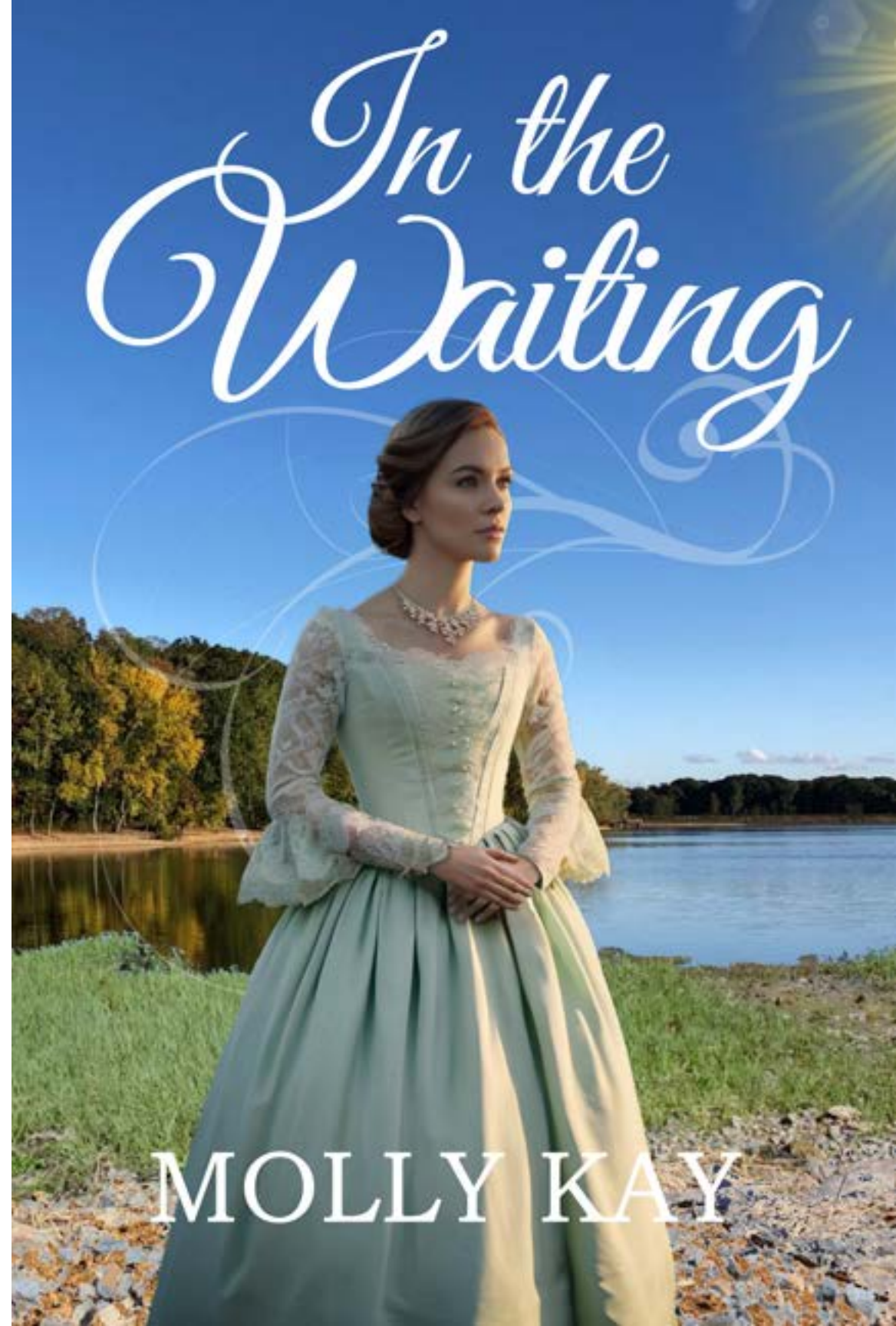




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*In the
Waiting*

*One Revolutionary War woman's search for
purpose in the midst of her waiting*

Molly Kay



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*To Nicholas Porges
The one for whom I waited*

*Special thanks to
Kurt Hake
Who helped me edit and polish this book
to what it is now*

Autumn, 1778

Setauket, Long Island

Chapter 1

“Charlotte! Charlotte!”

