

PRAISE FOR *THE LIBERTY BRIDE*

“Love and liberty sail the high seas in this thrilling tale of traitors, treason, and tyranny during America’s Second War of Independence—the War of 1812. When it comes to historical fiction, no one—and I do mean no one—charts a course for romantic adventure like MaryLu Tyndall, the Queen of the Seas when it comes to love, liberty, and the pursuit of a story that will steal both your heart and your sleep.”

–Julie Lessman, award-winning author of *The Daughters of Boston*,
Winds of Change, and *Isle of Hope* series

“*The Liberty Bride* has all the ingredients of a great Tyndall read—richly-textured historical setting, feisty heroine, strong and honorable hero, all interwoven with a thread of unyielding faith. I’ve long been a fan of her work, and this one did not disappoint!”

–Shannon McNear, 2014 RITA® finalist and
author of *The Cumberland Bride*

“You only need to read one line on the back cover of MaryLu Tyndall’s latest novel, *The Liberty Bride*, to know she has once again given readers a swashbuckling adventure of romance and intrigue that she is so admired for. Who can resist the tale of a woman captive aboard a British warship, while her allegiances are tested and a romance grows for a first lieutenant? I know I can’t.”

–Rita Gerlach, author of the *Daughters of the Potomac*
Series and other Christian romances

“MaryLu Tyndall never fails to deliver a spine-tingling, faith-inspiring story. *The Liberty Bride* is no exception. From page one, through many dangerous adventures to a satisfying conclusion, this novel will thrill and delight Tyndall’s readers and have them eagerly anticipating her next epic tale.”

–Louise M. Gouge, award-winning historical romance author

“In true MaryLu Tyndall fashion, MaryLu gives her readers another exciting adventure on the sea. Danger lurks around every corner and suspense on every page. This is one you won’t want to miss!”

–Debbie Lynne Costello, Amazon #1 seller

*The
Liberty
Bride*



MARYLU
TYNDALL

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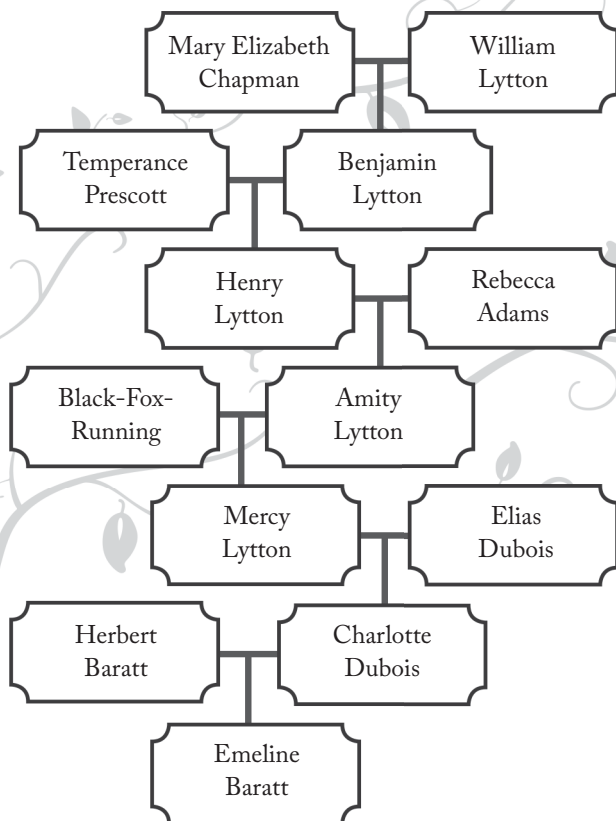
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Daughters of the Mayflower



The Lytton Family

William Lytton married Mary Elizabeth Chapman (Plymouth, 1621)

Parents of 13 children, including Benjamin

Benjamin Lytton married Temperance Prescott (Massachusetts, 1668)

Born to Benjamin and Temperance

Henry Lytton married Rebecca Adams (New York, 1712)

Children were Goodwill and Amity

Amity Lytton married Black-Fox-Running, a Mohawk warrior (New York, 1737)

