the maid into the room where Lady Mary awaited him. Abigail followed him in standing by the door to await her mistress's pleasure.

"Captain Lord Nicholls, a Fine Good Morning to you! What do I owe the pleasure of your presence so early this fine morning?" Mary asked brightly.

"I received the message regarding our standing engagement. When it was broken this morning I became concerned, hastened over to be certain that My Lady had not come down with an ague especially after the festivities last evening. But I see that you are the picture of Perfect Health." The Captain observed.

"I appreciate your concern, Captain." Mary said. "Won't you sit down? Would you care for some refreshment? Tea? Hot chocolate? Coffee, perhaps?"

He sat in the wing backed chair she offered crossing his long legs at the ankles, making himself comfortable. "Hot chocolate, if you please." He replied. "Major Andre is not feeling poorly?" He added with a touch of concern in his voice.

"No. Major Andre is the epitome of health, or he was when I saw him at breakfast. He has since gone out on some errands though he was not at liberty to say. Colonel Tarleton and Captain Lord Kennedy accompanied him. I do not recall if it were military or personal business. They would not let on."

"Lieutenant Andre?" Captain Lord Nicholls inquired.

"He has gone out for some air to clear his head or so it would seem. He appeared rather poorly at breakfast." Mary said.

"The party last evening was quite enjoyable. Several of our officers were also feeling poorly this morning." The Captain empathized kindly.

"I suppose they think it was worth it?" Mary asked.

"Fair amounts of coffee were drunk at breakfast." Nicholls provided. "I know that we have spoken of this before, I was hoping that there was something that I have done recently to sway your decision as to who would be your escort to Madame Stewart's Twelfth Night Masquerade Ball this evening? Or is Major Andre still escorting you? He has snapped you up?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Captain, but alas, my decision has not been swayed. Major Andre will still be escorting me. Yes, he has snapped me up."

"Just for the evening's entertainment?" The Captain asked.

"Sir?" Mary asked.

"We have been courting for some time, Lady Mary, long enough for me to have formed far more than a deep affection for you and come to the conclusion that we are a most suitable match. I would like you to marry me, if you would be willing. Will you marry me?"

"Captain Lord Nicholls, if the situation was different, I would happily accept your proposal and
become your wife but I cannot marry you." Mary replied.

"If you appear relatively willing why are you refusing? Major Andre has snapped up more than the opportunity to escort My Lady to Madame Stewart's masquerade. He has secured your hand in marriage, hasn't he? I wish you much happiness and envy Major Andre his great Good Fortune of securing one of the most desirable marriageable young women in the Empire as his future bride!"

"Thank you, Captain, you are most kind. I would ask that you would keep silent until it is announced."

"Of course, I will breathe not a word. Your secret is safe with me. I will continue to be your most devoted servant. If you ever have need of me for whatever it may be you know where to find me and have but to ask. I will do anything for you. I hope that I will remain your dearest friend." Christian Nicholls said unable to hide the regret and disappointment in his voice. He was in love with her; it hurt him to lose her to the major.

"That position is reserved for Major Andre, Captain. However, I do wish we are to remain friends."

Mary replied. "I would have enjoyed the privilege to make you incredibly happy, Lady Mary. Have a comfortable life in London and on our estates with our children and family. You would have wanted for nothing. You know how I regard you, that I do love you. I will be content to be your friend now as that is all that I can properly and respectfully hope for." He explained.

Abigail brought in a tray with Captain Lord Nicholls hot chocolate and a tray of shortbread. "Do you require anything else, My Lady?" Abigail asked looking up, her eyes traveling to the entrance to the parlor where Lieutenant Andre loitered in the doorway for a moment looking particularly dashing in his uniform despite an evening of imbibing vast quantities of drink. Having just come in from his walk. He was all legs, his tight breeches and boots making it appear as though they stretched on for miles.

"A Fine Good Morning to you, Lady Mary. I heard that I would find you here, you are still looking radiantly beautiful as you did at breakfast earlier." He complimented moving into the room completely ignoring all but her. "Is that hot chocolate? I could use a cup, thank you. Alas, the tea I drank at breakfast and my brisk walk have not cleared my head." He sat beside Mary on the settee with leonine grace not waiting to be invited.

"Abigail, a cup for Lieutenant Andre, please." Mary looked at the maid who hovered nearby. "Yes, My Lady." Abigail stated hustling from the room to do her mistress's bidding, quickly coming back with the requested cup and saucer which Mary poured hot chocolate into.

"Thank you. Lieutenant Andre, did you enjoy your walk?" Mary asked as she set the pot down. "As much as can be expected, Lady Mary. Good to see you, Captain Lord Nicholls. I hope that I did not intrude." He asked his ocean blue eyes challenging as he took the cup and saucer of hot chocolate Mary handed him. His fingertips brushing against hers when the cup and saucer passed from her hand to his. "Careful now!" William warned almost spilling the hot liquid from the cup feeling the flames leap through his fingers where they touched her, his mouth going dry, his cheeks suddenly hot, as he felt the intense pull of his physical attraction to her.

"Are you alright?" Mary cried, concerned that some of the chocolate had spilt onto his pristine breeches and burnt him. She looked, down to find none, sighing in relief. William's lips curved up in a smile watching her reaction before he took a sip of the hot beverage. "Perfectly well." He replied his hooded eyes flickering over the Captain Lord Nicholls, reaching for a piece of shortbread, biting into it with straight white teeth, savoring the explosion of butter and vanilla on his tongue. "Delicious!" He breathed his eyes sweeping over Mary from top to toe, lingering upon her breasts and tiny waist, remembering how she had felt in his arms the evening before when he had caught her beneath the kissing ball, the memories setting his blood to boiling. His flirtation with Miss Jane Fairfax during the soiree had done nothing to assuage his desire for the Lady Mary. Jane Fairfax was not the distraction he had originally imagined she would be. Her vicious sharp tongue a decisive repellant only enduring when she had been sucking his cock, even then it had been Lady Mary who he had imagined was pleasuring him. William shook off his inner thoughts focusing on the beguiling and enchanting fiery haired beauty seated beside him.
"Have you your costume for this evening's masquerade?" William asked. "I hear many are an open secret- what or whom one chooses to dress as can be purchased for a price. I hear for the women that there are to be several seasons, times of day, at least half a dozen Cleopatras, Empresses of Rome, many shepherdesses and a plethora of goddesses. Dare I hasten a guess as to what my lady chose? Something unique I would reckon?"
"You will have to wait and see. You may not even know my identity if I am masked." Mary replied. "I am confident that I could pick you out in a crowd of women." William bragged. "What can be expected of the gentlemen?" Gods? Shepherds? Various animals?" Mary asked ignoring what he had said. "What of you, Captain? Did you choose something nautical or completely opposite so no one will suspect that it is you?"
"The latter, Lady Mary. I will never reveal it. You have to wait until the time when we all unmask."
Nicholls teased, he winked.
William glared at the naval officer, his eyes flashing blue fire. How dare he flirt with her! "Does Admiral Sir Howe not require your presence, Captain?" He asked, making it clear that as far as he was concerned the other man had over stayed his welcome.
"Not this morning. But I did make arrangements to meet some of the officers at Broderick's bookshop." He replied.
"To select books for the orphaned boys?" Mary asked, her eyes brightening. "How kind!"
"Shhhhhh! My Lady! It was to be a secret!" The Captain chided her placing an index finger against his closed lips seeming to beg for silence. "You didn't suspect that we would all spend this Time of Goodwill dancing, drinking, spending time courting lovely young women and other natures of mischief, did you? Some of the officers in His Majesty's Navy are Good Christian Gentlemen." William resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "Really?" He asked not believing a word the Captain said.
The navy did have a reputation.
The Captain just smiled, rising. "Lady Mary a pleasure. Do remember what I said to you earlier. I am your devoted servant." He stated with a graceful bow. "Lieutenant..." He made his farewell to William.
"But you haven't finished your hot chocolate, Captain." Mary protested.
"The time grows late, Lady Mary. I do have a previous engagement. I do hope that you will save me an allemande this evening at Lady Stewart's ball. That is if I can figure out who you are beneath your domino." Captain Nicholls teased his eyes dancing; he took her hand, bringing it to his lips, kissing it. "Good Day, My Lady!"
He turned to leave walking out of the parlor leaving Mary and William alone together.
"I should leave you to your hot chocolate and shortbread. Abigail can bring you a newspaper if you are so inclined to read. I have several matters to attend to before this evening's ball." Mary said, going to rise herself. She did not feel comfortable around William Andre. Every time they found themselves alone together he acted in a most inappropriate fashion.
"If I were any other officer you would stay and keep me company. Why are you so eager to leave, Lady Mary? Have I offended you in some way? If I have please tell me the way that I can make amends and find my way back into your Good Graces. It distresses me that something that I have done may have upset you." William said. "Especially since it appears that we are to legally be family in a short while or so it seems. John could not resist bragging to me late last evening that you had accepted his proposal of marriage. How he strutted and preened. The old boy is completely captivated. It was disgusting, really. My brother is used to being adored. Not the other way round. I am so disappointed that you did not give me a chance to woo you away from him but there are other manners in which we can explore the nature of our relationship and settle on what will satisfy us both." He grasped one of her forearms as she rose so she could not move. He did not want her to leave. "Stay with me." He pleaded looking up at her through soulful eyes. "Please."
"Lieutenant, remove your hand from my person! I am an affianced woman!" Mary ordered. "This is not proper."
"What is a wee bit of affection between a brother and sister, Lady Mary? Or a gentleman and young lady that are to find themselves within that degree within months? Should we not venture to get
acquainted with one another in a more intimate fashion?” He asked. He stood, looming over her, his fingers
snaking up her forearm to grasp her elbow holding her fast. Mary tried to pull her arm away from him but he held her.

"Lieutenant Andre! This is most certainly not the manner in which I wish to conduct our relationship or get better acquainted. Let go of my elbow, please!” She was getting distressed. She did not know what officers were in the mansion at the moment. She dare not call out only to be found in a possible compromising position. It would only damage her reputation and defile John's honor. She went to jerk away her movement causing her to lose her balance for a brief second, stumbling against him, her breasts and hips brushing against his hard body an answering heat rising in his chest and abdomen, his cock becoming achingly aroused, the softly rounded curve of a buttocks filling his palm as he went to help break her fall.

"Careful, there!” He murmured huskily looking down at her, his other palm skimming her jaw before lifting her face gently up to his. He pressed his fingers softly to her lips to stifle her protest that threatened to burst forth as he bent his head closer. "Are you alright?” He asked genuinely concerned, his ocean blue eyes searching her sapphire ones. He smelled of limes, spices, hot chocolate and butter. "Yes. Please let me go!” She was afraid he was going to kiss her!

"Ah! Lady Mary! There you are! Abigail said that I would find you in the parlor!” John's voice broke Mary's considerable discomfort as he came striding into the room holding a small package, forcing William to release his hold on her, setting the proper distance between them. "William, I see that you have finally joined the Land of the Living with a hurting head, one would imagine.” The major mocked his younger sibling. "Lady Mary, if you would honor me with your attendance in my private office?” He asked as Tarleton and Brandon spilled into the parlor greeting Mary. Tarleton sitting himself in the wing-backed chair that Nicholls had been sitting in earlier that morning, reaching for a piece of shortbread.

Mary followed John out of the parlor and into his private office.

"You desired a word?” Mary asked standing in front of him, staring up into his handsome face, trembling slightly. John could sense her slight discomfort. Opening his arms, he drew her into the strong safe haven of his embrace, holding her close, wrapping her arms about her, tenderly stroking her back, feeling the tension leave her body.

Mary rested her in her head in the crook of his shoulder. "You will always be safe in my arms, Sweetheart. I will be your safe harbor, your rock. For always.” He whispered, tilting his head to look down at her, still holding the small package in his free hand. "I bought you a present. I do hope that you like it.” He added to lighten the mood.

"What is it?” She was instantly curious.

"A surprise.”

"A surprise that sparkles?” John chuckled. "Patience, Mon Cherie. Possible. Would you like to see it?” He asked.

"Yes! You know how I adore receiving presents, John. I am most grateful.”

"I do enjoy your demonstrations of appreciation.” He flirted.

"La, Johnny! Are you quite certain?” She asked, her eyes dancing. John looked past her thankful that he had shut the door, his lips quirking in a playful smile. "Oh, yes! Would you care to see it?”

"Please.” He raised the hand that held the gift over his head.

"Come and get it!”

He was of a mind to play.

"You would incite me to inappropriate behavior? Not adverse to having me climb you like a tree to obtain my present?”

"As long as you view me as a Strong English Oak.”
"Absolutely! I am not responsible for what may transpire between us in my efforts to obtain my gift. I will be fully accountable for what happens." John told her. "Are you prepared to start climbing?"

She nodded, going up on her tip toes, her body precariously close to his. He could feel her heat, desire shimmering between them as she grabbed for the package, missing it by inches, her body sliding down his front with agonizing slowness, the shimmers quickly igniting to flames.

"Perhaps it would be easier to obtain this way, Sweetheart?" He asked, stretching out an arm parallel with his shoulder. He grinned, winking. "One does not have to climb so high."

Mary went to snatch the gift out of his hand. "Hah!" She cried in triumph, as he was enveloped in his embrace.

"Clever minx! I thought that you would enjoy a bit of a challenge. Open it!"

"It is not from Madame Bernon's. The box is far too small. Unless it is another intimate garment fashioned for the privacy of our Marriage Bed." Mary observed examining the package in her hand. "Alas, no!" He said with a twinge of regret. "Would you like me to visit Madame and order some? She does receive the most titillating designs from the Continent. I was made privy to the option upon one of my visits regarding the other gifts."

"Madame's instincts were quite accurate."

"She understands l'amour, Mon Cherie. She is French. Are you not curious to see what it is? Open it!"

"If you ease your embrace."

"Just enough."

Her eyes swept up to his face, their eyes locking for a brief moment before she lowered them intent to see what was contained in the box. Opening the lid she gasped in delight. Nestled upon a white velvet pillow was a pair of sapphire and diamond earrings set in gold. The sapphires clearly Indian-of the finest quality, their color exquisite, the diamonds flashed their icy fire in the morning sunlight.

"John! They are beautiful!" She exclaimed setting the box down the desk, impulsively tossing her arms about his neck, kissing him.

"I had ordered them before I left for New Jersey and only had time to fetch them from the jeweler's this morning. I am delighted that they please you. There is a necklace, bracelet and a brooch to match. Oh, dear! I have ruined the other surprises. Oh, and, of course, now the betrothal ring." He explained smiling down at her.

"You spoil me! Love poetry, gowns, intimate apparel, and now this! What more can I expect? Sketches and music?"

"Whatever you wish. I will do whatever it is that I must to keep you incandescently happy." He vowed.

"Just incandescently?" She asked.


"Oh, yes, please!" She breathed.

"Gloriously. Magnificently. Marvelously. Superbly. Spectacularly." He said punctuating each word with a kiss, upon her forehead, the bridge of her nose, the tip, both cheekbones, before taking her mouth in a deep and tender kiss.

"Mmmm..." She moaned low in the back of her throat, kissing him back. "Have you spoken to General Howe yet?"

"I would have sought His Grace of Sutherland's permission since you are under the legal age of consent and because that is what is done. I would not wish for those loyal to Sutherland to desire my head for carrying his youngest daughter away and wedding her. I do not relish a bevy of fierce Scots wishing to do me bodily harm! However, since His Grace made the terms of your marriage implicit and clear, even going so much as granting his consent for you to marry before the legal age of twenty-one and allowing you to choose your husband. There is not fear of infuriated Scots intent on running me through. I am delighted that you picked me otherwise you know that I would have created a horrible scandal by seducing you away from your intended. General Howe will see to the publication of the announcement in the proper newspaper. I would allow His Excellency to revel in
his position as loco parentis as was entrusted to him.” John explained.
Mary grinned at the description of her family and those loyal to her father and his bald honesty in regards to his intent on taking what he wanted which was her. "Captain Lord Nicholls called today whilst you were out."
"As I had suspected he would."
"He proposed to me. Naturally I refused him." Mary explained wishing to be honest.
"How did she react?" John was aware that the naval officer was in love with Mary and desperate to marry her.
"He reacted in the way that one would expect, as the nobleman he is. He was terribly disappointed but wished us every happiness."
"How very kind of him." John said with a small smile. "I imagine that he wishes to remain a good friend with you once we are married?" He posed.
"I will end the friendship if you desire me to." Mary offered.
"That will not be necessary, Sweetheart, though I do appreciate the offer. He may worship you from the proper distance."
"As all the women will do you, Sir!" Mary stated touching the tip of his nose with a forefinger.
"Of course, May!" He said capturing her hand, kissing the tip of her finger, drawing it between his lips, dashing the pointed tip of his tongue over it. "My Ginger haired puss has claws!" John exclaimed squeezing her buttocks through the layers of gown and petticoats.
Mary barked with laughter. "John!" She admonished him. "I may but no one purrs like your puss when you stroke her properly."
"Lady Mary! How shocking! I have finally succeeded in corrupting those Fine New England Moral Sensibilities!" John exclaimed his eyes widening in mock horror. He winked. "You have become quite indecorous."
"Enough to merit a reprimand? My morality and proper comportment are your sole responsibility now since we are to be married. I submit to whatever you desire, John." Mary flirted looking up at him through lowered lashes the corners of her luscious mouth lifting in a smile.
"Perhaps, I suggest that you leave the door connecting our chambers ajar this evening, Sweetheart. Expect a nocturnal visit after the masquerade."

"Oh, my Gracious, May! That is wonderful news!" Lottie squealed with delight, the quartet of friends embracing giving into girlish enthusiasm.
"You are getting married!" Melissa exclaimed bouncing up and down, displaying behavior that would have shocked her Continental General father.
"Oh, May!" Rachel moaned unable to hide her displeasure.
"Do try to be happy for me. I know that he is not who you would wish that I marry." Mary said to her friend.
"Given the choice, I would have taken Lieutenant Andre not the Major." Rachel told her friend.
"William does not have the capacity to intimidate."
"He is an officer in His Majesty's Army. Major Andre is supposed to be intimidating if the situation warrants it." Mary retorted defending her betrothed.
"You know who I wish you would marry. If that is not to be, I would have picked anyone but Major John Andre. We cannot abide one another. He is the epitome of all my father is fighting against. I cannot bring myself to like him. He is arrogant and high-handed."
"When in your betrothal to be announced?" Lottie asked intent on speaking about something more pleasant. Rachel could become rather tedious when she went on about her fierce genuine dislike for Major Andre which had become hypocritical seeing as she was infatuated with Captain Lord Kennedy, another British officer. A match her father would most vehemently disapprove of.
"General Howe wishes to host a ball in our honor. He wants to make a public announcement of the betrothal then. The following day the announcement will appear in the newspapers." Mary replied having the grace not to bring up the matter of Rachel and Captain Lord Kennedy.
"Did Major Andre give you a ring? Have you set a date? Chosen the church?" Melissa asked caught
up in the romance of it all. "Not yet. Though I believe he spoke to a jeweler about the ring. Given his artistic talent and excellent taste, I suspect that he will have something made to his exact specifications and will design it himself. He designed the sapphire and diamond earrings he presented me this morning. I have to visit a silversmith and jeweler to order engagement gifts for Major Andre."
"What do you intend to give him?" Lottie asked.
"At the silversmith, I wish to order two figures one of St. George slaying the dragon and the other of Henry V mounted on his horse at the Battle of Agincourt." Mary replied.
"He will be the envy of all the other officers." Lottie said.
"And will become more insufferably smug and haughty!" Rachel complained.
"What are you ordering from the jewelers?" Melissa asked.
"An intaglio ring with his family crest and a new gold pocket watch. He cracked the crystal during the Battle of Princeton. It is not keeping time properly. He has a signet ring."
"He will be so pleased!" Melissa said dreamily.
"Then there are the practical gifts, a new a pair of boots, a uniform which I ordered from Hawes in London, shirts and linen. We will need to purchase a home near headquarters and the Academy."
"The Phipps's mansion has become available. Henry Phipps' family has moved to Bedford after he was arrested on suspicion of treason. They left in disgrace. The house is one of the best appointed in the city. Madame Phipps took great pride in her home. Mister Phipps is looking to sell."
"How are you aware of all this?" Mary asked. What hadn't John told her that they had arrested Henry Phipps?
"Gossip. Anne Jones had a loose tongue and takes great pleasure in sticking her nose in where she ought not." Rachel replied.
"I will mention it to Joh... Major Andre, though I do pray that he does not get offended. The husband provides the home for his bride." Mary said, worrying her lower lip with her teeth.
"He will appreciate your industriousness." Melissa assured her. "He knows that young ladies from Boston, Massachusetts are fiercely independent and rebellious."
"True, Melissa. I believe that it is one of the reasons that you captivated him, May. It is so refreshing to see a man like Major Andre doing the chasing," Lottie said, grinning. "You allowed yourself to be caught."
"If you had a man such as John Andre pursuing you, you would have done the same! Trust me!" Mary bantered back her eyes twinkling.
The other young women laughed.
beyond what is considered proper that is why I am asking that you be aware of any changes in her behavior and inform me immediately when you notice them, if the Lady Mary begins to exhibit certain... erm... How can I put this delicately?"

"That which would make it necessary for you to obtain a Special License to marry her, Sir?" Abigail offered.

The Major's face brightened. He smiled. "Thank you, Abigail. Yes! That exactly! General Howe will be so cross if he is not afforded a large sumptuous spectacle of a wedding to flaunt in front of the damned rebels. The Lady Mary's social position also demands it!"

Abigail arched at bow at Major Andre well aware that he enjoyed planning lavish parties. She knew that he would be disappointed if his nights making love to the Lady Mary yielded fruit necessitating in a Special License and a much quieter wedding. He was a man of the world. What did he expect would happen when he could not keep his hands and other body parts away from the young lady? She was bound to find herself pregnant much sooner than later. Abigail knew that he wasn't using French letters or sponges dipped in vinegar to prevent her young mistress from conceiving. Quite the contrary, Abigail suspected that Major Andre would be gloriously happy if the Lady Mary informed him that she was going to have his baby. "Yes, Sir." She found herself saying as the thoughts swirled about in her head.

"The bans do have to be read in church for three weeks prior to the wedding. That would mean February. Ah! Saint Valentine's Day! The day set aside for lovers! That is perfect! We may skirt a scandal and enjoy a lavish wedding!" John exclaimed excitedly grinning like a schoolboy, setting his quill down. Now he just had to inform Mary.

The clock above him chimed the hour.

Later that evening

With all the preparations and hustle and bustle in the house due to the ball that evening they still managed to steal a few intimate moments together.

He had found her warm, damp and fragrant from the bath wrapped in the banyan she had stolen from him when he had gone to New Jersey, wet tendrils of hair curling along her face and neck, slipping from the pins that Abigail had used to pile it upon her head so it would not have gotten wet in the tub.

He strode into her bedroom through that all too familiar door that separated his from hers, the soles of his high shiny boots sounding against the floor boards, softer upon the fine Persian carpet, coming up behind her, encircling her about the waist his hands splaying against her ribs and hip stroking the skin as his teeth nibbled up the side of her neck to an earlobe sending delicious shivers down her spine. She shuddered with excitement, aroused and awakened by his touch, arching her neck up, her eyelids fluttering closed, surrendering to his sensual assault on her person. "Oh, John!" She moaned his name, a soft whisper in the quiet of the room.

"I had to see you before Abigail came to help you dress, if only for a moment." He whispered hotly against her fevered skin.

"Then look your fill."

"I intend to." He told her, before beginning to sing:

"Red is the color of my true love's hair;
Her lips are like some roses fair;
She's got the sweetest smile and the gentlest hands,
And I love the ground whereon she stands."

He sang to her in a rich baritone.

"Are not the words black is the color?" She asked.
"Yes, but my true love has red hair so I changed them. Did you not enjoy the serenade, My One True Love?" He answered her question with one of her own.
"Yes, very much, you spoil me, I am the most fortunate of women."
"So it would seem." John agreed nuzzling the tender spot beneath her ear, he chuckled softly.
"Is there not more to the song?"
"Let me come to your bed tonight, May. I will sing you the rest."
"Is that a promise?"
"I would not miss it for the world."
"Then don't. Come to me."

Abigail’s eyes widened in surprise and admiration at the Lady Mary’s costume. Madame Bernon had created yet another masterpiece, the shades of yellow, orange and scarlet mixing together in perfection. The gown was styled as one worn by a lady of Ancient Greece with a deep V neckline golden clips were set at the shoulders with pale yellow diamonds, deep yellow topazes and blood red rubies, the bodice was scarlet to the belt encircling her tiny waist decorated with the same jewels as at her shoulders, the skirt falling from her hips in the variant colors of fire, to the floor. Her stockings were a sheer red silk clocked with flames in yellow and gold that appeared to be licking up her legs from ankles to calves. Upon her feet were scarlet shoes with Louis heels embroidered with flames and decorate with spangles, sequins and jewels that glittered in the candlelight.
"You don't believe that it is too indecent do you, Abigail?" Mary asked twirling in front of the maid, giving her the full effect of the costume, the rubies and diamonds about her throat and in her ears flashing red and white fire.
"Major Andre will be preening like a peacock and strutting about as a cock o' the walk when he sees you, My Lady. All the gentlemen will be more envious of this night than ever. You will most certainly turn heads.” Abigail opined.
"Do you believe that the Major will like it?" Mary asked.
"He will not be able to keep his eyes from you." Abigail said honestly pinning a last diamond pin in Mary's hair. "Off with you now. Major Andre will be waiting." She said handing Mary her mask and escorting her out the bedchamber door.
He was waiting for her dressed as Ice to her Fire, looking ten shades of gorgeous in his silver, white and icy blue costume. A white wig covering his glorious dark blond hair, his coat embroidered with icicles, and snowflakes, his waistcoat silver brocade. The sight of him made her breath catch in her throat especially when their eyes met as she descended the staircase. His cobalt colored eyes burning with a passion and lust so hot they threatened to scorch her.
"Good God!" He breathed his mouth going dry as dust as fire leapt through his veins.
"Is that an indication that I meet with your approval? Does my costume please you?" She asked reaching the bottom of the stairs and him, going to brush and imaginary thread or bit of fluff from his waist coat.
"So wish to kiss you but General Howe is watching us." She whispered.
"Tonight in your bed we will kiss as much as you wish. I promise." He whispered back. "Not just on the mouth." He added smiling.
"Oh!" She felt her cheeks heating as she blushed.
"All over, every precious inch of your delectable body." He breathed in her ear pulling back watching her shudder with passion and desire. He knew that she was aching for him. He could read it in her eyes. I want you! The words hung unspoken between them. "Our coach is ready, My Lady." John said as an orderly brought their capes helping Mary with hers and then John with his. "It is time for the masquerade ball!"
Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXII
Once again, because one can never be too courteous when someone does one a good turn, my continued gratitude to the lovely administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story. Thanks to Truth Universally Acknowledged for more great conversation. If you have a moment, please take some time to read her story, The General's Treasure (which is also part of this fandom). It comes highly recommended by this author.

Some notes and insights this time:
Captain Lord Nicholls proposes and is rejected. Fortunately he takes his rejection far better than Captain Lord Kent indicating that her wishes that he and Lady Mary can continue to be friends.

Then Lieutenant Andre comes in to cause more mischief.
The Major presents Lady Mary with a gift. It was customary for gentlemen to give Engagement Gifts. Andre had some wealth of his own being the son of a rich merchant. He wishes to keep his fiancée in the style she had become accustomed.

Twenty-one was the legal age that one could marry without parental consent. When a young woman became engaged she became the property of her husband to be and his responsibility. All of her goods, property and debt were his to control. That is unless there was a Marriage Settlement/Contract that detailed the terms of the marriage which indicated otherwise. As we read in Chapter XIV, the Duke of Sutherland had such a document drawn up that left Mary in control of half her yearly income, her properties in England and the West Indies and her share in the East India Company- all of which would be overseen by male agents which upon their marriage (or during their engagement), Andre would appoint on her behalf. Sutherland isn't so unconventional that he leaves those decisions to his daughter. Andre would review the accounts and see if the present agents would be staying on or if he would appoint those of his choosing. John would, as a courtesy, then discuss his choices of agents with Lady Mary.

We learn a bit more about Mary's background in their discussion. She also informs him that Captain Lord Nicholls proposed and was rejected.

Mary informs her friends of the engagement and we get very different reactions. Mary discusses her ideas for Engagement Gifts for her husband to be. There is also discussion of where the couple would be living once they are married.

Andre and Abigail have a discussion about Mary where the Major indicates his appreciation of all that the maid has done. He discreetly asks the maid to inform him if Mary begins to exhibit the signs of pregnancy which would necessitate a Special License. Within the conversation, Andre decides upon the earliest acceptable wedding date whilst keeping within the realms of propriety. Wedding Bans are traditionally read out in the bride and groom's parish church three consecutive weeks before the wedding. Black Is The Colour of My True Love's Hair shows up in ballads of 1915, around the time of the Great War and reputedly has origins in Scotland. Andre changes the lyrics slightly. Since this is AU, I pushed back the time to the 18th century.


Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
A Masquerade and An Announcement

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XXIII
The Stewart Mansion, New York City
Twelfth Night 1777

The ball was a resounding success, Madame Stewart thought watching her guests dancing an allemande, her gaze fixated on a beautiful young woman dressed as Fire, whom she suspected was the Lady Mary Ludlow- with a tall slender young man dressed as Lancelot du Lac- whom Madame imagined was Lieutenant William Andre. She watched the pair grasp hands, raising their arms, twisting under one another in a figure of the dance, making note of the young lady's posture as she tried to mask her discomfort. Apparently, the Lady Mary had not fallen under the spell of 'Winsome Will's' devastating charm.

Nearby, Ice danced with Air, whom Madame knew to be Major Andre and Melissa Alton. The Major had already stood up with thrice with his fiery fiancée inciting much gossip amongst the matrons and young ladies present. Madame smiled wickedly, wondering how they would all react when they read the announcement of the Lady Mary's engagement to Major Andre in the newspaper. The hearts of young women and gentlemen of all ranks would be breaking all over New York. She raised her glass of champagne to her lips taking a sip her sharp eyes still intent on the dancers .
"Ah! Sweet Fire how I crave your warmth and heat!" William flirted.
"Sir Knight, alas, my heat is set upon to melt only Ice." Mary countered, lowering her eyes from beneath her mask, moving about in the steps of the dance.

"Not even a wee spark for a poor gallant knight? I would be your champion and serve you all my days, Fair Fire. But you are determined to create steam with Ice." William glanced over at his brother and Melissa Alton as they danced. "How fortunate to be so cold. Your servant, mademoiselle." He grumbled bowing as the music ended. The musicians immediately striking up another dance melody, this time, Mary found herself partnered with General Howe, John with Madame Stewart. Passing by a servant with a tray, William snatched a glass of champagne, gulping down half of it, standing to the side to watch Mary dance with Howe, who was dressed as a Roman Emperor.
"Poor Darling Lancelot, how Fire eludes him this night!" A feminine voice beside him mocked.
"Your infatuation makes you foolish."
"If you are intent upon speaking of such matters, I would ask that you please move along. I am not disposed to discussing or listening to observations as to where my heart lies." William snapped his eyes fixed on Lady Fire, watching as she giggled at a comment the General made the pair moving about in the figures of the dance, the Emperor handing Fire over to Ice as he partnered Queen Elizabeth I. William's lips set watching as Ice bent his head to whisper in Fire's ear. It was clearly something flirtatious and wicked. She smiled, laughing lightly, taking his hand in hers, the pair became lost in one another as they danced.

Muttering a vulgar oath under his breath, William downed the rest of his champagne, grasping another glass off a nearby tray, setting the empty one down, tossing back half of the second.
"What about entertaining a distraction? She will never have you! I will be more than willing to play your Guinevere. Fire will only scorch you and leave you burnt." The shepherdess's voice was spiteful.
"I am certain that it will be worth it, every fevered moment." William said taking a sip of the effervescent liquid his eyes never leaving Fire and Ice.

"This is the fourth time that we have danced together this evening. All eyes are upon us. The matrons and young ladies are a twitter with gossip!" John teased. "If matters were different, I would take grave care in regards to your reputation however much that I enjoy the incitement of talk. Not that it
will ruin you. I would never allow it."
"Still intent on executing your orders to the letter, Sir?"
"I now have a great stake in the personal safety of the lady. I will go to great lengths and do whatever is required to ensure her every comfort and pleasure whilst she continues to be entrusted in my care." John explained.
"I am most confident that you will not disappoint." She flirted, walking about him in a figure of the dance.
"I am gratified to hear that you possess such faith in my abilities." He could not resist smiling smugly.

"You have never disappointed. Ever." She said. Her voice low when he moved closer, the steps of the dance requiring the pair to touch.
John slid an arm tightly about her waist as they danced an intricate figure.
"If one more of those young men gazes at you in an improper manner..." He warned, his cobalt colored eyes flashing with anger.
"Surely you are not jealous, Lord Ice?" She teased. She giggled.
"Yes, I am jealous, and we'll discuss it later, Mon Cherie, rest assured." He shot back.
Mary laughed delighted her eyes twinkling beneath her mask. "In private?"
"Absolutely!" He answered.

A delicious shiver danced down her spine reading the smoldering heat of his gaze.
Still standing on the sidelines, William Andre downed his third, or was it fourth, glass of champagne. "By God!" He heard a rich merchant dressed as King Henry VIII say. "Ice appears to be drawn to Fire's heat and warmth this evening and she to him- the lucky devil. If the pair is whom I suspect, from the looks passing between them, we should expect some manner of announcement soon. Howe would not allow one of his officers to carry on with such a lady of breeding and quality without there being a means to an end. Otherwise he risks severely damaging her reputation."
"Do not be foolish!" Another man chimed in. "It appears that Lord Ice has marked Lady Fire for himself! He will not stand on any interference. It is rumored the man has ambitions." The two men moved away from William, following a servant carrying a tray laden with mugs of flip, continuing their gossip.

William's desire rode him fiercely; his eyes narrowing speculatively scanning the crowd for a woman he suspected would be more than willing to be seduced this evening. He had received several subtle and not so subtle invitations from randy widows and bored young matrons, whose dottering indulgent husbands' prowess in the bed room left a lot to be desired. They were hot to engage in some carnal amusement with a dashing young officer such as him.
He would have no trouble arranging a quick tryst. Lady Stewart's mansion was large; there were many dark and secret corners one could snatch away to for a clandestine fuck, if one wished. He would only be appeasing his physical needs, however and he knew it. It was her that he wanted, he thought moving about in the intricate figures of the dance, turning to change partners as the dance required, and finding himself dancing once more with the object of his obsession, his heart skipping a beat when their fingers touched pure unadulterated lust dancing down his spine.
"My Lady Fire we meet once more, such a pleasure." He murmured as they walked about in a circle their hands clasped together.
"Sir Lancelot." Mary acknowledged him. "How are you finding Madame Stewart's ball? It is to your liking?"
"Quite well, if I had more opportunities to stand up with a particular young lady I may be enjoying it much more. Alas, she cannot spare even a wee flame for a poor chevalier."
"We have traveled down this path before, sir; I care not to venture there. Have you found New York to your liking since you arrived? How do the amusements available compare as to those in London? Is that not from whence you came? Do the colonial coffee shops and bookshops compare favorably to those in the Empire's capital?" Mary made polite conversation as befitting a young lady of Quality. "I have found New York most pleasing and delightful. The women are the most beauteous I have
beheld especially those transplanted from other colonies. The young women from Massachusetts Bay- Boston, in particular put the others to shame. Learned and lovely, they can converse knowledgably on Cicero and Homer whilst being expertly accomplished in all the housewifely and womanly arts, at least those of my acquaintance.” William replied.

"Such paragons! Do not allow the ladies of New York hear you speak thusly." Mary chided with a smile. He could be charming when he was not being generally despicable- attempting to seduce her, lure her away from John. Irrepressible rogue!

"Promise to keep my secret?" He inquired, his ocean blue eyes flirtatious. Mary hesitated.

"Oh, my dear lady, please do not leave me on tender hooks!” He pleaded.

"I believe that unmarried ladies of New York are entitled to know of the regard that a gentleman such as you holds them." Mary replied sharply. She leaned toward him. "Though I understand that you are not the only Englishman to succumb to the charms of an independent New England girl." Mary said, watching as Lady Richmond, dressed as Harvest, tossed her head, thrusting her bosoms beneath John's gaze, allowing him to view more than was considered proper even for a widow as the pair danced a few feet away. Mary knew that John had not chosen Lady Richmond as his partner. He had asked Georgiana Allerton- the lady Lieutenant Brandon fancied. As Mary had been partnering Tarleton-who else could be dressed as Hermes? - When the dance forced them to change partners.

Mary could read the veiled irritation in the major's face. He was clearly having none of the woman's attempts at flirtation. Lady Richmond was notorious. Mary knew her not so subtle pursuit of several of the young officers was the butt of crude jokes, several of which, Mary had overheard were incredibly vulgar. The woman was past her prime- not ageing well, employing vast quantities of cosmetics in an attempt to recapture her youth, paying young men to service her from what Mary had heard from the officers' gossip. They tended to be indiscreet and rather loud whilst enjoying their port, sherry and gentlemen's' talk after dinner. John had reprimanded them several times for their lewd talk reminding them to mind their manners, that there was a young unmarried woman living beneath their roof. Mary smiled at the memory of how they had all become rather solicitous and incredibly polite after one particular cross set down from the major one evening.

The woman was being insufferable! John thought to himself as they turned about the dance floor. She would not cease with her insinuations and attempts to brush herself suggestively against him. Had she not learnt for his first refusal? He prayed that one of the other officers would soon be forced to partner her in the dance when they changed once more.

"Certainly you have not had the opportunity to engage in intimate amusement whist playing nursemaid to the Lady Mary Ludlow? It has been noted how constantly you are in her company, Sir. How her Boston Sensibilities must leave you cold."

"Quite the contrary, Lady Richmond, I have found that I have a rather spirited young lady to contend with." John countered, politely, the corners of his mouth lifting in a small smile when the woman huffed in disappointment. "Sparkling with intelligence and geniality, strong opinions that verge on the positively rebellious but nothing that an officer in His Majesty's army cannot temper with charm and affection. She has been quite a challenge!"

Lady Richmond crinkled her nose. She was getting nowhere with her quarry. "I suppose." She dismissed, her eyes shooting daggers at the young lady she imagine Mary to be, dancing with Sir Lancelot.

It was soon time to go into supper. As at the van Lieden's dinner party, John and Mary found that they were dining partners.

"It appears that Lady Stewart fancies Mister Josiah Wedgwood." John whispered in Mary's ear indicating the dinner plates referencing their first formal meeting those weeks ago when he had made mention of the Eglatine roses on Katrina van Lieden's dinner service.

"I thoroughly intend to order a complete service from London for my trousseau or would you prefer that our dinner service come from France?" She whispered.

"Certainly not!" He whispered back. "Order whatever it is that you wish from Mister Wedgwood in
London unless My Lady wishes to avail herself of one of the services left by a fleeing wealthy rebel. I will leave the decision to you, My Dear. I know that I may trust your judgment. I will view the final choice and offer my opinion when your decision is made. "John said quickly hoping not to be overheard. One did not discuss such domestic issues in public at a party. "We will be requiring a silver service, as well." He added with a wink and a smile.