I restrained myself from responding to my young sister’s call in more haste than would befit a lady, but it is hard to contain one’s enthusiasm when a long-expected letter arrives.

“Yes, Mary Ann?” I answered with more composure than I felt as I laid aside the book on treating stomach illnesses that I had borrowed from my father’s library. I looked towards the doorway of the front parlor where my sister paused just long enough to grab a letter opener from the writing desk before rushing to the settee where I waited.

“This letter came for you just now.” She shoved it into my hand along with the opener, which caught on my skirt and tore a hole in it.

“Now look what you’ve done,” I scolded. But I wanted to open the letter just as much as Mary Ann wanted to watch me do so, so I moved on quickly without paying much heed to the gash.

“Thomas said it was sent some time ago, but the mail was delayed because the British army stopped the boat crossing from New York to search for spies carrying messages. I certainly hope they caught any aboard to make it worth the delay.” Mary Ann returned her focus to the letter. “I wouldn’t have seen it before you,” she continued, “but I was waiting by the door for Thomas to return with the mail since I am expecting a letter from Ellen Barlow.

You know she, my best friend, has left me alone here for nearly a month now? I still can't forgive Father for keeping me home while her father is letting her have all the fun in New York. It simply isn't fair. Well?"

I didn't pay much attention to my sister's prattling since I had heard this complaint many times in the previous weeks. I was tired of reminding her that Ellen was two years older than she, that Mary Ann would have her turn in society when Father felt she was ready, and that there was no use complaining since he wasn't likely to change his mind, though Mother was no doubt doing her best to fight for every opportunity that might give her two daughters a chance to make good matches. Certainly, that was why Mother had taken such an interest in Lieutenant Lawerance Taylor. She seemed more excited at the prospect of him and me forming an attachment than even I. Only at Mary Ann's inquiry did I remember that I still had not read the letter, so distracted was I with hoping and guessing its contents.

"It is from Lieutenant Taylor, is it not?" It felt as if she was shouting as she leaned into my ear.

"Shhh, keep your voice down!" I whispered through my teeth, "I don't need the whole house imagining whatever you are. Remember what happened when Mr. Lark stopped calling on me the Christmas before last, despite you having convinced everyone he would propose within days? Or what happened with Mr. Smith? I never saw him again after you and mother scared him off by asking how many children he wanted." Mary Ann apologized, but rolled her eyes, showing me that she was sure this time would be different.

"Yes, it is from Lieutenant Taylor," I replied after giving the letter a quick scan, "and there is nothing of significance to report, so you may be on your way." I

started to fold the letter. I had no desire to read it more intently in the presence of such a nosy sister. I had read enough to know there would be little in it to bring me joy or excitement.

"Oh please, Charlotte, please tell me what he says. Perhaps it will help cure the boredom I have from being left here in sleepy Setauket, too young to enter society while all the other girls my age are either in New York or preparing for the Barlow's autumn ball."

"I am afraid all I can say is that Lieutenant Taylor has been further delayed in his work with the British army in New York and will not return before the ball as he had hoped." I was more disappointed than I was willing to show. I knew Mary Ann would exaggerate whatever she imagined I felt. She did not need to know that I really did have hopes for a future with Lawrence and that I feared this was just a step towards his ending our relationship. He must have heard about my family's precarious financial situation and thought better of his advances.

"He waited nearly three weeks to send you a letter and that is all he says? Whatever are you going to do?" Mary Ann was clearly dejected by the idea that the situation seemed to be the same as what happened with Mr. Lark.

"There is nothing to do," I replied. "He is there, and I am here, and that is that. Now go wash for dinner. Mrs. Phillips will be announcing supper any minute, and Mother and Father will be waiting for us in the drawing room." When my sister had left, I took a moment to consider what the letter meant in the immediate. It meant I would be unable to attend the ball without looking like a desperate old maid, for that would be the general consensus among the gossips if I arrived with only my father to escort me. It also meant I would once again be made to wait.