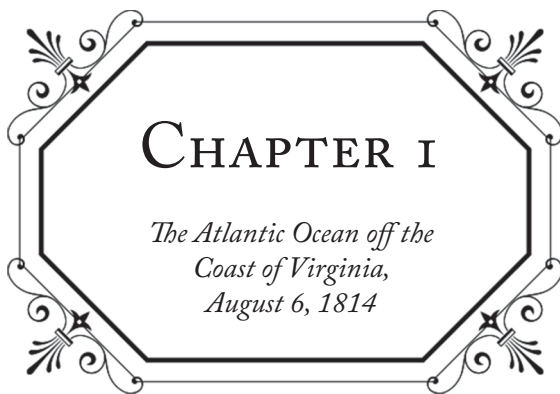
Only child was Mercy Lytton (aka Kahente)

Mercy Lytton married Elias Dubois (Massachusetts, 1759)

Children included Charlotte

Charlotte Dubois married Herbert Baratt (Maryland, 1788)

Children included Emeline



CHAPTER I

*The Atlantic Ocean off the
Coast of Virginia,
August 6, 1814*

What would it feel like to drown. . .to float listlessly down. . .down . . .beneath the chilled waters of the Atlantic? To feel salty fingers wrap around you, their deadly talons tugging you farther into the murky darkness, your lungs burning until they screamed for air that would never come. . .until finally, cloaked in a silent, peaceful tomb, you floated into eternity. . .

Emeline Baratt pondered these things as she gazed upon the dark waves from the larboard railing of her father's merchant brig—or rather, privateer—*Charlotte*. The pondering sliced an icy knife down her back. Was it the thought of dying or the chilled mist of the morning that caused her to suddenly draw the warmth of her cloak tighter about her neck? Perhaps both.

Unable to sleep as usual, she'd come up on deck just before dawn. It was the only time of day she was left unhindered by the many sailors on board who felt it their duty to protect and entertain their employer's daughter. On her long journey across the pond from Calais, France, she'd endured more than enough male attention to last a lifetime. Whether their desire for her was motivated by her dowry, their need for a wife to take care of them, or her "exquisite" beauty—as many of them claimed she possessed—she did not know. Nor did she care. As far back as she could remember, she had never wanted to marry.

A sliver of a moon frowned its disappointment down upon her. A scowl with which she was quite familiar, having seen it enough on her father's face whenever she'd dared to tell him of her dreams. Mockery

always preceded his frustration, a complete dismissal of all that was important to her. Yet she knew he meant well. He wanted to see her settled and cared for. He wanted grandchildren. And while he didn't voice it, she knew he wanted to be free of the burden of her support.

"At two and twenty, you should be married with a bevy of wee ones frolicking about your skirts," he had told her after he'd discovered her painting away the afternoon. "It is the godly and proper station for women—raising children and caring for a husband. Not wasting your time with frivolous art that will never sell."

That frivolous art was the most beautiful seascape she'd ever painted and a secret commission from the mayor's wife, who'd admired Emeline's work from afar.

She never finished it. The next day her father whisked her overseas to Brighton to spend a year with her great-aunt, a wealthy daughter of a baron.

"What you need is a woman's influence, someone to teach you how to be a proper lady." He waved his hand through the air and huffed. "Perhaps you'll even find a husband. God knows you've rejected every eligible gentleman in Baltimore."

Indeed she had. A smile lifted her lips at the memory of those suitors vying for her affections like puppies for their mother's milk. But she would not be any man's pet. Why tie yourself down to a life of endless scrubbing and mending and cooking and tending? She'd done enough of that in the past fourteen years caring for her father and two brothers after her mother died and then most recently her aunt. If that was to be her life, what was the point?

She gazed at the churning water again.

She *could* jump.

The brig pitched over a wave, sending the deck tilting and wood creaking, jarring her from her morbid thoughts. Gripping the railing tighter, she sighed and gazed at the blanket of golden light swaddling the horizon, fluttering threads of gold and azure over the inky swells. Soon the deck would be abuzz with sailors, joining the two night watchmen and helmsman standing at the wheel. Soon she would have to go below

to spend her final day at sea cooped up in a cabin the size of a privy closet. At least she had her charcoal and paper to keep her busy.