"Yes, Major. Shall I have the silversmith send you the bill?" She whispered, returning his smile. "Lady Stewart has surpassed herself. The masquerade is a resounding success!" One of the gentlemen seated across from Mary exclaimed requiring her attention. "Far more lively than Lady Richmond's party several nights past."

"Perhaps it is the inclusion of the bachelor officers of His Majesty's army and navy? They are a merry lot!" One of the ladies nearby offered.

"A vast quantity of merry bachelor officers does much to enliven the atmosphere of any party." Mary said.

"Especially those under the command of the Howe brothers in New York, they are a pack of light hearted rogues." John added causing those about him to laugh.

"All desirous to enjoy the winter amusements to be afforded them in the city." The gentleman stated. He leaned his head over the table. "And the young ladies, eh?" He said with a lascivious look, winking pointedly at John.

"What is one to do but amuse oneself with the flowers of New York womanhood? The ladies are ripe and desirous of the attention and opportunity to be courted by a selection of His Majesty's Finest." John said.

"But how many Provincial young ladies will land officers as husbands? They are considered fine enough to amuse oneself with whilst on campaign but the young women that they would consider to marry are aristocratic- daughters of or other female relations of peers." One of the young ladies posed.

"An officer requires a well connected wife if he is to advance in the army or navy especially if he has ambitions. They Lady Mary Ludlow's future husband will be most fortunate." One of the gentlemen nearby opined.

"Having been privy to My Lady's selection of potential spouses I would be of the opinion that she is most fortunate, choosing between the handsomest men in His Majesty's army and navy. We should all be so lucky to choose whether we wished to have Major John Andre or Captain Lord Christian Nicholls as our life mate." One of the young ladies stated.

"Whether the officer is pleasing to look at means nothing if the pair does not suit." One of the other young ladies sniped.

General Howe, dressed as the Roman Emperor chuckled. "Oh! They suit!" He muttered taking a sip of his champagne. "I hear that a Bill of Attainder has been issued against Young Henry Phipps. He is being kept in a gaol nearby. His father has moved the family to Bedford. The mansion will now be available. It is well appointed and furnished."

John glanced over at Mary, leaning close. "I will make inquiries." He assured her. Since they were to be married they needed a home. The Phipps Mansion would be perfect.

"Thank you!" She mouthed. Henry Phipps did not have the most pleasant of reputations and his family was known in the city for their arrogance and snobbery though Madame Phipps had been a grand hostess and had given fabulous parties. Mary did not feel that much remorse at the possibility of she and John setting up their first home together in the large mansion.

"Phipps will hang! The fool was caught receiving stolen goods!" One of the gentlemen added a chorus of agreements flitting about the table.

"Ladies, what manner of amusements shall we employ to enjoy? Can any claim the same accuracy with a snowball that the Lady Mary Ludlow possesses? Or shall we plan plays, toboggan parties, and sleigh rides?" John asked keen to change the subject matter as the soup was served.

"No ice skating? We would ice skate on the Charles River when it would freeze over." Mary said taking up her soup spoon, dipping it into the rich creamy sherry laced New England style clam chowder that had been served along with platters of corn bread and sweet butter. Their glassed filled
with a dry Riesling from Hesse to accompany it.

Taking a spoonful, John savored the taste of the chowder on his tongue. He had enjoyed several bowls of the hearty soup and corn bread at British Headquarters since Mary had come to stay. It was quickly becoming one of his favorites. "What of another sleigh ride and a winter picnic?" John asked. "However, skating on certain portions of the Hudson River could be enjoyable. I would wait until the cold holds for several days. I daren't risk losing you if you fell through the ice." He told her, caressing her with his eyes bringing another spoonful of soup to his mouth.

Mary blushed, her cheeks staining a pretty pink at his compliment.

The dinner progressed apace they dined on all nature of delicacies including turkey, all manner of smoked meats, roast beef, braised carrots in butter and brown sugar, peas with pearl onions and cream, turnips and squash mashed together and laced with maple syrup. There were two rice dishes—a risotto and a wild rice with dried herbs and spices and fresh cottage loaves of bread from the ovens. There were several of the finest vintages of wine and more champagne to wash it all down with.

Lady Stewart did not scrimp on what she offered her guests.

Mary ate a sampling of everything watching as the gentlemen heaped their plates savoring and enjoying each morsel of the delicious meal.

When midnight came the guests unmasked, amused and gently shocked to find out which one of their friends had been dressed in which costume.

More dancing followed, Mary and John partnering one another several more times inciting more speculation and gossip regarding their relationship as the announcement of their betrothal had not yet been made, the women whispering behind their fans and hands.

"It isn't fair!" Jane Fairfax whined tears glistening in her eyes. "The only reason he pays court to her is because General Howe ordered him to!" She huffed, casting her eyes about for Captain Lord Kent who was presently partnering Melissa Alton in a lively country dance.

"The reason that he pays court to her is because he is smitten with her, you foolish stupid girl!" Lady Stewart murmured under her breath attempting to hide her disgust. Jane Fairfax was a spoilt spiteful little bitch. Elspeth Stewart knew what Miss Jane Fairfax had been engaging in on her knees with Lieutenant Andre the other evening. He was not the first young man Jane Fairfax had entertained thusly. Her father's wealth would not protect her reputation. The little slut was becoming increasingly indiscreet.

The dance ended, Lady Stewart turned almost colliding with the Lady Mary and Major Andre.

"Oh, My Dear Child, you are looking a touch pale let me have Winchester send someone to fetch your carriage. Major Andre will you see her home?" Lady Stewart asked, knowingly. She had lived long enough and knew enough of smitten lusty young men to ascertain when he wished to be alone with his inamorata. It was plain from the look in his cobalt colored eyes the major wished to be engaging in more than dancing with the vivacious young woman standing beside him.

"Yes, of course, Lady Stewart." John answered catching on immediately to what the lady was about.

Lady Stewart motioned for her butler.

Several minutes later, dressed in their capes, Mary holding a fox fur muffler in hand, John was assisting her into their carriage, his palm resting possessively against the small of her back, making certain that her foot did not slip as she climbed into the carriage. They settled in beside one another. John tucking a blanket about them, placing a hot brick wrapped in a wool needlepoint cover at her feet. He rapped his knuckles against the ceiling, indicating the driver to move on.

"Are you comfortable? You aren't chilled?" He asked.

"If I were chilled I am certain that you would find the means to warm me." She replied looking up at him in that way she had that aroused him and sharpened his senses, stroked his male pride.

His eyes glittered mischievously in the moonlight cast inside through the carriage window. "Are you? What manner would I employ?" He inquired.

"We are in a closed carriage; you do have my reputation to think of though we are betrothed." She mused.

"So?" He prompted.

"Kisses, hot, burning, fiery kisses that would leave me breathless and trembling with anticipation."
She replied.
"Anticipation of?"
"What you were going to do next."
"What would you desire I do next?" He drew her down that path with him.
"After the kissing?"
"Yes, Sweetheart, after the kissing. What would come afterward? Caressing? Would you like me to touch you?"
She swallowed hard. Her mouth dry as dust, her breathing ragged her body suddenly feverish.
"Yes!" She knew it was wrong but she wanted him to touch her. She wanted to feel his hands all over her, caressing her, giving her exquisite pleasure.
He read the asking in her eyes when a shaft of moonlight briefly illuminated her face, the naked need unmistakable. She could not conceal it.
"Here and now? Shall I touch you now, in this carriage? Do you want me to, Mon Ange?" He asked.
"I... John, please..." Her cheeks were on fire, the way he was gazing at her, his eyes burning with passion and raw desire- he was making love to her with his eyes. In this carriage! "If I... We will be home soon!" She protested answering the unspoken question between them.
"I can ask the driver to take the long way..." He offered, smiling wickedly.
"I am expected."
"Would you rather that I take you in the comfort of your bed? I do owe you a serenade."
"Do you have the patience to wait?"
"Do you?"
"The scandal if we... Here!" Her implication was clear. They are talking about us already, Darling, saying, one would imagine, the most wickedly lascivious things. Are you warm or burning?"
"Come close and ascertain for yourself." She flirted. Good Gracious! She could not resist him!
"Oh, I thoroughly intend to! But what should I do if I find you burning? I do not know if I can exercise restraint. If I do not exercise restraint, if the driver does not take the long way home... Quell horror! The fear of another scandal! Whatever shall we do? You know that I intend to make you my bride before the next month is out. I was considering Saint Valentine's Day- the day set aside for lovers. Does that please you? What are your thoughts? I realize that does not give you much time to order and be fitted for your trousseau nor does it give us much time to find and furnish a new home. Do not fret, Sweetheart, I am certain that a bit of extra coin will serve us well. I am also quite adept at dealing with merchants."

January 7, 1777
Somewhere in New York City

Admiral Sir William Clark kissed a path along Philomena's naked spine, chafing is whiskers against her skin, making her squeal and giggle with delight between what she was reading out aloud to him from that morning's paper. He had sought her out after Lady Stewart's masquerade. The pair of them spending the last several hours fucking wildly.
"NOOOOOO!!!!!!!" She suddenly shrieked, her eyes widening in shock. "I do not believe it! It cannot be true!" She screamed, shaking her head back and forth, eyes riveted on the page. Her hand holding the paper trembling causing it to flutter.
"What is it?" The admiral asked, peaking his head over his mistress's shoulder.
"THIS!" Philomena could not conceal the anguish in her voice from her lover, point to what was causing her so much anxiety.
"Oh, my! Lucky Bastard! That is rather interesting news!" He mused before reading out.
"Engagements: Lady Mary Georgiana Amelia Louisa, beloved daughter of Their Graces the Duke
and Duchess of Sutherland to Major John Andre of His Majesty's 54th Regiment of Foot, son of the late Anthony Andre, London and Mrs. Marie Louise Andre, London. To which union His Grace has gladly given his consent."

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXIII
Once again, because one can never be too courteous when someone does one a good turn, my continued gratitude to the lovely administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story. Thanks to Truth Universally Acknowledged for more great conversation. If you have a moment, please take some time to read her story, The General's Treasure (which is also part of this fandom). It comes highly recommended by this author.

Not too many notes and insights this time:
Lieutenant Andre is getting up to his usual mischief. He indicates a preference for the Ladies of the New England Colonies. Mary makes note that he is not the only Andre man that feels that way.
Lady Richmond makes another effort at seducing the Major but is rebuffed.
Mary and John begin have discreet conversation regarding setting up and purchasing their marital home.
It was discussion of Henry Phipps back in Chapter I that prompted Major Andre to kiss Lady Mary in the carriage on the way home from the van Lieden's dinner party. He was a wastrel to begin with but his dirty dealings have landed him afoul of the law and his family in disgrace.
John tells Mary of the date his is considering for their wedding.
The announcement is made!

Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
A Lieutenant's Heartache, The Wicked Flirtations of a Gentleman, Miss Fairfax's Fit, A Tryst in the Library, Ben Gets in His Cups

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XXIV

"Bugger! Fuck! Fuck! Bugger! FUCK! FUUUUCK! FUCKING BUGGER SHIT!" Lieutenant William Andre swore, the sharp blade of his sword severing the head of the straw Continental soldier, his ocean blue eyes snapping with fury as he attempted to ease his white hot rage and misery. Damn his brother to the Eternal Fires of Hell! His mind cursed, the blade stabbing at the straw figure's shoulder sinking deep, quickly withdrawing it, aiming for what would have been the enemy's heart, this time thrusting so hard the sword sunk almost to the hilt. Hoping that, had the soldier been living, that the poor wretch's heart ached and throbbed with agony as much as his did. He was despondent, miserable. How was he to drown his sorrows and dull the pain?

John could not stop smiling at breakfast; taking the gentle ribbing and banter in his charming stride after General Howe had called for all the officers' attention, reading out the Engagement Announcement from the morning paper, fists and hands pounding on the table in approval, his brother receiving congratulations, slaps on the back and all manner of felicitations. They were all envious of the major's Good Fortune, marrying above his station and into a family such as the Ludlows with their vast wealth and influence. He was lucky to have landed such a wife. It made William almost physically ill and incensed to think about it.

His older brother and the Lady Mary were to soon be united in Holy Wedlock, the same young woman that haunted his dreams every night. It had begun as a conquest, a contest; he had never considered that he would end up falling in love with her.

But he had.

The fiery haired Siren had stolen his heart, a heart that was breaking with the knowledge that John was to have her as his spouse and not him. William had attempted to mask his profound disappointment.

Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! He cursed in his head. Another surge of rage traveled through him, William drawing back the sword, stabbing at the straw replica of the enemy. "Ah!" He cried, plunging the blade into his erstwhile opponent's gut, withdrawing it, his shoulders flexing beneath his shirt.

The cool morning air bit against his cheeks, his eyes still snapped with anguish, the void in his stomach hollow and cold. Christ! It hurt! He thought closing his eyes for a brief moment groaning, a low rumble in the back of his throat, yanking his blade out of the figure, sinking it back in to the hilt, brushing the back of his hand over his face pushing away a recalcitrant lock of hair that had fallen over his forehead.

He would be leaving to join his regiment soon. Placing some distance between him and the object of his infatuation may help to ease the dull ache in his chest that would not go away. The poets said that love was a sickness, they were painfully correct and he was afflicted with a malady that did not appear to have a known cure.

His romp with Jane Fairfax and her friend, Anne Jones last evening had only been a temporary release. Both young women certainly performed well enough on their knees, though William had to concede that Jane had the more talented tongue. The pair was eager to please and do whatever he asked them to. The secret alcove in Lady Stewart's private sitting room had been an ideal trysting place as he imagined it would be. The cushion and the bench beneath were comfortable and large enough to accommodate three. He had been clever enough not to keep them away long enough so that their absence was noted. Perfect for amusement, the pair of young ladies was not the sort that he would ever consider marrying. He knew that Jane Fairfax was earning herself a reputation similar to that of Lady Richmond. She was far too free with her favors and was becoming quite well known
amongst the British officers. When the little whore had been servicing him he had been picturing the Lady Mary in his mind. It was her on her knees, her mouth on his cock, her lips sucking him, her face soft and sensual in her passion when he kissed her, sought her heat beneath her skirts, her cries of rapture he heard when he made her spend.

He withdrew the his sword from the straw soldier, sheathing it, striding across the snow dappled grass, the soles of his polished boots leaving prints as he made to the front door, purposely strolling along completely aware that he had an audience watching him through the windows of the Academy.

"Ladies, what has captured your interest so that you cannot tear yourselves away from the windows?" Mary asked.

"Not what but who, Lady Mary!" One of the young girls answered the others giggling and laughing at her response.

"Who then, Miss Graham?" Mary inquired crossing the room to gaze out one of the windows.

"Lieutenant Andre!" One of the other young women gushed, the clutch of other young females about her sighing and simpering.

Seeing Mary at one of the windows with her charges, William flashed a raffish smile, his heart accelerating, the mere sight of her having a most devastating effect on him.

"Young ladies do not stare and simper at officers. It is most improper and a quick way of gaining a reputation as being fast!" Mary said primly, looking about the faces of her students.

"Even the incredibly handsome ones?" One of the young ladies asked.

"Especially the incredibly handsome ones, Miss Grey." Mary replied.

"Do you find Lieutenant Andre as handsome as the Major, My Lady? In your opinion which one is truly the Handsomest Man in His Majesty's Army?"

"Abby!" One of the girls admonished her as all eyes turned to Mary awaiting her answer.

"The Major, of course, Miss Grey, though since they are brothers, the Lieutenant does have his own particular assets that would turn a young woman's head. His great height, he and the Major are about as tall as General Washington in comparison, for one. His visage is rather pleasant to gaze upon, and the length and shape of his legs which do appear to stretch on and on without ceasing but I prefer the Major. Now come away from that window!"

"Though I am delighted that you prefer me over the Lieutenant, as well you should. Whatever affords me the sobriquet of The Handsomest Man in His Majesty's Army in your opinion, Lady Mary?" John asked entering the room, his eyes glittering with mischief.

"Do you not know it is horribly bad manners to appear vain and conceited, Sir?" Mary asked, her cheeks flushing, looking up at him through lowered lashes.

"I believe that you are aware of the answer to that question. It does have much to do with the regard and affection with which I hold you."

"The profound regard and affection with which My Lady holds me has an effect upon your opinion as to my attractions and merits?" John flirted, the corners of his lips lifting in a rakish smile, preening like a peacock beneath her gaze.

"It does." Mary replied.

"My Lady flatters me. I am deeply moved.” He dramatically placed a palm over his heart. Mary stifled a burst of laughter that bubbled at the surface. "Such the gallant!" She remarked. John dipped his head in reverence. "Such the gallant for you, Lady Mary, always for you." He murmured his gaze soft and tender.

"I hope one day that a man will look at me the way Major Andre does the Lady Mary." One of the young ladies sighed.

"They are courting. He is supposed to pay her effusive compliments and flirt. It is all part of the game, remember?" One of the other pupils leaned in to whisper.

"A game that Major Andre won by all accounts."

"Whatever do you mean?"
The announcement, you goose!"
"What announcement?"
"If you were not being punished for your infraction of behaving too forward toward Colonel Tarleton you would not have missed breakfast and the morning paper."
"Can you blame me? The Colonel is an adorable scamp. The Lady Mary has even said as much."
"The Lady Mary engaged in harmless banter with the Adorable Scamp she does not risk her reputation by being a brazen coquette, offering the milk for free."
The young lady flushed with shame. A fast girl even from a Good Family such as hers would not make a good match especially if she were seen as an officer's leavings not to mention how it would affect her sisters' prospects at making advantageous marriages. She would end up a spinster or worse. Marriage prospects dashed! "He was prepared to purchase! What is this about Major Andre and the Lady Mary?"
"Read the newspaper. Let's just say that insufferable snob, Miss Jane Fairfax will be furious and she will not be the only one." The young lady giggled. Jane Fairfax was a haughty, pretentious bitch that needed to be put in her place as were several of her set that had been pursuing Major John Andre with the intent of snaring him.
"Are we to have another dancing lesson? Oh, do say yes! Please! Oh, please!" One of the other young ladies pleaded.
John chuckled, glancing at Mary. "Shall we, My Lady? How could we refuse these darling eager faces?" He asked.
"Another dancing lesson, are we to demonstrate more proper conversation?" Mary answered his question with one of her own.
"Proper flirtation." John clarified. He winked. "Shall we?" He extended one of his hands to her which she took. "Ladies, this is an expansion of the dancing lesson of several weeks past. Assuming that the young gentleman has indicated interest through the proper social channels and has expressed his intent and desire to court one and has received permission from the appropriate male relation be it a father, elder brother, uncle, etcetera, whilst one is dancing one is allowed to engage in a degree of discreet flirtatious banter."
"Provided it does not become wicked or suggestive." Mary added.
John pursed his lips pouting. "But being slightly dangerously wicked is half the fun. One must master the skill." He remarked.
"Major Andre is an expert. Trust me!" Mary shot back unable to resist even though her comment could be construed as overly familiar indicating that they did, indeed, share a certain degree of intimacy that may not be considered proper. She knew that the young ladies were aware that the incredibly good looking army officer was her most ardent suitor that many were aware that the pair was finally betrothed to be married.
The girls laughed.
John clucked his tongue in mock disapproval. "An expert at flirtation or being wicked, Lady Mary?"
"In my experience or the general opinion, Major Andre?"
"Your personal experience because your regard means far more that what others believe of me. So where does my expertise lie? You must not fret of being accused of improper behavior or being indiscreet due to the nature of our relationship." He assured her.
Placing an index finger against her lower lip, she made a show of pondering her answer. "Wickedly flirtatious." She opined.
"Is that so? Might I inquire as to how My Lady came to that conclusion?"
"You honestly have to quiz me, Sir? Having come to know you, Major Andre, over the last several months and been subject to your ardent attentions and been made privy to examples of your teasing wit how could I not ascertain that you are most wickedly flirtatious though I am pleased that your behavior is confined to me. I am delighted that you are most courteous to the other young ladies but all your regard is focused upon the young lady you are courting."
"But of course, Lady Mary. It is most proper that I pay you my addresses and constrain and restrict my attentions to My Lady." He pulled her close against him.
"Much to the consternation of all the unmarried and several of the married ladies in New York."
Miss Graham whispered.
Their bodies were so close, she could feel the rough wool of his waistcoat brush against her, feel the heat emanating from him, the sheer strength and hardness of his body. Good Gracious! How he never ceased to arouse and awaken her senses! Would he ever stop making her acutely aware of what a most desirable young lady she was and that he wanted her? His naked passion for her plain for all to see in his eyes.
"What manner of dance requires the lady and gentleman to have their bodies so close together?"
Abby Grey asked.
"An an Italian form of the Allemande that the Dancing Master has not taught yet." John lied all of his attention focused on the woman that had captured his heart, his very soul, brushing his fingertips against the indentation of her tiny waist sending gloriously delicious chills up and down her spine. She bit her lower lip to stifle a moan that threatened to slip through her lips.
John grasped her other hand, squeezing it gently. "When one is courting, one can be slightly scandalous but not enough to shock society." He explained. "The close proximity of the lady and her gentleman lends itself to all manner of flirtatious banter that can be shared without being overheard. Are you still finding New York to your liking Lady Mary?"
"Yes. Very much so."
"And the officers are you still enjoying their company?"
"They are most gallant and attentive. There is one officer in particular."
"I am delighted to hear that you still have a fine opinion of the gentlemen of His Majesty's Army. What of this particular officer? Whatever has he done to capture your attention?"
"He happens to be the finest looking man I have ever laid eyes upon but it is not just his appearance that has turned my head. Something in his character, that upon further acquaintance, I find that I am completely unable to ignore, it draws me to him like a moth to a flame."
"Does it now? What is it that this finest man you have ever laid eyes upon draws you to him? A young lady of your fine character and reputation must find something within him that is worthy of turning your head. Whatever may that be? His wit? The way he gazes at you?"
"He epitomizes all that a gentleman ought and should be." Mary replied. "He sounds like a virtual paragon." John quipped. "Oh, he is." Mary assured him.
"Is he aware that you possess such a fine opinion of him? Any gentleman to be held in such high regard by such an esteemed lady as you is the most fortunate of men."
They were so transfixed by one another that they did not hear William Andre enter the room, standing just over the threshold his features set, watching the pair spar back and forth engaging in their Dance of Courtship, their pupils dilated, faces gently flushed, the sexual electricity between them palpable in the air, virtually crackling between them.
The manner in which the Lady Mary looked at his older brother tore at William's heart. If, just for a moment, she would look at him the way that she was gazing at John, with her heart in her eyes, he would consider himself blessed.
"I believe that he is aware of my high regard. He, most certainly, is plain as to his feelings for me."
"Does that please you?"
"More than anything!" She whispered badly honest, lost completely in his eyes. IS that even proper?" Miss Graham asked Abby Grey watching her headmistress and the British Major.
"I believe that Major Andre is presenting us an example of the Wicked Flirtation of a Gentleman."
Abby opined. "Yes, please!" Miss Graham said with a sigh. The Lady Mary was the most fortunate of women!

Later that morning
Somewhere in New York City
Jane Fairfax lay in her four poster bed, reliving in her mind what had occurred at Lady Stewart's masquerade ball.

After their love play last evening, she was quite certain Lieutenant Andre would be asking to speak with her father or at least she could hold his attentions whilst she pursued his elder brother. She thrilled at the thought of entertaining both Andre brothers - one as her lover and the other as her husband - that was if she could eradicate Major Andre from the apparent thrall of the Lady Mary Ludlow. She would have to find a way to get him alone and suggest servicing him. What man could resist her oral talents? General Randall said she had the skills of an accomplished courtesan. She had had the practice, entertaining the cocks of a good portion of General Howe's officers, all those interested in a dalliance with a pretty young lady.

"Miss Jane, your hot chocolate." Britt, Jane's maid announced coming in carrying a tray, arranged upon it was a pot of hot chocolate, a cup, toast, jam and a small dish of freshly churned sweet butter. "Bring it here!" Jane snapped at the maid. "Has my father finished with the morning papers?"

"Not all of them, Miss, but he sent this one up." Britt replied laying the tray across her mistress's legs after Jane sat up in bed, Britt plumping the pillows, pouring a mug of hot chocolate, offering the paper which Jane snatched from her hand immediately searching through for the Social Announcements: Births, Engagements, and Deaths.

"That bitch! That wicked bitch!" She shrieked, tossing the paper on the bed, sweeping the tray off her lap, sending the pot, mug, and the food all clattering to the floor. "No! No! No!" Frustrated angry tears shone in her eyes. "He is MINE! Major Andre was to MARRY ME! He only paid court to the Lady Mary Ludlow because General Howe ordered him to! He does not want her!" Jane screamed launching into a tantrum, tossing the blankets and quilt off, jumping out of bed, her night rail swirling about her as he frantically dashed to her dressing table, sweeping all the contents upon it onto the floor with a shriek of despair. "He does not want her! He does not! He is only paying court to her because he has to! He wants ME! We danced together at that soiree two months ago! He wants me! Not HER! Not that Ginger Haired Bitch! NO!" She screamed, tears pouring down her cheeks, her eyes darting back and forth across the room looking for something else to toss in her pique of anger. She alighted on the newspaper that had fallen on the floor, snatching it up, she began to tear it to bits, tossing the pieces into the fire as she sobbed.

"Now, now, Miss Jane, do not fret. There are other men." Britt attempted to soothe her mistress. "I do not want another man! I want Major Andre!" Jane whined through her tears. "Papa was to arrange it! He promised!"

Britt did not have the heart to tell her young mistress that when approached by Mister Fairfax regarding his daughter, Major Andre had refused the offer to court Jane saying that he was otherwise engaged and if he was not, Miss Jane Fairfax was the last young lady in the Colonies that he would consider as a potential wife. Mister Fairfax was painfully aware that the Major was not interested in his spoilt, spiteful and incredibly vain daughter. Her meanness and exclusion of other young ladies in the New York Social circles in which she moved had not gone unnoticed by Major Andre and his friends. A gentleman could not over look such flaws in a young lady's character.

"Major Andre did speak with Mister Fairfax, Miss Jane." Britt informed her.

"What did he say? That he was only doing his duty? Poor Man!" She sniffed.

"No, Miss, the Major told Mister Fairfax that he did not fancy blondes." Britt told her mistress. "Not fancy blondes? How could he?" Jane was incredulous. She knew that Major Andre's last mistress, that actress, Miss Hallam, was blonde.

"Told your papa quite honestly that he had developed and inclination for fiery haired New England Girls especially ones from Boston." Britt explained.

"New England Girls?" Jane shrieked. "NO! NO! NO! He cannot! He does not! That Bitch! I hate her! I hate her! I HATE her!" She cried through another torrent of tears tossing all the pillows that were on the bed onto the floor, stamping her feet shrieking and raging. "That flame haired cow! How dare she! How dare she steal MY MAJOR!"
"Careful now! Let me help you!" John exclaimed watching Mary stretch up one of her arms going up on tip toe, attempting to reach a book that sat on a high shelf. "Do we not have enough to read? Or did you find a favorite tome that we neglected when we moved your books next door to Headquarters, hmm?" He asked coming up behind her, his front brushing against her back, feeling the luscious swell of her buttocks beneath her skirts and petticoats, making his cock twitch in anticipation and need. "Will you reward me if I get it for you?"

"A reward? I thought that you were being gallant, fetching my book of your own accord, Johnny! What would you desire? A kiss for your exertions? Is that fair and sufficient reward?"

"The door is locked and we are not due at the Phipps' mansion until later this afternoon..." John offered a rakish glint in his eyes.

"What of the callers? Would they not be scandalized if they were told we were indisposed?"

"I can be quick if the occasion warrants it but I fear that you are proving to be far too desirable to resist!"

"La, John! Were you not satisfied enough last evening?" She asked leaning into him, brushing her backside tantalizingly against him, teasing and enticing.

"That was last evening, Cherie! I cannot get enough of you! I never tire of wanting you!"

"My students..."

"Are presently occupied at their lessons, we have not fear of being disturbed." "The officers..."

"Know enough to interrupt," He assured her, his breath fanning hot against the side of her neck, his voice rough and seductive.

"What of my book?" She whispered. "I have something far more enjoyable than reading in mind." He assured her, dipping his head, feathering hot burning kisses along the chords of her throat from the slope of her shoulder to the sweet hollow beneath her earlobe, his strong arms wrapping about her, drawing her into the protection and comfort of his embrace. His teeth nibbled along her ear making her gasp with pleasure.

"John!" She pleaded, grasping one of his forearms to steady her.

"Yes, Love?" He chuckled lightly, completely charmed with her reaction. "What do you fancy?" His fingertips danced lightly over her embroidered stomacher, her stomach fluttering beneath his expert touch.

"Oh!" She breathed, the pad of his thumb stroking the swell of her breast, dipping beneath the low cut bodice of her gown dashing over her nipple, it puckering to a taut peak beneath his caresses. A low throaty moan escaped from between her lips, "John!" She crooned, fierce excitement racing through her body.

"I told you this would be much more enjoyable than reading." "In the library?"

"Oh, Darling! When we are married, I have every intention of taking you in all the rooms of our new home." He assured her.

"Even the servants' rooms?"

"Well, every room appropriate to..."

"Is that a promise?"

"You have my solemn word."

"That could take all winter!"

John's laughter was low and deep rumbling up through is chest. "Oh, I plan on it!"

"Do you now?"

"Mmmm." He replied his deft fingers working at the fastenings of her stomacher. "We can practice here, in the library, until we have a home of our own. You know what they say about practice, May? It makes for perfection. "He teased.

"I am so fortunate then to have you as my partner, Major; I am assured unspeakable delights and
pleasures at your hands. The strive for perfection will be most enjoyable."
"Shall we put your expectations to the test? I want you, Cherie! I want you so desperately I ache, so
very badly, so very, very badly!" He loosened his grip about her ever so slightly, allowing her to turn
about within his embrace brushing her front enticingly against his.
"If you want me so desperately then take me! Show me some of those unspeakable delights and
pleasures. There was something that you did to me last night in my bed. I cannot stop thinking about
it."
"May..." He warned.
"Do not fret, Johnny Dearest! I will only ever be so forward with you in private."
He nodded. "We will find a happy compromise between naughty and respectable that will leave me
the envy of all the officers and not ruin your reputation. Now tell me what I did to you last night in
your bed that you cannot get out of that wickedly lovely head of yours? Shall I hasten a guess?" He
asked walking forward forcing her to move backward.
"Yes!" He had her inches from the chair as she would be forced to sit in it.
"Something that shall require me to kneel, in this instance, between your legs, slip my hands beneath
your skirts." He said moving those scant few inches making her lower her into the plush cushion of
the winged back. John kneeling before her, the leather of his boots scrunching in the quiet room, the
tips of his fingers slithering up her legs from ankles to knees lifting her skirts and petticoats exposing
her to his heated gaze. "Like this?"
"Just like this." She agreed.
"What happens next? Do my fingers move up your thighs as you move them apart?" He asked
moving a wee bit closer, watching her squirm. He could feel the burning heat between her legs. She
was on fire for him, scorching hot.
She nodded. "Higher, John." She whispered watching him intently. "Ooooh!" The tips of his fingers
slid over the smooth soft skin of her inner thighs.
"Touch me!" She demanded. "There! Yes! Oh! Right there!" Her eyes fluttered closed as the pad of
his thumb passed over her incredibly sensitive nub of flesh.
"Last night I used my mouth, May. Shall I use it now?"
"Please..." She pleaded her teeth worrying her lower lip, the pointed tip of her tongue darting across
it to moisten it, thrusting her hips up, offering herself to him.
"Oh, Sweetheart... Place your thighs on my shoulders. You like the feel of the wool and epaulette
against your bare skin, don't you? And my tongue here?" He slashed the pointed tip against the very
core of her making her gasp loudly at the sensation.
He chuckled inhaling her salt sweet fragrance. "Like that, don't you?" Christ! She was intoxicating.
"Yes! Far too much, you rogue!" She breathed, running the fingers of a hand through his hair from
his forehead back ward pressing his head further into her. His tongue continuing its sensual assault
on her, Mary's toes curling in her shoes, her thighs tensing as she gripped the upholstered arms of
chair to steady herself. "OOOOOHhhhh, Jooooohhhhhhhnnnn!" She moaned. What was he doing to
her with his tongue? Oh, Good Lord! Was he now nibbling her with his teeth? He was devouring
her, taking every bit of her, branding her, marking her. She would not want anyone else after he was
through. She doubted there was a man that would ever make her feel like John Andre did at this
moment, loved, cherished, adored and completely possessed. His mouth, teeth, lips and tongue doing
the most exquisitely intimate and wicked things to her. A few more nips and licks and she would
come apart. "Oh, God! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! John! Oh, Please! Oh, Please! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!" She shattered,
her orgasm hitting her with incredible force, her hips bucking.
He did not wait until her tremors has subsided before her had had risen, swiftly undoing his breeches
and tending to his linen he withdrew his engorged organ thrusting it inside her, wrapping her legs
about his hips. "Oh, Christ!" She was so bloody tight! He allowed himself a moment to enjoy the
delicious feeling of her soft heat encasing his great shaft before he began moving in and out of her,
flexing and contracting his hips and buttocks as he moved against her, driving himself to the hilt.
She cried out, feeling him on all sides, stretching and filling her. It felt so good his cock inside her!
She released her grip on the upholstered arms of the winged back dancing them up his chest,
grasping the facings of his scarlet coat causing his organ to delve that much further into her, deep against her very womb.

"Oh, Sweetheart, you are perfect!" He ground out, pulling her legs that much higher about him, a dainty heel of one of her feet pressing into the small of his back. John increasing his pace, feeling her tighten about him.

"Tell me how that feels, May?" He demanded, withdrawing his cock almost completely out of her then thrusting home to the hilt, sheathing himself deep within her.

"Oooohhh." Her passion glazed eyes met his. "It... I..." She was temporarily devoid of speech for a moment completely lost in the pair of them and their fevered lovemaking. "As it always feels." "How does it always feel, May?" He asked looking deep into her sapphire colored orbs, his gaze smoldering , his cobalt blue locking with hers.

"Wonderfully amazing, you take me to Paradise each and every time." "Wonderfully amazing, hmmm? It is my duty to please you!" He stated. "Does this please you, May? To be taken in the library?"

"Yes! It pleases me. It pleases me to be taken by you in any place that you choose, John." She replied, arching her back out of the chair to meet him thrust for thrust and things became fast and furious between them, Mary's head falling back against the back of the chair, closing her eyes, gently moaning and crying out as he brought her closer and closer, her thighs tensing. "John!" She breathed. "Oh, GOD! John, please!" She tossed her head back and forth feeling the walls of her passage clamp about him as a vice.

His head buried in the crook of her neck, nuzzling her, nipping at her with his teeth, growling low and sensually in the back of this throat, making her giggle and cry out in delighted alarm by turns. "Do you like to be taken here in this chair and fucked senseless? Come for me, My Wicked Little Rebel!" He rumbled in her ear, biting the lobe with his teeth. He slammed into her one last time, exploding inside her, his hips furiously jerking against her as he spent, roughly turning her head to his, his mouth claiming hers in a fierce and demanding kiss, catching Mary's cries as another violent orgasm slammed into her.

She grabbed at him to steady herself as the spasms shook through her body.

"Easy, Love! I will catch you!" He assured her smiling, delighted with her intense physical reaction to their intimate expression of their love for one another, grasping her, holding her close against him, his mouth devouring hers with hot passionate kisses as she calmed.

John finally withdrew his cock from her, tended to his personal linen, buttoned his breeches.

"Did I leave you incandescently happy?" He asked looking down at her, love and tenderness shining in his eyes. The corners of his mouth turning up in a contented smile. He suspected he had from her reactions but he delighted in hearing her say so. It stroked his male pride.

"Always, John, always incandescently, brilliantly." She whispered her voice low and seductive. Her gently flushed skin and bright glittering eyes giving indications that she appreciated and desired his carnal attentions.

His smile broadened into a grin. "Brilliantly, you say?" He asked, helping her set herself back to rights, their fingers tangling as he helped her refasten her stomacher. "Careful." he warned the pair of them laughing.

"La, John! You have become such a proficient maid, so adept at undressing and dressing me." "Ah, vixen! you have become a skilled valet by contrast." He returned helping her draw her skirts down, smoothing them, assisting her out of the chair, drawing her to him, her body brushing against his. "Are you still interested in that book?" He teased.

"What book?" She asked innocently. "I do not recall being interested in a book. If I was, I was promptly and deliciously distracted." She added making John laugh.

Several Days Later
Continental Encampment
"And where, pray tell, did you acquire this adorable creature, gentlemen?" The Commander of the Continental Army asked several of his junior officers that presently surrounded him, glancing from
one face to the other. "Come now! Out with it! It did not just materialize in camp. A spoil from the latest forage behind enemy lines?" Washington asked in his understated way. "The pup belongs to someone. He is clearly wearing a fine leather collar. A breed of this calibre does not belong to one's average laborer. Have you all been struck dumb? Well, Major Bradford? You were out on that patrol."
"Yes, Excellency, I was." Major Bradford answered.
"Do not be impertinent, Sir!" Washington barked. I have not been living under a rock, Major. I hear the talk and rumors. I am well aware that this English setter pup was a gift to the Lady Mary Ludlow from Major John Andre. Now how did you come to acquire him? I would like a quick and clear answer, Bradford!" The major was beginning to try the Commander's patience.
"Yes, Excellency..." Bradford stammered, intimidated by the General's great height and presence.
"Out with it, man! Washington barked.
"The beast found his way behind our lines. I suggested to Major Tallmadge and Captain Hamilton that we attempt to shoo it back toward where the British were but they would have none of it. Major Tal...
"You liar!" Ben spat out. He would not allow Bradford to place the blame on him and Captain Hamilton.
"Major Tallmadge, you take issue with Major Bradford's tale?" Washington asked.
"Yes, Excellency. It is an utter fabrication!"
Bradford glared at Ben, his expression murderous.
"Care to enlighten me to the truth? You do have other witnesses other than Captain Hamilton, here, to co-operand your version of events?"
"Yes, Sir, Lieutenant Brewster and Tench Tilghman." Ben reported.
"Well then, Major Tallmadge," Washington's sharp blue-grey eyes stared directly into Ben's. Go on..."
"Major Bradford thought that it would be a fine jape to snatch the setter, making an indelicate remark regarding the pup's mistress, bragging about his potential reward from a grateful young lady when the creature was returned, saying that he would risk hell-fire and Major Andre's wrath for even a kiss."
"A jape? Stealing a young lady's dog is not one of your college romps. Officers under my command behave with more integrity and decorum. Is Major Tallmadge's telling of the events true, Captain Hamilton?"
"Yes, Sir!" The slightly built good-looking young man replied. "I am most displeased by the blatant lie, Major Bradford. You are aware of the consequences of Conduct Unbecoming to An Officer? I should have you whipped for your insolent behavior, Sir! I will see that you are court martialed. He is a fine specimen, bred to hunt and retrieve fowl."
Washington stated squatting down to stroke George the setter's silky ears. Sensing the large Virginian's great appreciation and affinity for his kind, the pup instantly fell for the man, as much, if not more than he reveled in the affections and attentions of General Howe. George began wiggling and wagging his tail completely captivated by the Continental Commander. Washington smiled. "I cannot fault Major Andre's choice of bride or the companion for his Lady." He stated, "We must return you forthwith. The Lady Mary will be frantic when she finds you have gone missing. We dare not cause any undue distress. Major Tallmadge, our Angel of Mercy has gone and gotten herself affianced to her British Major. We must look to other methods of obtaining supplies and provisions."
"The rumors are true then, Sir?"
"The Engagement Announcement was in the paper. One of our informants sent a copy in their latest dispatch. I pray he proves himself worth of her." Washington said wistfully. "All of our intelligence says the devil is smitten. God help him!" He chuckled. "Major Tallmadge, I will require that you and Captain Hamilton return this darling lad back to his mistress."
Washington stated as George placed his forepaws on one of Washington's thighs leaning up to lick the Rebel Commander's face his tail wagging wildly, he whined with excitement. "Under a White Flag of Truce... Be prepared to leave at
first light. You and Captain Hamilton are free to go. Major is there something amiss?" He added noting Tallmadge's stricken expression, the poor young man looked as though someone had dropped the world on him.