Waiting seemed to be my lot in life. I had waited a

full seven years for a sister. I had waited to enter society until I was almost seventeen because my family was busy preparing for and making the move from England to the colonies the two years prior. And now I was still waiting for an offer of marriage at age twenty-two, well past the age of many brides. It was not that I was disliked or undesirable. In fact, I was told that my gold hair, fair skin, green eyes, and graceful air were considered by most to make me at least pretty, yet I did not seem to hold the interest of anyone for any length of time. Just as I would begin to feel close to someone, I would discover I did not have as high a place in his heart and mind as he had in mine. Mary Ann would be presented next season, if she could behave herself long enough for Father to consider her ready for such a step, and here I was, a young woman whom everyone seemed to think well of, but whom no one cared to truly befriend.

The chime of the clock brought me back to reality from my bout of self-pity, and I sighed to myself thinking how perfectly selfish I was to be thinking such things when clearly Lawrence was doing his best to finish his business in New York. After all, he did say in his letter that he missed me and was sorry. As much as I wished to escape to my room to sort out my feelings and disappointment instead of attending the evening meal, I knew that would be impossible, as my father had a guest who would be joining the family table. I stood up and smoothed my skirts.

When I found the newly made hole in the fabric, I regretted not taking the advice I gave Mary Ann to clean up a bit before supper, as a guest I had never met would be there. I would have to hope the folds hid the tear, for a late arrival to a meal would cause my mother even greater frustration than an imperfect appearance, and my

mother's frustration was not something I desired to have directed towards me.



I walked into the drawing room only a minute before our housekeeper, Mrs. Phillips, did, so the introductions were brief.

"Charlotte," my father said as the gentlemen rose and the gaze of the room fell on me, "I would like you to meet Mr. Eric Kingsley. Mr. Kingsley, may I present my eldest daughter, Miss Charlotte Devonshire." I was surprised to learn he was our guest, as I recognized the name. He was the son of an old friend of my father. The Kingsleys had moved to Boston from England back before my father had married, so I had never met Eric Kingsley or his parents. Political unrest, and then the war, had kept my family, except Father, on Long Island or in New York City since we moved.

"I am glad to meet you, Miss Devonshire." He took a step towards me and bowed low. He paused there and tilted his head up, revealing a sly grin and a twinkle in his gray eyes before straightening. I hastened to adjust my skirt. He must have seen the hole! How rude of him to acknowledge it like that! Did he have no sense of civility? I fidgeted uncomfortably, but he was awaiting my response.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance," I replied quickly and took the opportunity to check my dress once more as I curtsied, "We have waited to meet you for so long. Any friend of my father is someone I am happy to know." I don't know why I said the last bit, for it most certainly wasn't true. Father had many young men work with him who seemed rather roguish for being welcomed into a proper English home. But I always seemed to talk more when I was embarrassed or uncomfortable. Mr. Kingsley's

solid jaw and wavy brown hair did not help my situation as I was typically most uneasy around handsome men. "I am sorry I am late," I apologized as I turned to my father.

"She has received a letter from Lieutenant Taylor!" Mary Ann blurted quickly.

Apparently she thought an explanation for my delay was necessary.

Thankfully, at that moment Mrs. Phillips entered, and Mother quickly took Father's arm and followed him into the dining room to distract from the outburst. Mr. Kingsley followed suit by taking my arm. He leaned close to my ear, "It must have been some letter to excite you enough to cause a tear in your skirt." I gasped wide eyed but had no chance to reply as we were already taking our places at the table.

Father sat at the head with Mother at his right. Mr. Kingsley was seated at his left with myself beside him and Mary Ann across from me. The meal would have passed quite pleasantly if the gentlemen had talked while the ladies sat silently, as was our normal practice, but Mr.

Kingsley seemed determined to cause me discomfort by harassing me with questions.