"No, Excellency." Ben lied. "Do I have your leave to go, Sir?"

"Do not fret, Major Tallmadge, she will lead him a merry dance." Washington said referring to the Lady Mary and Major Andre. "Yes, get on with you!"

Tallmadge and Hamilton exited the room, Bradford's eyes following Ben's retreating back, glaring, attempting to intimidate.

Caleb met the pair outside.

"Christ! What happened? You look like hell!" He asked Ben.

"Major Bradford is to be court martialed for baldly lying to Washington."

"That is a bad thing?"

"No! Major Tallmadge just learnt that the Lady Mary Ludlow's engagement was announced."

"Shite, Benny-boy! I told you that you should have shot Andre dead at Princeton!"

"You know the perfect remedy for mending a broken heart? A pretty whore and a lot of drink!"

Hamilton stated.

"I will take the drink!" Ben said instantly warming to the idea. He was desperate to ease the raw ache in his chest.

"We have several bottles of the fine West Indian rum that the Lady Mary sent!" Caleb said, as the three swept into the tent, the pair shared, a brazier blazed in the center warming the space. Caleb went over to a side of the tent ruffling through some items coming up with three mugs and the first bottle of rum, which he promptly uncorked, setting the three mugs down upon a rickety camp table, pouring a glass for each of them, handing them around.

"I do not know about the pair of you but I plan upon getting raging drunk. The announcement of such news calls for imbibing large quantities of this fine West Indian rum from one of the Ludlow's own sugar plantations."

"I wish to propose a toast!" Alex Hamilton slurried slightly, the trio had been drinking for nigh on an hour or two and were well into their cups. They had first toasted the Lady Mary's relations all the way back to Lot or Orkney and were working their way back to the Ancient kings when Ben, who was leading the toasts, had forgotten the line of descent. So not they had decided to toast the bride-to-be, raising their glasses to various portions of her person getting drunker and drunker in the process.

"What were we drinking to now? The Lady Mary's erm... pert little nose?" Caleb asked looking over at Ben. "If I do recall May Ludlow does possess a rather cute nose!" He stated in his drunken haze.

"I was thinking of that pretty mouth of hers." Ben stated, taking a sip from his mug, taking a bottle of the rum on the table and filling it once again. "It was made for kissing!"

"I would imagine that it was made for engaging in much more intimate pursuits than kissing, Tallmadge." Hamilton stated with a lascivious laugh, winking, his meaning clear.

"To the Lady Mary's most talented mouth!" Hamilton toasted raising his glass.

The trio clinked glasses, drinking soundly, filling their mugs once again.

"It is your turn, Caleb, what other portions of the Lady Mary's person shall we toast? I hear from many of the Massachusetts boys in camp that have seen her say that she does have a rather lovely bosom. Shall we toast the Lady Mary's bosom?" Alexander Hamilton asked.

"Aye! A pair of tits that would make a man weep to gaze upon them!" Caleb said.

"Aye! Her lovely breasts! The tiny waist and that delicious plump little arse! Each moon made by God Himself to fit perfectly within a man's palm. Praise the Lord!" Ben stated toasting once more.

"And all His saints and martyrs!" Hamilton added clinking his mug against Ben's.

Mr. Tilghman and Mr. Sackett. come join us! We are toasting portions of the Lady Mary Ludlow's person. What would you raise your glass to Tilghman? We have toasted her eyes, nose, mouth, waist, lovely tits and that delectable little arse!" Ben waved the men into the tent pouring two more mugs handing them to the other two men. Ben was incredibly drunk. Washington had told Tilghman and Sackett to allow the major to drown his heartache and profound disappointment in alcohol with not reprisals. The young man needed his release. He would never refer to a young lady that he so
admired in such a crude fashion. All the lewd talk was due to the mass quantities of rum Ben had
imbibed.
"Her hips, Tallmadge!" Tilghman said.
"Aye! Those hip, we cannot forget about her thighs and most importantly her..." Ben slurred
laughing, stumbling over his words. "That most intimate place!"
"You mean her cunt?" Caleb asked crudely dodging Ben's cuff to his head.
"Watch your tongue!" Ben hissed.
"Sorry, Benny Boy! Did not mean to..." Caleb said, his voice trailing off.
"I say that we drink to the Lady Mary's knees." Mr. Sackett said noting the slight tension between
Tallmadge and Brewster.
"Aye! Do not mind if I do!" Hamilton said clinking his mug against Tilghman's and then Sackett's
the three of them drinking soundly.
"Well, Tilghman, what shall we drink to next, eh?" Ben asked again putting his arm about the other
man.
"The graceful line of the Lady Mary's back, Tallmadge."
"So you have noticed that she had a graceful line to her back, eh, Tench?" Ben asked. "I believe that
toast will require a long drink. What say you, Tilghman? To Mary's graceful back! He cried out
raising his mug then clinking it against Tilghman's, both men taking a long drink as the other men
joined in.
"Shall we toast the Good Fortune of the groom-to-be? That he can consummate their union, find his
way about that luscious body?" Caleb said. "That the Lady Mary proves to be more than a handful
and a bit much for that Bloodybacked bastard to manage?"
"Aye! To Major John Andre! May he find his bride and domestic felicity an intense challenge!" Ben
stated raising his glass, drinking the contents down in one gulp.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXIV

Once again, because one can never be too courteous when someone does one a good
turn, my continued gratitude to the lovely administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page
(https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story and
me over these past several weeks. I am eternally grateful.
Thanks to Truth Universally Acknowledged for more great conversation. If you have a
moment, please take some time to read her story, The General's Treasure (which is also
part of this fandom). It comes highly recommended by this author. I wish thank her
publicly for her friendship and support as I cope with and go through the grief of a loss
in my family.
Notes:
Lieutenant William Andre takes the announcement of his brother's engagement to the
Lady Mary Ludlow very badly.
The Lady Mary catches the young ladies at the Academy staring at him and reprimands
them accordingly. Major Andre then comes in sparking another dancing lesson, this one
is far different than the first seeing as the parties involved are now affianced. John
prompts Mary to divulge her some of her feelings for him which results in some
flirtatious banter.
Jane Fairfax reacts to the engagement announcement very badly. We also learn what a
little sociopath she really is!
John goes to help Mary retrieve a book in the library at the Academy. But reading is the
furthest thing that the major has on his mind as we see from what transpires next. The
poor darlings were due for an explicit love scene. I hope you enjoyed it!
George the setter finds himself in the Continental Encampment. Major William Bradford
tells a lie. Which Ben Tallmadge calls him out on inciting Washington's ire. Washington
succumbs to the charm of the pup. (Can we blame him?). Stating that he will be returned
to the Lady Mary under a White Flag of Truce.
Ben is another that takes the news of the engagement of the Lady Mary Ludlow and
Major John Andre badly. He proceeds to get raging drunk. with Caleb and Hamilton- in
the end Tilghman and Sackett join them.
We have the inclusion of Captain Alexander Hamilton (Taron Egerton) and Tench
Tilghman, who was Washington's secretary (Charlie Hunnam).
Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your
continued interest and praise means the world to me!
Compliments from a Commander, Familial Hospitality, Temporary Truces and Intimate Slow Explorations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XXV

Continental Encampment
Morristown, New Jersey

"How much rum did we drink last night?" Ben asked. Lord! His head hurt, his temples throbbed and it felt as though someone had scraped his eyes with sand and shoved a swath of cotton wool in his mouth.

"Eight bottles between the five of us. The trio of us, you, meself and Alex drank six, two apiece. Ye don't remember toasting the Lady Mary?"

Ben groaned. "My memory recollects to when I attempted her line of descent from Lot of Orkney the Ancient kings then all is a bit of a blur. Tell me that I did not do what I believe that I did? I did do something completely untoward."

Caleb chuckled. "Aye, Benny-boy! Ye did or some other lad possessed ye last night. Ye were not yerself. Toasting the Lady Mary's finely shaped arse."

Ben hung his head in embarrassment, his cheeks flaming, gripping his temples between a thumb and middle finger. "Oh, God! Tell me that I did not do an inventory of her person? Tell me that it was just her... Oh, Sweet Christ! It was every inch..." Ben moaned again.

"Do not be getting at yerself for it. The Lady Mary did not hear a word nor will she ever."

"Damn it! I wish that I had remembered her Line of Descent!" Ben complained.

"Hamilton here rose to the occasion."

Alex managed to smile wanly, tipping his hand at Ben. "I am curious to see this Venus!" He quipped tying a knot in his stock. "Do you believe the Lady Mary will find me pleasing?" He asked turned to Ben and Caleb for their inspection.

"Not with Tall boy and Major Andre about." Caleb said. "Though women are fickle creatures."

"Not the Lady Mary!" Ben defended. "We had best be leaving." He added straightening the facings of his uniform then running his fingers through his hair making certain all of it was neatly caught in his queue, George the setter watching him intently from where he lounged on Ben's camp bed.

"Will I turn her head?" Ben asked.

"Absolutely, much to the consternation of Major John Andre." Hamilton said. "What New England girl with the Lady Mary's intelligence and fine Good Sense can resist a strapping august officer in Continental blue?" He added.

Caleb laughed, the force making him twinge in pain. "It will be worth the trip to see the expression on that Lobster's face when he witnesses his Lady May making cow's eyes at Tall Boy, here!" He
grinned.

"Oh, aye! I would pay good coin to view that!" Hamilton agreed.

"Do not fret about having some lovely young girl to admire you, Hamilton. The Lady Mary owns and runs the finest Dame school in the Colonies which is located right next door to British Headquarters." Caleb explained.

"The Saint Thomas Aquinas Academy for Young Women? I have heard rumor of it. Of course it opened shortly after I left King's College but I heard about the pupils, prettiest bouquet of flowers from the colonies amassed under one roof."

"Oh, aye! Ye we have no trouble finding some young lady to flirt with if ye are of a mind though I hear that the Lady Mary is strict with her pupils especially with a house full of randy Blooybacks living next door." Caleb said.

"As well she should be. Hopefully there has not been an outbreak of Scarlet fever." Alex said. "Though the Lady Mary has, apparently, been infected."

"Are we all prepared to leave?" Ben snapped, motioning to George the setter to get down from the camp bed. Alex's comment regarding the Lady Mary's present affliction had clearly hit a nerve with the tall good-looking major. "We do not wish to get a late start."

The other two mumbled their agreement.

They made their way the short distance to where General Washington was lodged. The Commander having instructed them to meet with him briefly before they left. He was seated at his work table sanding a letter when they were admitted. Brushing the residual sand from the letter, the General brought it closer to him, blowing gently on the paper to dry the last residuals of ink. Satisfied, he folded the missive meticulously in thirds but not before reading out:

General Washington’s compliments to The Lady Mary Ludlow. He does himself the pleasure to return her a dog, which accidentally fell into his hands, and by the inscription on the Collar appears to belong to The Lady Mary Ludlow.

He folded the letter in half. "Good Morning, Gentlemen. Please take this letter and present it to the Lady Mary Ludlow, with our compliments. Unfortunately, present circumstances did not allow acknowledgement of My Lady's day of birth, which was this New Year's Day past and her engagement to Major Andre. It grieves Lady Washington and me that we cannot exercise our duties as the Lady Mary's godparents given the situation between America and Great Britain." The Commander stated profound disappointment clear in his voice. Both Washingtons were devoted to their beautiful, intelligent and vivacious goddaughter. Members of his staff knew how much it pained the general that he had to leave the Lady Mary in New York when the British had taken control of the city the previous September about the same time that he had learnt that the Marquess of Stafford, as Mary's father had then been, had become the Duke of Sutherland. "You understand the gravity of the situation and why none of the British command must ever ascertain Lady Washington and my relation to the Lady Mary Ludlow. I will expect a full report as to how she truly fares."

"Yes, Excellency." The trio chorused.

Washington managed a small smile. "Lady Washington will be most grateful. Get on with you now and Godspeed." He dismissed them. "Wait... I do extend my permission to engage in negotiations for a prisoner exchange. I am willing to send a tenth of the Regulars that Captain Hamilton captured in Nassau Hall back to New York for the remaining Connecticut Dragoons Rogers allowed to survive.
They nodded their assent.

The trio filed out of the room, setting out the door almost colliding with Major William Bradford who sailed impatiently into the Commander's headquarters. "Off to New York? It is a pity that General Washington did not seek to ransom the wee creature. Lord knows what lengths that British Bastard Major Andre would have gone to please his lady. I hear that she is a fine young filly ripe for breaking." He said lewdly.

"I would not know, Bradford." Ben said, disgusted with the lecherous Bradford. Every officer needed to let off tensions now and again but William Bradford was quickly becoming notorious for his drinking and wenching. The other young officer made Ben want to recoil in revulsion but his impeccable manners prevented him from doing so. Major William Bradford was not worth the trouble.

"No? I thought that you had a long acquaintance with the Lady Mary Ludlow. Did you not attend Yale College with one of her brothers, Tallmadge? That there was tal..."

"Major Bradford, General Washington will see you now." One of the orderlies stated preventing Bradford from finishing his thought much to Ben's relief. Bradford walked past them without saying farewell, into, what the trio knew to be, a complete setting down, ignoring George the setter who was comfortably settled against Ben's boots lazily watching the exchange between Bradford and Tallmadge.

Three privates were holding the bridles of each of their mounts, a corporal the White Flag of Truce, the sergeant present, in charge of the pup that was to ride with Ben for a good portion of the journey held in his saddle.

The trio mounted. George being handed up to Ben, he settled comfortably next to the major, resting his head upon one of Ben's thighs. Hamilton was given the Flag of Truce, Brewster more of the provisions that they may need, all were heavily armed well aware that the British were known not to honor the parley. They set off.

Since the announcement of her Engagement to Major Andre, Mary had been besieged. The well-wishes and callers poured in all day, friends, acquaintances, and those not so well-known to the couple wished to extend their congratulations. Mary was caught up in the whirlwind of it all. This afternoon she played hostess to another group of matrons and their daughters serving coffee and tea along with pastries in the parlor of the Academy.

"It is true that Major Andre has placed an offer upon the Phipps Mansion? What a beautiful place to begin your married life." Lady Richmond asked, assessing Mary over the rim of her tea cup.

"Now where did you hear that bit of gossip?" Mary asked brightly knowing she was being scrutinized by the other woman.

"There will be a suite of rooms for the Lieutenant?" Lady Richmond continued desirous to cause trouble.

"Major Andre had arranged for us to view the van Allen mansion. We will make our final decision as to where we are to live once we are married after we see and assess it. As for establishing rooms for Lieutenant Andre, one would imagine that considering both homes contain many bedchambers
there would be a place for him to stay if he were so inclined. As Major Andre's brother he is always welcome wherever we were to reside." Mary replied not taking the bait.

"Even when the Major is away?" Lady Richmond asked, eyes glittering with malice, still inclined to provoke gossip and speculation regarding the Lady Mary's relationship with Lieutenant William Andre. Caroline Richmond's vast experience with men lead her to ascertain that the strikingly good-looking young man had fallen for the woman his gallant elder brother was to marry. Her inability to seduce either of the Andre brothers incited her intense jealousy. The Lady Mary would pay for capturing both their hearts.

"Pardon?" Mary asked, taking a sip of her tea.

"Even when Major Andre is away Lieutenant Andre will be welcome in your home?" Lady Richmond repeated. "Ah! Here he is!" She added lightly watching the Lieutenant cross the threshold into the parlor, frowning slightly as she watched William Andre spot the Lady Mary to his genuine delight and her extreme fury! The veiled desire in his eyes when he looked at the fiery haired beauty made Caroline Richmond glower with jealousy and rage which she concealed beneath a mask of bland cordiality.

"Good Afternoon, Ladies!" William greeted the women crossing the room, completely aware of the several heads of Mary's pupils that turned to gaze at him, their gentle sighs and the buzz of whispers that preceded him.

"Lieutenant Andre!" Mary exclaimed. "We were not expecting you"

"I was sent along in advance of the Major who begs your indulgence for another hour as he attends to the grueling business of war." William said bowing elegantly before her, taking one of her hands in his, kissing it, looking up into her face, a playful smile skirting about his mouth, his eyes sparkling. He was clearly of a mind to flirt.

"Lieutenant, we were discussing if the Lady Mary and Major Andre would have a bed for you in their new home. Even if the Major happened to be absent on campaign. You do intend on being the gallant by watching over the lady for him?"

"It would be my deepest desire and pleasure, Lady Richmond." William replied his eyes dark with lust as they swept over Mary assessing, lingering overlong on her breasts and the swell of her hips as he imagined her naked, wanton and willing in his bed.

Mary lowered her eyes, a cold shiver of fear dashing down her spine. She did not care for that look in his eyes, it made her excessively uncomfortable. She hoped that he would be leaving to join his regiment soon. She had heard that he would be garrisoned in New York or New Jersey. She prayed that it would be the latter.

"That is excessively kind, Lieutenant, but will you not be garrisoned with your regiment? I am certain I may be able to manage. Major Andre trusts my ability to keep a large household running smoothly and efficiently in his absence." Mary offered, modestly but there was pure steel beneath her words. She was not one to be trifled with.

"If I have the privilege to remain in this fair city will My Lady not have a place for me to lay my head?"

"Of course, the hospitality of the house extends to family with Major Andre's blessing." Mary stated diplomatically deferring to her husband to be.
"Well said, My Dear!" Lady Stewart approved. "Lady Mary, I would speak with you. I took the liberty of inquiring of artisans and craftsmen if you should require them. Many are most delighted to be of service to and take on commissions for My Lady and the Major."

"Thank you, Lady Stewart. Major Andre has such particular tastes and opinions as to furnishings, furniture and colors. He absolutely refuses to leave all the decisions to me."

"You do not find such interference daunting?" Lady Richmond asked.

"Not at all. I find the Major's attention and delight in domestic matters and affairs immensely appealing." Mary replied.

"Major Andre does have impeccable taste. He did persuade the Lady Mary to marry him!" Lady Stewart pointedly stated to Lady Richmond looking about. "Where is that darling creature?" Major Andre does not that gorgeous setter with him?"

"No. George has gone missing. He went out on patrol the other evening with some of the officers and soldiers. The Major was furious when he learnt what had happened. I have only observed him that cross once or cross before. Poor Captain Lord Kennedy and Corporal Fraser, they received the full extent of his wrath. He was formidable in his rage." Mary explained.

"One would imagine that My Lady soothed his temper." Lady Stewart stated.

"We are both distraught about George's disappearance. I will be ever so grateful when he is found and returned." Mary told Lady Stewart and those around her.

"He will be found and returned. I am certain of it. Major Andre is doing all that he can to find the wee beastie?" The old lady asked.

"He and General Howe both are. His Excellency has become quite attached to George."

"The Rebels would return him? Why is such a fuss being made over a dog?" Lady Richmond sniped.

"Major Andre gave him to me as a gift to help ease my distress of missing my family, none of whom are presently in the Colonies. Was that not exceedingly kind and thoughtful of him?" Mary replied.

"There are other implications." Lady Stewart added mischievously.

"I am certain that My Lady will be all too pleased to make us all aware as to what those are." William said.

"Poor Darling Lieutenant, it is so dreadful that the Lady Mary chose the wrong Andre brother." Lady Richmond mocked in a whisper. "That you were not privileged to purchase her a pet and arrive too late, hmm?"

William glared at Lady Richmond. "Mocking a man does not make a woman appealing. You are in possession of a spiteful tongue, Madame."

"Perhaps one evening I could apprize you of its other talents?" She offered.

William shook his head.

"Still intent on having that fiery haired vixen? You will get burnt then need someone to ease your distress and lust."
"Doubtful." William stated his gaze fixated on the object of his obsession.

"He was rather ardent in his wooing" Lady Stewart recalled continuing on about Major Andre. She laughed. "But a lesser woman would have allowed herself to be caught much sooner. You led him a merry chase. Served him right!" She whispered to Mary. Her indiscreet gossip not censured because of her status and relationship to the lady she could be indulged. Not so Lady Richmond.

"It was not my walnut tarts, Lady Stewart?" Mary teased.

Elspeth Stewart snorted with more laughter. "Perhaps... A wee bit more than your expertise in all matters culinary, Lady Mary!" The girl was still gloriously unaware of her profound sexual allure and charm. How she captivated a man like John Andre. It was all quite charming, Lady Stewart thought. She would learn soon enough how she incited desire and passion within her future husband if Major Andre was not having a most delightful time teaching her at present from the looks that she had observed pass between the couple she imagined that he most certainly was.

"Is there something amusing, Lady Stewart?" Lieutenant Andre asked noticing the expression on the older woman's face.

"A private thought, Lieutenant. Do indulge a lady."

"Of course." William was gracious.

Lady Richmond pursed her lips huffing impatiently. "Lady Mary Ludlow is titled and rich, that would cause any officer with ambitions to pursue a lady. What happens after marriage is another matter, after the bloom is off the rose."

"It will take many, many years for that to happen, if at all." Lady Stewart contradicted the other hostess with much authority. "He may have been a rake and a rogue, but Major Andre is clearly smitten with the gel. Not all men are Augustus Richmond, though it is common knowledge that you cuckolded him long before he ever took a mistress." She said sharply putting the nasty cow in her place.

"If you would excuse me, Lady Mary, I believe I may have lost where the minutes have gone and stayed overlong. If you would please excuse me, I must be leaving." Lady Richmond attempted to make a gracious exit clearly embarrassed. She rose to go.

"Lady Richmond has offended the Lady Mary and is attempting to smooth the insult over by leaving." Abby Grey whispered in Miss Graham's ear as the pair sat near the window. She peered out, leaning close, something, more accurately, someone, catching her eye. "Who is that?" She asked gazing at the three Continental soldiers riding in under a White Flag of Truce indicating the over tall brunet on the grey horse with what appeared to be a pup laying in front of him on his saddle. "He certainly is handsome!"

The trio of Continental officers and George the English setter were escorted to the steps of British Headquarters by Captain Lord Kent and five other assorted officers and Regulars.

Kent, who was riding next to Ben Tallmadge, reined in his mount, causing the others to do the same. He dismounted, tossing the reins to a private who seemingly appeared out of nowhere to take them.

"Wait here!" He ordered Ben, Alex, and Caleb, striding purposely up the stairs of the headquarters. The three rebels exchanged glances, whilst George the setter began crawling all over Ben, placing his paws on one of Ben's muscular thighs, going up on his forepaws, bracing them against Ben's
chest as he nibbled at the fringe of the nearest epaulet.

"Ah! We will be having none of that, Scamp!" Ben admonished the dog, chuckling, withdrawing the bits of epaulet from the setter's mouth with his fingers.

The British Sergeant standing guard beside him grinned at the pup's antics. "He is a scamp, that one!" He agreed. "Looks like you have an audience, Major." He added indicating the myriad of young women standing at the windows of the Academy all intently interested in the three Continentals. Ben scanned them to see if he could spot Mary, his heart fluttering in his chest in anticipation, just as the door to the Academy opened revealing her, Lady Stewart (whom Ben remembered from his time spent with the Ludlows in Boston), the Misses Shaw and Alton, Miss Melissa Alton, a tall rather good looking British lieutenant, behind them about a dozen young women.

"Well, would you look at that?" Alex Hamilton murmured, appreciatively, eyeing the women.

"The Saint Thomas Aquinas Academy for Young Ladies has a lovely variety of flowers; girls from all over the colonies come to study here, so I have been told. That is Lady May, erm, the Lady Mary Ludlow in front there, the flame-haired beauty. She is to marry Major John Andre." The sergeant made friendly conversation.

"The officer that has been describe as 'The Handsomest Man in the British Army?'" Alex asked receiving glares from Ben and Caleb.

"Ham..." Caleb warned through clenched teeth looking over at Ben to gauge his reaction.

"Aye! The lucky devil!" The sergeant said with a cheeky grin. Despite their opposing sides, the sergeant rather liked the trio of rebels. When the British had attached themselves as escorts they had made small talk when they could to ease the boredom of travel. Sergeant Hugh Livingston, in course of conversation, had told them that he had family that had settled in Connecticut, in the town of Coventry, where Nathan Hale, Ben's Yale classmate and friend had come from. The talking had continued from there.

"Lucy, indeed!" Ben murmured. His smoky blue eyes capturing and locking with Mary's sapphire colored ones, the corners of his chiseled mouth lifting in a winsome smile, making her look demurely away, her long eye lashes fanning against her cheeks just as the door to the British headquarters opened to reveal Captain Lord Kent beside him was the strikingly handsome Major that Ben remembered seeing across the battlefield at Princeton-John Andre, his Great cape swirling about him as he strode purposely down the steps, the high polish of his black boots capturing the late afternoon sunlight.

The Major strode determinedly toward the three Continental officers, just as George caught sight of Lady Mary whom Andre had nodded to come forward which she did. The look on the British officer's face-the mixture of passion, adoration and pride of possession when he stared at Mary cut Ben to the core. They both approached him.

"I promised that he would be returned unscathed, Cherie!" John assured Mary with a smile referring to the pup.

He turned to Ben. "Thank you, Major...?"

"Tallmadge." Ben supplied.

"Ah, yes! I recall from Princeton. Horrible business that. Thank you, Major Tallmadge for returning
the dog. My Lady has been quite distressed since he went missing, it has been painful to see as one can imagine. I had all I could manage to ease her heartache and sorrow. I am most grateful." Andre made certain that his words struck home, hopefully conjuring visuals in Ben's head of the manner in which he had eased Mary’s heartache.

"With General Washington's compliments to the Lady Mary Ludlow." Ben stated ignoring Andre’s words, clearly said to get a reaction from him. He reached into his waistcoat to retrieve the missive from the Continental Commander holding it out. Andre went to take it, watching George as he wriggled in Ben's other arm, anxious to get to Mary, whining with excitement. John smiled at the pup indulgently.

Ben pulled the missive back. "The Lady Mary Ludlow." He repeated the expression in his smoky colored eyes hard as flint as they met Andre's cobalt blue one's which glittered back in challenge.

"Of, course! May Sweetheart!" John prompted studying his adversary for a reaction to the intimately affectionate words. The elegant Englishman was clearly baiting the dashing American.

Mary took the message from a still mounted Ben, their gazes locking for a flickering moment, neither capable of concealing the spark that still managed to flare between them. "Please extend my sincerest appreciation to General Washington for his kind courtesy." She said earnestly.

Ben dipped his head. "My Lady, it would be my deepest pleasure." He assured her, George continuing to squirm in his arms, the dog’s tail wagging furiously, leaning up he licked Ben's chin causing Mary to giggle.

"I can just imagine." John murmured watching the pair. So a part of her still cared for Tallmadge? "I will take the beast if you please." He added with marked courtesy.

"I was given strict instructions to present the pup to the Lady Mary."

"As her affianced husband, all matters and concerns in regards to the lady by English Law are mine and fall to me." John challenged. His eyes snapped with barely contained fury. Viewing Tallmadge this close, and not through a spyglass on a battlefield, he could understand the man's appeal to the fairer sex including the Lady Mary. Her reaction to the rebel officer had not been lost on John who had all intentions of exorcising any desire that she may still harbor for Benjamin Tallmadge out of her with a passionate bout of love making that evening. When he was through the incredibly handsome blue eyed rebel major would be but a distant memory.

"I was given my orders, major, certainly as a brother officer, one can respect the desire to follow one's superior's orders to the letter or face the consequences." Ben stated raising a brow as the setter began nibbling one of Ben's gloved fingers, a paw resting on his forearm, his tail still wagging furiously.

"I would not want one to face the consequences. We hear that Washington has quite the fierce temper. I would not care to subject another officer to such wrath over a misinterpretation of the presentation of a beloved pet to such a dazzling and exquisite young woman as the Lady Mary. It is clear that your superior wishes to be remembered with much courtesy and gallantry. I would not fault any gentleman that wished to pay such addresses to my future bride." John remarked. "I must commend your superior for sending the animal along knowing as he must the value of such a creature. Though we are on opposing sides of this dreadful business, I cannot help but admire such integrity. It will not go unreported. That one can be most assured. I will be certain to make General Howe aware. Afterward we can discuss and negotiate a prisoner exchange, perhaps? Several of our officers and men were taken after the battle at Princeton, having surrendered to a young captain, an Alexander Hamilton. We would like them back."
Alex grinned at the mention of his name. He was enjoying himself immensely, having caught the Lady Mary's eye several times unable to resist the opportunity to flirt with her whilst the majors were otherwise engaged in their discussion. He certainly could see why Tallmadge and Andre had fallen in love with her. She was beauty but, sadly, unavailable, he would have to content himself with the companionship of one of the lovelies that stood on the steps. There were several that had indicated an interest in Alex that he had all intentions of pursuing if he were allowed.

"Negotiating a prisoner exchange was not my initial order, Major Andre."

"How heroic and honorable, risking possible capture even death to return a lady's beloved pet, seeing as she is the Lady Mary Ludlow I can most certainly understand." John commented, glancing at Mary. All could see that Andre was clearly smitten with her. He did absolutely nothing to hide it. "Though one will consider the negotiation?" Tilting his head in inquiry, he waited for Ben's answer. "Though we are not inclined to return General Charles Lee as of yet. Do present the pup to the Lady Mary since those were your orders. I see that he is most anxious."

Ben gathered the setter in his arms, Mary stepping forward to receive the pup. Tallmadge bent down in the saddle to hand George to her, arms, hands and dog getting tangled in the exchange, non intentional brushing of fingers and forearms on various portions of the other person leaving the pair a bit flustered.

"Thank you, Major Tallmadge." Mary breathed staring up into his smoky smoldering blue eyes, heat gently stealing through her cheeks, flushing a rosy pink, she lowered her eyes feigning interest in the pup who burrowed his head in the crook of her neck happy to be in his mistress's embrace whilst Mary attempted to conceal her physical reaction to Tallmadge feeling slightly ashamed and disloyal. She was in love with and adored John Andre, had agreed to become his wife. But she had been infatuated with Ben. If the situation were different, had Andre never entered her life. Had...

There were so many. Mary knew that she would have been content and happy being Ben's wife though she wondered if she would have experienced the same intense passion and desire that she had found in the intimate physical relationship with John Andre? Would Ben have made her shriek in ecstasy when he touched, caressed and tasted her in those wickedly rapturous tender moments? Her body was certainly telling her that Tallmadge was most capable to incite the ardor and passion in any young woman. Was that what distressed her so and that she was so keen to hide from the man she loved?

"Your servant, Lady Mary. I am delighted to have returned him to My Lady safe and unscathed."

"Now that you have seen the pup delivered and into to the lady's arms, Major Tallmadge, shall we move onto more pressing business? His Excellency, General Howe is anxious to have his soldiers returned." John prompted.

Later That Evening

"Where is the Lady Mary?" John asked Sergeant Livingston who was in the process refilling the brandy decanter on the sideboard in the Major's private office.

"The Lady Mary went up to bed about a half an hour ago, Sir, took Georg with her." The sergeant answered.

"I regret that negotiations with those damned rebels took far longer than anticipated. Did she leave
any message for me, sergeant?"

"Only to speak with Abigail, Sir."

"Where is Abigail?" John asked, instantly becoming intrigued.

"You were looking for me, Major Andre?" Abigail asked from the doorway.

"Ah, Abigail!" John exclaimed crossing to where the maid stood.

"Sergeant Livingston said you had a message from the Lady Mary."

"Yes, Sir. My Lady said that she has retired, taking the pup up with her. She begs your indulgence that you would spare a moment for her."

"More than a moment! I would spare a lifetime if it would please her. She is in her bedchamber?" John asked before dashing out to seek Mary, taking the stairs two at a time, rushing down the hallway to her door, knocking upon it lightly not waiting for her to respond, opening it, walking inside.

The room was softly lit by candelabra filled with beeswax candle, a fire crackled and spit merrily in the fireplace, Mary in front of it, sitting on the lush Turkey carpet, dressed in the black banyan she had taken when he had been campaigning in New Jersey some confection beneath, George dozing in her lap.

"What a precious domestic scene! He exclaimed with a smile. "The rebels are on their way!" He added knowing she would ask, crossing to her, bending down to kneel beside her.

"Shhhhh... George is asleep. Would you help me place him in his basket? I do not wish to wake him. His belly is full and he has had a bath."

"I thought I smelt sandalwood." He remarked, running an index finger over the top of George's head, stroking his silky fur, causing the dog to grunt contentedly in his sleep.

John chuckled. "Come here, lad." He said, hands going beneath George's inert body, his fingertips brushing against the tops of her thighs, flames of desire shooting up his arms at the contact, the pads of his fingers burning where he touched her, "Whatever are you wearing beneath this banyan? A new confection from Madame Bernon's?"

"What am I not wearing, Darling? Place George in his basket and I will consider showing you." She flirted with a seductive smile.

"Just consider? You know I can be very persuasive. I could insist upon it. I am to be your husband. You are mine." He reminded her. "You would have never belonged to Tallmadge, not with me about. Oh! He is devastatingly handsome, shrewd and intelligent. Any gentleman and fellow officer would concede that but I would have seduced and charmed you into my arms and into my bed."

"I would never!" She protested.

"Not at first, Cherie, but you cannot deny what exists between us. Tallmadge best have a care with his captain. That Alexander Hamilton is a charming rake and rogue. He is brilliant, alluring and attractive to women. Half of your pupils would have parted with their virtues for one of his smiles. I did not care for the manner in which he was gazing at you or that he was bringing up your name and inquiring after the flowers of the Academy far more than necessary during our prisoner negotiations. I believe that he was far more interested in the welfare and well being of the daughters of the rebel
generals, merchants and planters and aristocrats than that of his own officers and soldiers." He clucked his tongue in mock disapproval.

"One would think that one would be flattered that the captain admires and appreciates your lady and those under her charge. I believe that one exaggerates!" She accused him.

"Perhaps." His eyes glittered with mischief. "But he was looking about and asking after you, May and your virginal charges."

"Major Tallmadge?" She asked.

"What of Tallmadge? Ah! I believe that he is well aware as to the state of, erm, affairs between us. Quite the gentleman, truly, he expressed felicitations upon our engagement though I could read the profound disappointment in his eyes. Poor man is heartbroken and wounded. He is in love with you! Lieutenant Brewster is rather wickedly witty." John observed. "He most certainly does not care for the officers of His Majesty's army and is a bit rough about the edges but the man does possess a rather sharp tongue and is incredibly amusing." He spoke as he placed George in his basket near the fireplace, tucking his blanket about him. "But enough of those rebels. What do you have beneath that banyan? Hmmm? Are you going to show me? I am intrigued."

"Close your eyes, Johnny!" She instructed him.

"You wish me to close my eyes? But half of the pleasure is watching you untie the sash of the banyan and the manner in which you reveal what is contained beneath. You are becoming rather adept in the most enticing and exciting ways to undress." He protested.

She sighed in resignation. "Since you asked me so charmingly... "Her hands went to the sash untying it, shifting her bum in the carpet. The banyan falling open to reveal a confection of creamy white silk, lace, rosettes and ribbons, the neckline cut so low, the edge skimmed the tops of her nipples. "Do you like it? My mother had it made and sent from her mantua maker in London as part of my trousseau. General Howe just gave it to me this afternoon upon her strict instructions. Do not fret. His Excellency did not see it. There are several mo..."

"I want to see you!" His voice was rough against her wet swollen mouth. "All of you, May!" God! He wanted her! His hands slipping from her face dancing gently down her neck, his fingers skimming over her heated skin in a warm caress, to push the banyan off her shoulder, Mary easing her hold on him, drawing back for a moment, the pair laughing and giggling, unable to keep their mouths and hands from each other, as John eased the banyan completely off her, gasping in appreciation when what was beneath was revealed, the creamy silk was virtually transparent and left nothing at all to the imagination, enhancing her assets and charms.

"Yes, John?" She asked. "Does it please you? You know that you are horribly overdressed!"

"I thought that you harbored a particular admiration for men in scarlet and wished to oblige you." He teased. "But if you feel otherwise we most certainly can remedy it." His hands going to the closures of his coat, undoing them, shrugging it off, tossing it onto the seat of the nearby winged backed chair, quickly making work of the buttons of his waistcoat. "Are you not going act as my valet?" He asked.

"If you wish me to, however I am enjoying and admiring you undress yourself." She told him, her
eyes sweeping from top to toe indicating her interest.

John laughed. "Wicked Little Rebel!"

"I am *YOUR* Wicked Little Rebel!" Mary emphasized the your. "Intent on laying siege to my defenses once again, Johnny? Or shall I lay siege to yours? Turnabout is Fair Play."

"Fair play? Who said anything about playing fair, Cherie! I play to win!" John said.

"So do I!" She told him. "That being said, stop making a show of fumbling with your waistcoat buttons and come closer so I may help you." Crooking one of her index fingers she beckoned him.

He closed the gap between them in two strides. "Would you help me, Darling? I fear that I have become all thumbs when it comes to undoing these blasted buttons." He said with a mischievous smile.

"I can just imagine." She said, her fingers starting at the first button near his throat making quick work of it, going onto the next and then the next, humming another of the wicked camp ditties that Colonel Tarleton had taught her.

"Remind me to have words with Ban!" John said listening to the melody recognizing the song immediately. It was about a whore and her gentlemen, incredibly inappropriate for a lady of her station to know.

"Have words with Colonel Tarleton regarding the inappropriate camp songs that he enjoys teaching your fiancée. It appears that Major Andre would be the only officer in His Majesty's Army to corrupt my Fine New England Moral Sensibilities." She said, all the buttons of his waistcoat undone, she pushed it off his shoulders, drawing it off him. "Sit and draw your boots off. I may not have the patience for the interruption later."

"As My Lady commands." He sat in the other winged back chair to draw his boots off, setting them beside each other, as she watched him stand and come to her. "Let us see about the rest of these clothes, May."

"Where do you plan on taking me? Here in front of this warm fire on the Turkish carpet? Or are you going to carry me to the bed and take me there? You do intend on making passionate love to me all night. Don't you? I will be ever so disappointed if you won't."

"Of course, my love, all night if you wish it, first on the carpet and then in the bed. We could even try one of chairs or I could take you up against the wall. We have never tried the wall, May. Would you like to be taken up against the wall?"

"One of the first kisses we shared you slammed me up against the wall." She recalled, untying his stock, drawing it off with agonizing slowness, tossing it on the chair with his waistcoat and scarlet jacket. Her fingertips dancing a path down the front of his shirt, tilting her chin up, pressing a kiss against the line of his jaw down the side of his neck.

"That we did. Did you enjoy it?" He recalled.

"If the truth be told... But I had best not allow you to know all of my secrets. Lady Stewart says a bit of mystery between a wife and her husband keeps a marriage passionate and exciting. It assures that one's husband will not stray. He will never become bored." Mary said through her kisses, her fingers yanking at his shirt, drawing it out of his breeches, her fingertips skimming and caressing the naked skin of his lower abdomen, giggling in triumph when she felt him shiver with desire, tilting her chin
up to claim her mouth with his.

"See how you excite me, May, making me shiver with desire? I will never stray or become bored. Tonight, I intend on exploring you, intimately, slowly. In every way I know you love."

"Oh!" She exclaimed helping him draw his shirt over his head tossing it on top of the other clothes in the chair, running her fingertips from his shoulders, down over his chest, tantalizingly slow, tilting her chin up, her eyes meeting his, her lips curving up at the corners in a satisfied smile when she heard him gasp with pleasure, his stomach muscles contracting beneath her hands, the skin, hot, near to burning to her touch. "When are you to venture exploring, Johnny?" She asked going up on her tip-toes, her warm breath fanning against his mouth, her lips so precariously close to his they were nearly touching.

"My Lady has become rather forward." He observed, chuckling, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "I do not hear you objecting." She countered. "No, quite the contrary, I am quite delighted." He told her. "Are you?" She whispered huskily against his lips.

"Oh, yes!" He replied, yanking her to him roughly, kissing her deeply, his mouth slanting over hers, his hands all over her, her tiny waist, down over her hips to her bum, grasping her buttocks, hitching her up and drawing her roughly against his arousal, which was hard and rampant beneath his breeches. "I want you, May... Let me..." His voice was rough and thick with his carnal need for her, drawing her with him to down the plush warm carpet in front of the fire, their intimate embrace silhouetted against the wall. John moving himself between her legs, drawing the hem of the frothy confection she wore up over her shapely legs, seeking and caressing her heated skin, aroused and inflamed by his touch.

Mary moaned underneath his mouth as his finger deftly undid the buttons of his breeches their fingers tangling as she helped him, pushing them past his hips, the feel of his bare taut skin beneath her hands adding to the fevered excitement.

"I cannot wait, May!" He whispered hoarsely, his fingers delving into the intimate place between her legs, feeling her heat. She was so ready for him. Withdrawing his fingers, he thrust his hips forward, entering her.

"Whatever happened to the intimate exploration?" She asked drawing one of her legs up about a hip, the movement causing him to sink that much deeper inside her.

"We have all night to go on our intimate exploration. This is the beginning..."

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXV

Once again, because one can never be too courteous when someone does one a good turn, my continued gratitude to the lovely administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/JJFeildtheactor) for their continued support of this story. Thanks to Truth Universally Acknowledged for more great conversation. If you have a
moment, please take some time to read her story, The General's Treasure (which is also part of this fandom). It comes highly recommended by this author. I wish to thank her for the suggestion that George the setter find himself behind the Rebel lines- inspired by the story of General Howes' dog- causing the Lady Mary and Ben Tallmadge to meet after he has learnt of her Engagement to Major Andre. General Washington's headquarters were in Morristown, New Jersey at this point. A fast gallop over not the most reliable roads would have taken several hours not to mention a ferry ride across the river to Manhattan Island.

Lady Richmond tries to cause trouble with living arrangements when Mary and John move into their new home. Georgian House Hunters! They have two homes to consider- the Phipps and the van Allen's. Major Andre's interest in home furnishings just seemed to fit with what I have read historically about his artistic temperament and character. He reminds me a lot of the late George, Duke of Kent (Queen Elizabeth II's uncle) in this regard- I was reading a book about the present British Royal Family when I was writing this chapter and the description of Kent's artistic bent and his flair for dinner parties fit Andre to a T!

The Continentals arrive at the camp. My descriptions of George the setter's puppy behavior come first hand from having a lot of experience around dogs. I hope that you all enjoyed reading how the two romantic adversaries reacted to one another finally having come face to face. I do hope that Alexander Hamilton provided some interesting relief. We see Lady Mary's reaction to Ben Tallmadge. There are some feelings still there (I also thought it quite fair to let Andre squirm a bit!). Feelings that Major Andre is determined to exorcise from her. His has every right to be jealous because Mary and Ben are still attracted to each other. She is in love with Andre and will be a loyal wife but she is certainly thinking of 'What could have been?' with Tallmadge. Can we blame her?

Thoughts that in the last portion of the chapter, John addresses and exorcises from his bride to be taking pride that she is his and not Tallmadge's, confident that he would have seduced her no matter what. The pair bantering back and forth as matters become incredibly heated between them.

The face claim for the British Sergeant Hugh Livingston is Richard Madden. Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me! I apologize for the long wait between chapters lately. I hope to be posting more frequently now that the Christmas Season is over.
A Lusty Morning Romp, The Major Receives a New Sobriquet, Georgian House Hunting and a Trip to the Jeweler's

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XXVI

She did not remember when they had moved from the Turkish carpet to the large four poster bed, it was all still a blur, she thought opening her eyes. She was tucked into the security of his embrace, her bum nestling against his groin, one of John's hands resting against her abdomen the other curled above near her head on the feather pillows, her lover spooning her, the pair of them naked. She moved slightly undulating her hips against his privates causing his organ to swell with anticipation, the feel of the hair on his thighs and some place more intimate tickling her.

"Anxious for more, May?" His voice was a hot whisper in one of her ears.

"You are insatiable, John!" She said, laughing lightly. He had already taken her three times. The realization that he wanted her yet again delighted her.

"I do not hear any objections. I cannot help that I find you irresistible. You have captivated me, Cherie! Completely!" He told her, swirling patterns over her lower belly and abdomen, nuzzling her neck with the tip of his nose, kissing her from the slope of her shoulder to the tiny hollow behind her ear, nipping her earlobe gently.

She shivered gently, her skin burning beneath his touch. It was always thus with the pair of them, his mere touch arousing her. "Have I?" She asked.

"Oui! You know that you have! Do not play coy, though I do find your banter incredibly charming. It would be rather tedious if you were of the simpering sort, hanging upon my every word."

"But you love being adored!" She countered. "Don't you?"

"Well... I do prefer a bit of spice and vinegar."

"That is a gentle and diplomatic way of telling me that I am inclined to speak my mind. Some gentlemen prefer that ladies in my position do not harbor such firm convictions."

"Quite the contrary, I find them rather refreshing. Our heated debates do tend to end in the most pleasant of circumstances..." He observed.

"The pair of us, naked, in my bed, you mean."

"Erm...Well, yes..." He agreed, chuckling. "Is it not a rather pleasant place to be? It is so much more comfortable than a carpet, a chair or over your dressing table." Those had been two of the places that they had made love the previous evening. The other he had propped her up upon, kneeling between her thighs, he then had performed oral sex on her before the pair of them had tumbled into the bed where John had made love to her the third time.

"I found great pleasure on my dressing table." She intimated, dancing an index fingertip suggestively along one of his thighs.
"Just great pleasure?" He teased. She was driving him crazy with her caresses! In retaliation, he nuzzled her neck, in that sensitive spot, the place that he knew when he kissed her it sent shivers down her spine, a hand dipping between her legs. He knew the effect that had on her as well. "Not glorious?"

"Well..." She began, flames dancing down her spine from the spot where he kissed her. Damn the man!

"Yes, May?" He prompted, elated with her reactions to him. They were just as he knew they would be. Never had he been with a woman as sexually responsive as she was. "What is it, Sweetheart? Ah! You are blushing!" He laughed lightly, unable to conceal his enchantment at her response, his mouth trailing a line of searing kisses along the slope of her shoulder once more.

"John!" She warned wriggling against him, her buttocks stroking against his groin.

"You know I want you. Let me, May... Please... I know you want it, too, My Dearest. I was told in no uncertain terms that I was to take my wife at least three times an evening. Do you not remember?" He withdrew his hand from between her legs, shifting himself in the bed so she could no longer spoon him, sitting up, her red-gold curls falling down her back in a seductive dishabille, John grasping one of the curls, twirling it about his finger, his fingertips brushing the small of her back. "It would be well within our interest to get about practicing for when we do exchange our vows all would be set in its proper place. Do you not agree?" He asked.

"You have proven that you do have the stamina, thrice in one evening, there was no need or reason to fret that it was a diabolical plan of your Wicked Little Rebel to kill you when she made it clear that she would be demanding your carnal attentions at least that many times an evening. I can see that my major has, erm, risen to the request." She said, smirking when she realized she had made a pun.

John grinned. "Clever!" He acknowledged, twining more of her hair about his finger, drawing her that much closer.

"I am so delighted that you approve of my wit, Sir." She bantered.

"I do but I know of other manners in which to keep that glib tongue of yours otherwise occupied, manners that would be pleasing to us both." He countered.

"Are you tiring of my chatter or are you desirous that my glib tongue become occupied in another fashion?" She asked ascertaining what it was that he wanted. She knew from the look upon his face and how his eyes had darkened with lust.

"I am desirous that glib tongue of yours becomes occupied in another fashion." He answered.

"Which would be?"

"Beneficial for us both, May, come and straddle my head..." He instructed her, releasing her hair, giving her buttocks a playful swat.

"John!" She cried out, her buttocks stinging lightly, her eyes widened knowing that her suspicions were correct as to what he wished her to do, watching as he lay on his back amid the pillows.

"May..." He began, crooking one of his fingers, beckoning her with a seductive smile. "Come, cherie!" He coaxed her.

"Since you asked so nicely..." She moved with feline grace toward him, crawling on her hands and knees, pausing to nuzzle one of his hipbones with her nose, planting a kiss upon it, trailing a path of
burning kisses over his hip, his abdomen, his chest his breath becoming shallow with the pass of her lips about his person as she aroused him.

"May, what are you about? Wily vixen!" Damn it! She was driving him near to madness with her kisses.

"I am only practicing what you taught me, Johnny. Does it please you?"

"Yes, very much!"

"Good. I know how you do so love being adored. I thought I would show you how much." She said through her kisses, her mouth moving higher, planting a kiss upon his jaw. "Now about that straddling of your head..." She began inching herself up, positioning herself in a way upon he bed so that her sex was poised above his mouth.

"Perfect." He approved, grasping her on either side of her hips to draw her down to his face.

Mary squealed in excitement when his tongue delved into her secret place. "I am so delighted that you approve, Sir." She teased. "Such exquisite pleasure should be reciprocated. Now should I lower my head and..." Opening her mouth, she brought it to the head of his erect organ, gently closing her lips about the very tip easing it lightly into the warm cavern of her mouth, suckling soothingly upon him, licking him tenderly with the tip of her tongue.

"Yes! Mon Dieu, Mary!" He rasped hoarsely, closing his eyes as he continued stimulating her with his most talented mouth, teeth and tongue, feeling her take a wee bit more of him, swirling her own tongue about him, then increasing the pressure of her lips ever so slightly about him as she continued to suck. Letting a hand fall away from her buttocks, he drew it down over her back, caressing the smooth line of her spine as she afforded to him some of the most intense pleasure he had ever know, sighing contentedly, his tongue finding her clitoris, drawing it into his mouth to suck upon, nibbling her gently with his teeth, as she proceeded to work her sensual magic upon him, her slender fingers to glide ever so gently about his hips.

"Does this please you, John?" She asked, feathering tiny kisses upon him before taking him back into her mouth, quickly finding a rhythm that brought him closer and closer with each movement of her lips about him. Soon...

"Mmmmm... Yes! Sweetheart... what are you? If you do not cease your exquisite torture... I will..." It was too late; his tribute flooded her mouth as he experienced an intense release.

Mary took what was given to her, swallowing and drawing upon him until it was over, withdrawing her lips from about him. "Was that the way to keep my glib tongue occupied that you mentioned?" She asked, turning her head to look back at him delighted with the expression of utter bliss that she could see upon her lover's face as his mouth continued to feast upon her, his tongue teasing and torturing her until she felt as though she would explode with her longing. Getting closer and closer, moaning his name over and over, softly, until finally she came, experiencing an intense orgasm, her thighs trembling with the force of it, John holding her in place, gripping her hips as the spasms washed over her, allowing them to subside before releasing her.

Not waiting a beat, he gently tumbled her off him, covering her body with his, thrusting inside her. She purred with contentment. "Do you never stop?" She asked.

"Now why would I ever wish to do that? I can never get enough of you. You have bewitched and enraptured me,"

"Just bewitched and enraptured?" She asked with a mock pout, running an index finger from one of his high cheekbones to his chin, gazing up at him through lowered lashes.

"Beguiled, charmed and fascinated. You have me completely fascinated."

"Do I? So I have enamored and intrigued you?"

"Oh, yes, My Love. Very much. Very, very much."
"Truly?"
"You doubt me? Never doubt that I adore you, May."
"I do not doubt that you do. It just pleases me to hear you tell me. Just as it pleases me when you whisper hotly in my ear all of the wicked and naughty ways you are going to make me cry out in ecstasy in the course of our love making. All the manners in which you will corrupt my Fine New England Moral Sensibilities."
"Are there any that I have yet to corrupt?"
"I will have to think on it. I believe that I have retained many of my virtues. At least those that a gentleman of your standing would wish his young wife to possess. That she be wild and wanton in your bed, for example."
"Wild and wanton?"
"Oh, yes. Incredibly wild and ever so wanton." She teased him, her finger tracing the line of his jaw down his neck, tipping her chin up, her gaze locking with his.
"Ever so wanton, you say?" He asked, thrusting deeper insider her causing her to gasp with the pleasure of it.
She nodded her assent to his question, her legs twining about his hips, drawing him that much closer.
"Ever so wanton only in your bed."
"Damn right!" He agreed.
"Do you know how captivating and delightful you are when you are possessive, John?"
"I am happy that my display of devotion delights you, Cherie."
"It does, as much as I have beguiled, charmed and fascinated you."
"That is quite a bit." He stated as he continued to make love to her. "Hold on." He warned, grasping her buttocks with his hands, turning them about so she was now on top. "My lady is an expert equestrienne, show me how skilled you are, May. Ride me."
She moaned when he thrust upward, impaling her on his cock, feeling him on all sides of her.
"John!" She protested, splaying her palms against his rock hard chest, pressing her fingertips into his heated skin, her nails leaving little crescents, where she gripped him tightly. His valet would know where he had spent his evening when he tended to the major later.
She was a beautiful sight, straddled above him, her long red-gold hair falling down her back about them. He gasped in appreciation when she arched it, her breasts thrusting forward and upward, raising herself to lower down upon him once more.
"Oh, yes, Love." He encouraged her, releasing her hips, running his hands up over them, the indentation of her tiny waist, grazing them over the sensitive skin of her ribs, cupping her breasts as she began to set the pace, up and down, taking him deep, closing her eyes for a moment, losing herself in the incredible sensations. "Open your eyes, May. I wish to look into your soul as you take your pleasure." He knew that any lingering feelings that she may have harbored for that dashing Continental major had been exorcised after the non-stop evening of carnal passion they had just shared. She would not be imagining herself impaled on Tallmadge's cock behind those briefly closed eyes. It would be him that would be haunting her fantasies, her dreams, her most intimate thoughts not that schoolteacher turned rebel officer from Setauket.
"Seeking to divine my thoughts?" She asked her eyes soft and sensual in her passion. "You are not the only one that has been charmed."
He snorted with laughter at that, grinning wickedly. "Is that so? I would never had thought, Lady Mary." He teased.
"But you read people ever so well, do you not? It is one of the many gifts that you possess." She opined, moaning softly when she took all of him inside, to the hilt. "Yes, John, yes!" She breathed.
"Many gifts?"

"If you are fishing for me to name them you are sore mistaken! I am certain that you are well aware as to what they are."

"I am ever so curious to hear your opinion."

She giggled. "If you are incredibly good, I promise to give you my opinion in the carriage on the way to the van Allen's after breakfast."

"What if I am incredibly naughty? But you do delight in my naughtiness, do you not?"

"Cease entertaining those wicked thoughts of what you wish to do to me in the carriage, Sir!" She admonished him, smacking him lightly.

"Ouch! You wound me! Naughty Little Rebel!" He exclaimed thrusting his hips up off the bed, his cock sinking deeper if that were possible.

Mary moaned that much louder, biting her lower lip. Oh, God! That feels so good! She thought matching his thrust, sinking that much lower upon him, taking him all inside her. "What ever will you do to chastise me?"

"I should take you over my knee!" He told her smiling at the look of complete mortification on her face.

"No!" She whispered, their banter ceasing as things became fast and furious between them. Mary bouncing up and down whilst John tweaked her nipples, one of his hands trailing a path from her breast, over her abdomen and belly lightly making her shiver, to tease the tangle of golden curls at the apex of her thighs, dipping inside to tease her clitoris, tweaking it with a thumb and forefinger.

Mary cried out. She was so close to coming apart.

"Soon, May. Soon..." He soothed when she whimpered and moaned, his forefinger dashing over her little jewel, once, twice, thrice.

Oh Sweet Blessed Jesus she was so close! So very close... "John... John..." She panted over and over. "Please... please..."

"Reach out and take it, May!" He encouraged her. "Take it, Mon Amour!" He thrust upward one last time, spilling his seed inside her, his body shuddering, experiencing a fierce orgasm. Would it always be thus between them? The stimulation, the intense sexual physical attraction, the engaging banter?

It had been lust at first sight on the street that autumn day- he had almost lay siege to affect an introduction- which had intrigued him. All the other Belles of New York were eager for the company of the well-connected handsome British officers but not Mary Ludlow! She had evaded his initial advances which had increased his ardor and intrigued him. The man that women so ardently pursued had become the pursuer.

She finally came apart, biting her lower lip to quiet her cries of rapture as she came, tossing her head back, keening softly, her hands pressing into the strong muscles of his chest, her breath coming in short hot pants. "OOOOohhh!" She crooned. "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

He watched her mesmerized as she took her pleasure, most pleased with himself.

"Did you enjoy that?" He quipped as she leaned over him. His cock still imbedded inside her.
She laughed lightly, flushing. "What do you think?" She asked, gently swirling patterns on his chest with the forefinger of one of her hands.

He inhaled sharply. What was she about now, the coquette? "I believe that Their Graces, the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland would be shocked to learn that their precious youngest child has developed quite a fondness for wanton copulation. That she demands that her affianced husband service her three times in the span of one evening. That she requires him to engage in all manner of carnal acts with her."

"Mmmm... Their Graces would be pleased that their daughter is demanding the man that she is to marry to service her and tend to her pleasure. Just as they would expect him to."

"Would they? His Grace would approve that I took your innocence before our wedding? Before you had agreed to marry me? You know he or any of your brothers could call me out for besmirching your honor!"

"I have it on the best authority that my parents did not wait until the archbishop had married them to consummate their passion." Mary explained. "What does it matter? You have ruined me for anyone else." She declared.

John smiled. "How kind of you to remember, Cherie!"

"How could I forget?" She asked a fleeting vision of Benjamin Tallmadge flashing in her mind.

Later that Same Morning

John assisted Mary into the carriage gracefully following behind, setting the warm brick at her feet, leaning back against the upholstered seat, stretching his long legs out, the orderly shutting the door. John rapped the ceiling with his fist indicating the driver to move on.

"It should not take overlong to travel to the van Allen mansion, Le Tresor. A fine name for a fine house. It is reputed to be quite the treasure. Or would My Lady Wife prefer to reside in the Phipps mansion, Rosemont? Thusly named for the rose colored brick of the home. Le Tresor does have a cosmopolitan flair whilst Rosemont is so decidedly British." John explained as the coach moved along the cobblestone streets.

"Do you have an opinion John? I know that you require a ballroom large enough to build a stage in so that you may hold your plays and other entertainments. We will be hosting all manner of diversions. The home should be elegant enough to hold such gatherings in a manner befitting our exacting specifications."

"And reflect the origins and pedigree of the lady of the manor. I will not have the most important hostess in York City holding court in a home that does not meet my standards not those that I believe Their Graces would care their daughter to be receiving callers and important guests."

"Rosemont does have that large Entrance Hall and the large staircase. It is do appropriate for the pair of us to descend to greet our guests in a grand fashion. I do know how you so appreciate theatricality."

"Of course! I will take the greatest pleasure in showing off my bride to the envy of all of the gentlemen present." John complimented.

Mary blushed at that, laughing delightedly. "Is that so, Sir? Are you the envy of all the gentlemen?"
'Absolutely! There is not a bachelor in this city and possibly the Colonies that does not begrudge me my Good Fortune.'

"Just the bachelors?" She prompted.

John snorted with laughter. "If the truth were told..." He began.

"Yes?"

"You are completely unaware of the effect that you have on men? It is not only that you are one of the richest heiresses in the Empire." He explained.

"Is it?" She asked.

"Securing the hand of a daughter of a Peer of the Realm is far more desirable than securing that of one of those rich daughters from some of the First Families in this city, Boston or Philadelphia for that matter. Any of the cities, truly. Williamsburg..." His voice trailed off. "You are well aware of your value on the Marriage Mart, May. Do not be foolish. You are a most desirable young lady. Any man would be privileged to have you on his arm, mistress of his home and in his bed. Which brings us back to the number and size of the bedroom suites in Le Tresor and how well appointed they are. Then there is the space for the children to consider, the nursery, a schoolroom, etcetera. You know that I wish to have brood of children? Strong sons and beautiful daughters for the Good of the Empire."

"An heir and one of for each of the services and the clergy?" She asked.

"Yes and several daughters that are as strikingly gorgeous as their mother."

"The sons as handsome as their father?" She offered.

"Absolutely!" John agreed, grinning, he winked at her. "The will all receive the best of educations."

"In America or England?"

"England, of course! Eton, Oxford or Cambridge."

"Not abroad?"

"When they take their Grand Tour. Of course, we will take them on holidays abroad when they are younger. We will have an extensive library and conservatory."

"At all of our estates?"

He nodded. "And in London. For now let us choose our first home."

"Rosemont would be a lovely place to have the wedding." Most people got married at home in their parlor not in church.

"Absolutely not! We are to be married at St. Paul's. General Howe insists upon it." John replied. "I have already sketched some ideas for decorations inside the church. I will show them to you when we return to headquarters."

"Thank you. Did you design the dress I am to wear?"

'I was sore tempted." He admitted. "I did sketch some ideas for your traveling costume, an abundance of blue velvet and fox fur."
"Made from the bolt of fabric that Her Grace, My Lady Mother sent?"

"The peacock blue? That hue does flatter your coloring though I was of the mind that a darker color would be used. Madame Bemon has a bolt of velvet the hue of the jackets worn by the officers in His Majesty's Navy, an indigo. It is so dark a blue as to appear black in candle light."

"I thought that it was the wife's prerogative to plan and choose her own wardrobe but I believe that it will not be that way in our marriage. Are you intent on usurping all my feminine domains? Am I to have nothing of my own to be sole mistress of or will you have an opinion on all domestic matters?" She asked.

John laughed. "I thought that you appreciated that I take an interest in many of the domestic issues. I will be the master." He explained.

Mary pursed her lips together, pondering a retort. She did appreciate his artistic temperament and talents. It was one of the aspects of his personality that she found incredibly attractive and that had drawn them together as a couple. It was one of the many aspects of their relationship that would bind them, a shared interest in all of the arts. "But not both master and mistress?" She asked.

"Yet you will retain control of half of your fortune and all of your landholdings and international interests." He retorted.

"I have conceded that you may appoint the agent in England but I request that I am allowed to make the final decisions." She negotiated.

John huffed. "Very well. It is highly unusual but if it will make you incandescently happy, May Love." He accepted. What he would do to please her! But it would be all worth his while in the end.

She nodded. "I will be forever grateful, Johnny Darling."

"Johnny Darling?" He pondered, narrowing one of his eyes. "I do like it! Sounds a bit like the title of a Scots ballad." He hummed a highland tune.


"Absconded from that stout bad-tempered Massachusetts traitor and his wife. It does describe the pair of us." He sighed.

"Mine Own Galahad." She posed.

"Son of Sir Lancelot and Elaine, renowned for his gallantry and purity, sought the Holy Grail. So I am your Knight Errant?"

"If you choose to be." She replied.

"Nothing would please me more to be addressed by My Lady as Mine Own Galahad. I do hope that I have acted as your devoted cavalier these past several months hence earned the privilege to become your devoted gallant." He told her, the romantic in him coming to the fore. He did imagine himself her chevalier and champion. He was already her lover.

Mary felt heat stealing into her cheeks, blushing at his compliments. She did enjoy his sincere flattery and occasionally the effusive compliments that he was apt to give her when he was intent on charming her. He was so adept at charming her. "Then I shall address you as Mine Own Galahad."

"In public if you wish. Let it slip now and again. It would serve the rebels well to know the high
regard in which you hold your husband. That you are so pleased with the match that you have bestowed upon me the name of that pure and gallant knight of King Arthur's Roundtable."

"I would imagine that Major Tallmadge, Captain Hamilton and Lieutenant Brewster will most certainly carry stories back to the Continental camp as to the high regard I hold you. It was quite evident to them. Neither of us hid our mutual affection for the other."

"It will only help to give credence to what that trio of rebel officers observed. It will spread through their army as quickly as smallpox!"

"You are likening our mutual affection to smallpox!" Mary was incredulous.

"The analogy was a poor one. I apologize if I offended you. Spreading through their army quickly as a wild fire! Is that better, Sweetheart?"

Mary made a show of pouting. "Perhaps... That analogy to fire is far more appropriate..."

"Meaning?" He probed.

"Given what occurs in my bed every evening." She whispered careful to be discreet.

John grinned, showing his dimples, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "Which is?" He wanted to hear her tell him.

"The fierce scorching passion between us." She gave him what he wanted. He had been kind enough to pay her those effusive compliments and declare his undying devotion, Her Galahad.

"Which we will continue to explore in our new home. Ah! Here we are." John exclaimed peering out of one of the carriage window as it drew up to the well appointed gates of the van Allen mansion, a servant in the livery of the family swinging the gate open to let the carriage through to begin its short journey up the gravel drive to the entrance, snow covered lawns on either side large enough for George the setter to run upon banking the drive on either side. "A grand and noble entrance."

"Rosemont's is grander and it has a gatehouse."

"So it does. Rosemont was built in the reign of Queen Anne. Le Tresor was built in the late king's reign. The architectural style is a shade different." John noted staring at the façade of the house.

"I do like the large oak tree on the lawn there. Big enough to hold picnics and receptions under in the heat of the summer."

"And secluded enough from the street to engage in a romantic tryst without the fear of being seen and causing a dreadful scandal." John quipped with a wink as the carriage stopped at the front door where the butler, house keeper and staff were waiting.

"Is the entire staff staying on if we purchase the house?" Mary asked, looking at the line of servants ignoring his comment.

"Apparently their wages are included in the purchase price. Mr. van Allen is keen to escape to family in New Jersey. The blockades severely affected his fortunes so he must give up his home and leave the city taking only a skeletal staff with him and his family."

"Poor man!" Mary whispered.
"His misfortune is our gain. He is willing to sell the home to me for a most reasonable price."

"Could you not just go in and conscript it as an officer of His Majesty's Army?"

"That would not be honorable, Mary."

"The British Army has done it in other instances. Though the van Allens are known to be Loyalists. Is that why?"

"Well, yes, of course."

"What of Rosemont, then? Due to the Phipps family's recent disgrace, is that home being offered to us with different conditions?"

John nodded. "You knew that. Rosemont will be ours if we just give the word. Given Henry Phipps' treason not to mention his inappropriate behavior toward you at the van Lieden's dinner party it is only fitting! But I thought that you may prefer the van Allen home."

The carriage stopped, the door swung open by a liveried footman. "Welcome to Le Tresor, My Lady, Major Andre." They were greeted by the butler, as another footman rolled the stairs of the carriage out, assisting Mary out, John following behind. As if on cue all of the staff bowed or curtsied. "I am Mister Gibbs, Welcome to Le Tresor" He introduced himself leading them through the front door into the well appointed foyer.

"A parlor, a library, a study, an office..." John ticked the rooms off on his fingers, murmuring to himself as they stood in the dining room.

"What are you doing?" Mary asked.

"Ticking off the rooms in which I will corrupt your Fine New England Moral Sensibilities." He teased.

"Shhhhh... Mr. Gibbs will hear you." She warned.

"No he will not. Mr. Gibbs is deaf in one ear and cannot hear all that well in the other. My plans will not be overheard as to cause a scandal." John reassured her. "Does it truly matter what we do in the privacy of our home if we are discreet and do not shock the servants?"

"What are your opinions? Do you prefer this home or the other. Rosemont is decorated in a far grander style."

"It also has a much larger library." John provided. "Though the nursery is slightly better appointed here."

"The guest suites are separated from those of the gentleman and lady of the house at Rosemont. Here they are in one portion of the house." Mary offered.

"You would feel more comfortable if your guests slept a long corridor away from you, My Dear?" John asked. He certainly would feel more comfortable if William was sleeping at one corner of the house and his wife another if he were an overnight guest and John was called out on patrol or off fighting in New Jersey. Though he hoped that could use his influence with General Howe to get his younger brother billeted to a home in New Jersey away from Manhattan Island and his bride to be when William went to join his regiment. "I understand that Lady Richmond was making mischief
yesterday that could have made you uncomfortable. If you wish, you may place my errant and wicked! younger brother in the worst of the guest suites assuring that he will not visit overlong."

"Have we made our decision then?" She asked him. She knew that his intent was to purchase the Phipps mansion, Rosemont all along. This trip to the van Allen home had been to humor her.

"Yes! Indeed we have!"

"The van Allen home does contain more cosmopolitan furnishings. I am certain that Mr. van Allen would sell the items that you desire for a reasonable price. But I do believe that you would be rather disappointed to not have access to Mr. Phipps' scientific library. I can clearly recall the look upon your face. I would be a cruel wife if I sought to deny you the pleasures of getting lost for hours in Mister Phipps collection. Not to mention the artifacts, fossils and whatnots that he has on display."

"The daughter of a British Peer should live in a most British appointed home." John added with a smile.

"The approach to the home is a bit more elegant. If I recall, the Phipps have two oak trees on their front lawn not just one."

"That they do. Another tree under which to hold picnics, receptions and conduct trysts?" John asked a rakish glint in his eyes.

"Perhaps... Rosemont does appear a lovely home in which to raise children." Mary offered.

"OH!" John exclaimed, his eyes widening, he grinned. So she had truly placed her future into his keeping? No more looking back with regrets at Benjamin Tallmadge?

Later that Afternoon

At the Jeweler's

Miles Burgess looked up from the diamond bracelet he was polishing when he heard the door of his shop open, a quartet of young women crossing the threshold. "A Fine Good Day to you, Lady Mary! Miss Shaw, Miss Alton, Miss Melissa Alton." He called, coming from behind the counter to greet the young women.

"A Fine Good Day to you, Mister Burgess." Mary said by way of greeting as did the others. "Are the items that I ordered for Major Andre ready?"

"Yes, they are. I finished the engraving on the second of the Major's new watches last evening. If you would follow me please and have a seat over at the table near the window? Sampson, two other chairs!" He called to his black servant who brought the additional chairs as Burgess disappeared for a moment, Sampson setting the two chairs about the table, tending to the young ladies, taking their cloaks and gloves before they sat.

They had settled in their seats about the table, when they heard the door to the shop open to admit several young women among them Jane Fairfax and her boon companion, Anne Jones.

"Well, Mama said that Lady Richmond saw him here with Colonel Tarleton earlier in the week! He was speaking to Mister Burgess showing him some sketches. Apparently, Major Andre had exacting
instructions. Lady Richmond ascertained that he was ordering some sentimental pieces as parting gifts for his last mistress, that notorious actress, Miss Hallam!" Jane Fairfax said with malicious glee.

"Oh, Jane! You know as well as I do that Lady Richmond was making mischief!" Anne Jones admonished her friend.

"Oh no she was not!" Jane cried defiantly. "He was!"

"Lady Richmond is sore mistaken! I heard from my Mama that Major Andre was ordering gifts for his bride! Mama said that he was sparing no expense for what he wanted for the Lady Mary Ludlow. But he wasn't the only one..." One of the other girls began.

"What do you mean? Who?" Jane Fairfax asked.

"Lieutenant Andre was also spotted here looking at pieces of jewelry. Mama said that he had Mister Burgess show him pearls..."

"What?" Jane giggled, preening. "Do you think that Winsome Will was purchasing tokens of his affection for us, Nan?"

"Pearls? Oooooohhhhh!" Anne Jones cooed with excitement at the prospect of receiving tokens of William Andre's affection and appreciation for their oral ministrations.

"Mama said that Major Andre was speaking of diamonds, emeralds and sapphires. Oh, and pearls, strands of pearls!" The other girl said. "Lots and lots of pea..." She shut her mouth when she spotted Mary, Charlotte, Rachel and Melissa near the window. "Oh! Do you think they heard us?" She said over loud.

"They heard you all the way on Long Island, Winifred!" Jane Fairfax mocked. "Mama says a gentleman purchases his lady expensive presents when he has been wickedly naughty, to assuage his guilt when he has been indecorous!" She sniped meanly.

"I heard that a gentleman purchases expensive presents when his lady has been particularly naughty with her favors toward him!" Winifred observed contradicting Jane.

"Major Andre was looking at diamonds, particularly teardrop earrings," Georgiana Allerton provided walking past, two of her friends tittering with laughter behind their hands as Jane's face fell. "Large diamond teardrop earrings!"

"She is lying!" Jane spat. Not wishing to believe Major Andre was buying the Lady Mary diamonds.

"Will she ever cease with her nonsense? It is becoming an embarrassment." Rachel's voice was low pitched. The other members of the quartet all knew who 'she' was. "Colonel Tarleton and Captain Lord Kennedy said that Major Andre was looking at jewelry for a 'Particular Lady'."

"Oh!" Mary blushed, remembering John telling her how he wished to sketch her wearing only a pair of diamond drop earrings or pearls- strands of pearls. He had recently drawn her draped in only a sheet and wearing sapphire earrings. She trembled at the memory of what he had done afterward, the flush to her skin deepening.

"Yes. He will spend not expense to please you, May!" Melissa stated.

"Ah! Lady Mary, here we are!" Miles Burgess said approaching the table, he lay the watch on the large black velvet cushion. "Just as My Lady requested. The Major's monogram and his Regimental insignia upon the case." He turned the watch over the show Mary the back of the watch. "Vous et
nul autre engraved beneath the insignia. You and no other." He translated. "If we look at the face of the watch- the diamonds set about, the emerald chips above the Roman numerals." He withdrew another from the cloth he held. "The more practical field watch." He stated, placing a simpler but by no means less elegant watch on the black velvet beside the other. "No diamonds or emerald chips. I enameled it as requested, My Lady. The monogram on the back with the insignia is the same, and the words engraved beneath."

"Two gold watches, May! Gracious! That man is completely spoilt! Not to mention the gifts that you have ordered from the silversmith!" Rachel exclaimed.

"I have the means, Rachel. Why should Major Andre not receive the best? When we are married his social standing will improve. Why should he not receive the benefits of such an improvement to his station in life? If the roles were reversed I would be applauded and envied my vast Good Fortune. Why cannot Major Andre be afforded the same praise and receive the same benefits without comment?" Mary asked.

"I agree with May, Rachel. Major Andre is marrying into titled, rich and influential family. Why should he not receive some of the benefits? You would most certainly not begrudge May getting a whole new wardrobe and being showered with jewelry. I did not hear a disparaging word from you when she showed you the sapphire earrings the major presented to her. If I recall, you admired them as much as Melissa and I." Lottie chided.

Rachel pursed her lips. "I will concede that the watches are both elegant and will please him. Am I to assume that the one with the diamonds and emerald chips will be presented to him on your wedding day. To wear to church?"

"Yes."

"Lady Mary, there are watch chains I created to compliment each of them and a pair of watch keys. I also have the sleeve buttons that you ordered. The intaglio ring will be ready early next week if that is agreeable, My Lady? If I recall Your Ladyship was undecided as to what you would present to the Major as a Wedding ring. Has My Lady reached a decision?" Miles Burgess asked.

"I still have to think on it, Mister Burgess but I will reach a decision and let you know as soon as possible. You do have time before the wedding?" Mary asked.

The bell above the door sounded as several British officers entered amongst them Lieutenant William Andre who was immediately spied by Jane Fairfax and Anne Jones.

"Lieutenant Andre a Good Day to you! What brings you to Mister Burgess's fine establishment? Seeking to purchase gifts for a particular young lady or should I say young ladies?" She implied with a flirtatious giggle batting her eye lashes as William removed his tricorn.

"Good Day, Lieutenant! What brings you here to Mister Burgess's?" Anne Jones asked touching the lieutenant's forearm gazing adoringly up at him.

"Why would I venture into such as place as this, ladies?" He retorted. "Ah! Mister Burgess!" He said, his face brightening upon seeing the proprietor with the Lady Mary and her trio of friends. How fortunate for him that John was engaged with General Howe and paperwork for the next hour. "If you would please excuse me!" He made for the window where Burgess was standing with the quartet of women. "Lady Mary what a pleasure to see you!" He exclaimed with an engaging smile. He was incredibly pleased to find her here.

"Lieutenant Andre, Good Day to you, Sir." Mary replied as he took one of her hands, drawing it to
his mouth to place the obligatory kiss upon it, his ocean blue eyes searching hers.

"Good Day. Ladies!" William greeted the other young women as was custom. "What have we here?" He asked his eyes catching the watches displayed on the black velvet.

"Some gifts for the Major." Mary replied, she could not conceal her pleasure. "They are to be surprises so please do not give me away!"

"My silence may come at a price, Lady Mary!" He teased.

"What manner of price, Lieutenant? Not another forfeit? What is it to be this time? What will it cost me to have you keep my secret?" She tilted her head, her brows furrowed in consternation. She was not pleased. She tired of his flirtatious games. Did he not realize that she would never enter into an incestuous affair with him no matter how charming and attractive he was? She was not in love with him. He would never possess any part of her. All of her, in the eyes of God and Man, would belong to another officer with the surname of Andre. Not him!

"Do be gracious and allow me some time to ponder your question, My Lady. Whatever will I require of you to keep your secret from my brother?" William said, pursing his lips, gazing down at her, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he smiled.

"That bitch! How dare she twist the Lieutenant about like a fish on a lure!" Jane Fairfax spat watching Lieutenant Andre with the Lady Mary. "Look at him!"

"I do not know, Lieutenant. Honestly, I do not believe that a gentleman would require a forfeit in order to keep a lady's secret especially if that lady and gentleman were to soon find themselves kin." Mary replied.

"I am gratified that My Lady believes me to be a gentleman." William said, placing his tricorn dramatically over his heart taking her hand just as Mister Burgess cleared his throat.

"Beg pardon, Lieutenant." He began becoming embarrassed for the Lady Mary. The young, officer was flirting with her outrageously causing other patrons in the shop to stare.

"Yes, of course, Mister Burgess, do excuse me. I will let you know about that forfeit, Lady Mary. "He said before moving off. "Mister Burgess, my selections are ready for purchase?" He added moving off after addressing his farewells to the other three young women.