"Miss Devonshire, have you learned to like America since your arrival? Though I know that was some time ago now. How do the men of the colonies compare to your suitors in England, for no doubt you had many?" He bowed his head to take a bite of food and looked sideways at me so only I could see the mischievous twinkle his eyes held.

I sat stunned, but Father laughed good naturedly.

"I'm sorry, sir," Mother interjected, "why do you ask such a question?" She seemed as vexed as she was stunned.

Father tried to explain. "Oh, darling, Mr. Kingsley is simply being friendly. He is no stranger here and should

not feel as though he must behave as such."

Father may have felt this way because he had spent a brief time with the Kingsley family in Massachusetts shortly after our move, but to the rest of us, who had only met the young Mr. Kingsley that day, he *was* a stranger.

"Oh, I am sorry if I have overstepped, ma'am. I meant no offense. Mr. Devonshire is right. I am afraid I have not spent very much time in high society recently. I meant only that your daughter has reason to have had many admirers. But again, I apologize, Mrs. Devonshire, Miss Devonshire."

"I understand, and apologize for misreading what you meant by it," conceded Mother, but she did not seem to understand and was certainly no more comfortable with Mr. Kingsley's style of conversation now than she had been before.

"There is nothing to apologize for," I replied, "I have heard the colonists are rather... apathetic to things like reputation and respectability, so it is not your fault if they have influenced you in that way."

No one said a word for some time, and as I realized how harsh my comment was, the sting of it likely hurt me more than it had Mr. Kingsley. I had only meant to repay a bit of the teasing he had given me. I didn't mean to insult his character. No wonder no man had ever remained in my life long enough to marry me. I was an expert at saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Yet to apologize now would be impossible. I just smiled as sweetly as I could, hoping he would take it as a joke, and turned my attention to the food in front of me.

He returned my smile with another question. "And Miss Devonshire," he began just as I took a bite of a much too hot potato to distract from the inner guilt of what I had said. I struggled to keep it in my mouth.

"Do you enjoy dancing?" He did not sound as lighthearted as before. He almost sounded cold, like he was speaking only out of the necessity to move on from what had just transpired between us. Then he added under his breath, "Perhaps that is what has caused the tear in your dress." I nearly choked. I glanced at my mother and saw that she still did not appreciate such questions being asked of her daughter by a man I had just met, but also that she had thankfully not heard his second comment.

"Well," I began hesitantly but defiantly after I had swallowed, forgetting all regret I had for my previous statement, "I find dancing an enjoyable diversion on such occasions that call for it and when there are *gentlemen* with whom to share it." Eric's eyes narrowed at the insinuation of my remark, but my mother's face relaxed. I could tell she was satisfied that I gave an answer that did not invite further discussion and discouraged any other seemingly advanced comments Mr. Kingsley may have considered directing towards me. My mother need not have worried. I had no interest in this long-lost family friend who was too forward and crass to be considered a true gentleman. I would hope I could set my sights higher than that. I was sure Mr. Kingsley had no real interest in me as anything more than the object of a good tease anyway, especially after what I had said.

I was unaware of the awkwardness of the silence that followed my second, admittedly rude, comment until it was made worse by Mary Ann. "How sad you must be that you don't have anyone to take you to the autumn ball now that Lieutenant Taylor will not be here!"

"Mary Ann!" My mother gave her a sharp look of reproof for speaking out of turn with such personal information, then turned to me with questions in her eyes.

"Oh?" my father exclaimed, "Well, I am sorry to hear

the Lieutenant will not be joining us at Fencomb, but I am sure Charlotte will not be required to stay behind. Someone will surely be willing to escort her, especially if I ask." My cheeks flushed red with embarrassment. I may be behind when it came to securing a man and a stable future, but I did not need my father to find someone to take me to a ball. "Why, young Kingsley, you must come to the ball. I am sure our invitation from the Barlows may be extended to you. And as I have just invited you, you cannot already have asked someone to the ball. Would you be so kind as to escort Charlotte to the dance?"

I wished I could have run out of the room and never seen Eric Kingsley again. The whole group held its breath for Mr. Kingsley's response, even Mr. Kingsley.