Mary could not conceal the expression of relief upon her face knowing he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXVI

A continued Thank you to the JJ Feild Facebook Page for their support of this story. Mas Merci, Carolyn and Maria! XXX

Many thanks to Truth Universally Acknowledged for her continued friendship over these last several months, she is truly one of the gems of this fandom. Please take the time to read her story, The General's Treasure. It is one of my absolute favorites.

I do hope that you enjoyed the scene in the beginning of this chapter. Methinks a child may come early for the Andres!
Mary bestows upon John a new sobriquet. I hope you like it as much as the Major does! Honestly, I did not extensively research house hunting in Georgian times. Though there is an excellent DVD available that I have watched several times entitled: At Home with the Georgians. http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008F0QBO6?psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=ox_sc_act_title_1&smdid=ATVPDKIKX0DER Which comes highly recommended by this author. It interesting to note how involved gentlemen were when purchasing a home and deciding upon the furnishings for his bride. Also, how much marriage meant to Georgian men. I drew on some of what I learnt from watching the video and from what I have learnt about Major John Andre when I was writing his and Lady Mary's conversation in the carriage on the way to the van Allen's home. I do hope that you enjoyed reading about their Georgian House Hunting experience and the couple's views on marriage and children. It is interesting to note which one of them is anxious to begin a family, isn't it? Lady Mary is a rich heiress so it is only fitting that she give her gentleman expensive presents. Rest assured that Major Andre will be reciprocating in kind. There was a mention of a pair of diamond drop earrings, wasn't there? That probably will not be the last of it. Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
New York City

General Howe was kinder to Henry Phipps than he had been to Captain Nathan Hale. Talk about York City was that it was due to the paternal affection the Commander of the British Forces harbored for the Lady Mary Ludlow, who was to marry one of the officers on his staff and take up residence in Rosemont, the Phipps' former mansion. It would not be politic if there was a taint to the happiness of the couple. General Howe would be affording all that was right and proper to the traitor before he was executed including allowing Phipps to make his peace with God and allowing him to write letters to his kin after the trial that had found him guilty. Captain Hale had been given none of those courtesies.

It was cold and clear that morning, a steady wind coming off the water, when the officers escorted Henry Phipps to the gallows.

"Will there be much pain?" He inquired of one of the Regulars that walked beside him, wiping the smidgen of blood from his chin with a forefinger where he had nicked himself shaving, trying to remain calm. He took a deep inhale of cool air, filling his lungs in a feeble attempt to calm his hammering heart. To no avail.

"I would think not, Mister Phipps. The executioner is known for his skill." The Regular replied steadily. The young man certainly was courageous in the face of death.

"Providence be praised. I would that it would be quick. That I would be home to God and facing my Eternal Judgment before too long." Henry Phipps stated with more bravado than he felt. He looked about as they got closer to the gallows where a large crowd had gathered. The Phipps were an old established family in the city having arrived in the later 1670s becoming wealthy merchants. They had been long known for their arrogance, sense of entitlement traits and lavish parties. The former having not endeared them to the other residents of the city. Many of them believing that justice was being served that the young scion of the family was being hanged for high treason for crimes against King George III, his Sovereign Lord and the country of Great Britain. The penalty for which he had been found guilty carrying the most severe sentence. He would forfeit his life.

Phipps' blue eyes scanned the crowd looking for familiar faces. He finally spotted them, the Quartet of Sirens, standing beside the British officers. The Lady Mary Ludlow gripping the forearm of her betrothed, her gloved fingers digging into the scarlet wool, watching as Major Andre leaned his head down to listen to what she was saying, pursing his lips, his brows knitting in concern, her murmured something to the lady which made her immediately brighten, a small smile upon her mouth, her lightened mood causing Andre to grin. Phipps regretted not being able to catch her interest. Pity! He knew that his father had been anxious for him to make a Good Match. Her reported fortune would have helped pay off his gambling debts and finance his women and drinking. But that was not to be. That blasted Bloody back had taken possession of her leaving Phipps with leaner prospects. He had taken pleasure in fucking Miss Philomena Hallam, Andre's former mistress, wrecking his revenge.
The wench had proven an eager and inventive bed partner and was happy to oblige his more risqué proclivities—using the tawse on his arse until it was sore and a bit raw.

"Traitor!" A pock faced man, missing several teeth his greasy hair tied back messily with a piece of leather thong spat throwing some rotten cabbage at him. It hit him on one of his thighs splattering, leaving a stain on the fine wool then landing in the street. So it began as he got closer and closer to the gallows, people not being as kind as the pock faced man, some seeing it fitting to toss the contents of their chamber pots at him. Soon portions of him were covered in day old piss and shit.

He knew that he was a shadow of his former self. His handsome visage, once an object of much swooning by the ladies in New York, was almost indiscernible under the bruises especially about his nose and mouth where several teeth had been knocked out when one of the Regulars had struck him during an interrogation. Fortunately he had been able to comb through the dried blood that had been caked in his ginger blond hair. Howe had been anxious that he make a good presentation upon the gallows given his family's former social prominence in the city.

He and his escort finally reached their destination. Henry Phipps' wrists were untied as he was lead to the scaffold. An Anglican chaplain prayed with him for a moment reciting Psalm 23 with him before Henry turned to the crowd that fell silent to listen to the condemned speak. "I come here to die to atone for my treasonous offenses against His Most Gracious Majesty King George, Our Sovereign Lord, a great and glorious prince, long may he serve to reign over you by the Will of Almighty God who, in His Infinite Grace, will see an end to this dreadful war. Please pray for me." Henry said, his voice faltering at the end. There would be no long speech from him. The time had come.

A soldier came forward. "Do you forgive me, Sir?" Execution was technically murder and against God's Commandments. Forgiveness would assuage the sin.

"Yes, willingly. Please make it quick. I wish to be free of this world." Henry Phipps stated regaining some of his courage.

The soldier placed a blindfold about Henry Phipps' eyes tying it about the back of his head before placing the noose about his neck, tightening it.

"Lord Jesus, save me! Have mercy upon my soul." Phipps was heard to whisper as he was pushed off the scaffold, the rope making a resounding snap, his body dangling in a grotesque array, jerking as the life left his body.

Mary shut her eyes, burying her face into the comfort of John's cape and against his uniform to block out the gruesome spectacle, the crowd cheering watching the traitor quickly meet his end.

"There now, Cherie." John soothed, tenderly stroking her back. "It is over now."

"Is General Howe going to leave him hanging for days like he did Nat...Captain Hale?" Mary caught herself at the last moment. She was not quick enough however. John's eyes widened and one of his brows shot up.

"Captain Hale was a spy and a traitor, May. He was caught and deserved his fate." He spat, attempting to sweeten what he as saying to her by the use of her pet name. "General Howe was correct... I do not wish to discuss the matter further." He was firm broaching no argument.

Mary bit back a sharp retort. She had known and liked Hale. Had admired his and Ben Tallmadge's ideas about the education of girls and young women. It was partially due to Hale and Ben's encouragement that she had decided to open the Academy.
"What is it? He was another of your Yale educated schoolmasters, was he not? Another misguided young man that got rebellion into his head?" John asked. "I heard that he was incredibly handsome- tall and fair- the son of a farmer. Not the sort of young man that the daughter of a marquess would even consider marrying even if he did graduate with first class honors."

He could be so incredibly insufferable at times. "Certainly not!" She replied. She had not wanted to marry Nathan Hale. Her head had been turned by the brunet- Benjamin Tallmadge.

"There is a coffin there. Look! General Howe will not afford Henry Phipps the same fate as Captain Hale The young man deserved his fate. His family is correct to leave the city to avoid more scandal."

"And we take their home as our own." Mary provided.

"Do not fret, May. It is right and proper that we begin our married life in such a well appointed home. That it was formerly the residence of a known traitor and his parents- whose crimes were not only being incredibly arrogant and far too self-important- Mister Phipps senior was a known smuggler and privateer. He did not pay duty to the Crown on his goods."

"Another of his crimes?" She asked relieved that the talk of Nathan Hale had ceased. She was curious if John knew that it was in Hale's bed that she had placed the live lobsters. She knew that he would find it incredibly amusing if she ever had a mind to tell him.

"Yes." John replied moving her away from the site of the execution to their waiting carriage. "I do have important business to attend to for the rest of the morning. Afterward I will be most delighted to help you attend to the Wedding Preparations. We do have an appointment with the rector at St. Paul's later in the afternoon."

"Did General Howe not invite the rector to tea?" Mary asked.

"I do not recall. I believe that we are to call on the rector unless His Excellency made other arrangements." John said. "Either way we are to speak with him."

"We are not to have one of the Army's chaplains marry us?" Mary asked.

"I was of the opinion that My Lady wished to be wed by the rector of St. Paul's. I have learnt how fond My Wife-to-Be is of the rector as his wife. How kind they were when your great aunt in Connecticut died."

"How did you ever..?" She began.

"I made the proper inquiries. Do you not know that I will manage to know all of your secrets eventually? Well, perhaps not all of them- we dare not become so over familiar with one another as to become bored and complacent in our married life. I thought that it would please you that we are to be married by him. Seeing as to your position, I also felt it right and proper as there is no archbishop or bishop about." John answered.

"That was incredibly kind, John. I am most grateful for your thoughtfulness." He did tend to have the kindest of hearts when seeing to her comfort was concerned.

"Good!" He smiled. "Now are we to attend the theatre this evening or Madame Fairfax's fete? Do not make a face! I am not well disposed to venture to the Fairfax home either. There will be a reception for the released officers and soldiers before the theatre. That is only the beginning. I am afraid that we must completely abandon Mister Shakespeare for the present. That is, until we have fulfilled all of our social obligations."

"Abandon Mister Shakespeare? Nay!" Mary protested, John assisting her into the carriage, climbing in behind her. "If we do not make an appearance at Madame Fairfax's fete she may retaliate. One does not wish to be the subject of salacious gossip a second time, does one?"
"I can ensure that Madame Fairfax will hold her malicious tongue." John assured her.

"How?" She asked curious.

"I have my methods, Mon Coeur." He stated. "I have heard rumors as to what her precious daughter, Miss Jane, gets up to. She is not the Young Lady of Quality we have been led to believe. Quite the contrary."

"Truly?" Mary had suspected that Jane was not the young lady that she wanted people to think she was. Not to be hypocritical, Mary knew she was not either. But John had compromised her that first evening, the pair both knowing the course their relationship would have to take. It was not that she was being free with her favors. Despite his reputation as a rake and rogue, he was clear that he desired to marry her even if, at that time, it would have been a Marriage of Convenience. He was quite principled.

"She is, erm.. fast." John said delicately. "Madame Fairfax has no business casting aspersions on your reputation. Not that it truly matters now, does it? We are getting married. Many a bride has gone to the altar having known the bridegroom in the biblical sense before the vows were taken."

"She has not. Yet. We should make and appearance, Mine Own Galahad."

John sighed, puffing out his cheeks, the air creating a hissing sound when he exhaled. "Must we? Oh, very well. A dance or two. But I will not be adverse if you complain of a headache necessitating our quick departure."

Mary laughed. "For a man that takes great delight in social affairs I am rather surprised."

"Are you? May, you are well aware that I detest the Fairfax women. Jane Fairfax is a spiteful little minx with a sharp tongue. Her mother is notoriously free with her favors. Still furious that I declined her blatant invitation." John explained.

"I see." Mary bit out turning her face toward the window of the carriage peering out. She wondered if he had considered it. Madame Fairfax was a voluptuous blonde.

"Come now, May, you are not jealous of Madame Fairfax, are you?" He asked.

"No. But it can be a wee bit disconcerting when one knows that a vast portion of the women in this city wish to have your betrothed in their beds." She replied honestly, turning her face back to look him directly in the eye.

"What does it matter when the only woman that I want in mine is you?" He asked. "Your fears are unfounded, put them from your mind." He added, reaching across the carriage seat to grasp one of her hands, giving it a gentle squeeze to reassure her. He did not release it.

Mary looked at their hands entwined. "I did overhear Colonel Tarleton and Captain Lord Kennedy settling a wager as to how many times you were seen to be yawning behind your hand at this Morning's Officer's briefing. The pair were grinning wickedly until they saw me in the hallway."

"Were they? I will have to have words with them about taking bets as to what occurs between the pair of us in the privacy of your bedchamber at night and the effects that it has on my constitution the following morning." John stated.

"Though you make no secret of your desire." She said softly, the pad of her thumb caressing the soft spot between his first knuckle and that of his thumb.
"What is there to keep secret? There is no shame in desiring a beautiful young woman and letting the world know of that desire."

Mary felt her cheeks flushing as she blushed.

"It strokes my male pride when you blush May, especially all over when in the throes of passion." He commented chuckling.

"Rogue!" She accused looking up.

He grinned, his dimples showing and his eyes crinkling at the corners. "I am to be your rogue, My Sweet." He reminded her.

"I am the most fortunate of women." She quipped her eyes glinting with mischief.

"I can just imagine." He parried his grin widening. He laughed. "You, my dear intended wife, are a wicked and naughty young lady. Whatever am I to do with you? Hmmm?"

"I have heard many threats of being taken over your knee, sir. That I am to be chastised for my wickedness. Yet nothing has happened."

"You are no longer mortified about being spanked? Dare I ask as to what merits the change? Some advice from Lady Stewart, perhaps? Has the old dragon been expounding upon what some gentlemen enjoy in their Marriage beds? That My Lady is to indulge her husband and feign to enjoy them?"

"She is a dear old dragon, John! I will not deny that since all of my family is back in Great Britain and other parts of the Empire, that Lady Stewart has taken it upon herself to act as an affectionate grandmother would in such instances. She is a dear friend and confidant of my Granny Cate."

"I have heard rumors about this Granny Cate. She appears to be more formidable than Lady Stewart if that is at all possible. A biting wit and a renowned beauty in her day so I have heard. Ruled her family with an iron hand."

"General Howe has been gossiping once again. Men enjoy telling tales and speaking of other more than women!"

"Ah! You have found us out!" John said in mock horror making Mary laugh.

"Apparently you are not the only one that can divine secrets and thoughts."

"Apparently." He agreed as the carriage pulled up at British Headquarters. Several orderlies rushed to attend the carriage, the door opening, the stairs being rolled out, John assisting Mary down and up to the front door, which was opened by another soldier.

"Welcome back, Lady Mary. Major An..." His words were cut off as George the setter came sailing out of the parlor his tail wagging furiously making straight for Mary, who bent down to pick him up. The soldier grinned at the dog's display of affection.

"Hello there! Have you been a good lad?" Mary asked, scratching the dog behind one of his ears, George grunting contentedly, nipping at a curl that fell over one of her shoulders making her and John laugh.

"He looks as though he just got up from his mid-morning nap!" John observed.
To prove his master correct, George took the opportunity to yawn a small squeak coming out.

"Ah! A wee pup-squeak!" John said, smiling, stroking the top of George's silky head.

The setter responded by nuzzling his muzzle against the crook of Mary's neck, resting it upon her shoulder with a happy sigh, his eyes at half-mast. He was clearly still groggy from his nap. He snuggled into Mary a wee bit closer.

"Scamp!" John teased, ruffling George's ears. "Watch over your mistress whilst I meet with General Howe. If you are good, I would wager that His Excellency will have a treat to award your excellent behavior."

"He will grow fat with all of the indulgence." Mary complained.

John raised a brow, one of his eyes narrowing. "My Lady should be aware as she is one of the worst offenders!"

"I... No... " She sputtered. "We have had this conversation before. You, sir, are just as guilty." She accused, her eyes dancing with mischief.

"Me? Certainly not!" He replied with mock severity. "Master George, I am depending upon you! Take care of her!" He dipped his head, kissing her tenderly upon the mouth inhaling the scent of her perfume, a mixture of roses, lily of the valley, jasmine and a hint of fine Egyptian musk. It was provocative and arousing. White-hot heat leapt through his limbs, inflaming him. He cursed under his breath. He would have to wait until later this afternoon when he could sneak into her bedchamber as he had many times before or later this evening to have her. Another kiss would have to satisfy him until then. "Wait for me!" He said, his lips brushing against hers once more moving off, handing his hat, gloves and cape to an awaiting orderly, disappearing down the hall to his meeting with General Howe.

She sighed, her eyes fixated on his retreating back, watching him until he turned just before disappearing out of sight, looking over a shoulder, obviously feeling her eyes upon him. He smiled, his dimples etching either side of his mouth, his gaze meeting hers. He winked.

She lowered her eyes, turning her face away, cheeks flushing.

"Can I take your gloves and cape, My Lady?" An orderly asked.

"If you would take Master George for a moment, please." Mary said, removing the pup from where he had settled in, he appeared none too pleased. "It will just be for a moment. Be patient." She quickly removed her gloves and cloak handing them to the private who gave her back the setter. George settled back against her.

"Good Day, Lady Mary! I trust that you are not too distressed after witnessing Henry Phipps' execution. The pale pallor suits you. I believe that you owe me a forfeit for my silence regarding the gifts you had commissioned for my brother, the major. I have come to collect." William Andre's smooth deep voice sounded behind her.

"As I told you at Mister Burgess's, I do not believe I should indulge your whim in order for you to keep silent, lieutenant." She said turning about to face him.

"But I do, My Lady. Would you have me ruin your surprises? But what is a kiss and caress between two people that will soon find themselves kin, hmm?" He asked, his eyes sweeping over her boldly. It was clear that he wanted to be far more intimate with her than mere kinship allowed.

Mary's eyes widened. "No, Sir. I would not. Nor am I prepared to indulge that which you desire."
"I desire far more than a kiss and caress from you, My Pet. It would be prudent for the pair of us to have amiable familial relations, would it not, especially given the nature of my elder brother's career? Heaven Forbid he gets injured, maimed or killed. It would be my duty to give comfort and solace to the grieving wife or widow."

"I will honor my vows to the major, Lieutenant, as is my duty as his wife." Mary explained.

"You could not find it in your heart to care for me, even a little? My Lady chose the wrong brother. I could make you far happier than he ever could. I still can, if you but let me..."

"I will not let you, Lieutenant. What you are suggesting is against God's law and Man's!"

"Come now, Lady Mary, you know as well as I do, that there are many documented instances of a man marrying his deceased wife's sister or a widow her deceased husband's brother. We should be certain that we suit one another in that particular manner."

"It is against the law of the Anglican Church." Mary countered.

"Did he ever tell you that I stole one of his paramour's away? A pretty little French girl in Geneva named Antoinette De Blais. She was quite the coquette, black curls, large luminous brown eyes, breasts that could fill a man's hands to overflowing. John was besotted with her. Toinette was the first woman that he had lost his heart to after Honora had broken it. He was infatuated. Alas, we met at a ball; Toinette was instantly taken with me and was most eager to part with her most precious gift that I was most eager to take. John caught us in flagrante delicto in the conservatory of her home. She was content to part with her virtue upon the harpsichord. I was most happy to oblige her. It was the first of several times that I succeeded in taking a woman from John."

"As I have told you, Lieutenant, your suit is wasted upon me. I do not want you, Sir."

"That is because you have not ventured to try me. Are you not curious to compare us, Lady Mary? Find which of us proves to be the more skillful lover?" He asked, closing the gap between then as he spoke, the back of his hand caressing her from cheekbone to her mouth, his index finger running along the seam of her lips, his ocean colored eyes search hers.

"Do not touch me!" She warned taking a step back, using George as a shield, clutching him closer to her.

"Come now, Lady Mary! You do not wish to have regrets, do you? Especially when I show you how much more expert I am at pleasing a lady." William taunted her.

"Major Andre makes me incandescently happy." Mary told him. "I believe this conversation is at an end, Lieutenant."

"He does? More than me or Major Benjamin Tallmadge ever could? I stood on the steps and watched the pair of you. You and that rebel officer. He is in love with you. It takes another man in love to know it. He could not keep his eyes from you the moment he and those two other Continentals came in under that Flag or Truce. Could not tear them away until you left."

At the mention of Benjamin Tallmadge's name, Mary felt her cheeks flush. She was still attracted to him. There was no denying it. But there was a difference between one being attracted to a man and being totally smitten. It had taken some time, but she was marrying the man with whom she was totally smitten. She knew that he felt the same. "Excuse me! There are wedding preparations that I must attend to before this afternoon. I must..." She turned away.

His hand shot out, grasping one of her forearms, yanking her to him, wrapping his free hand about
her waist, his head dipped, intent on kissing her. She caught a whiff of the citrus scent he wore, felt the heat of his breath. Fortunately she anticipated him, turning her face at the last moment so that his lips landed upon her cheek instead of her lips as he had wished.

"Let go of me!" She exclaimed, struggling, attempting to wriggle free, finally managing to untangle herself. She glared at him. "How dare you accost me in that fashion!" She hissed. She was furious.

"Do you know how desirable you are in a fit of temper, My Lady? A pity that I will not be the one to tame that fierce Scots' spirit. No wonder why John has not wanted another woman since he met you, I imagine that fierceness fuels your intense passion in private."

"How dare you! How can you insult me so?"

"Love makes men rash and reckless, Lady Mary. Do forgive me if I have appeared to speak out of turn. What can I do but blame my love for you. My heart is full of ardor and devotion. I want you so very badly. I burn."

"Mayhap some time drilling with your regiment out in the cool crisp air would assist in cooling your ardor, Lieutenant?" Mary snapped. "Then a ride to New Jersey to join your regiment."

"You would see me sent away? Will you at least be kind enough to see me off with a kiss?" He asked, his eyes twinkling. He was ever hopeful.

"No!" She cried in exasperation startling George, storming out of the hallway without taking her leave of him.

He watched her go, smiling after her. "If I have my way, you will do much more than send me off with a kiss, My Sweet. My brother be damned!"

Mary paced back and forth in the library, clutching George close to her, stroking his back in an attempt to calm her thundering heart and stop herself from trembling and shaking in mixture of fright and fury. She took a deep breath of air, closing her eyes, feeling the hot tears stinging behind her lids, burying her face in the setter's neck. A small tear rolled unchecked down a cheek, Mary bit her lower lip to repress a cry that threatened to tear through her throat.

"Lady Mary? There you are!" Abigail's warm soothing voice came from the doorway. "Begging My Lady's pardon, but were you not supposed to be meeting the Mistresses Shaw and Alton and Miss Melissa to travel to the silversmith's?" She paused for a moment, staring at her young employer noting how she clung to the pup in her arms as a lifeline. Something was wrong. Something was horribly wrong. "Lady Mary, are you quite well?" She asked, walking into the room and straight toward the girl.

"Oh, Abigail!" Mary choked out a sob, bursting into tears. "He... He..."

"Shhhhh! What distresses you so, Child?" Abigail asked, concern furrowing her brow, lifting Mary's chin. "He? Lieutenant Andre? He be pestering you again? Did he harm you? You have to tell the Major so he will be certain that the lieutenant is sent to New Jersey and away from you!"

"If I tell the Major what the Lieutenant said to me, the Major is liable to call him out and kill him! I cannot have that scandal blackening my reputation and Good Name!" Mary explained through her tears.

"So you remain silent about it and allow this rascal to continue to harass you and possibly do worse?
No, Lady Mary! If you are not going to tell the Major then let me! I knew that boy was trouble the moment he arrived from London! How he was chasing after you when the Major was away off fighting! Thought the lieutenant's pursuit would end with the announcement of your engagement but it did not. Something has to be done!"

"He will not leave me alone! Lieutenant Andre was bragging how he stole a lady away from the Major when they were in Geneva. He... he said he wished..."

"He wished that he could do the same to you." Abigail concluded Lady Mary's sentence.

Mary nodded. "He suggested that I try him. That I should not marry the Major without..."Mary could not get the words out. They were too shameful.

"Without allowing the lieutenant to seduce you. What did you tell him?" Abigail finished for her. The maid knew exactly what Lieutenant William Andre was about, that young scoundrel.

"I said that it was against God's law and man's. I would never!" Mary explained.

"Shhhh... Child..." Abigail stroked Mary's back to calm her. She hated to see her young mistress so upset. She would speak to Major Andre about getting the lieutenant transferred to New Jersey. Certainly he would do something once Abigail told him what William had done to Mary—propositioning her and accosting her—had not been the first time. The situation could not be allowed to go on. Lady Mary should not be terrified during what should be one of the most joyous times in a young woman's life. "I promise I will tell the Major. You need not fret. Now dry those tears. You have to think about your future happiness. Be sure that you have some fun at the silversmith. Choose a piece that will leave no doubt in any man's mind where your heart and loyalties lie!" Using a thumb, she brushed one of Mary's tears from a cheek, her deep warm chocolate brown eyes gazing into Mary's, smiling.

"Thank you, Abigail." Mary said, sniffing.

"Give me, Master George! I will see to him. Go upstairs and splash some cool water on your face. I will be certain that your cloak and gloves are ready when you come down again. We will fix this. I promise." Abigail reassured Mary, taking George.

"We will!" Mary agreed. Some of her waning confidence restored. "What would I ever do without you?" She added, giving the maid a quick kiss on one of her smooth cheeks before dashing out of the library.

Later that morning
The Silversmith's

"Do you believe it will please him?" Mary asked her trio of companions, the quartet staring at the figure of King Henry V mounted on his great war horse, sword in hand, prepared to vanquish any and all French foes at Agincourt dressed in battle armour, the arms of England on his surcoat and the trappings of the great war horse. If one looked closely at the features of the king one could discern a rather uncanny resemblance to Major John Andre.

"What manner of question is that? Of course it will please him, May! He will become yet more insufferable when he studies the figure, which we all are painfully aware that he will be wont to do. He will become virtually impossible when he realizes that King Henry's face is not the one from the portraits but the Major's own. I do not understand why you indulge his vanity so!" Rachel
complained examining the figure.

"It pleases and makes him happy. Why should I not indulge him? It is a gift commemorating most auspicious occasion." Mary said. "He reciprocates in kind, trust me."

Lottie giggled. "In more than one fashion. I always wondered what went on when you and Major Andre were behind closed doors in his study and the library. There are only so many times a gentleman may use the excuse of being the lady's protector to meet in complete private with a young lady of marriageable age without severely damaging her reputation! Was he thanking you for your profound generosity? Were you thanking him for his? However did he get away with it?" She teased.

"Lottie! Someone will hear you!" Mary admonished her friend looking about the shop. Hoping there were no eavesdroppers listening. "He is circumspect and discreet. None of the matrons of the city naysay him or speak ill because they all dare not incite his wrath. You know that where he goes the other young officers follow. Men are such sheep."

"Woe be to those old harridans, Madame Fairfax and Lady Richmond. Colonel Tarleton says that if they say a word against you or the trio of us that both will be socially ruined." Melissa told them. "No one dare spread lies and gossip about His Grace of Sutherland's daughter or her friends!"

"Always have their noses in others' business and are quick to pass judgment. Hypocrites! Madame Fairfax cuckolds her husband and Lady Richmond is notorious for her taste for younger men. I hear that she pays them to satisfy her baser desires." Rachel told the trio.

"Madame Fairfax has tried to get Major Andre in her bed but he will have nothing to do with her!" Melissa said. "But enough of them, I am incredibly curious as to in what other manners that you intend to indulge the major, May? Does a portion of it have to do with those fittings at Madame Bernon's?"

"Melissa! Never you mind!" Rachel cried. "You will find out when you are engaged!"

"Come now, Rachel! You know that I will not rest until May tells me at least something."

"Now is neither the time or the place."

"Are you happy that you are marrying Major Andre instead of someone like Captain Lord Kent? One would imagine that either of them would make an incredibly handsome Henry V." Melissa asked.

"Captain Lord Kent is a boy compared to Major Andre no matter what his antecedents." Rachel observed.

"Both are reported to know their way about a battlefield and the bedroom. rather well" Lottie whispered so only her friends could hear. The comment causing them to all burst into a fit of giggles.

"What a highly inappropriate comment to come from a young lady of your social standing, Miss Shaw." Mary admonished her mimicking one of the older matrons of the city causing more giggles.

"Captain Lord Kent is not what he appears to be. He is a wicked young man!" Rachel said.

"Yes! Please!" Melissa cried. The quartet all burst out laughing.

"How do you know this, Miss Rachel Alton?" Lottie asked her friend.
"As much as she says she dislikes Major Andre, Miss Rachel has been spending quite a lot of time in the company of Captain Lord Kennedy." Mary observed. "I do wonder what your father would say though I believe the captain is to inherit and earldom, if memory serves. Or would your father disown you if you married a British officer?"

"I do not believe Captain Lord Kennedy has marriage with a colonial young lady in mind. You are as well aware as I am as to how the world works, May!"

"Why not? Your antecedents are as well placed as mine. Your great grandfather was an earl. Albeit your grandfather sought to prosper in America being a younger son. He certainly cannot be faulted. Your family is certainly rich enough. At least you enjoy his company." Mary said.

"Is it to your liking, My Lady?" The silversmith asked.

"Yes, Thank you, Mister Hilliard. Immensely pleased. You have far outdone yourself." Mary replied.

"Shall I have it wrapped then? The other piece Your Ladyship commissioned will be completed tomorrow. I hope that you do not mind the slight wait?"

"It is well before the date we agreed upon, Mister Hilliard. I am most grateful."

"It is me that should be grateful, Lady Mary. I do appreciate your patronage. Since word has gotten out that Your Ladyship and Major Andre have purchased items from this establishment my work has increased. I have had to hire two more smiths and three apprentices to keep up." Mister Hilliard replied with a smile.

Mary smiled back. "I am delighted!"

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British Headquarters
While the Quartet was at the Silversmith's

"Major Andre? Sir? Do you have a moment?" Abigail asked from the doorway of John's private study.

John looked up from the sketch of a piece of jewelry he was designing for Mary. Her Grace of Sutherland had sent along some loose precious stones that General Howe had given to him in a packet this morning. The intent being they were to be made into ornaments for the duchess's daughter. John was designing a pair of earrings and necklace for the emeralds and diamonds he had found. "What is it, Abigail. Come and look at the jewelry I am designing for the Lady Mary. These emeralds gracing her ears and about her throat will compliment her beauty."

"On your Wedding Day, Sir?" She asked.

"No. She will be dressed with diamonds and pearls on that day." John answered, Abigail coming forward to look at the sketches. "Now what is so pressing that you sought me out. Is the Lady Mary well?"

"Yes, Major Andre. Well, no..." Abigail took a deep breath.

"She is not distressed about Henry Phipps' execution? I had thought we discussed that to her satisfaction this morning in the carriage. What is amiss? Bridal nerves?"
"It is Lieutenant William Andre. He will not cease pestering Her Ladyship. I do not wish to speak wrongly but I found her in the library. She was quite distressed, Major Andre."

John's brows furrowed in concern, he went white about the mouth, he could feel his anger beginning to rise. "How distressed, Abigail?"

"She was in tears, Sir. Lieutenant Andre had accosted her after you had gone to speak with General Howe. She said that he said the most horrible things. Saying how he had stolen a lady in Geneva from you, Sir. How he would do the same to Her Ladyship. That Her Ladyship should try and compare the pair of you as to how you both performed in intimate matters, Sir. That she had picked the wrong brother. This has not been the first time this has happened. It may not be my place but I have become incredibly fond of the Lady Mary, I fear for her safety if Lieutenant Andre remains billeted in this house for much longer. " She dare not press on. She should let him draw his own conclusions. She prayed it would be the right ones for her mistress. William Andre had to go!

"I see." John's voice was low and dangerous. "I should call him out and kill him where he stands! But I will not engage in fratricide as much as I wish to. Perhaps my brother had best cool his ardor in New Jersey? I do have to have him at the wedding. There is no getting 'round that. But otherwise... It will be best for Lady Mary that he is as far away as propriety demands. I do not wish to have a skittish and distressed bride to contend with. Though I may enjoy the pleasures of soothing her frayed nerves." He said attempting to make light of a dreadful situation. He hoped he had not failed miserably. "Thank you, Abigail. How is the Lady Mary's health? Has she, erm... I know that she is due to..." John hedged about. He hoped that their wanton copulation every night would soon have the desired results. He knew that the Ludlow women were notoriously fertile giving the number of living offspring in Mary's family and how many relations she had.

"Has the Lady Mary experienced her monthly flow? She is several days late, Major but it is far too soon to tell if she is breeding."

John could not mask his joy at the possibility. He grinned, his eyes sparkling. "So there is a chance that I could...? As King Henry VII did with Elizabeth of York." He chuckled, delighted.

"Sir?"

"The first Tudor King was betrothed to marry Elizabeth of York to heal the rift created by the Wars of the Roses, unite the factions of York and Lancaster. There have been rumors for centuries that they consummated their marriage over Christmastide before their wedding on January 18, 1486. Arthur, Prince of Wales was born eight months later, by all accounts a healthy full term heir. Queen Elizabeth was married pregnant." John finished his brief history lesson.

For their sake, Abigail hoped that it was true. She hoped that Lady Mary would be breeding sooner than later. A baby, especially a healthy son, would be such a wonderful gift to the couple. She suspected that Major Andre would be a wonderful though indulgent father. "Thank you, Major."

"Is that all, Abigail? Is there anything else that Lady Mary or you require? I do so appreciate that you have developed a deep affection for Her Ladyship."

"If I may be so bold, Major Andre..."

"You may." He gave his permission.

"The Lady Mary is very easy to develop a deep affection for." Abigail said.

"That she is. She is very easy to love, is she not?" John said wistfully.
Notes on Chapter XXVII
Once again, many Thanks to the JJ Feild Facebook page for their continued support of this story and their friendship. I am ever grateful.
Many Thanks to my Brainstorming Partner, LadyJ! We are a great team, Girl! Thank you for all of your ideas and suggestions.
To Truth Universally Acknowledged and Obrohom Woodholl : Two of my loudest cheerleaders, thank you for your insights and comments. Your friendships have been gifts from this fandom.
Please do take a moment to read Truth Universally Acknowledge's story, The General's Treasure and the other works in this fandom that I have bookmarked. All the stories are well written, researched and enjoyable.
Notes: Henry Phipps is finally executed for treason. He does not receive the treatment that Captain Nathan Hale did. To read an account of Hale's execution and about his life please refer to this work which contains many primary sources, http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1428600434?psc=1&redirect=true&ref_=oh_aui_detailpage_o07_s00
This author found it to be an invaluable resource.
Mary and John have an interesting discussion on the way back to headquarters. Marriages in the 18th century were very different from those of today. They were traditionally held in the parlor of the bride's home with the rector or member of the clergy arriving to perform the ceremony in his street clothes. A British officer would have most likely been married by his Regimental Chaplain. However, given Lady Mary's social status and because I reign as Goddess Supreme in this Alternative Universe, the pair are going to be married from St. Paul's/Trinity Church on Wall Street which was built in 1766 and survived the Fire of 1776. It was the one that George Washington worshipped in the morning of his Inauguration. It is also the church where General William Howe worshipped when the British were occupying New York. Lieutenant Andre is still stalking the Lady Mary. Stalkers are incredibly persistent and do not take no for an answer (as a survivor of such behavior 10 years ago, I can assure you what is portrayed is accurate- at least in my experience- there are various degrees of stalking) The young lady in Geneva is from the imagination of your faithful author and has no basis in fact.
Fortunately, Abigail is there to calm the Lady Mary in the library. She quickly sees how the situation is escalating where it could eventually result in a sexual assault hence her decision to speak with Major Andre on Mary's behalf to have Lieutenant Will finally sent off to New Jersey. Mary's fears about being blamed/the damage to her reputation, etc are real and completely plausible.
The young ladies make it to the silversmith! Whilst there they engage in some rather naughty conversation.
Abigail seeks Major Andre out and informs him what his scoundrel of a younger brother has been up to. The Major becomes furious and makes the decision to have William sent away. He also asks Abigail if the Lady Mary is breeding yet giving the maid a brief history lesson about the intimate lives of the first Tudor King and Queen.
Thank you to all my readers and those that have left kudos on this work. The continued support means the world to me.
Chapter XXVIII

Lieutenant William Andre looked up from reading the orders in his hand. "You are sending me away to New Jersey?" He asked his ocean blue eyes meeting his brother's cobalt blue ones across the desk they were seated opposite. "Am I not to be your supporter at your wedding? We are blood, John!"

"General Howe believes that it is time that you joined your regiment. They have need of you. You have dallied here for far too long. You will be allowed to come to York City to attend the wedding."

"Do not feign innocence, Major Andre, I know that you had a hand in my transfer. Afraid that I might steal your betrothed away? That she would prove to be just like Antoinette de Blaise? Actually it would be far worse than Antoinette, because unlike her you are totally besotted and completely in love with the Lady Mary Ludlow. You were only slightly infatuated with Madamoiselle de Blais. Your Beautiful Little Rebel from Massachusetts is curious as a ship's cat. Afraid that temptation would eventually get the better of her? That in her curiosity she would seek me out?."

"You flatter yourself, William." John bit out, glaring at his brother across the desk. "The Lady Mary would never betray me."

"Are you so certain? She appeared still quite taken with that Continental Major Tallmadge." William shot back at John.

"I would concede a wee bit of residual affection for a Young Lady's First Infatuation but she is mine, heart, mind, body and soul."

"So you say." William said.

"I know it."

"Only because I did not arrive sooner from London and meet her first."

"So you have been intent on reminding me time and again. It would not have mattered. Face the truth, Will. She does not want you. She has made that abundantly clear. It is eating you up inside like a wasting disease. You can never or will ever have her." Once again, John made William aware of some painful truths.

"We shall see about that."

"There is nothing to see. She was so distressed after you has accosted you in the hallway she was so terrified she was in tears."

"Terrified that she was desirous to succumb to my wooing."

John shot out of his chair across the desk, his fist hitting William's chin quickly grasping the hilt of his sword, his free hand grabbing his brother's stock jerking William toward him, their faces so close...
together they were nose to nose. "Mayhap in that twisted mind! The fact that we share blood is what prevents me from spilling yours right now by running you through with my sword! Keep away from what is mine!" He growled, his eyes blazing blue fire.

"She does not belong to you. Yet!" William countered, his ocean colored eyes blazing back at John's, his hands braced on the desk to steady him.

"Do not try my patience, William!" John warned, gripping the hilt of his sword that much tighter, metal sounded against metal as he withdrew the sword a fraction from its scabbard watching his brother's face turn white.

"John, please do not..." William pleaded his eyes riveted on John's hand that held the hilt of his sword. "How can you fault me? You fell in love with her, as well!"

"You are not in love with her. You wish to possess her. She is a trophy to you!" John accused. "I am besotted with her and wish to make her incandescently happy. I would do anything for her! There is a vast difference."

"That is not true!"

"Is it not? You seem to forget that I know you, William, almost as well as I know myself. You are all about possession and conquest! Well this is one woman that you will not possess and conqueror. She consented to marry me. She is to be my wife. Mine!" John spat out. What did he have to do and say to convince William that Mary did not want him? That she wanted John? "Perhaps I should arrange that you leave Sunday afternoon after Morning Service. The rector is to be publishing the Banns of Marriage between the Lady Mary and me for the first time. You should be present to hear them."

John watched his brother's facial expression as the words sunk in.

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Sunday, January 26, 1777

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, New York

John assisted Mary out of their carriage, taking her hand to help her down, then offering her his arm, escorting to the steps of the church. "Remove your gloves when we get inside. Show off the ring, May Love." He told her, the pair mounting the steps followed by John's brother officers. "I am certain that there are many young ladies that would be delighted to extend their felicitations upon our betrothal." He added with a cheeky smile.

"You are incorrigible!" Mary chided, giggling in spite of herself. She shook her head. "Did you remember your Book of Common Prayer?" She added. He was wont to forget it, having to share hers. Mary was beginning to believe that he did it on purpose as an excuse to stand closer to her than was considered proper, wanting to be near her as much as he could.

"I forgot it!" He answered.

"Yet again. John!" She admonished him.

"There you go on using my Christian name in public once more. What will people think and say?" He teased.

"What would you wish them to say?" She flirted, gazing up at him through lowered lashes. "That the Lady Mary Ludlow is so besotted with her betrothed that she forgets herself in public? Is that what you wish, Mine Own Galahad."
He cocked his head to one side, pursing his lips seeming to ponder her question. "Yes! Exactly that! Mmmm... I do so enjoy it when you call me Galahad." He replied after a moment.

"Well, Sir, people will begin to see through why you conveniently forget your prayer book. Why at every service you have to share mine! They are beginning to notice your inclinations to flirt with me. Those looks have not been lost on other members of the congregation. So I have been told." She said, looking up. Her gaze meeting his.

"Let them watch us and gossip What manner of behavior do they expect other than the most chivalrous when my betrothed has bestowed upon me such a sobriquet. I do have to live up to Sir Galahad's gallantry especially to My Lady." John retorted, the couple reaching the door to the church, moving inside. "Do not forget to remove your gloves, May Love." He added, removing his tricorn and his own gloves.

Mary did as she was bid, revealing the large oval cut sapphire and diamond betrothal ring that John had designed, which rested on the fourth finger of her left hand. The stones catching the sunlight that poured in through the church windows, brilliantly sparking. Holding her hand out, Mary turned her hand this way and that, staring at the ring, a dreamy look upon her face.

"Does it please you, Dearest?" He asked watching her admire the ring. Her obvious pleasure and delight make his heart swell in his chest with tenderness and love. Sending up a brief prayer to Providence that he had found her.

'Yes! It is does. Very much." She replied, smiling radiantely up at him, unaware that in the clutch of officers that had just entered the church, William Andre had spotted the pair and was glaring at them, his ocean blue eyes dark and stormy like the waves off the coast of Boston in The Colony of Massachusetts Bay during an autumn hurricane. His jaw set, lips pursed his anger.

"Good!" He replied. "It does me well to please you!"

"I do ever so enjoy being pleased, John!" She stated.

His brows shot up. "Another use of my Christian name in public. What am I ever going to do with you?" He asked with a grin.

"You will think of something." She quipped.

"Oh, you can count on that!"

A delicious shiver ran down her spine. "I will await in eager anticipation... John." She whispered back.

He chuckled. "Naughty vixen!"

"A Fine Good Morning to you both! What sparkles so that it is nearly blinding me? Ah! Lady Mary is that a betrothal ring that I see upon your finger?" Banastre Tarleton cried making a show of covering his eyes. "It is! And I very large and beautiful one. Sweet Jesus, Johnny, the stone is so large it almost covers the first knuckle on her finger! How did you ever find a Ceylon blue the exact color of Lady May's eyes? Certainly there was not one available in the Colonies to serve your purpose?"

John laughed. "Nay! A packet arrived from London."

"His Grace of Sutherland is more than generous. What did you ever do to receive such precious jewels from him, eh?" Ban asked. The officers were well aware as to what Mary's parents had sent
from England items for her trousseau. They had spared no expense. Her mother had been insistent that she received all the expected luxuries of a woman of her class and station to begin her life as a married woman and officer's wife. "Out with the secret, Johnny! Certainly there are no more peers' daughters about York City that have no male relations to chaperone them and require His Majesty's Army to step in and find them protectors?"

"Sadly, no." John answered.

"More's the pity." Ban replied with a mock pout, he winked at Mary who brought a hand to her mouth to stifle a giggle. "Some of us have all the luck!" He added, his gaze sweeping over John, sizing him up, as other officers crowded about them.

"If he ever disappoints you, Lady Mary, you know that any of us would be more than willing to take his place." A handsome Scots officer with black hair and green eyes teased good naturedly.

"You will all have to queue behind me!" Lieutenant William Andre quipped coming to join the group.

"That will be incredibly difficult, Lieutenant, seeing as you will be in New Jersey for the unforeseeable future." Captain Lord Kent said. "I am certain that there are many of us present here that would be more than willing to take your place as first in line."

"Thank you, gentlemen, I am gratified that you all have such confidence in my abilities as a husband. Rest assured that I will never disappoint My Lady. Quite the contrary." John commented with a wink his gaze capturing Mary's, who had the courtesy to blush, beaming. "And I will be certain to see to it that she is never given cause to require any of your, erm, attentions."

The officers about him chuckled.

"Lieutenant Andre and Captain Lord Kent will have no reason to head the queue. There will absolutely be no need." He added with confidence.

"Should we not be taking out seats?" Mary asked changing the subject.

"You do not wish to be crowded by well-wishers anxious to see your betrothal ring?" William Andre asked, his ocean colored eyes assessing Mary, his gaze caressing her creamy white breasts through the neckline of her gown, which was covered by a sheer cream lace fichu a silk red rose corsage pinned at the center. It had been created at Mary's specific specifications to compliment her betrothed's uniform, the ribbons being of dark blue and gold. It stood out against her dark green gown.

Mary did not have a chance to answer his question as at that moment several women who had entered the church spotted the Lady Mary Ludlow standing beside her British major came dashing over as quickly as propriety would allow.

"Good Morning to you, Lady Mary! Major Andre!" One of the girls gushed pushing her way through the officers about two dozen other young women behind her all chatting, giggling and twittering like a flock of magpies anxious to get to Mary. "Is that your betrothal ring?" She asked, pointedly staring at the jewels glittering on the fourth finger of Mary's left hand. "Oh, My Gracious! The stone is the size of a Robin's egg! You are so fortunate, Lady Mary! Angelica, come look! Isn't it beautiful! I hope that my Freddie can afford a betrothal ring that large!"

"Ohhhh! Let me see!" A woman with fat butter yellow curls gushed drawing her daughter forward. "Ooohhhh! That is so beautiful!" The daughter squealed with delight. Her curls, just like here
mother's bouncing in enthusiasm when she when up on her toes to take a closer look.

"You are so lucky! Was the stone picked to compliments the facings of Major Andre's uniform?" A young woman with dark brown hair and eyes asked.

"Is that a sapphire I have never seen one that large! The color matches your eyes!" A pretty blonde complimented.

"Did you see that ring? I wonder if the size of the stone is compensating for something wicked Major Andre did that he harbors guilt for? It is awfully large!" Jane Fairfax laughed meanly.

Anne Jones snorted. "Oh, Jane!" She stifled a laugh behind her hand. "There is the lieutenant..." She added her gaze drawn to William Andre, who was staring transfixed at the Lady Mary and not having a care to hide it.

"Where?" Jane asked. "What ever do he and the major see in that flame-haired cow besides her title and money?" She sniped noticing at whom William could not tear his gaze from. That ginger-haired bitch! How she despised the Lady Mary Ludlow.

"I do not know but whatever it may be I do not like it. How dare she!" Anne Jones hissed.

"She does. It is not fair!" Jane whined.

Her words were lost in the crush of young women and matrons that came forward to look at the ring and offer their Good Wishes and felicitations. John standing beside her preening with pride at all the attention.

"So His Majesty's Army managed to out maneuver His Majesty's Navy, eh?" Admiral Clark asked his voice low and husky approaching the couple. "Quite a prize you secured for yourself, Andre! That filly appears to be ripe to be broken and ridden. Would not have minded to take that little mare for a canter about the paddock myself.." He whispered in John's ear. "I would warrant that her saddlebags are full for the one that is capable of mastering and subduing her. Good luck with that, Major!" He turned his attention to Mary, taking her hand, planting the obligatory kiss upon it. "A Fine Good Morning, Lady Mary! My Sincerest Congratulations though I am dreadfully disappointed to hear that Captain Lord Nicholls was refused mayhap there is another officer in our service that will meet your, erm, needs? We would be more than delighted to oblige you." He flirted.

"I sincerely doubt that, Admiral Clarke. One particular officer in His Majesty's Army fulfills all that I require. But I do thank you for your sincere concern for my happiness." Mary replied sweetly. The admiral's hungry gaze was making her feel rather uncomfortable. The only other place for her to look without appearing rude to the sailor would be at William and she dare not give him any sort of encouragement by catching his glance but the admiral's eyes were incredibly unsettling. Staring at the lieutenant for even however brief, would be better than enduring the admiral's lecherous assessment. A lesser of two evils. Her eyes traveled from Admiral Clarke to William Andre, their eyes locking for a brief moment, Mary reading the naked passion and lust for her in his ocean colored gaze. She felt her face heat, looking away. Picking a piece of imaginary fluff off her gown, looking up through her lowered lashes to find him still staring at her, one of the corners of his mouth twitching up in a devilish smile.

She was happy when she spotted Lady Stewart approaching,

"Lady Stewart, a Fine Good Morning to you!" Mary exclaimed, relieved to see the formidable Old Lady. Knowing that protocol demanded that she be addressed first but not caring. She prayed that the admiral would move off.
"A Fine Good Morning to you, Lady Mary!" Lady Stewart greeted her. "Is this the ring?" She asked peering through a lorgnette at the large array of precious stones on the fourth finger of the young woman's hand, holding it up to her face. "You outdid yourself, Major Andre! Washington and the Continental Army will be able to see that stone all the way in New Jersey!" She quipped with a smile.

John grinned. "I am glad that you approve, Lady Stewart."

"I do. You are fortunate that she agreed to have you and take you on." Elspeth Stewart told him baldly.

"I am most grateful and look forward to entering into the Bonds of Matrimony." John replied, gazing adoringly at Mary. He was clearly taken with the girl.

"With that naked and willing in my bed every night I would be inclined to explore the bonds of Wedded Bliss myself." One of the officers leaned over and whispered to another.

"Shhh! Remember we are in church!" The other officer hissed back.

"God hears and understands." The first officer retorted.

"Dear Lady Mary, I would be honored if you would come for tea this coming week. Do not bring this dashing gentleman with you. Can you bear to let her out of your sight for several hours, Major, indulge an Old Lady?" Elspeth Stewart teased.

"I will do my best to find a way to manage, Lady Stewart. Do not keep Her Ladyship for overlong." John replied gallantly.

"I would not think of it, Major!" Lady Stewart countered. "I will send my carriage, Lady Mary." She lowered her lorgnette. "Shall we all see about taking our seats. Banastre, do be a dear and escort me to my pew box!" She called to Tarleton who was flirting with a trio of young ladies from the Academy.

John escorted Mary to the Ludlow pew box accompanied by William, Admiral Lord Richard Howe and General William Howe were already seated, they stood upon seeing the Lady Mary. General Howe could not resist beaming as the officers greeted the Lady Mary.

"Not long now, My Dear! A wee bit more than three weeks. I understand from Major Andre that the preparations are advancing apace?" General Howe said good naturedly.

"Yes, Excellency. The Major has been incredibly kind. He has rather firm opinions upon domestic matters including marriage." Mary replied.

"He has made me privy to the sketches. He is planning quite an elaborate affair." Howe said. "As well he should. A young lady of your social standing and beauty should be shown off to the Colonies."

"You flatter me, General Howe. I thank you!" Mary said sweetly.

The other worshippers took their seats. The service began.

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It came to that portion of the service. The rector rose and walked up to the pulpit, stepping up to address the congregation. "I publish the banns of marriage between the Lady Mary Georgiana
Amelia Louisa, beloved daughter of His Grace the Duke of Sutherland of Boston in the Colony of Massachusetts, London and Dornoch and Major John Andre of His Majesty's 54th Regiment of Foot, presently of York City and of London. This is the first time of asking. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in Holy Matrimony ye are to declare it."

A stifled whine of dismay was heard as well as several languished sighs throughout the congregation as several of the women and men of New York lamented the fact that the Lady Mary Ludlow and Major John Andre were to be united in Holy Wedlock.

William lowered his eyes, his heart constricting with jealousy and pain. Damn John! He thought, his fingers absently pulling at loose thread on the arm of his scarlet coat. Casting coveted glances at Mary. How he burned for her! The almost three weeks apart from her he was to endure were surely to be the longest in his life. She certainly would allow him to tender his farewells to her. To refuse him would incite gossip and comment. He knew how precious her reputation was to her. How that sentiment would play in his favor. He looked forward to taking advantage of it.

Later that Same Day
British Headquarters

He stood propped up against the doorjamb watching her fingers knot the skien of silk embroidery thread between two slender fingers. Clipping the ends with the pair of scissors designed as a crane laying them on the small candlestick table to her left. Sensing someone's presence she looked up, her sapphire eyes meeting his ocean blue ones, her upper teeth biting her lower lip in consternation. He wondered how that lip would taste next to his.

"Lieutenant Andre, what a pleasant surprise!" She exclaimed a tad too brightly, laying her embroidery frame upon the table next to the scissors. "What do I owe the honor? Lieutenant, you have an uncanny knack of finding me wherever I may be. Be it under a Kissing Bough at Christmastide, the parlor or the Entrance Hall. You manage to seek me out."

"I came to say farewell, Lady Mary. I am going away." He explained to her sadly walking into the room coming to stand before her as she rose. "I am finally off to join my regiment in New Jersey. General Howe has given the orders. I had to see you and make my farewells to you before I left. I will return in three weeks time to attend the wedding."

"Go with God, Lieutenant." She did not know what else to say to him. "I will pray that He will keep you safe and away from harm."

"My Lady is the kindest of women." He told her feverently, taking one of her hands, bringing it to his mouth to plant a kiss upon it. "I appreciate your concern for my welfare. Is that all you will be doing? Praying for my welfare?" He asked, looking up at sadly once again from lowered lashes, his blue-green eyes meeting hers, his lips set.

"What will you have me do, Lieutenant?" She answered a question with one of her own. "May God grant you Godspeed." She added.

William took a step closer to her, his lips brushing her cheek, his mouth hovering there, his breath warm against her face. She could feel his heart begin to race as her close proximity. She could smell the scent of cloves that he chewed to sweeten his breath, the scent of citrus and fine spices that he wore swirled about him.
He pulled her roughly against him, his mouth crushing next to hers in a searing kiss. He was going to make this memorable. She would not soon forget him.

Trapped in his embrace, she could not pull away, his hands grasping her shoulders, holding her close against him as his lips caressed hers, drawing her deep into his arms. The kiss turning to kisses that became more and more impassioned as she made a feeble attempt to pull away but he held fast and was not about to let go, she was caught as a vixen in a snare. William's chest crushing against her bosom, making her moan in protest against his mouth. He had to stop this! It was completely wrong and entirely improper!

His other hand fell away from her shoulder running frantically up and down her back to her buttocks and back again, his lips parting slightly against hers, his tongue teasing hers, swirling about, teeth nipping not so gently at her lips.

"William, stop!" she protested, trying to wrench herself out of his embrace feeling a tiny thread of desire race down her spine and gently clench within her belly, twisting herself about until she was able to press her hands against his chest. "You must!" She added giving him a gentle shove forcing him to release his hold on her, reluctantly allowing his grip on her shoulder to fall away, the knuckles of his other hand caressing her face from temple across to her chin.

"Leave me with sweet memories to warm the cold and lonely nights, Sweet Lady! Do give me a token of your esteem!" He pleaded.

She shook her head.

"Not even a lock of your hair? A ribbon or handkerchief?" He asked sadly.

"Major Andre has absconded with all of my handkerchiefs. I have not a one to spare!" She explained.

"I will take another kiss." He said not giving her time to protest, drawing her into his arms once again, tilting her chin up with a long slender forefinger. "Just one more kiss, May One more luscious kiss!" He whispered before his mouth claimed hers, taking complete possession of her, the tip of his pointed tongue swiping along her swollen lower lip, tracing the seam of her mouth, yanking her closer to him, his palm on the small of her back, the pressure and movement causing her lips to part, his tongue slipping inside, the kiss deepening as his tongue sought hers. 

Mary grasped at the facings of his scarlet coat to steady herself against him, pulling her chin away. "Enough, William! Please!" She pleaded, drawing away. "Please go! You have to go!" She moved away from him skirting behind the candlestick table, placing it between them, smoothing her skirts, turning her back.

His eyes swept over her. taking her in from top to toe committing every inch of her to memory so he had something to think on in those cold nights when he could not find a pretty ginger-haired whore to slack his lust upon.

"Go with God, Lieutenant." She said, much calmer than she felt, attempting to hide the fact that she was sorely unsettled and completely shaken.

"May I write?" He asked, forever hopeful.

She shook her head. "Farewell, Lieutenant Andre." She dismissed him. She would not turn about to allow him one last glance.

William took at step toward her, wanting to touch her one final time, he reached out but thought
better of it at the last moment hearing someone in the hall. "You chose the wrong brother." He stated striding from the room.

Later that Afternoon

John found her in the place where they had spent all those evenings reading Shakespeare together, curled up on the settee her legs tucked beneath her, a book in her hands. She appeared lost, her gaze apparently fixated on the fire blazing merrily in the hearth.

"Mary... May... May Cherie?" He called softly approaching her.

At the sound of the velvet timber of her betrothed's voice she turned her head. "John..." Her voice shook on a sob before she burst into tears. Oh, John!

He was on her in seconds, taking the book from her hands, laying it aside, drawing her into the warmth and comfort of his embrace. "Shhhh... I am here now... My Dear Sweet Darling Girl. What is it that distresses you so?" He asked gently stroking her back, allowing her to vent her sorrow and anguish on his shoulder, her face buried in the crook, holding onto him as if her life depended up on it.

"Lieut..." Her voice was muffled against him.

"What about my brother, May Sweetheart? Did he hurt you?" John soothed stroking her back, attempting to mask the fury surging through him. If his brother had abused her in any way, William would pay the price for it.

She nodded, beset my another torrent of weeping that tore at John's heart he drew her that much closer to him regretting that he had not taken the opportunity when it had presented itself and run his brother through with his sword.

"Shhhh... Cherie. Ma vie... He consoled her, planting gentle kisses against her hair and temple. "What did he do to distress you so? Did he make inappropriate advances and suggestions to you once more?" He questioned having a care that she did not detect the rage he held so tightly in check.

"Yes!" she croaked. "He sought me out when I was embroidering. He told me that he was leaving and came in to tender his farewells. I told him to Go with God that I would pray for his safety and he would keep away from harm as I do with all of His Majesty's officers and soldiers. He was disappointed that was the extent of my wishes for him. He expected more. I then wished him Godspeed. It was then that he took a step toward me, his lips brushed my cheek," She sniffed. "He... He... he then..." Her voice broke once again, tears coursing down her cheeks as she cried attempting to summon the courage to explain to John what happened next.

"What did he do, May... ? It is all over now. I am here. I promise to keep you safe. What did he do? Tell me." John asked. She was killing him. Watching her anguish and distress was ripping his heart apart. It pained him to see the woman he loved so distraught.

"He kissed me. Here. Upon my mouth." Her fingertips gently brushed against where William's mouth had been. "He would not stop. He would not release me! He would not listen to me when I begged him to cease! I pushed at his chest." She cried taken over by another torrent of tears.

John ran his hand up and down her back, drawing her that much closer, into his lap, he did not care
how improper it may appear. All he cared about was her. He hated William for what he had done to her! His brother would pay! John would see to that.

Mary snuggled close against him, the tight tension and fear that coiled about her, unraveling bit by bit as he strove to calm and soothe her distress, allowing him to feather gentle reassuring kisses along her temple down toward her cheekbone, her tears salty against his lips. "Mon ange. Ma vie..." He whispered, tilting her chin up with a forefinger, the pad of his thumb tracing along her lower lip, gazing into her eyes, which shone like rain washed jewels. "I promise you, that as long as there is breath in my body, he will never hurt you ever again. You have my solemn word." His voice was firm with conviction. His withdrew his thumb, his head dipping, his mouth brushing next to hers in a tender kiss.

Mary drew her hands up over the facings of his jacket with tantalizing slowness, twining her arms about his neck allowing herself to be drawn into his kiss and the refuge of his embrace. 'John...' It was a plea. A plea for him to remove the anguish, her fear, she clung to him, tilting her chin up a fraction of an inch, offering her mouth for another kiss. His mouth took possession of hers, feathering intimate kisses against her lips murmuring endearments between them, his breath hot against her, his hand traveling up between her shoulders, caressing the smooth skin at the back of her neck burying the tips of his fingers into her hair. "I promise that you have nothing more to fear!" He assured her. He could feel the intense tension slowly leave her body as his words warmed and calmed her. No one will harm you. No one."

Chapter End Notes

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XXVIII NOTES
Once again, many Thanks to the JJ Feild Facebook page for their continued support of this story and their friendship.
Many Thanks to my Brainstorming Partner, LadyJ! We are a great team, Girl! Thank you for all of your ideas and suggestions.
To Lisa for her support and friendship, I am blessed to have found you!
To Truth Universally Acknowledged and Obrohom Woodholl: Two of my loudest cheerleaders, thank you for your insights and comments. Your friendships have been gifts from this fandom.
Please do take a moment to read Truth Universally Acknowledge's story, The General's Treasure which is a favorite of mine. The story is original and unique: I adore the idea that the Washingtons had a daughter. The portrayals of the principal characters are spot on. I wish that I will learn to write Benjamin Tallmadge the way she does!
Please also take the time to read the stories that I have bookmarked. There are some incredibly talented writers in this fandom who have written some hidden gems.
Mary shows off her Betrothal Ring and the Marriage Banns are read out for the first time in Church. They are read out and published the three consecutive Sundays before the couple is married in the parish the couple is residing in and their home parishes (I would like to believe that a rider got to Boston in time for Lady Mary and Major Andre's Marriage Banns to be read and posted in her home parish.)
The purpose of banns is to enable anyone to raise any canonical or civil legal impediment to the marriage, so as to prevent marriages that are invalid. Impediments vary between legal jurisdictions, but would normally include a pre-existing marriage that has been neither dissolved nor annulled, a vow of celibacy, lack of consent, or the couple's being related within the prohibited degrees of kinship.
In England, under the provisions of Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753, a marriage was only legally valid if the banns had been called or a marriage licence had been obtained, codifying earlier practice within the Church of England. By this statute, 26 Geo. II, c.33, the banns were required to be read aloud on three Sundays before the wedding ceremony, in the home parish churches of both parties. Omission of this formality rendered the marriage void, unless the bishop's licence (a common licence) or the special licence of the Archbishop of Canterbury had been obtained. This statutory requirement had the effect of requiring Roman Catholics and other non-conformists to be married in the Church of England, a requirement lifted by legislation in 1836.

Before 1754, when Lord Hardwicke's Act came into force, it was possible for eloping couples to be married clandestinely by an ordained clergyman (a favourite location was the Fleet Prison, a debtors' prison in London, in which clergymen willing to celebrate irregular marriages might be found). After the law, elopers had to leave England and Wales in order to contract a marriage while avoiding these formalities. Scotland, in particular Gretna Green, the first village over the border from England, was the customary destination, but became less popular after 1856 when Scottish law was amended to require 21 days' residence. The Isle of Man was briefly popular also, but in 1757 Tynwald, the island's legislature, passed a similar Act, with the additional sanction of pillorying and ear-cropping for clergymen from overseas who married couples without banns.[4] These details often figure in melodramatic literature set in the period. [5]

The wording of banns according to the rites of the Church of England is as follows:
• I publish the banns of marriage between NN of … and NN of …
  o This is the first / second / third time of asking. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, ye are to declare it. (Book of Common Prayer 1662) Which is the version that I used for Lady Mary and Major Andre.
Distractions, Detractions and Duty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal
Chapter XXIX

Mary sighed, knotting the thread, biting it off with her teeth, holding up a pair of John's biscuit colored breeches; they were one of his favorites. She had taken in the waist. She was becoming concerned. Her betrothed had been eating poorly, waking early and coming to her bed very late at night over the last week. He was working hard, attending General Howe and to the affairs of the war as well as the renovations of their new home and the wedding. Working far too hard, as far as she was concerned. She was beginning to feel neglected. She would not find amusement elsewhere. She would never think of it even though she did not lack for opportunities. Several officers would be more than willing to enter into a flirtation with the Lady Mary Ludlow despite the fact that she was betrothed to Major Andre. Several would dare risk his wrath. There was Captain Lord Kent, Captain Lord Nicholls and General Randall. All those men had made known to her their interest. Mary was having none of them, even though Captain Lord Nicholls had slightly turned her head once again with his dark good looks. He was not John. None of them were. She wanted his attention! She should be the mistress and lover that should have his full attention and focus. As much as she appreciated his dedication to duty, he did not lie with General Howe nor was he to marry His Excellency.

"What is it, Lady Mary?" Abigail asked noting the look of concern on her mistress' face.
"Major Andre has been working far too hard and is in sore need of a distraction, Abigail."
"What does Your Ladyship propose to do?"
"Distract him. He is getting far too thin. Colonel Tarleton and Lieutenant Brandon say that sometimes he forgets to eat or will just have an apple or pear when he is working." Mary shook her head, she did not like it.
"So?"
"Major Andre needs to be reminded that though the war is important, other items and people should also be that which the major pays more than a passing attention to." Mary explained.
"What would you do, Lady Mary?"
"Something drastic! Do we possess that dancing costume, the one from Algiers the Kadin presented to me, the one Her Grace, my mother, sent from London in the trunk with the other items for my trousseau? The top may be a wee bit tight since my bosom has gotten larger since I was fourteen but I am intending to get Major Andre's attention. The hip belt should still fit. We could add some jewels, remove or add a scarf or two..."
"Lady Mary! You would present yourself to the major in such a fashion. Will he not be shocked?"
"How else will I regain his attentions? He works far too hard. He is in sore need of something to amuse himself. That something will be me. I shall order a meal prepared with some of his favorite dishes and then when he is well fed and content I will present him with that which he most desires."

Later that Same Evening

Mary stole down the Entrance Hall, holding the food tray, her features and costume made totally indiscernible by the cloak that covered her, while she moved along. Ignoring the lewd and inviting comments of the guards on duty in the hallway, she would have a word with General Howe about that, women, even the merest of scullery maids, should be able to travel about headquarters
unmolested at night. She was relieved to reach John's office door. Balancing the food tray in one hand, she knocked.
"Come!" John called.
Mary entered the room, shutting the door behind her. He was sitting at his desk, papers strewn all about before him, his eyes closed as he sat back in his chair and sighed, rubbing the space between his eyes at the bridge of his nose. Thinking her an orderly he did not move or hear he lay the tray down on a sideboard or walk over to him until he smelled the exotic perfume she wore and the feel of her fingers on his shoulders as she began massaging the tension from them.

John sighed contentedly. "Should you not be abed, Sweetheart? You need your rest for the wedding; you daren't overtax yourself." He inquired, concerned for her welfare.
"This from the man that up until recently has been seeking my bed every night and taking me three to four times within the course of the evening!" Mary replied.
"Now, now! Does my Wicked Little Rebel miss the attention? "John murmured, chuckling.
"Mmmmmmm... That is lovely." He added, moving his head to one side to allow her better access to the muscle knot that she was working on.
"I am delighted that you are enjoying this. Yes, Your Wicked Little Rebel does miss your attentions. Immensely. I have come to tend you some attention since, as of late, John, it appears, you are not tending to yourself."
He smiled at her concern. "Not enough time. Far too much to tend to." He said, purring with pleasure as her fingers continued to work their magic on his shoulder.
"Not enough time to tend to your betrothed wife, Major Andre?" She asked.
"Mary, Sweetheart..." He began to protest but she silenced him with a kiss on his cheek, then his mouth.
"Hush! I came to tend to you. When was the last time you ate a proper evening meal? I brought some supper. "She said running a finger down his chin then pulling it away. Crossing to the sideboard with a sensual sway to her hips, the costume she was wearing beneath her cloak making her feel a bit wicked. Picking up the tray, she crossed back to where he sat. "Move some of those papers." She instructed.
John did as he was bid, watching Mary place the tray in front of him. "Why the cloak, May? Remove it and stay awhile." He said.
"In due time, my master." She replied with a smile.
John immediately knew something was afoot. She had something hidden beneath her cloak. "What are you about, Mon Cherie?"
"I do not know what you are referring to, Mine Own Galahad." She replied, playing dumb.
Mary, you called me 'master'. What is beneath that cloak? What are you hiding?"
"I shan't show you anything until you eat something. You are becoming far too thin, John. I do not like it. I had one of the cooks help me prepare chicken pie, roasted carrots and I made fresh walnut tarts. There is also fresh bread, butter and some soft brie and nice sharp English cheddar." As she spoke, she filled his plate with a bit of everything on the tray. Then placing a linen napkin in his lap, filled his wine glass with more Madeira.
"Join me. I cannot eat unless you do."
Mary took a carrot between a thumb and forefinger, bringing it to her mouth; she bit off the tip, her eyes never leaving his face until she had finished it. "Delicious!" She said, licking her fingertips. "Be sure to eat every bit of what is on your plate."
"Do you promise to remove your cloak?" Damn! He was being persistent. He did not like surprises, wanting always to be in control.
"Not when you are still eating. You may never finish your meal, John."
"What are you wearing or what are you not wearing, Sweetheart?"
"Patience, John. Remember, good things come for lads who wait." She scolded him. "You will not be disappointed."
"Is that a promise?" He countered, taking a spoonful of the pie, his face transforming to one of sheer
"bliss. "Ohhhh." Making sounds of contentment while he chewed. "Did you make this?" He asked taking a sip of wine.

"Yes, Mrs. Mason, our cook in Boston, taught me how to when I was a little girl." She replied. "This is wonderful. What other talents are you hiding from me, Mary?"

Smiling, she said, "You have the remainder of your mortal life to find out, John, do you not? I did promise that I would never bore you. I will keep that promise. I will also never give you cause to reproach me. Finish your supper before it becomes cold."

"Yes, Lady May."

They discussed wedding preparations and the renovations to Rosemont, their new home, John and Mary discussing more details of the Marriage Service and the menu for the reception.

Mary was relieved when he finished his meal, relieved and nervous. Her plan to refocus some of his attentions back to her could backfire; he could be shocked and think her boldness and costume beneath her as the daughter of a Peer of the Realm. Men had such odd ideals, even him! She had come this far, there was no turning back. "Are you ready for dessert?" She asked, clearing the rest of the supper dishes off his desk.

"Yes." He sat back in this chair, slightly. "Are you? Will share it with me?" He asked, watching her as she sat on the desk, pushing more papers off. "Mary, what are you doing? Those were important pa..."

"Shhhh..." Placing an index finger upon his mouth to silence him, while her free hand worked at the frog closure of her cloak; she was nervous, so it was not done with the same grace that she and Abigail had practiced it, but...

"SWEET CHRIST!" He cried, his eyes wide with surprise, the surprise quickly changing to pure lust. "Oh, God!" He gasped, taking in her costume, or lack thereof.

"Come have your dessert, John." She beckoned, offering herself to him like the most accomplished Eastern houri, arching her bare torso up, moving sensually like a serpent as she remembered the dancers in Algiers had done.

That proved his undoing, he was on her in two seconds, his mouth on hers, his hands everywhere, touching, caressing, pulling while she frantically kissed him back, pulling at his scarlet coat and waist coat until they both came off and were tossed aside, one landing on the chair and the other on an edge of the desk.

She shifted herself on his desk, sending a stack of books, a bell, the silver inkpot and the quill knife clattering to the floor along with several goose quills and papers, black ink splattering on the carpet, her fingers making quick work of his stock, removing it, allowing it to slip from her fingers to fall upon the floor.

"This is most unseemly." John commented, while her fingers found the closure of his breeches, he chuckled as they fell into the intimacy they shared.

"It is that." Mary agreed, undoing the buttons. "Most undignified." She added, guiding one of his hands underneath the thin layers of sheer purple silk, up one of her thighs.

"If someone should come in."

"The sound of the ink pot and the books clattering to the floor made quite a racket. Oh, dear!" Mary said, caressing his erection.

"The youngest child of the Duke of Sutherland behaving like an Eastern houri..." The tips of his fingers found her core, she was burning for him.

"With her betrothed husband, the spymaster of His Majesty's Army." Mary inched closer, nipping a side of his neck as his fingers delved deeper inside her.

Arching her body up to his exploring hand, her breath hitching when he found her most sensitive place. "Oh, John." Her voice was a breathless whisper.

"You are so appealing, Mon Cherie." Moving his thumb against her, he felt her thighs tightening as she got closer and closer to her orgasm. He abruptly snatched his hand away and hers. She was so ready...

"Ohhhhh, John! How appealing?" She breathed, feeling him enter her. Their eyes locked, shadows casting against their faces from the candlelight. She could see the passion and desire in his eyes.
Hitching a leg up against one of his hips caused him to give her that much more of him. "Oh, yes!" She breathed.
"Very appealing." He whispered moving within her. "Naughty Lady Mary."
"Just very?" She asked, moaning arching her neck up while he planted fevered kisses upon her throat.
"Incredibly. Much more so than Captain Lord Nicholls would ever find you, my sweet Mary." He said through his kisses. He knew all of those who still tendered affections for her and would usurp his place. A hand slipping beneath one of her buttocks, moving them closer while he continued to kiss her fiercely reversing his path up to her mouth, nipping on her lips with his teeth until her mouth opened allowing his tongue inside, as they continued their passionate love making on his desk. Her fingers frantically clawed at his shirt liquid fire coursing through her veins, her body burning with wanton excitement. Their tongues fencing as they continued their frenzied kissing, Mary moaning, a low sensual sound in the back of her throat, grasping a handful of fine cotton and the rock-hard muscle beneath, the fabric tickling the naked skin of her torso, a delicious shiver dancing down her spine.

John's fingertips dug into the smooth soft skin of her bum, gripping tightly, drawing her nearer to him if that were possible, thrusting deep, then drawing back, feeling the walls of her passage tighten about him. Mon Dieu! She was driving him wild with her unrestrained hunger for him. He was delighted that she had no qualms about making it clear that she wanted him, she was honest in her desire and eagerness. She had a fierce craving that thrilled him and was as shameless as the Eastern Houri she was seeking to emulate. "So very incredibly appealing..." His voice was rough, husky and thick with his intense obsessive passion for her. He thrust hard and deep once more.

She gasped as he drew her down into the vortex of inexplicable pleasure, moving with her at the edge of the desk, hitching her legs about his waist one of the heels of a dainty foot pressing in the small of his back, forcing her against the hard wood, his fingers grasping at the gossamer sheer silk of the scarves attached to the jeweled belt she wore where amethysts and emeralds of various hues sparkled and glittered in the candlelight.

The pair was totally unaware of the door opening. "Major Andre, forgive the intrusion, I did not receive leave to come but light was coming from beneath the door. I was told to repor..." Captain John Graves Simcoe came into Major Andre's private office, stopping dead in his tracks, blinking then grinning wolfishly at the totally sensual tableau before him. It appeared that the Major was fucking a young lady- Sweet Christ! It was not just any young lady but his betrothed, the Lady Mary Ludlow. Major Andre was fucking the Lady Mary on his desk! From what Simcoe could see, Her Ladyship had a pair of the prettiest tits in the American Colonies and was clad in the most fetching costume, what little there was of it.

Breaking their kiss, Mary turned her head at the sound of Simcoe's voice, crying out with embarrassment and mortification; searching about for John's discarded uniform coat to cover her nakedness from the captain's gaze.

"Lady Mary, no need to cease on my account," Simcoe told her, bowing his neck, giving the proper respect to her rank and social station, leering and winking when he lifted his head, those strange pale eyes sweeping over her. "On the contrary, please proceed." He chuckled. Major Andre was a most fortunate man! She was as a nymph from one of the Classical Grecian tales and just as beguiling.

"Get out, Captain Simcoe! Out!" John shouted not even turning to look, shifting his body to protect his future bride.

The Following Day
"Ah, Captain Simcoe! Come join us! We have been discussing several of the young ladies of the Academy and women of York City that may be ripe for dalliance or who may be interested in flirtation or courtship. The wedding of the Lady Mary Ludlow and Major Andre will most certainly bring out the flowers of New York ripe for the picking and those not so fresh that would be revived by the attentions of a gentleman." General Randall called to the captain to come sit. Lieutenant Brandon shifting over a seat to make room for him. "Certainly an amusing manner in which to spend the cold winter months, eh?"

"I would be delighted to, General Randall. I am never one to pass involving himself in discussions regarding the fairer sex of any sort. The Ladies of York City in particular. Which lovely ladies are you fine fellows presently speaking of?" He asked. He debated if he should share what he had witnessed in Major Andre's office the previous evening.

"So what of this caped figure that was spotted entering Major Andre's office late yesterday evening? I thought that he was besotted with the Lady Mary? Not yet married and he is entertaining other women." General Randall gossiped.

"Come now, General Randall, with all due respect, if you were to marry a woman such as the Lady Mary Ludlow would you wish to entertain other women so close to your wedding day or any day for that matter? There must be a particularly naughty and delicious tale behind the lady that entered Major Andre's office last night." Colonel Tarleton defended his friend. "Captain Simcoe, you attended Major Andre late last evening. Was he with a woman?"

"Colonel, you will have to excuse me for declining to answer." Simcoe replied.

"So, Major Andre is tom-catting about?" Randall asked coming to the worst conclusion.

"Jack, John Andre has had eyes only for the Lady Mary Ludlow since the van Lieden's dinner party though she captured his interest when we caught her, Miss Shaw, Miss Alton and Miss Melissa Alton romping in the Hudson River last October. Your bitterness at losing Her Ladyship to him is clouding your judgment." Tarleton explained.

"Give over, Jack! It was your own fault that you lost her to the major." Brandon said. "If there was any woman that he was entertaining last evening it was his betrothed."

Simcoe cleared his throat. "What of the discussion of the ladies, gentlemen? Which one of the young ladies has captured your attentions? I hear that Captain Lord Kennedy has developed a particular affection for Miss Rachel Alton."

"What did you witness in Andre's office, Captain?" Randall barked.

"Ah, patience, Jack. Have patience. It can wait until we cease our discussion of the ladies. Which one has captured your attention?" Ban Tarleton pointedly asked General Randall.

"Miss Charlotte Shaw." Randall answered.

"Ah, one of the close companions of the Lady Mary. Pretty young lady, very pretty. Is she still entertaining the attentions of Lieutenant Pitt? Or has that ceased? She is certainly ripe for courting." Brandon said. "If I were not so besotted by Miss Allerton, I would certainly be interested. Miss Shaw has quite a bit of agency but for her strong political opinions. She would be a lovely asset to any drawing room back home in England."

"The Lady Mary has apparently made her reservations regarding my reputation known to her friend.
Ah! Had I not made a mess of matters, I would have married her. I would have mended my wicked ways or at least learnt to be incredibly discreet in my affairs. But, alas, Major Andre has that honor. Damn the man!" Randall complained.

"He does that, General. Damned? I am not so certain. Unless the Lady Mary is a little demon in manners where it would please a gentleman," Ban said. "John does appear to be blessed with the devil's own luck!"