"I suppose as a *gentleman* I must oblige." His emphasis on the word did not go unnoticed, certainly not by the one who had more than implied his being unworthy of such a title. "Miss Devonshire, would you do me the honor of allowing me to escort you to the autumn dance this Friday?"

I knew I was right in my previous judgment of this insufferable man. My first instinct was to refuse with a stinging remark, but then I remembered that Mary Ann did have a point. This was the only way I could go to the dance that I had looked forward to for weeks. Despite my tendency for embarrassment in society, I did still enjoy social functions, especially those with dancing, which, along with reading medical journals, was a favorite pastime of mine, though I would never tell Mr. Kingsley so. I made a decision then that though I would have to accept, I would make Mr. Kingsley regret his insulting behavior. It was either that or I would have to tag along with my parents.

"Why yes, I would be flattered to be escorted by a

gentleman such as you, sir." I managed to give my answer with enough spite to satisfy my malicious desires for the moment. My reply seemed to frustrate him as if he had intentionally asked me in the least inviting way possible.

Though that idea angered me, it made me glad to see I had succeeded even so slightly in making him wish he had not provoked me.

"It's settled then!" Father concluded, rising from the table and not seeming to notice the obvious reluctance with which both parties had agreed to his solution. "And the two of you will have plenty of time to become acquainted with one another as I have invited Mr. Kingsley to stay with us here at Longford until his family returns from their trip to England, which with the war will most likely be some time. He has had to stay behind for business reasons, you see, as I have asked him to assist me in some matters."

It was not uncommon for my father to have men stay for a few days while working with him, but I somehow knew this would be different. My father was all too eager to pair me with him for the dance. It seemed Mr. Kingsley would not be leaving anytime soon.

When we had finished eating, we adjourned to the drawing room. The two men stood by the fire, and we ladies sat on the sofas as we conversed.

"So, Mr. Kingsley, have you heard any recent news of the war?" Mother must have been desperate to turn his attention away from me if she was willing to bring up the war.

"Well, Mrs. Devonshire, since gaining such support from the French, the colonists are putting up a formidable fight."

"It's meddling, if you ask me," chimed Mother, "The French just want an excuse to stab us in the back."

"Miss Devonshire, what do *you* think about the

colonists' use of the French?" He looked at me expectantly, as if he was trying to uncover something.

"Lieutenant Taylor thinks that it reveals a lack of confidence and backbone to be relying on France."

"With all due respect, Miss Devonshire, I asked what you think, not what your Lieutenant thinks."

My mother's attempt had failed in sparing me from his harassment. My cheeks flushed hot and I scrambled for something smart to say. '*My* Lieutenant'... The audacity of this man!

"Well, personally, I do not think the French would support a group that is weak enough to doom them to failure. They are too smart for that... At least that is what I heard Andrew Barlow say last we visited Fencomb," I hastened to say for fear my mother would think me insolent.

Eric didn't reply but only shook his head. No one knew what to say next, so we sat in the quiet, listening to the crackling of the fire and the wind outside for a moment.

I couldn't pretend I was enjoying our guest any longer. I excused myself from the room but did not escape his presence, as he also decided to retire and followed me out.

When we were safely in the hall, I heard from behind, "Miss Devonshire, may I speak to you for a moment?"

I turned to face him and nodded though I had no desire to hear what he had to say.

"You don't like me, and, quite frankly, I'm beginning to reciprocate the feeling," he said matter of factly. "So if you would rather not go to the dance with me, I am sure I could take the disappointment." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Not that I doubted the truth of his words, but I couldn't believe he was actually saying them to me, and with such sarcasm!

"No doubt there are still one or two men out there who

would be desperate enough to take you. You certainly strike me as the kind of woman who wouldn't mind the whole town knowing that the last pick of the crop was the best escort she could get for a high class ball."