"That he is! Had I attended the van Lieden's dinner party I would have stolen Her Ladyship away from him. But, alas, Andre got there first. So, I will apprise Miss Shaw of my interest and content myself with debauching as many fair wenches and ladies as I may!" Randall exclaimed.

"As long as it pleases General Howe." Brandon added. "One can always find a willing woman to amuse one's self with. Some are more so than others."

"As willing as Lady Richmond?" Simcoe asked.

Colonel Tarleton and Lieutenant Brandon both chuckled.

"Lady Richmond does not discriminate to whom she bestows her favors." Tarleton stated.

"There are those officers that do prefer forbidden fruit, knowing it to be the sweetest and the most desirable." Brandon said. "Officers such as Lieutenant Andre, who fancied that which he should not."

"Lieutenant Andre? The major's younger brother?" Simcoe asked.

"Yes. William was infatuated with the Lady Mary. His behavior less than gentlemanly toward her. He found her incredibly appealing." One cannot fault a man for speaking that what he knows to be true. Think of those perfect breasts, that tiny waist, that plump little arse, and those sweetly rounded hips. Pardon me, Gentlemen but ...Damn! Major Andre is a most fortunate man and the envy of his brother officers. To have such as that in one's bed! Christ! If they were not assured that he would call them out, many a man would risk their lives for her sake." Randall said.

"Major Andre would not hesitate. I shudder to think on it. He can be rather unmerciful when he sets his mind to it or is particularly cross." Ban Tarleton explained.

"And rather passionate, it would seem." The time was right for Simcoe to relay his deliciously naughty tale even if it was scandalous. "But what I dare say to you now must remain between us, for our sakes and the respect we bear to Major Andre and the Lady Mary Ludlow. Last evening, when I arrived I was ordered to report to the major. Seeing illumination from beneath the door of his private office, I knocked, not receiving a response and expecting to see the major deeply involved in his work, I opened the door and stepped inside. Imagine finding Major Andre, without his jacket, waistcoat and stock with that lady seated on his desk, papers, quills and ink pot strewn all over the floor. They were intimately entangled."

"Who was she?"

"The lady whom Major Andre was in the process of pleasuring, who, incidentally was dressed quite fetchingly as an Eastern harem slave was the Lady Mary, the major's betrothed, I even caught sight of that Ceylon blue on her left hand. There was no doubt it was Her Ladyship. I remembered her from my previous visit over the Christmas Holidays. How could one forget?" Simcoe finished.
Choking on a laugh, Black Jack Randall sprayed the mouthful of coffee over the carpet beneath their feet. "So Major Andre is being certain that they suit and to assure he marries her? He was fucking her on his desk, Captain Simcoe? Was she naked?" He could not resist asking.

"Almost." Simcoe said with a twinkle in his eye.

"She has a lovely pair of tits, I would imagine." Randall stated.

"Oh, God! Did he see you?" Tarleton asked.

"Yes. I told them not to cease on my account but Major Andre became rather enraged and, in no uncertain terms, shouted at me to get out."

"Was he able to finish?" Randall wanted to know. This was too rich, John Andre caught fucking his betrothed on the desk in his private office... Black Jack chuckled.

"I did not stay long enough to ascertain the outcome as Major Andre as not about to allow it, Sir." Simcoe finished.

"Well he should not. Affianced to such as Her Ladyship, any gentleman would rightly wish to keep all that belonged to him to himself! No man would wish to share." Brandon said.

"There appears to be quite a bit of passion there. He is most fortunate." Simcoe observed.

"You have no idea..." Ban Tarleton remarked winking.

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The Day After That
British Headquarters

Mary walked at a brisk pace across the lawn, trying her best to keep up with George, who ran on ahead, pausing periodically to sniff at something that caught his interest then scampering on ahead once more, being certain that his mistress was not that far behind.

She had missed her monthly bleeding. It was far too soon to be certain but she could be breeding! Those evenings spent in wanton copulation with John may have rendered the desired results. Thank goodness it was far too soon for her to be experiencing the morning nausea or fatigue. She prayed for John's sake that the child she hoped she was carrying would be male though a secret part of her hoped for a daughter. After the incident in his office, he had been more attentive and solicitous of her. She had taken a great risk. Fortunately it had not backfired completely. Captain Simcoe walking in on them in flagrante delicto had been embarrassing. She still could not help but blush crimson when she and the captain found themselves in one another's presence. For his part, Captain Simcoe, was doing his best to place the incident behind him. At least he had not ruined her reputation though Ban Tarleton had told her that General Randall had backed the poor captain into a corner where Simcoe had to tell those officers present who the lady was that had visited Major Andre that evening. They had all been sworn to secrecy. At least her reputation was not ruined. She had almost done that herself and would never take such a risk, again. Thank goodness it had the desired effect. John knew never to neglect her. She smiled, remembering the look on his face when she had removed the cloak and what had happened afterward. As rash and reckless as it had been, having him back where he should be, not working so hard, had made it all worthwhile.

The preparations for the wedding were proceeding apace. She had a fitting for her gown that
morning where the waist had to be taken in at least an inch.

"George, what is it?" She asked the dog who had rushed further ahead and was now barking enthusiastically. "Oh!"

Captain Simcoe was bending down stroking George's soft black and white fur, as the setter wiggled; tail wagging while the officer moved to scratch George behind one of his ears. "Who is growing into a handsome lad? Good day, Lady Mary." He said to her.

"Captain Simcoe, what a pleasant surprise. I had thought that you were confined indoors with Major Andre being debriefed and meeting with your brother officers. What brings you outdoors at this hour? In need of some fresh cool air?" She asked, walking toward him, her stomach in knots, trying not to blush. This man had witnessed her engaging in the most inappropriate behavior upon John’s desk last evening.

He rose, sketching her a neat bow, removing his tricorne hat, the sunlight reflecting in his dark auburn hair, catching the red lights. He was not wearing his customary wig. Lifting his head, his pale blue eyes captured hers. He is rather handsome in a cold and elegant way, she thought. She knew that he was wildly ambitious and eager for advancement. She prayed that he would not use what he had witnessed between she and John for his own ends.

"Yes, Lady Mary. It was becoming rather stifling in General Randall's presence, if I may be so bold. He has been making improper insinuations. I may have spoken out of turn, My Lady. I am prepared to endure the full consequences of my actions but I could not stand by and allow Randall to tell more untruths. However in doing so, I did have to say that which I ought not. I sincerely apologize. I do hope that you can find it in yourself to forgive me. You may trust my total discretion."

"Major Andre will be utterly furious when he learns what happened. We both know that he will far sooner than later. When he does, be prepared to endure the full measure of his wrath. His tongue can be sharp and vicious when he wishes it. I do not envy you, Captain Simcoe. Not at all. His dressing down will be fair recompense for what was shared with the officers. If you are the gentleman that I imagine you to be, we will speak no more of the unfortunate incident." Mary stated.

"You have my word, Lady Mary." Simcoe assured her.

British Headquarters
That Same Day

"Why should it surprise me? You have always wanted her, have you not? Since that day that you saw her frolicking in the Hudson River with her skirts tied up, behaving as a water sprite. Was it the forbidden view of those neat calves and ankles that sparked your interest at first, major, or that riot of fiery curls? I was always under the impression that you preferred blondes. Clearly I was wrong in my assumption." Randall baited John, gazing at him through hooded eyes, his thumb and forefinger caressing the stem of his glass filled with Madeira.

"What is it that you are getting at, Randall? Yes, it is true, I did become interested in the Lady Mary that day when we caught her and her friends romping in the Hudson River. What of it? You are fully aware of what transpired next." John said, his eyes steady on Randall.

"You must have been so disappointed when she resisted your initial advances. How that must have
stung. The Handsomest Man in His Majesty's Army being refused by a chit of seventeen! Even after you hand delivered that bouquet of flowers to her finding the young lady, erm, what was the word used? Indisposed, was it?"

"Come now, General Randall, we are both seasoned and well-trained officers. We both know what to do when met with a bit of resistance be it on the battlefield or in the ballroom." John countered good naturedly. He was not about to let General Randall's baiting spark his temper. "I was not about to be put off by one episode. The lady did accept the flowers and sent me the most delightful note of Thanks, written in Greek, which led to the presentation of a book which I was able to give in person to Her Ladyship in the garden."

"After she had left word that she was once more indisposed." Randall snickered. "Oh, the garden! I heard all about the incident with the roses, Major Andre! How gallant of you to stay the bleeding of the Lady Mary's finger when it was pricked by a thorn!"

"I was not about to allow My Lady to ruin her fichu or dress by allowing it to be stained with blood, Randall." John continued his good-natured retorts.

Randall snorted. "Always so chivalrous, Andre? One would believe it an excuse to touch the lady without being seen as overly forward."

"With a young lady such as she, would you expect me to behave otherwise?" John asked.

"I suppose not. How quick did you obtain intelligence to ascertain that Miss Mary Ludlow was indeed *THE* Lady Mary Ludlow? Is that when the plotting and strategy to get her into your bed began? When you decided to seek to enthrall and seduce her?" Randall started. "How convenient that of the superior officers on General Howe's staff that you were one of the select few that received an invitation to the van Lieden's that fateful evening that was able to attend."

"I was not responsible that several of the officers had contacted and ague and had to tender their regrets." John replied.

"Weren't you, Major Andre? A little tampering with the food or drink of a brother officer for a price to press your advantage?" Randall insinuated.

"Do you know what you are implying, Sir? Do you believe me to be without honor?" John's voice raised slightly in agitation.

"Considering that you dropped your mistress without a proper farewell and the customary gift when you realized the considerable eligibility of the Lady Mary, I would stop to pause and wonder, Sir." Randall replied.

'I believe that I was not the only officer that dropped their mistress upon making acquaintance with Her Ladyship some of us even continued on with our indiscretions though covertly when we sought to court the lady." John countered referring to General Randall's own situation. "I broke clean from Miss Hallam."

"Certainly you jest? You sent Miss Hallam away that night having secured a more promising prospect." Randall remarked.

"I do not have to answer to you for my conduct considering your own, Sir!" John's voice was icy.

"Are you questioning the comportment of a superior officer, Major? I would have a care, Sir. How I conduct my private affairs is none of your concern" Randall's voice was equally as cold. "I do have to commend you for your agency in securing the protection of the lady so that you were able to
monopolize her time."

"We have had this discussion before, General Randall. I was just following orders from my Commanding Officer. Not to do so would have had dire consequences such as a possibility of Court Martial. General Howe entrusted the protection of the Lady Mary Ludlow to me."

"Which you took absolute advantage of." Randall stated. "I was presented as a suitor to Her Ladyship yet I had no opportunity to court her because she was engrossed with another officer on His Majesty's staff, namely yourself" 

John held his temper in check by a thread. General Randall was sorely trying his patience. "I was doing what I was commanded, General Randall."

"So you say, Sir. Just as you were carrying out orders the other evening when a particular lady found her way into your private officer where you were subsequently caught in some highly inappropriate behavior on your desk. Do not deny it. I know it to be the truth. Assuring your future and fortune?" Randall sneered.

"We are betrothed to be married. The banns have been read out for the past two consecutive Sundays in church." John was defensive. "I hear that the only reason that Captain Simcoe revealed the identity of the lady was because a certain general was insinuating that I was being unfaithful to my betrothed which was, and is, a bold faced lie. If I did not hold my future bride in the esteem that I do, I would call you out to avenge that insult. Fortunately, there has been no damage to her reputation. All those present have honored their vow of complete secrecy for which I am most grateful."

"If you hold your betrothed in the esteem that you claim that you do, you would not be fucking her on your desk like a common whore!" Randall commented.

"Jealous, Sir?" John asked watching Randall flush with anger. He had hit a nerve.

Randall sputtered, lost for words Andre's comment cutting through him like a knife. "Had I been afforded the opportunity to court her the situation would be different. It would be me standing up with her in church on the fourteenth not you!"

"Are you so certain, Sir? Did you not refer to the Lady Mary Ludlow in disparaging terms as a 'chit of seventeen'? She is most certainly not an immature insignificant young woman. Quite the contrary. I do not believe that you ever thought past the advantages and fortune that marrying the lady would have afforded you."

'It was not only the social advantages and fortune, major. A young lady as curious as Her Ladyship can be, erm, molded and shaped to enjoy and appreciate her husband's particular desires within the privacy of their bed room. You took that opportunity from me."

"If the truth be told, I am happy that I did." John stated baldly.

John Andre knew the sort of man that Black Jack Randall was. He enjoyed quite a bit of pain with his pleasure, was controlling and vainglorious. A match between the General and Lady Mary would have been a miserable mistake. Mary would have made the best of a bad situation but over time she would have grown to despise her husband. She was not the sort inclined to turn a blind eye to peccadilloes, either. Randall was notorious for his string of mistresses. The man probably had contacted a dose of the pox from all of his bed hopping. John would do anything not to subject Mary to that pain and anguish, mental and most certainly, physical. He knew that the General quite
enjoyed using a riding crop on his horse and his lovers.

"I can just imagine. I would have run you through you half-Frog bastard if you had dare lay a finger on what would have been mine!" Randall growled.

'Bastard? I assure you, Randall that I do not deserve that sobriquet. My parents were well and truly married when I entered this world. Missed opportunities and what would have been yours? Why can you not acknowledge what already exists? That through your own foolish rash and reckless tongue you lost her to me!" John was becoming increasingly frustrated.

"Be prepared for a scandal to burst around your head, Major Andre. A horrible scandal. It will be far worse than what followed that quaint snowball fight and game of the Norman Invader and the Saxon Maiden."

"You gave your solemn word to Captain Simcoe. There will be far more of a scandal when it is made known that you do not honor your word and are no a gentleman. You will be shunned and ostracized. Do not try me. Several choice words spoken to General Howe. I would have a care as to what nature of rumors that you seek to spread about what happened in my officer that evening." John warned indicating that the matter was closed. Both men knew that General Howe would not let even the merest thread of scandal touch the Lady Mary. For all his relationship with his mistress, the luscious Betsy Loring, the British Commander had developed paternal feelings for Sutherland's daughter. He would not see her hurt or harmed in any way.

Lady Stewart's Mansion
York City

"Coffee or tea, Lady Mary?" Lady Stewart asked indicating the silver pots on the tray that sat on the table in front of her. "It is so kind of you to call and indulge me. It is I that should be paying a visit to the Academy as protocol demands."

'Tea, please. It was my pleasure, Lady Stewart to skirt what etiquette requires of the pair of us. I do it as a favor to My Lady Grandmother, for the affection and respect that she holds for you."

"Even though Lady Richmond's tongue may wag?"

'Whatever Lady Richmond says and who she says it to has no bearing on how I conduct myself. She has no business passing judgment on what others do considering what she engages in her private life. The officers have not been as discreet in their discussions as Major Andre would want them to be. I have overheard the officers and soldiers discussing Lady Richmond in the most unflattering terms. Major Andre has given them quite the lecture for speaking of such inappropriate matters in front of a Young Lady of Quality."

"Such a gentleman, your Major Andre, so concerned for your reputation and virtue that is not when he is carrying you up the steps of British Headquarters slung over one of those luscious broad shoulders as a spoil of war." Lady Stewart stated with a twinkle in her eye.

Mary had the courtesy to blush, suddenly becoming rather interested in her tea cup.

"He will make you a fine husband, My Gel.. He certainly is pretty enough." Lady Stewart went on. "Did Her Grace, your Lady Mother, ever explain to you the expectations of the Marriage Bed?
Living in a house full of randy young officers over the last several months one must have overheard
them speaking on intimate and amorous matters? Being chased by that rogue for several months must have resulted in some kisses and caresses especially when one is carried up the steps of headquarters in fashion that was mentioned."

"Yes, Lady Stewart. Major Andre has kissed me many times in the course of our courtship. I am not adverse to his attentions." Mary was a bit evasive.

"There are many places that man may kiss a woman. Has he told or shown you?" Lady Stewart asked.

Mary nodded, tilting her chin up to meet the older woman's keen gaze, her cheeks gently flushed. There was no reason to lie.

"Gentlemen do have their physical needs. Though many other couples believe otherwise and it is fashionable for women and men of our social stature to seek pleasure outside the bonds of Matrimony. I do not believe Major Andre will be inclined to do so. He is completely smitten with you. Woe be any man that would seek to take his place in your bed. He will not think twice about killing the rogue. A man such as the major is of a rather amorous inclination. He will desire to lavish those attentions upon you. You are aware of what the Act of Love consists of, Lady Mary. What happens when a man and woman couple?"

"Yes, Lady Stewart. I have periodically viewed the animals on our estates engaged in the act." Mary replied honestly.

"When humans engage in the act it can be the most pleasurable thing created by God." Lady Stewart explained wistfully. "I do believe that Major Andre would want it to be for you, My Dear." She added, smiling wickedly. "Let him have his way with you. There are intimate places where he will wish to touch, caress and kiss you for your pleasure and delight as well as his. There are, erm, certain intimate acts that a gentleman such as Major Andre may desire to perform on you and have you perform on him."

"Lady Stewart?" Was she alluding to when John pleasured her between her thighs with his mouth, lips, teeth and tongue? Just thinking about it made her hot all over, she squirmed slightly in the chair remembering the previous evening, what he had done to her up against one of the walls in her bedroom that he had continued in her bed. She bit her lower lip, suddenly rather interested in the contents of her tea cup, hearing a gentle creek of a floorboard she looked up to see John standing in the doorway of Lady Stewart's parlor. He placed an index finger to his mouth, signaling her to be quiet.

The old lady lowered her voice as to not to be overheard by the servants but loud enough to be heard by the major. "It will please him to lick your cunny until you cry out and experience what is called la petite-mort. It is a most delicious feeling."

John's eyes widened listening to Lady Stewart's words, his brows shooting up, winking at Mary, drawing his finger away his lips curling up in a roguish smile. "Lady Stewart, so very kind of you to apprize my dearest betrothed of what may be expected of her on our Wedding Night." John stated striding into the room.

No man had the right to look that dashing so early in the day! Mary thought allowing her eyes to sweep over John from top to toe in appreciation as he entered the room,

Mary laid her cup and saucer on the low table beside her. Her eyes riveted on the man that was soon to be her husband.
"Lady Mary you are looking particularly lovely this morning, absolutely glowing. The gentle flush to your skin suits you. That color is most flattering. I pray that there are more gowns in that color that were ordered for your trousseau?" John complimented reaching Mary, leaning down; he kissed her one cheek and then the other "Tell me how delicious it feels. Or better yet, show me." He whispered in one of her ears for her alone, his heated breath ruffling her soft curls.

A shiver of pure desire danced down Mary's spine. "There were, at least a half dozen more! Just for you! Make me feel delicious, John!" The last comment was whispered out of Lady Stewart's ear shot.

"Oh, I thoroughly intend to, My Sweet May, as always." John assured her chuckling when the color in her cheeks deepened.

"Completely Enchanted I see, eh, My boy? You cannot manage to stay away from her. What excuse brings you here this morning?" Lady Stewart asked her keen eyes scrutinizing the pair.

"If I may steal my soon-to-be bride away, Lady Stewart? There are some decisions regarding our new home that require a feminine opinion. Matters, that a gentleman, even in possession of my discerning taste, would hesitate to make." John explained.

"Go on, then!" Lady Stewart waved the pair away with one of her hands. "Take her. I know that you cannot bear to be parted from her over long, Major Andre. I do hope that General Howe has given you at least a week's leave after you are married. Though I would warrant that the pair of you will require double that." She chuckled wickedly. "Good Day."

Chapter End Notes

Continued Gratitude to the Administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page for their support of this story. XXX Carolyn and Maria!

Many Thanks to Lisa who asked me to make good use of Major Andre's desk in a very big way. I do so appreciate you reading those scenes and giving me your frank and honest opinions about them. I hope that you enjoy the results. Your friendship has been a blessing.

TruthUniversallyAcknowledged, Lady J and Obrahom Woodholl- Thank you for all of your comments, brainstorming sessions, suggestions, ideas, support and friendship. The three of you are amazing!

As this fandom grows and matures, there are some authors that have begun posting that are incredibly talented (in this author's opinion) they and their stories should be recognized. I have many of their works bookmarked. Do take time to read what they have written. Such works should not go unnoticed. Their creativity and attention to historical research are amazing with a variety of plots and genres.

TruthUniversallyAcknowledged

MercuryGray

Neftzer_nettlestonenell
As mentioned in previous chapters, Lady Mary has traveled extensively with her family since she was a baby. Granada, Cadiz and North Africa would have just been other destinations. Due to her father's rank and social position the family would have met such dignitaries as the Bey of Algiers and his Kadin. Both parties would have exchanged lavish presents including a rather inappropriate costume that was given and sent to Lady Mary from her mother, The Duchess, as part of her trousseau. Mary is enterprising donning the costume to distract her overworked betrothed. It works.

General Randall is still bitter. He tries to incite trouble by leveling untrue accusations. He and Major Andre have it out. John gets the better of him.

It is still too soon to tell but Mary may have some wonderful news to tell John!

Lady Stewart has 'The Talk' with Mary.

Thanks once again to my dear readers and those that have left kudos on this work. Your continued interest and praise means the world to me!
A Lieutenant's Beating and a Major's Pre-Wedding Festivities

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An Indecent Proposal: Chapter XXX

Somewhere in New Jersey
Early February 1777

William Andre winced in pain, groaning, feeling the masked ruffian's booted foot make contact with his ribs once more as another's hit the small of his back near his kidneys. He screamed in pain, white hot agony radiating from his solar plexus. His breath coming in shallow pants, striving to catch his breath as it was knocked from him.

"Damn Fucking Cur!" The man who had kicked William in the back growled.

There were three assailants from what William could count perhaps more. They had confronted him outside the tavern where he had enjoyed the favors of two delicious ginger haired whores and several glasses of flip in a vain attempt to mend his broken heart and drink his sorrows away. The whores had been a rather inventive pair. Not adverse to allowing William watch as they had kissed and caressed one another, fingered and tasted each other's cunnies. He had then fucked them both. But the drink and the sexual excesses had not been enough. He still coveted that which he could not have and was denied him.

Traveling to join his regiment had not staid his unnatural obsession for the Lady Mary Ludlow. His desire and hunger still burned as brightly and consumed him as before. She haunted his thoughts in his waking moments and his dreams at night. His attempt at slacking his lust for her on a pair of pretty wenches had left him wanting. His passion still engulfed him. How could a pair of sapphire colored eyes and a mane of fiery curls captivate a man so? He had imagined it was her that he had been fucking behind his closed eyes. Crying out her name when he spent. Just as he had done in New York with all those other women. His craving was worse since he had tasted her luscious lips, held her close in his embrace.

He winced once again when one of his assailants landed another blow into his abdomen with a booted foot, whilst another struck his face. William fought them off; withdrawing the dagger he kept in one of his boots to slash one of their hands. The man let out a vulgar oath, screaming in pain, clutching his injury, blood running out of the wound and over his fingers so they were slick and sticky, appearing black in the moonlight.

They had not stolen from him. Their intent had been to hurt. He realized that now. Whose wrath had he ensued to merit such punishment?

"You hit me once more and I will slit your fucking throat!" He threatened the man clad in black leather, grasping his wrist twisting it. Oh, Sweet Blessed Christ! It hurt to breathe. Inhaling sent searing and burning pain through his abdomen and chest. He knew that several of his ribs were severely bruised; perhaps two or three were cracked if not broken. He was relieved that the home in which he was billeted was not far from the tavern. He did not believe he get there on this own power
if it were situated any further than it was.

One of the ruffians, a tall lanky specimen with what appeared to be stringy brown hair tied back with a piece of leather cord, yelped in pain when William stomped on his foot. "Bloody Hell! Damned Bloodyback!" He swore, spitting through his rotted teeth, backing away from his prey. The lieutenant was unusually alert for someone that had imbibed as much as he had.

It was rather disconcerting. They had been hired to render the young British officer incapacitated enough so he would be unable to travel to York City. Limping down the aisle in excruciating pain all battered and bruised was no way to stand up for another man at the altar, the man all dressed in black thought, wrestling his wrist from the officer's firm grip. "Not before I do my worst, boy!" He snarled at the younger man, pulling back a fist to strike. The strikingly good-looking lieutenant would not be so pretty when he was through.

The Academy
Several Days Before the Wedding

"Well, May, if the officers are insistent about holding a 'Gentlemen's Club Dinner' for Major Andre before the wedding than we should have our own bit of fun. 'Tis only fair!" Rachel told Mary. The quartet of friends were seated in the library at the Academy discussing what was scheduled to the run to up to Mary's wedding to Major Andre.

"What happens at these sorts of dinners? It is true that the men drink to excess and have women of questionable reputation present?" Melissa asked, innocently.

"Hush, Melissa!" Lottie admonished looking pointedly at Mary. "Rachel is correct, May. Major Andre and the officers should not be the only ones enjoying the evening. One should have some delightfully wicked memories to look back upon when one becomes a wife." She added.

"Married to a man such as Major Andre, May would not have any need to look back nostalgically at delightfully wicked memories. I would imagine that you have already created some of your own with him and will continue to in the course of your marriage." Rachel said, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

"Rachel!" Mary exclaimed, having the courtesy to blush crimson, suddenly interested in an imaginary stray thread on the skirt of her gown, seeming to pick at it with a thumb and forefinger.

"May, you and Major Andre...? You and he? He has not... Oh, Gracious!!" Melissa asked, her eyes widening as she ascertained her sister's implications, putting two and two together reaching the proper sum.

"Melissa!" Lottie admonished her mortified. She did not wish to think overlong upon what her dearest friend and the dashing British officer engaged in whilst in private. The Major was a sensual man. Lottie knew that he would be want to slack his acute carnal passions upon the alluring young woman seated beside her if he had not already done so. Lottie was all too aware how John Andre felt about Mary. He did not bother to conceal it. "I say that we have a spot of fun at Major Andre's expense!" She said, an idea forming in her mind.

"A spot of fun at the Major's expense?" Rachel looked about being certain that there were no servants about or no one listening. "Lottie, you are not proposing that we get up to a manner that
"Have the quartet of us hanged?" Lottie whispered, incredulous. "What were you thinking, Miss Alton? Sending word to a certain trio of gentlemen presently residing in New Jersey?" Knowing the path upon which Rachel's mind tread.

"Rachel, no!" Mary cried a bit louder than she intended.

"No, May? Not even one last time?" Rachel asked. "If it were me, if my betrothed husband was enjoying a dinner with his brother officers and women of questionable reputation, I would wish to see my former suitor before I entered into the Bonds of Matrimony. I would reckon that Major Tallmadge would travel through hellfire to secretly call upon you!"

Mary could not resist blushing at the mention of Benjamin Tallmadge's name, heat curling involuntarily within her stomach or was the fluttering a reminder of something else? She passed a palm absently across her flat abdomen, picking at another imaginary stray thread. No, Rachel." Her voice was firm and resolute. She would honor her vows to John Andre no matter that Benjamin Tallmadge would always hold a portion of her heart- a portion that she would keep secreted away unknown to anyone but her.

"I say that we interrupt the major's dinner party by calling attention to ourselves," Lottie posed. "What are you proposing, Lottie? We cannot venture into Major Andre's party unless we are disguised." Mary exclaimed. "We could perform a dance, masked, of course. I am certain that Colonel Tarleton would be most delighted to be party to our plan and would help us to arrange it I am certain that he would not be obverse to four young ladies providing some riveting entertainment."

Lottie grinned, she had just planted the tiny seed of suggestion allowing Mary's clever mind to take over. "I would imagine that Colonel Tarleton would enjoy planning our surprise for Major Andre. Do we have the time to secure costumes?"

"Costumes? Such as we wore to the masquerade ball?" Melissa asked.

"Yes, costumes but different from those that we wore to the masquerade. These must be able to incite the ardor of a man but they cannot be too scandalous. All of you are unmarried young women of pristine reputation. I suggest diaphanous, Grecian in design." Mary offered. "In scarlet and gold, of course."

Lottie giggled. "Why do you not have yours created to incite the ardor of the man and ours more modest, May? They do not have to be all the same. Do you believe that Colonel Tarleton will conspire with us?"

"If May speaks to him, I would imagine that he would do it. He does hold her in the highest regard. "Melissa observed.

"That he does. Why do you not put on that Grecian costume and lure Benjamin Tallmadge through hellfire from New Jersey? He would most certainly risk much for your sake." Rachel posed unable to release her plan. She was still not resigned to the fact that Mary was going to marry her British officer. She still hoped that Mary had some manner of a future with Benjamin Tallmadge whatever it might be.

Mary shook her head. "Rachel, I am engaged to marry Major John Andre. We will be exchanging our vows on Friday the fourteenth of February. Why cannot you accept that fact? I am well aware that you do not approve of the match but as one of my dearest friends, I wish that you would support
my marriage. As handsome and attractive as I find Benjamin Tallmadge, I cannot marry him. My fate lies with an officer of His Majesty's Army. You are as aware of that as am I. I love and adore John. I will honor my vows to him."

"And seek to entice him to wickedness. Not that Major Andre would need much prompting. We all are aware of the way he looks at you, making love to you with his eyes, May," Rachel accused. "At least you could have had the temerity to choose the other brother since you decided you could not have Ben Tallmadge. Lieutenant Andre would have made a much more agreeable husband."

"So you have said, Rachel. I am well aware of your opinion on the matter. Any man in my bed but John Andre."

"Winsome Will does have those legs that seem to stretch on for miles and miles. He is also so incredibly charming. Not to mention his other assets." Melissa sighed, giggling.

"You have been captivated by a pair of sparkling ocean blue eyes!" Lottie teased the youngest of the quartet.

"A pair of sparkling ocean blue eyes that would seek to tempt our May," Melissa added.

"Not blue?" Rachel asked.

"Not since May came down with that dreadful case of Scarlet Fever." Lottie teased. "But the case seems to have been confined to one particular officer."

"You cannot fault me for my particular fondness for him, ladies. There is so much to recommend him. He is a fine specimen of an officer and a gentleman."

"That he is, May, and you have him twisted about your wee little finger."

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"Colonel Tarleton, please, if you would indulge me. I would be forever grateful and in your debt." Mary whispered, looking up at the debonair young officer through her lowered lashes, tilting her chin down in a flirtatious manner.

Tarleton clucked his tongue in mock disapproval. "You know that I cannot resist you when you employ that look, Lady May!" He chuckled.

"So you will do it then?" Mary asked sweetly. "Oh, Banastre, please!"

"Now you have gone and done it! Using my Christian name!" Tarleton exclaimed in mock horror. "How can I resist. I will be considered less than a gentleman if I refuse such a pretty request made in such a fetching manner. Poor Johnny! Is he aware of your uncanny ability to twist a man about your wee little finger? You do not reserve your magic for only us mere mortals? He has been completely entranced." Ban grinned.

"So you will indulge me then?" She was hopeful.
How could he refuse her? She was so very enchanting and her idea was so very clever and intriguing. He looked forward to seeing John mesmerized by the masque dancer that would beguile him. "Of course!" He replied incredibly pleased when she impulsively rose slightly up on her toes, giving him a kiss upon one of his cheeks, squealing in girlish delight.

"You are a darling!" She exclaimed.

Tarleton laughed. "If I had known that you would have been so delighted, Lady Mary, I would not have been such a gentleman. I would have requested a wee bit more than a peck on my cheek." He quipped, winking.

"How are you ever going to endure spending several hours away from your betrothed this evening?" Tarleton teased John.

"I will be counting the hours from whence we are parted." John replied gallantly. "I pray that it will not be too tedious. They do say that absence makes one's heart grow fonder."

"Then, I daresay, Johnny, your affection and ardor for the Lady Mary will have increased tenfold or more, if that is at all possible. Considering the hours the pair of you will be parted. Though, I understand that there are to be several flowers delivered this evening for certain manners of entertainment." Tarleton continued his good natured teasing referring to the ladies of questionable reputation that would be attending the major's Gentlemen's Dinner Party.

John grinned. "The only flower I am interested in is a most rare variety of English Rose. She provides me with all the manner of entertainment I require."

"One bred in New England?" Tarleton asked.

"Yes, in the colony of Massachusetts, in the fair city of Boston to be exact, The climate makes for one of the most beauteous blooms in the Colonies, if not the Empire." John stated clearly referring to Mary.

"Boston, you say? That hot bed of revolution. Seditious and mutinous." Tarleton said.

"They breed spirited women with much agency, intelligence and allure in the colony of Massachusetts Bay. Such spirit keeps a gentleman on his toes, captivates his interest. He does not run the risk of becoming bored. Life will most certainly never be dull." John stated.

"All of us, the officers and soldiers, envy your Good Fortune, Johnny. We just dare not mention it overmuch so you become too insufferable!" Tarleton quipped taking a sip of his Madeira.

"Insufferable? If I have become insufferable, intolerable, arrogant or cocksure it is with good cause." He teased back.

"Oh, Aye! It is but many of us are most envious." Tarleton shot back.

"Understandable." John answered. "Providence has a most odd way of working in a man's favor or to his detriment. A year ago, I would have never imagined myself facing marriage to one of the most eligible heiresses in the Empire and uniting my house with that of the lofty Ludlows. I am the most fortunate of men."
"Treat her kindly because there are officers, gentlemen and soldiers on both sides of this blasted conflict that would take your place in a moment!" Tarleton warned him.

"Honestly, Sir, would you believe that I would ever have cause to be unkind in any manner married to the likes of her? Like King Henry VIII said of Anne Boleyn, I would soon as beg from door to door than forsake the Lady Mary Ludlow." John's voice was firm with conviction.

"You most certainly share an uncommon passion but, Providence be willing, your marriage will be a long and happy one, unlike that of King Henry and his unfortunate queen." Tarleton said. "How much of a respite has His Excellency General Howe given you to spend with your bride?"

"Up to a fortnight." John answered with a grin. "I do hope that will be enough time."

"Enough time to what?"

John cleared his throat. "To make good use of and explore every room in Rosemont and the various surfaces contained therein." He winked at Tarleton his meaning all too clear.

Ban burst out laughing. "Breeding up fine sons and beautiful daughters for England?" He asked.

"Enjoying the benevolence and generosity of General William Howe." John replied. He grinned, his eyes crinkling in the corners.

"I can just imagine." Tarleton quipped, grinning back. "We had best get you to your dinner. It is that time. Where is your betrothed spending her evening?" Ban asked knowing full well where Mary would be.

"At the Academy with her trio of companions. Miss Shaw and the Misses Alton." John replied.

__________________________________________________________________________________

The Academy
That Same Evening

"Do you think he will like it?" Mary asked, smoothing the scarlet colored silk of the dress she wore. It left nothing to the imagination. There were no stays or panniers. The thin silk was left to fall naturally about Mary's form, enhancing her figure in all the proper places that would incite and entice a man. Emphasizing her lovely bosom, tiny waist and the sensual slope of her hip that morphed into her shapely legs. Madame Bernon had outdone herself with such a short time to design and fit the gowns which was done in the upmost secrecy. Not a word as to what the quartet of friends had planned for Major Andre's dinner had been breathed to anyone in the city. The only person that was a aware of their plan was Colonel Tarleton and he had not imparted his knowledge to a living soul.

"It is not as revealing as the other costume but it most certainly accentuates your, erm, assets, My Lady." Molly, one of Mary's maids offered her opinion. "Major Andre will be enchanted, riveted. He is, pardon me, My Lady, for saying so, rather attentive where Your Ladyship is concerned if you get my meaning." She blushed at her own insinuations.

Mary smiled. Molly was correct. John was rather attentive where she was concerned, the realization sent exquisite delightful shivers down her spine, arousing her, scorching heat curling within her core, making her burn with need, she bit her lower lip to stifle a low throaty moan that threatened to escape through them as Molly put the finishing touches on her hair, placed a tiny heart shaped black taffeta patch near the corner of her mouth on the right side. Looking in the pier glass studying herself. "Yes!
It is perfect!" She whispered. She drew back to view the full effect, how her hair had been dressed, her masque, the costume, taking it all in. "Completely perfect!" She added, her voice a low husky whisper feeling wickedly wanton. She would capture his attention tonight. Then once caught, he would be hers, all hers.

British Headquarters

Philomena had taken great care with her appearance, her face paint was flawless, several patches had been placed in strategic spots on her face and about her chest and bosom. He would notice her as he had in the theatre on Guy Fawkes Day where she had been performing on the stage. She would incite his lust and captivate him once again. She would steal him back from that titian-haired little bitch he was to marry! Philomena would have him back in her bed where he belonged. Not fawning over that girl. What did Major John Andre see in the Lady Mary Ludlow? Granted the little chit was very wealthy and incredibly well educated but money and learning could only hold a man's interest for so long. Philomena, would also concede that she was extravagantly beautiful even if she did possess unfashionable red-gold hair. However, her complexion and figure were exquisite. So were her eyes. The vixen!

Philomena pulled down the bodice of her dress, adjusting her breasts, being certain to show as much bosom and cleavage as possible, pushing the edges of the neckline to the edge of her shoulders, revealing more of her creamy skin. The major had always complimented and appreciated her skin-her skin and her body. She would never forget how his eyes would follow her when she would parade naked about his room, before and after he had fucked her senseless. What he had done to her with his fingers and his cock. How he had filled her cunt full to bursting. The memories made her wet. She wished she could get her hands and fingers beneath the layers of her skirt and petticoats to touch herself, stroke and tweak her clit until she came.

She had taken several lovers since Major Andre had abandoned her. First there had been the young lieutenant that, in the dark, had borne a passing resemblance to the dashing British spy master. Then she had seduced Admiral Clarke, one of the up and coming officers in His Majesty's Senior Service. He had introduced her to multiple partners and women- how she enjoyed the soft skin of another woman's body against her own- the taste of another woman's cunt. He had done that and shown her a Pillow Book from the East. They had had a glorious time trying out several positions, duplicating many of the pages from that wickedly delicious tome. She had then had a brief but incredibly torrid affair with Captain Lord Kent. Then she had taken General Jonathan Randall to her bed several times. He liked it rough. Not that she minded, of course. She could spend if a man spanked her the right way. She shuddered remembering how the general had stroked her hidden nub of nerves with his riding crop. Left her bum red and wonderfully sore.
She had been with Admiral Clarke when she had learnt about the Engagement. She should have known that he would be caught. She had seen them together out on the street and at the theatre, watching him preen like a peacock beneath that girl's gazes and flirtations, become captivated and fall under her spell. He had placed himself in an enviable position, as he was wont to do. He had become her protector. Philomena suppressed a laugh at the irony. Had General Howe known what he had been doing leaving a man of John Andre's reputation to watch over the virtue of a such a wealthy heiress as the Lady Mary Ludlow? She had caught the fierce lust in John's eyes for the young lady, the burning passion at the theatre that evening. From that moment, Philomena had despised her! Despised how Admiral Clarke and Captain Lord Nicholls had been enchanted by her. Despised it when the captain had requested to call and Major Andre had agreed knowing that he would compete with the handsome captain for the Lady Mary's attentions and would spend as much time as he could with her. They had taken to reading Shakespeare together in the evenings. So that was what Major Andre chose to call it? Leave it to him to find a literary aspect to his seduction. Philomena was certain that he tried to read far more than the Bard of Avon with her. John was an incredibly sensual man and experienced seducer. When he decided to lay siege to the lady's defenses it would not have taken long for her to succumb. Philomena cursed under her breath at the notion. She had been delighted when General Randall had requested her services for this event, looking about as the other courtesans began collecting in the Entrance Hall of British Headquarters. She could hear the sounds of men's voices and the scraping of cutlery against plates in the dining room. They were probably finishing off their first course, which would have been something in manner of oysters or onion soup, both known to affect a man's potency. Not that a man such as Major John Andre needed help from aphrodisiacs. Imbibing large amounts of Madeira, champagne, brandy or any other sort of drink did not have any affect his potency either as it did other men, Philomena recalled a smile curling her ruby red lips.