I could hold my tongue no longer. "Oh! And you don't care one lick what people think of you? Is that it? We'll see about that. Mr. Kingsley," I held my nose high, my cheeks hot as fire, "I said I would go with you and I will, but I promise you; you will regret how you have treated me. You, sir, are no gentleman, so do not be surprised if I refuse to treat you as such!" I appreciated the look of frustration on his face before I spun on my heel and rushed up the stairs, at the top of which I saw Mary Ann had been waiting, thankfully out of earshot.

"I suppose you won't be as lonely without Lawrence now that another young man is here," she whispered mischievously. I could have smacked her had I not been so shocked by the remark that she had time to escape my reach.

Did everyone see me as being so desperate as to need a man so beneath me to be begged to take me to the dance and live in my family's house?

Chapter 2

The two days leading to the ball thankfully passed rather uneventfully. Mr. Kingsley evidently had business of my father to attend to that kept him busy much of the time, so we only saw each other at meals. He had stopped asking such personal questions, and it seemed he considered our conversation an agreement of a truce of some kind because he only spoke to me when absolutely necessary.

When the night of the autumn ball came, though I had wished with all my heart something like a dreadful illness would prevent me from arriving on the arm of a man I despised so much, I had the misfortune of being in perfect health. Mary Ann would take my place in a heartbeat, I was sure, but alas, she wished to go but had to stay, and I wished to stay but had to go. As my mother reminded me whenever she had the chance, since I had no brothers, it was my duty to marry well so that she, Mary Ann, and myself would be provided for. I did not have the luxury of turning down the opportunity to be in society. Normally I would have no desire to miss such a grand event, but attending a dance with a high-class gentleman like Lieutenant Taylor was very different from being escorted by Mr. Eric Kingsley.

I looked in the mirror one more time. Maggie, who had been Mary Ann's and my maid since we first came to the colonies, was helping me get ready. "Oh, this won't

do," I told her, as she tried to put a string of pearls around my neck. "Use these." I lifted my best green jewels from the armoire. "They match my dress and bring out my eyes. I need to look my absolute best, and arriving with Mr. Kingsley won't do me any favors. You know what my mother always says, 'Always present your best when there are men to impress.' Though normally that irritates me, I'm inclined to agree tonight."

"Yes, miss, I'll do my best, miss. Your father told me to help you look particularly beautiful tonight."

"He did? Why, whatever for? He has never seemed to like mother's encouraging me to 'catch men.'" I adjusted the ruffles on the skirt of my gown as I thought. "He can't possibly... no, he can't *still* be hoping Mr. Kingsley and I..." I didn't finish the thought. It was simply too ridiculous.

"I don't know, miss, but you did say he seemed awful quick in suggesting Mr. Kingsley take ya tonight."

"Yes. He did."

"Well, that Mr. Kingsley isn't *too* bad to look at, if you don't mind me sayin'."

"Of course, he isn't bad-looking! He's one of the best-looking men I've ever seen! That's what makes it so terrible! He hates me so it is all for nothing. Besides, I don't care for him either. He is rude and forward and a tease. He deserves no more respect from me than what he has given to me." I spun around, grabbed my fur coat and gloves from Maggie's hands, and left the room. I made my way down the steps, trying to cool my temper on the way to where the rest of the party was waiting for the carriage to be brought around.

"Why, you look lovely, my dear! Doesn't she look lovely?" Father exclaimed and turned to Mr. Eric Kingsley, who politely agreed with a simple nod and smile. Though this question gave credit to the idea that Father was

attempting to kindle a relationship between Mr. Kingsley and me, I could not help but beam at my father's praise. I knew my purpose was to secure an advantageous marriage, and since I had so far been unsuccessful in this pursuit, I greatly appreciated praise. Each bit that I was given gave me the confidence I needed to carry myself with patience for a little while longer. Perhaps I did rely too much on praise as Mr. Kingsley had implied. But it was praise that gave me hope for any sort of success in my life, so what was there to be ashamed of in seeking it out? After all, there would be no way I could marry well if I did not pay attention to what people thought of me.

Mr. Kingsley helped me with my coat, and we all stepped outside. I was glad Maggie had insisted I wear my fur coat instead of the light one I had first chosen. The weather was quite frigid this late in November. Eric helped me into the carriage and sat beside me. I did not need to worry about conversing with the man next to me as my parents, who sat across from us, kept the chatter going as they discussed the people Eric would meet at the dance. I did, however, worry about what to say to him for the rest of the evening when there would be no escaping the need to talk to him. I had the skills a lady needed to politely converse with gentlemen, but Eric did not follow the usual rules of etiquette and decorum when it came to conversation, as he had shown at our family dinner. I chastised myself for not having prepared a list of things to talk about or ways to respond if ever he asked me something I felt I could not answer.

"Charlotte?"

I had not noticed that my mother was asking me a question. "Yes? Forgive me, Mother, I was lost in thought."

My father studied me with concern, but Eric's gaze was one of amusement. It was the same look he had given

me when he noticed my torn dress. Oh, I hated how much enjoyment he seemed to get from my embarrassment.

"I was just telling Mr. Kingsley about Andrew and Edward Barlow. Of course, Edward is the younger and is married to Sarah, but it is rumored that Andrew has intention for the Church, is it not so? Which, of course, will leave the estate to Edward since their father has passed."

"I believe that is what their sister Ellen told Mary Ann last we discussed it." "Excellent!" Mr. Kingsley replied, "Then everyone must be on their best behavior, since they will be in front of a soon-to-be minister." He looked at me in such a way as if to dare me to try anything.

Did he have no sense? It was then that I had my idea of how to both rid myself of this man's presence for the evening as well as pay him back for his continued lack of decorum and civility. The first chance I got, I would introduce him to Ada Winters. If he didn't think he cared about what other people thought of him, and that everyone would be on their best behavior tonight, he was sorely mistaken, for Ada was the most obnoxious flirt on the island and would certainly test both of Mr. Kingsley's claims.



When our carriage arrived at the front steps of Fencomb, Eric helped me down and took my arm as we followed my parents to the ballroom of the manor. It was just as beautiful as I had hoped. Since the French joined the war on the side of the rebels, parties such as these were becoming less and less common, so each one was an event to be treasured. The ceilings were higher than I remembered from last year, and the room much larger. It stretched from the front of the house to the back and so had two walls of windows on opposite sides through

which the moonlight shone. There were elaborate settees and chairs around the room and a large space cleared for dancing in the middle. The band was situated under the farther wall of windows.

Mrs. Barlow and her two sons greeted us at the double door entrance. "Thank you for having us tonight," my mother said.

"It is always a pleasure to host fellow neighbors still loyal to the crown," added Edward Barlow. My father smiled and shook his hand, but I thought I felt Eric's arm in mine get tense.

"Now brother, we know you have been proud of the king's victories and frustrated with his opponents of late, but we have promised Mother there would be no talk of the war tonight. It's wonderful to see you again, Sir." Andrew shook my father's hand then turned to Mr.

Kingsley. "And I am so glad to have you join our party this evening, as well."

"Thank you, Sir, I am grateful for your hospitality," Eric answered and shook Andrew's hand as we removed our coats.

Mrs. Barlow gave me a warm smile. "Welcome, dear. I believe Sarah is sitting across the room somewhere. She has been eager to see you. Have a wonderful evening," she said. Eric began leading me in the direction Mrs. Barlow had gestured.

I spotted Sarah conversing with a few ladies I did not recognize, but when she saw me approach, she excused herself from their company and hurried to welcome us.

"Charlotte! Oh, I am so happy you have come!" Lady Barlow was two years younger than I, but she had at one time been a friend to me like Ellen was to Mary Ann. She had done so much to help me fit into society when we first arrived on Long Island. Though, naturally, our different

positions in life, her being married and I not, had put an unintentional distance in our friendship over the past couple of years, I still very much enjoyed her company.

"I am happy to be here and happy to see you," I answered with genuine pleasure. "May I introduce Mr. Kingsley, a guest of my family. And, Mr. Kingsley, this is Lady Sarah Barlow, Sir Edward's wife."

"A pleasure to meet you, ma'am," said Eric.

"Likewise, sir." Sarah curtsied. "What brings you to Setauket?"