Listening hard, she could hear some of the officers making toasts, first to King and Country, then to the groom and bride. Her smile turning to a frown when they began extolling some of the Lady Mary's virtues and assets, as she heard the sounds of glass clinking against glass, more corks popping. She knew that the champagne would be flowing this evening.

"Compliments of Major Andre." An orderly stated, presenting Philomena and the other women present with a tray laden with glasses filled with champagne. Her prayers answered, Philomena took one of the glasses off raising it to the women beside her. "Remember to be amiable, acceptable and flexible." She purred seductively, the women's eyes meeting, they both giggled, drinking their glasses down placing them on the tray as they were led into the dining room.

"Ah, the flowers have been delivered!" One of the officers said with a leer as Philomena and the other women came in sashaying into the room, to muffled appreciative applause.
Immediately spotting Major Andre seated between Colonel Tarleton and Captain Lord Kennedy, Philomena quickly made her way toward him.

"Desirous of some companionship this evening, Major?" She purred seductively, fluttering her eyelashes at him. "It has been a long time... I understand that your young lady is sequestered for the evening, in that convent that she runs for young ladies of the Finest Quality, prim, priggish young virgins. Was it her title or fortune that intrigued you? Though I have seen her on the street and about the city, she is so very young and so very beautiful." Philomena stated, reaching a hand out, attempting to caress his face.

John pulled back, recoiling.

"Do you not find me desirable? There was a time when you could not wait to get beneath my skirts and in my bed." She thrust out her lower lip, pouting prettily. "Certainly that girl does not satisfy you as I could and can." She added giving John a view of her breasts, thrusting them upward, placing their creamy whiteness on display.

"Miss Hallam, I will concede that you are a lovely woman. However, I am betrothed to another and will honor my vows and all the other promises that I have made to my lady." John explained.

"Not the least bit tempted? Even to have me on my knees? My tongue is ever so talented and desirous to please."

John shook his head. There had been a time when he would have been sore tempted but not now. Now, he would call down the moon and the stars, present them to Mary if she but wished it. She consumed his heart, his mind, every fiber of his being. How he had allowed himself to fall so completely, where no one or nothing mattered but her. None of the finest ladies procured this evening could tempt him. Not even the obvious charms of Miss Philomena Hallam that had clearly been placed on display.

"No? Are you certain? Perhaps I could remind you?" A hand slipped down between his legs which he grasped, his fingers digging into her wrist.

"Go entice Captain Lord Kent. I am certain that he would appreciate the attention." John told her drawing her hand away. "I understand that the pair of you are quite intimately acquainted."

Philomena pursed her lips. "Do you not desire to renew our intimate association?" She flirted trying one last vain attempt to entice the major.

"Captain Lord Kent would be much more enthusiastic. Then there is Admiral Clarke." He offered.

Philomena frowned. She did not want either of them. She wanted John.

"My Lords and gentlemen, May I have your attention please." Banastre Tarleton called out as the music suddenly changed. A lone flute and other instruments suddenly struck up a sensual tune. Four dancers dressed in Grecian style costumes of red and gold moved sinuously to the music taking their places in front of where the officers sat. The men sat up, sliding forward in their seats for a closer look mesmerized by the quartet of young women as they danced, commanding all the attention in the room, moving with grace, their bodies alluring.

John watched enchanted, unable to take his gaze from the lead dancer whom looked eerily familiar, her body moving to the music of the flute, her costume enhancing the curves and contours of her body. John feeling himself become increasingly aroused, catching her gaze with his. That Little Minx! He ginned delighted confirming is suspicions, recognizing Mary. No other woman he knew
had eyes that shade of blue or looked at him in that fashion, which set his heart to racing. His cock swelled, becoming hard, his mouth dry, breath catching in his throat, rising from his seat when she crooked her finger at him, beckoning him to join her.

"Dance with me!" She said, moving her lithe young body against his, luring him to her.

"How could I refuse such a pretty request?" He asked grasping her hand with his, turning his head as she circled about him, his eyes riveted to her hips and bum as she moved them from side to side in a sensual sinuous seductive manner intent to beguile, to captivate and enthrall him. "You seek to bewitch me." He stated moving with her in the dance.

She laughed lightly. "You have found me out, Sir." Her voice was a low caress. The sound making the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. His cock twitching with need between his legs.

"Wicked and naughty lass." He grinned. "I know what you are about. Do not believe for a moment that I will allow this to go unpunished though I am delighted at your agency and inventiveness though I fear that General Randall is incredibly cross. He will have to compensate the Flowers he chose for tonight. What is your price, Sweet Siren? A lifetime of faithful wedded bliss?" John asked. His voice for her ears alone.

Mary flushed scarlet. "What is to be my punishment? You are not so dreadfully annoyed?"

"Should I be? My betrothed seeks to seduce me in front of my brother officers. Why should I have reason to be cross? Shall I carry you out over my shoulder as a delectable Spoil of War, my love?"

"Would it not be rude to leave your guests?"

He arched a brow over an eye. "Trust me, May, they will understand and forgive my enthusiasm and fervor to get you alone." He explained, following her dance steps drawing their bodies close to the applause and appreciation of the other officers. Their eyes riveted as Mary and John virtually seduced each other, their bodies moving, dipping, brushing up next to the other with sinuously seductive precision, John swallowing hard, snaking his tongue out to moisten his dry lips, clearly incredibly aroused and not bothering to conceal it from those present.

"I am going to fuck you hard and deep, My Love. So hard and deep it will take your breath away." Then after I finish that, I will fuck you senseless."

She swayed toward him, her eyes fluttering closed, a delicious shiver dancing down her spine. "Take me from this place." She whispered opening her eyes, staring up into his handsome face, into his eyes which were dark with lust and passion. "Excuse yourself."

He did not have to be told twice. The next thing she knew, she was being lifted in his arms, tossed over his shoulder.

"If you will please excuse me gentlemen, the lady and I have a pressing prior engagement." John stated to much laughter, catcalls and applause from his brother officers and whines of disappointment from the courtesans.

"What of my cloak?" She asked when they were passing through the Entrance Hall.

"Really, Darling?" John asked carrying her toward the door, out into the night, walking the few dozen steps to the Academy, up to and through the front door, carrying her into the parlor, placing her gently on the settee.

"Shall I take your breath away or fuck you senseless?" He asked, a hand going to the closures of his
scarlet jacket, undoing them, shrugging out of it, tossing it on a nearby chair.

"Take my breath away."

"Oh, I thoroughly intend to." He purred.

And he did.

Chapter End Notes

Continued Gratitude to the Administrators of the JJ Feild Facebook page for their support of this story. XXX Carolyn and Maria!

Many Thanks to Lisa who inspired the idea to have Lady Mary crash John's Stag Dinner. I hope that you enjoy the results. Your friendship has been a blessing.

TruthUniversallyAcknowledged, Lady J and Obraham Woodholl- Thank you for all of your comments, brainstorming sessions, suggestions, ideas, support and friendship. The three of you are amazing!

As this fandom grows and matures, there are some authors that have begun posting that are incredibly talented (in this author's opinion) they and their stories should be recognized. I have many of their works bookmarked. Do take time to read what they have written. Such works should not go unnoticed. Their creativity and attention to historical research are amazing with a variety of plots and genres.

TruthUniversallyAcknowledged

MercuryGray

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I apologize for the long wait in posting this chapter, Holy Week and some personal major surgery have contributed to the length between chapters. I have another six weeks of recovery ahead of me. I hope to finish An Indecent Proposal and have the last chapter posted by the Season III premiere on April 25 (In the USA).
Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!

"Sweet heavens! Would they please cease that infernal racket?" Mary said to no one in particular tossing the bedclothes over head in a vain attempt to block out the strains of the tune, The British Grenadiers that wafted through the closed windows. The kettle drums making the house almost tremble upon its foundation. George stirred, yawning, letting out a pup squeak that made Mary giggle. The pup had virtually taken over the bed not having to navigate about his master's tall and slender frame.

Closing her eyes, trying to shut out the drummers and fifers, Mary groaned. It was far too early. A minute longer! Just a minute. Soon Abigail, Molliy and Pricilla would arrive with her bath and to help her dress. She wanted just one more minute to herself before it all would begin. Her Wedding Day!

"Lady Mary, your bath is here." Abigail said, pulling aside the bed curtains, letting in the early morning sunlight. "I also brought up a breakfast tray. You will need your strength this day, May." She told her mistress.

Stirring in the bed, Mary tossed the covers off her head and sat up. "Good morning, Abigail. What time is it?"

"Good Moring, Lady Mary. 'Tis almost seven of the clock." Abigal replied, watching as George, who had woken up, rushed up to greet his mistress, tail wagging. "Shall I see to Master George?"

Molly came forward to pick up the pup after curtsying to her employer. He was promptly given to an orderly that loitered by the doorway with a collar and lead. Lady Mary would not be taking her customary walk with George and Major Andre. Not this morning!

"Thank you. I will bathe first then eat while my hair is dressed." Mary instructed, getting out of bed, walking over to where the tub was set up. Molly and Pricilla were there with the basket of fragrant oils and Mary's jasmine scented Castile soap. Abigail helped Mary undress noting that she still wasn't showing yet. They helped her into the tub, pinning her long hair up so it would not get wet. While Mary bathed, Abigail, Molly and Pricilla fetched towels, her undergarments, petticoats, her wedding gown and several jewel cases.

Rinsed, Mary stood and was helped out of the tub while plush white Turkish towels dried her off, a cream made of jasmine oil was applied and rubbed all over her skin, then she was dusted with a powder puff made of ostrich plumes. She was wrapped in the banyan she had stolen from John while Abigail and Molly dressed her hair and she broke her fast.
Pricilla picked up one of the jewel cases, opening it. Inside was a diamond brooch crafted as a rose, a wedding gift from General Howe.

"It is beautiful, Lady Mary!" Pricilla said. "Shall I have this pinned to your corsage of your gown or wait until you are dressed?"

Mary shook her head as Lottie, Rachel and Melissa came bursting into the room, laughing and giggling. "Look at what was delivered!" Rachel called out holding forth a letter.

"How kind of Major Andre to send a note this morning." Mary said, flushing prettily. His frequent and rather extravagant gestures of gallantry never ceased to please her.

"How do you know that it is from Major Andre? The courier that delivered this said it came from New Jersey." Rachel taunted tapping it in her palm. "I wonder who could have written it? It came from a village where the British Army is known to be billeted." Rachel continued to taunt her friend. Her implication as to who had sent the letter abundantly clear. Lieutenant William Andre was now in New Jersey.

"Do not listen to her, May! These also arrived by two orderlies with Major Andre's compliments." Lottie said smiling, holding forth a large red velvet box and a bouquet of flowers tied with scarlet and blue ribbons, Major Andre's regimental colors.

Mary took the bouquet, bringing it up to her nose to inhale the fragrance of the late winter flowers. Wherever did John find cream colored roses? That particular flower and lilies hydrangeas, ranunculus, sprigs of heather and rosemary made a beautiful arrangement; one that she suspected her groom had placed some careful thought.

"The orderly said that the Major gave specific instructions to you, May: To wear and to carry to church! " Lottie stated.

"Ohhhh! Open the jewel case, May! What did Major Andre have made for you? He has been seen at the jeweler's quite a bit with Colonel Tarleton and Lieutenant Brandon conferring with Mister Burgess." Melissa squealed with girlish delight.

Mary placed the velvet box on a nearby table, opening it, she gasped. Inside was the most exquisite parure of two necklaces, brooch, earrings and bracelet in diamonds and pearls. The earrings were teardrop pearls suspended from diamond bows. One of the necklaces was a simple pearl choker with small diamonds separating each pearl. The other was a more elegant stand with tiny diamond bows interspersed within the pearls, the pendant was a diamond bow, hanging from it a teardrop pearl that could nestle rather prettily upon the wearer's chest or dip fetchingly to her décolletage.

The brooch was a bow set with diamonds another teardrop shaped pearl hanging from it. Mary's eyes widened at her groom's extravagant generosity, marveling at each piece as she examined it. She knew that he had designed every bit of it. She had heard Colonel Tarleton and Captain Lord Kennedy gossiping about John sketching jewelry when he should have been focusing on the Officers' Morning Briefings. Apparently from their conversation, this was not the only gift he was planning on presenting her within the course of the early days of their married life. She learnt that she was to expect several more pieces. He had made good use of the loose jewels that Her Grace, Mary's mother had sent along with other items for her trousseau. She smiled that secret smile wondering when and where he would be presenting her other gifts. Given the times that John had presented her other presents in the past, she was curious feeling her cheeks flush when she realized that each and every presentation had led to the pair of them in her bed, making passionate love to one another. She strongly suspected that it was during one of those passionate wanton encounters she had conceived


the child that she strongly suspected that she was now carrying.

"He must truly love you! I have never seen anything so fine. Euphemia Fairfax, Jane's cousin did not receive anything so lovely when she married that rich old merchant last summer. She just received a necklace and earbobs which I hear were cheap paste! Just as their marriage turned out to be. Jonah Fielding had a mistress when they married and Euphemia, it is rumored, has taken one of the sergeants in General Randall's regiment as her lover!" Melissa said looking at Major Andre's gift to Mary, her eyes as wide as saucers with awe at the officer's generosity.

"What a gentleman presents his wife in jewelry on their Wedding Day is not a testament to their relationship or his genuine feeling for his bride." Lottie opined. "However, we are all well aware of Major Andre's regard for May. It certainly has been expressed in this present! Good Gracious, May! Is this the price of a gentleman's enchantment?"

Mary's blush deepened, feeling her cheeks heat. "Perhaps..." She whispered, pursing her lips with pleasure, lowering her long lashes over her eyes. God! How she adored him!

"Does this mean that you will not be wearing General Howe's brooch to church?" Melissa asked.

"No, I will not. Major Andre did give specific instructions." Mary replied. "I do not believe that General Howe will be offended if I wear Joh... Major Andre's gifts." She moved away from the table, sitting down at her dressing table, a gentle thrill dashing down her spine remembering what John had done to her upon her dressing table in her rooms at the British Headquarters. How he had knelt before her and... She bit down on her lower lip to stifle a gentle moan what he had done to her as he knelt before her coming vividly to mind.

Abigail looked at her young mistress. "Begging My Lady's pardon but your hot chocolate is getting cold. I will not have Major Andre's wrath come down upon me when you faint at the altar because you neglected to eat your breakfast! We do have to dress your hair."

"We have to see to the other attendants as they arrive." Lottie stated. "Rachel give May her letter. We should allow the bride to finish getting ready in peace. As the Chief Attendant I will be up later to check upon you and receive Major Andre's ring. "Lottie went to leave, usher the pair of sisters out with her not before Rachel handed Mary the letter.

"Do read it!" Rachel said as she handed Mary the missive, her eyes sparkling wickedly.

"Come Rachel!" Lottie called from the door not allowing Mary to respond.

"I will not be the one reading this!" Mary snapped tucking the letter up against a small silver bowl filled with dried rosebuds and lavender after her trio of friends had left, biting into a piece of toast, settling in the chair before her dressing table so that Abigail could tend to her hair. She would be certain to present the letter to John at some point. She had no intentions on reading it suspecting what it may contain. Whatever had she done to merit such a missive? Had she lead Lieutenant Andre on? Had he felt her reaction when he had kissed her farewell? Had he sensed that tiny flutter in her stomach? Had it given him the smallest modicum of hope that she could still be his for the taking? "Nothing intricate puffed and curled today, Abigail. No wig or powder. I go to my marriage a maid. Dress it with the ribbons and strands of pearls as we discussed." Mary instructed in an attempt to shake off her disturbing thoughts of her groom's younger brother as Abigail set about to dress her hair, withdrawing the pins. Drawing her hair away from her face, leaving some small tendrils to fall softly over her forehead and at her temples and ears, securing the pearl strands and ribbons, winding them about her hair adding in diamond and pearl hairpins where needed, creating and elaborately elegant yet romantic style that was perfect for the day ahead allowing the thick mass of curls to tumble down her back to her waist.
Abigail secured the last diamond and pearl pin in Mary's hair, stepping away to view the affect in the pier glass. "Beautiful, Lady Mary. Absolutely beautiful. Major Andre will not be able to take his eyes from you; he will be completely captivated as will every officer and gentleman in that church."

British Headquarters
That Same Morning
An hour or two later

John adjusted the knot of his stock, checked the portion of lace peaking the space left by the pair of opened button of his waistcoat, picking a bit more through with a long elegant forefinger and thumb, studying himself in the pier glass, his thin lips quirking in a small smile remembering the last time Mary's nimble fingers had been frantically undoing those same buttons in an effort to get to him, to the naked flesh beneath his waistcoat and shirt. That night... What he had done to her in the parlor of the Academy, his smile quirked into a grin as he remembered quieting her soft keening cries of rapture when he took her upon the settee. Then what they had done in one of the winged backed chairs... He closed his eyes, his expression suddenly turning serious. His attraction to her had been immediate and intense, all consuming. He had skirted the realms of propriety in his effort to have her. Securing his place as her protector. Outwardly there had been no scandal, but in private, he had been quite aggressive in his wooing. The Lady Mary Ludlow had been a beautiful innocent when he had met her- innocent in the ways of men- In his lust to satisfy his carnal desire for her he had corrupted that innocence- introduced her to wanton sensuality- had made her his in every sense. Upon reflection he knew that his behavior had been forceful. But he was a far better match for her than General Jonathan Randall or Captain Lord Edward Kent. The young lady had needed a husband- better him than any of the others. The thought of any other man touching his Mary in the manner and ways that he had made him shudder with involuntary revulsion, as he opened his eyes. There would be no other for her but him. How did he ever compromise his principles to treat her in that fashion? A proper gentleman did not debauch and seduce a young woman of her rank and station, John thought feeling a pang of guilt. It had been out of necessity. He knew she certainly would have ended up raped and compromised by one of the more unscrupulous officers. Better him than someone else. He would make it up to her, he thought, being bound and determined to be a faithful and loving husband, to make her gloriously happy for the rest of their mortal days.

"Johnny, do you have the ring for me?" Banastre Tarleton asked, coming into the room. "Thinking of the Lady Mary?" He added noting John's faraway wistful expression.

"Yes." John answered unable to resist grinning like a besotted fool when his bride was referenced, he handed Tarleton a small velvet pouch. "Do not lose this!" He joked as his valet came forth to help him with his jacket, the man brushing the shoulders of any dust or debris, real or imagined, John hooking the closure. "Is it time to head to church?"

"Yes. There is quite a crowd along the procession route."

"Certainly you jest?" John countered.

"Come outside and see for yourself." Banastre shot back, the pair of men proceeding out the door.

The Academy

Mary lifted her bridal bouquet as Abigail and Pricilla smoothed the back of her gown whilst Molly gave the bodice one last adjustment. Making certain that everything was perfect, the trio of maids stepped away to view their handiwork.
"Ready?" Abigail asked Mary, smiling warmly, they could hear the fifes and drums play a selection of field music and the cheers of the crowd as the bride's procession began its way to church.

"Yes! Abigail... Thank you!" Mary whispered, her eyes, misting.

"It has been my pleasure, Lady Mary." The older woman replied, taking the free hand that Mary had offered giving it a gentle squeeze, the pair enjoying a moment of friendship. "Off with you now! Major Andre will not be pleased if you are overly fashionably late to church. Though, if I may, you will be well worth the wait. Here comes the bride." She called out preceding Mary down the stair case.

Mary took a deep breath as Pricilla and Molly stepped away, placing her hand on the banister, lifting her foot, taking that first step down the stairs to her future, her gaze meeting that of General Howe that stared in awe watching her, his mouth agape, eyes widening with pleasure. Never had he seen a more beautiful bride.

"Will I do, Excellency?" Mary quipped.

"Very nicely, My Lady." Howe replied, grinning broadly, offering her his arm to escort Mary to the coach that waited outside and then to church.

There was a mounted escort of six lower ranking officers from John's regiment for the bride, all acknowledging her when she stepped into the coach with their Commander, Mary smiling back, the door shutting. The fifes and drums struck up Rule Britannia as the coach joined the procession on its way to Trinity Church. Mary and General Howe unable to carrying on much of a coherent conversation due to the music from the regimental band and the loud enthusiastic cheers that swelled down the route as the coach past. Mary responding, smiling and waving to the crowds through the closed window of the coach, looking left and right while they made their way to Trinity Church, exchanging reassuring smiles with the British Commander who was bursting with pride and completely content, having secured a bride such as the Lady Mary Ludlow for one of his officers

Inside the church, Major Andre and Colonel Tarleton greeted the rector and vicar, shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries after having removed their hats and capes.

The church was packed with people, in the pews and galleries. The Marriage of the Lady Mary Ludlow and Major John Andre THE event of the Winter Season if not the year. It was not every day that the daughter of a Peer of the Realm got married in York City.

"Do you have the ring?" John asked Tarleton as the pair stepped away from the clergy.

"Yes, right here! Safe and secure!" Tarleton replied, patting the pocket of his uniform where Mary's wedding ring was securely kept.

"Good." John said, tugging nervously on the lace cuffs of his sleeves, smoothing the front of his uniform coat.

"Nerves?" Tarleton quipped.

"I am most fortunate. I cannot believe that she agreed to take me on." John replied.

"She must be incredibly foolish or very much in love. Knowing the lady as I do, I strongly suspect the latter. Good Luck! But remember, if you ever hurt her in any way or do anything to make her unhappy you will have me and all the British Army to answer to!" Ban warned.

"You will not have to fret about that. I intend to be a faithful and loving husband, for all my days."
John vowed.

"With a woman beside you such as the Lady Mary I believe that you will be." Tarleton stated hearing the first few measures of Pachelbel's Canon in D. "Ah! We are needed at the altar." He added, the pair making their way down the aisle in the groom's procession walking a slow and steady pace down the aisle.

Standing at the altar waiting, John could hear the cheers swelling outside as the bridal procession got closer and closer to the church finally reaching the door. Everything happened so fast, General Howe helping her out of the coach.

"Ready?" He asked with as smile as they turned to wave to the cheering crowds.

Lottie Shaw stepped away from the clutch of attendants which included some favorite students from the Academy, to arrange Mary's train, smooth her hair. "You look lovely, May. Major Andre has been blessed. I am delighted that you have decided to marry him." Lottie had a private moment with her best friend.

"And he, me, Lottie. We are quite a pair." Mary replied, squeezing Lottie's hand.

"That you are, May. I do wonder if knows how truly lucky he is. You could have married at least a half dozen other officers than him." Lottie whispered returning the squeeze. She then went back to making certain that Mary's hair was perfect. She stepped away as the bridal procession went inside the church to more cheering.

The clergy was there waiting to greet the bride, General Howe and the attendants. After greeting them all in turn everyone took their places. It was time.

A fanfare sounded, everyone standing as Purcell's Trumpet Voluntary began as the Bridal Procession moved up the aisle of the church to where Major Andre and Banastre Tarleton awaited.

John's face split into a grin when she reached him. "You look lovely!" He whispered.

"Lovely for you!" She retorted with a smile. They turned their attention to the rector, Mary swallowing, her throat suddenly dry as the organist began to play the music of the hymn that she had chosen. She had managed to keep it secret from her groom until this moment despite his best efforts to ruin her surprise. John turned his head toward her when he realized what hymn she had picked. He blinked back a tear as the congregation joined in singing, I Vow To Thee My Country.

"I Vow to Thee My Country, All earthly things above. Entire and whole and perfect the service of my love, The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test, that lays upon the altar the dearest and the best. The love that never falters, the love that pays the price, the love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice."

John attempted to hold back tears, his voice cracking as he sang, blinking several times, his heart swelling with love and pride for the young woman standing beside him. His bride was declaring to all those present in the church and outside on the streets of York City and beyond listening declare her loyalty to Great Britain and in essence to him. Her love and what she was prepared to do for him to prove that commitment- a love that would stand tests, giving to him her dearest and best, a love that would never falter, that would make undaunted any sacrifice required of her in the days, months and years to come. He had known that Mary was the wife for him but having it confirmed in such an eloquent and public way took his breath away. The song proceeded to the second verse.

"And there's another country I've heard of long ago. Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know. We may not count her armies; we may not see her King. Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering. And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase. And her ways
are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace."

The rector of Trinity Church began the words of the Wedding Service from the 1662 Church of England Book of Common Prayer, " Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this Congregation to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony, which is an honorable state, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying us the union that is betwixt Christ and his Church, which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable of all men; and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites like brute beasts that have no understanding."

There was an audible snicker in the crowd of guests that came from where Captain Lord Edward Kent and several of the younger officers sat that was silenced by a stern glare from one of the higher ranking officers.

"But reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained:
First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his Holy Name.
Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.
Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity.
Into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. Therefore if any many can show any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter for ever hold his peace." The rector finished looking about the congregation noting that some women were pursing their lips in vexation and several gentlemen were scowling in disappointment.

The rector turned to Mary and John. "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of Judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know of any impediment, why ye may not be joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise that God's word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their Matrimony lawful."

Mary quickly shoved away from her mind an image of Ben Tallmadge that came to her unbidden, focusing all of her attention upon the man beside her. The past was over. John Andre was her future and she would marry him and make him gloriously happy.

"John, Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor, and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, for long as ye both shall live?" The rector asked.

"I will." John's voice was loud and firm in the church, smiling reassuringly at Mary.

"Mary Georgiana Amelia Louisa, Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor and keep him in sickness and in health and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will." Mary's voice softer than but as firm with conviction as the major's had been, her gaze meeting his noting the undisguised pleasure and relief on his face.
"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" The rector turned to the British Commander who was standing on the other side of Mary.

"I do on behalf of His Grace the Duke of Sutherland." General Howe stated.

The Commander handed Mary's right hand to the rector, uniting it with John's right hand.

"John, repeat after me: I, John, take thee, Mary Georgiana Amelia Louisa to my wedded wife. To have and to hold from this day forward." The rector instructed.

John smiled down at Mary. "I, John, take thee, Mary Georgiana Amelia to my wedded wife. To have and to hold for this day forward."

"For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance and thereto I plight thee my troth." The rector went on.

"For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance and thereto I plight thee my troth." John's voice was loud and firm once again as he took his vows.

The rector loosed their right hands switching their positions. Mary taking John's in hers. "Lady Mary, repeat after me: I, Mary Georgiana Amelia Louisa, take thee, John, as my wedded husband. To have and to hold from this day forward."

"I, Mary Georgiana A... Amelia Louisa take... take thee, John, as my wedded husband. To have and to hold from this day forward." Mary stumbled slightly over her vows, looking to John who squeezed her hand in reassurance.

"For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance and thereto I give thee my troth." Mary finished her voice gaining strength with each word.

Reaching into his jacket pocket, Banastre Tarleton withdrew the ring from its velvet pouch handing it to the rector, a band of alternating diamonds and sapphires.

Laying it upon the Book of Common Prayer the rector took the Holy Water and blessed the ring handing it to John to place upon the fourth finger of Mary's left hand.

"With this ring, I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." John repeated the words after the rector.

Handing Mary an intaglio signet ring engraved with the Andre crest, Mary placed it on the pinky finger of his left hand. John pausing to admire it before the pair knelt down on their prie-dieus for the blessing.

"Let us pray, O, Eternal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life. Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that as Isaac and Rebecca, lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, wherefore this Ring given and received is a token and pledge, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The rector took John and Mary's hands joining together, wrapping the edge of his stole about them. "THOSE WHOM GOD HAST JOINED TOGETHER LET NO MAN PUT ASSUNDER." He
declared.

"Forasmuch as John and Mary Georgiana Amelia Louisa, have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a Ring, and by the joining of hand. I pronounce that they me Man and Wife together, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." The rector declared.

Beaming, General William Howe could not mask his delight. So it was done. They were well and truly married, he thought looking from bride to groom. The Lady Mary sweetly pensive, Major Andre bursting with pride.

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve and keep you. The Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may life together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen." The congregation rose as the organ and orchestra began to play All Creatures of Our God and King, which John knew was one of Mary's favorites. He had chosen it because he knew that it would please her.

"All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing:;
O burning sun with golden beam,
and shining moon with silver gleam,
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
O rushing wind so wild and strong,
white clouds that sail in heaven along,
alleluia, alleluia!
New rising dawn in praise rejoice;
you lights of evening find a voice:
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Cool flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear:
alleluia, alleluia!
Fierce fire, so masterful and bright,
providing us with warmth and light.
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Earth ever fertile, day by day
bring forth your blessings on our way;
alleluia, alleluia!
All flowers and fruits that is you grow,
let the his glory also show;
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
All you who are of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part;
alleluia, alleluia!
All you who pain and sorrow bear,
praise God and on him cast your care;
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness,
alleluia, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!"

After the last strains of the hymn died away, Admiral Sir William Howe walked to the pulpit. "The First Lesson is taken from Psalm 45, verses one through seventeen.

My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.
Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.
Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.
And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.
Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.
Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.
Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.
Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.
Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;
So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.
1And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour.
The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.
She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.
With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace.
Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.
I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.

Thus Endeth the Lesson." The Admiral stated, giving proper obsience, going down the steps of the pulpit and removing back to his seat.

General William Howe rose and walked to the pulpit. "The Second Lesson is taken from Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen, verses one through thirteen.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as
sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

The organ and brass began to play the strains of 'Jerusalem' as the congregation stood for another hymn.

"And did those feet in ancient time, Walk upon England's mountains green: And was the holy Lamb of God, On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine, Shine forth upon our clouded hills? And was Jerusalem builded here, Among these dark Satanic Mills?"

Singing, Mary wondered if they were referring to the Thirteen Colonies. The words were rather apropos. She wondered if John had chosen the hymn for that purpose or if it was one that General Howe had suggested. Especially when the congregation began to sing the second verse.

"Bring me my Bow of burning gold; Bring me my Arrows of desire: Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold! Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight, Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand: Till we have built Jerusalem, In England's green & pleasant Land"

The bride and groom sang lustily, Mary's fine soprano blending wonderfully with John's baritone. After the hymn, the rector took to the pulpit to give the Address to the couple expounding upon the expectations of marriage and how such a union would aid in their mutual comfort during wartime.
Then it was time for the Prayers and Blessings. Mary and John knelt before the Communion Rail at their prie-dieus the rector approaching them.

"Let us pray: O let the nations rejoice and be glad: for thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God: yea, let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth bring forth her increase: and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing. God shall bless us: and all the ends of the world shall fear him. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Answer. Christ have mercy upon us.
Minister. Lord, have mercy upon us.

OUR Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven: Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. Amen.

Minister. O Lord, save thy servant, and thy handmaid; Answer Who put their trust in thee.
Minister. O Lord, send them help from thy holy place; Answer. And evermore defend them.
Minister. Be unto them a tower of strength, Answer. From the face of their enemy.
Minister. O Lord, hear our prayer; Answer. And let our cry come unto thee.

Another fanfare of brass sounded announcing the introduction of the next hymn, Praise to the Lord, The Almighty. The hymn was one that John and Mary had chosen together.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near;
Praise Him in glad adoration.
Praise to the Lord, who over all things so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen how thy desires ever have been Granted in what He ordaineth?
Praise to the Lord, who hath fearfully, wondrously made thee;
Health hath vouchsafed and, when heedlessly falling, hath stayed thee.
What need or grief ever hath failed of relief?
Wings of His mercy did shade thee.
Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
If with His love He befriend thee.
Praise to the Lord, who, when tempests their warfare are waging,
Who, when the elements madly around thee are raging,
Biddeth them cease, turneth their fury to peace,
Whirlwinds and waters assuaging.
Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,
Who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
Sheddeth His light, chaseth the horrors of night,
Saints with His mercy surrounding.
Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him.
Let the Amen sound from His people again,
Gladly for aye we adore Him
Then the rector bestowed the blessing:

Minister. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, bless these thy servants, and sow the seed of eternal life in their hearts; that whatsoever in thy holy Word they shall profitably learn, they may indeed fulfill the same. Look, O Lord, mercifully upon them from heaven, and bless them. And as thou didst send thy blessing upon Abraham and Sarah, to their great comfort; so vouchsafe to send thy blessing upon these thy servants; that they obeying thy will, and alway being in safety under thy protection, may abide in thy love unto their lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
After the blessing John and Mary received Holy Communion. All standing as the brass played a fanfare. Praise and Blessings had been given to God it was now time to acknowledge their sovereign, King George III. And honor him they did. The organist and brass played lustily and with flourishes. For their part the bride and groom, gazed at one another as they sang. Mary knowing, that if John had any doubts as to her loyalty and total commitment to him and the cause of the British it was declared in her singing allegiance to her king. All of Mary’s spying and aiding of the Continental Army was now behind her.

God save our gracious King,
long live our noble King,
God save the King.
Send him victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save the King.
Thy choicest gifts in store
on him be pleased to pour,
long may he reign.
May he defend our laws,
and ever give us cause
to sing with heart and voice,
God save the King.

The Bride and Bridegroom along with their witnesses and several high ranking British Military officers moved to the sacristy of the church for the signing of the Marriage Register.

"Lady Mary, erm, Lady Andre..." The rector said, handing Mary the quill pen. Indicating Mary where she was to sign.

"Thank you. You are the first person to address me by my new name. I quite fancy it. I had most certainly best get used to it." Mary said sweetly.

"That will not be too difficult with it, LADY Andre?" John asked grinning.
Mary looked over the page where it contained her full name, her age, the word spinster, her father's name and title and occupation, Peer of the Realm. There was John's information to read, his full name: John/Jean Andre as acknowledgement of his French Huguenot heritage, his age his deceased father's name, Anthony and his occupation, merchant.

"What is your opinion upon the matter?" Mary teased back, as she finished signing her name, handing the quill pen to the groom, her husband.

"Hmmm..." John touched the edge of the quill to his mouth, seeming to ponder the matter. "I do not believe that there will be any trouble." He went to sign his name, finishing he handed the quill to General Howe.

Out in the church the choir, organ and orchestra were performing Bach's Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring.

Jesu, joy of man’s desiring,
Holy wisdom, love most bright;
Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring
Soar to uncreated light.
Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,
With the fire of life impassioned,
Striving still to truth unknown,
Soaring, dying round Thy throne.
Through the way where hope is guiding,
Hark, what peaceful music rings;
Where the flock, in Thee confiding,
Drink of joy from deathless springs.
Their is beauty’s fairest pleasure;
Their is wisdom’s holiest treasure.
Thou dost ever lead Thine own
In the love of joys unknown.

After the Marriage Register was signed the Bride and Groom emerged from the Sacristy.

"A fortnight? Good Gracious!" Captain Lord Kennedy was saying, grinning. He strongly suspected where Major Andre intended to spend his time on his Wedding Trip. He sobered when they came into view of the congregation.

The bridal procession formed, the Bride and Bridegroom at the front, the organist, brass and orchestra striking up, Handel's Hornpipe from 'The Water Music'.
"Are you happy?" John asked, beaming as they proceeded up the aisle, acknowledging various guests as they walked past with dips of their heads and small smiles.
"Are you?" She answered his question with a question.

"I promise to show you just how happy I am this evening. Thank you for the gift. I am quite touched and intensely moved that your opinion of me is so high that you would place me on the caliber with Saint George."

"You are Mine Own Galahad." Mary reminded him.

"That I am. As I ever more shall be." John agreed, continuing to beam as they made their way out of the church to loud cheering from the soldiers and people awaiting them. Everyone was whooping
and singing.

According to custom, John threw a large handful of sixpences into the crowd. The children of York City and some of the other residents dove and jumped for them. The coins spun and bounced, catching the sun like jewels. Mary and John pause on the church steps to acknowledge the adulation of the crowd of soldiers and people. Who chanted for the pair to kiss.

"Shall we?" John asked with a cheeky grin.

"Why ever not?" Mary replied laughing sweetly before her lips met her husband's, the soldiers and crowd sending up a resounding cheer.

Unbeknownst to the bride and groom a man sat on a horse watching them exit the church and pause on steps. He pursed his mouth in consternation feeling the sheer joy of the couple waft toward him like a gale in a fierce storm. The knowledge seeped into him, inside his gut. He sighed with deep regret, his heart aching and breaking. She was truly lost to him now. "Enough. It is all over." Benjamin Tallmadge murmured, pulling the horse around riding off into the opposite direction back to New Jersey and the Continental Army.

Chapter End Notes

Notes on Chapter XXXI: THE WEDDING

Once again, many Thanks to the JJ Feild Facebook page for their continued support of this story and their friendship. I am ever grateful. Thank you, Carolyn and Maria! XXX You are a pair of amazing women. I am blessed to know you both.

To my dear friend, Lisa, whom I met through our mutual admiration of JJ, History and particularly Jane Austen- Thank you for everything! Especially for reading the galleys, brainstorming and especially for collaborating with me on which musical pieces to choose to make the Wedding of Lady Mary Ludlow and Major John Andre become what it did.

To Truth Universally Acknowledged- Thanks for your love, friendship and support - I am blessed that we found our friendship through this fandom. Best of Luck to you as you end one adventure and begin another. You deserve the best in life and I hope that you receive it.

Thank you Lady J... It has been quite a ride!

ObrohomWoodholl - Thank you for your comments and continued interest. I see great things in you!

As this fandom grows and matures, there are some authors that have begun posting that are incredibly talented (in this author's opinion) they and their stories should be recognized. I have many of their works bookmarked. Do take time to read what they have written. Such works should not go unnoticed. Their creativity and attention to historical research are amazing with a variety of plots and genres.

TruthUniversallyAcknowledged

MercuryGray

Neftzer_nettlestonenell

The Wedding Vows are from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer which I have transcribed and cut and pasted. Those were the ones in use in 1777 when Lady Mary Ludlow and Major John Andre are married.

The Bible Verses are from the 1611 Translation of the King James's Version of the
Bible. They would have been the ones read during the 18th century. As Goddess Supreme in this Alternative Universe I have taken the liberty with some of the hymns. I am well aware that many of the pieces that I used did not come into existence until later.

The Groom's Procession, the Bridal Parties' procession, the Bride's Procession, the hymn played when Lady Mary and Major Andre were signing the register and the Recessional are all pieces that would have been played/sung in the 18th century. 'I Vow to Thee, My Country' and 'Jerusalem' are Victorian/Edwardian hymns. The tune for 'All Creatures of Our God and King' is an 18th century contemporary tune but the words would have been different. 'Praise to The Lord, the Almighty' is from 1680 and based on a German hymn 'Lobe den Herren'

'God Save the King' is the National Anthem of England.

I am still looking at another three to four weeks of recovery for my surgery. As promised I have finished An Indecent Proposal before the Season III premiere on April 25th.

I have another new project looming on the horizon but if you are interested in reading more about the Lady Mary Ludlow and Major John Andre please let me know. Feel free to leave a message in the comments section.

Thank you to all my faithful readers who have read the story, left comments and kudos. Your interest and praise mean the world to me.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!