"My family lives in Boston, but when my parents decided to wait out the rest of the war in England, it was decided I should stay with our friends, the Devonshires, instead of going with them. I am in business with Mr. Devonshire."

"Oh! Well, your family's loss is our gain," she responded with a coy smile, "And what kind of business would that be?" She tried to act natural, but it appeared she was going beyond the usual pleasantries and toward intense interest.

"Just business," Eric smiled back, then rose. "May I have this dance?" he inquired, offering his hand to me.

"Yes, thank you," I replied, standing clumsily. I had not expected the conversation to end so abruptly.

"It has been an honor making your acquaintance, Lady Barlow," Eric said to Sarah as he bowed. She nodded, but Sarah's curiosity seemed to have been piqued. I admit even I was a little intrigued. My father had never shared much about his business dealings. I had always assumed he was just dealing with our farmland and investments and such. I could not think of why Eric wouldn't be able to explain as much to Sarah. Perhaps he simply didn't want to take the time or effort. I did not have time to ponder long, as we were lining up with the other couples, the music was

starting, and we were beginning the dance.

"Is your father interested in medicine?" Eric evidently, and unfortunately, *was* going to follow the rules of polite conversation tonight and insist on talking while we danced.

"Not particularly so. Why?"

"I saw a book on broken bones in the parlor yesterday."

"He collects books of all kinds." I did not give a further explanation though I knew he was waiting for it.

"*You* are the one reading it," he exclaimed with surprise. It seemed he had only needed to look at me to discover this fact.

We had to separate to take our turn weaving around the other couples, but when we came back together, he continued.

"I must say I am surprised. I had you figured as an entitled heiress too stuck up to be anything of substance. But this does explain things."

"How so?" I asked with genuine curiosity as I stepped around him.

"It explains why you aren't married yet, despite your obvious obsession with becoming so."

My face flamed hot. How dare he. I stiffened my jaw and squared my shoulders. "And what do you mean by that, *sir*," I spat the title with as much sarcasm as I dared, but under my breath. The last thing I needed was for the people who surrounded us to hear what he had to say.

He appeared to be unperturbed by my obvious discomfort and frustration. "Well, none of these men would want a wife with such tendencies towards intelligent reading and conversation." He gestured to the room, and in my mind, I conceded that he was right. "They must be intimidated by you," he continued, so matter-of-factly that I almost believed he was serious. But I knew

such an absurd notion could not be thought true. Besides, Mr. Kingsley had made his negative opinion of me clear enough that I could never trust an evaluation he gave of me or of what people thought of me.

I didn't know how to respond, so we finished the dance in silence. When we had applauded the band, Eric led me to where my mother and Mrs. Barlow were sitting together against the wall near the front windows.

"Now if you will excuse me, I have someone with whom I must speak," and Eric bowed slightly, spun on his heel, and crossed to the opposite end of the wall of glass.

Chapter 3

"You dance as wonderfully as ever, my dear," Mrs. Barlow complimented me, as I took a seat beside her.

"Thank you, Mrs. Barlow." I spied through the crowd and saw Eric had found Father and Andrew Barlow.

"Yes, though I am afraid you are stumbling more than usual with this new partner of yours," added my mother.

"Tell me, Mrs. Barlow," I continued, ignoring my mother's remark, "Will Mr. Barlow be joining the Church soon?"

"Why yes, as a matter of fact, he has begun studying via correspondence with a seminary professor and shall be shadowing a minister at a small church in town. Of course, I shall still be seeing you in our church. As a societal leader I cannot leave the congregation, but I think this church will suit his needs for now, especially as Edward has agreed to support him financially for as long as he needs."

"How nice! You must be very proud of your son." I looked back towards the gentleman and had to adjust my position to see that they were looking out the windows across the bay, discussing something.

"And of your son Sir Edward, too," Mother added. "I hear he has been instrumental in the British cause of late."

"I am proud of both my sons, and yes." She beckoned us to lean towards her. "Edward has just been appointed as the civilian in the area responsible for keeping an eye