She may even finish her sketch of the captain if one of the sailors didn't come down with some phantom illness she had to address. Possessing medical skills she'd learned while accompanying her uncle on his rounds in Baltimore was yet another thing that kept her forever tending to everyone else's needs.

Everyone's but her own.

La, but she sounded bitter. *Forgive me, Lord.*

The pound of footsteps and groans of men unhappy to be awakened from their sleep rumbled behind her. A brisk wind flapped loose sails and stirred the curls dangling about her neck, and she drew a deep breath of the sea air. She'd grown so accustomed to the scent of brine, wood, and tar these past six weeks she'd all but forgotten what land smelled like.

She'd nearly forgotten her father's face as well—at least the look of chagrin it usually held. Would he be happy to see her? Perhaps her absence for nearly two years had softened his resolve to force her to marry if she returned without any prospects. Or would he be angry that she returned no better off than when she'd left? Without a husband and with but a pittance of an inheritance from her eccentric aunt.

She supposed his anger would win out, especially since he'd been forced to risk one of his merchantmen-turned-privateers to bring her home during wartime. Not just any privateer, but his best one, along with his best captain, Henry Lansing, notorious not only for capturing three British prizes but also for his skill at breaking through the British blockade of American ports.

Now that they neared the American coastline, they'd need his skill more than ever.

"Good morning to you, miss." One of the sailors smiled at her on his way to the foredeck as more men emerged from below and hurried to their posts.

Facing the sea once again, she drew back her shoulders. She had made up her mind. She would give up her art, marry within the year, and settle down to the life that was expected of her, a life that would please her

father, society—and most of all, God.

No more wasted time, no more painting, no more frivolous dreams. . .

She dropped her gaze once again to the misty sea. She *could* still jump. Death would come within minutes, and then she would be taken to heaven. To be with Mama.

“Oh Mama, I miss you so.” She gripped the locket hanging around her neck as the sun peered over the horizon, soon becoming naught but a golden blur in Emeline’s teary vision.

More sailors greeted her.

Wiping her eyes, she leaned over the railing and watched the line of bubbling foam rise and fall over the hull.

It would be so simple.

But of course she wouldn’t jump. She straightened and glanced over the dissipating mist. From this moment forth, she intended to be a proper lady. And proper ladies certainly did not hurl themselves into the sea.

“Lay aloft! Loose top sails, Mr. Brook!” the boatswain shouted behind her.

Sailors leapt into the shrouds and skittered to the tops like spiders on a web. Within minutes, sheets were dropped, flapping idly before they caught the wind and ballooned in a thunderous roar.

Lowering her head, she prayed for forgiveness for her negative thoughts. She prayed that God would take away her dreams and help her be a godly woman. Then, perhaps then, He would choose to bless her and not punish her.

Warmth caressed her eyelids, and she opened them to the sunrise kissing the waves with saffron and whisking away the remaining fog. Perhaps an omen of God’s favor at last. She started to turn and descend to her cabin, when a dark shape on the horizon caught her eye. Squinting, she watched as it grew larger. . . a leviathan emerging from the mist.

“A sail! A sail!” A shout came from the tops.

They hadn’t seen a single ship in the entire crossing. Odd since America was at war with Great Britain. Odd also because the captain had warned her that they may encounter some trouble.

She scanned the deck and spotted him mounting the ladder to the

quarterdeck where he took the telescope from his first mate.

Another shout came from the tops. “She’s flying the Union Jack, Cap’n!”

“What in the blazes! Where did she come from?” Captain Lansing bellowed, scope still to his eye. “Why was she not spotted earlier?”

“There was a heavy fog this morning,” the boatswain offered.

“We are at war, man! Fog is no excuse!” Captain Lansing gripped the quarterdeck railing, his face mottled with rage.

“She’s heading our way, Cap’n, signaling for a show of colors.”

“By God, then we’ll show her our colors! Raise the flag! Beat to quarters! All hands make sail!”

The string of orders sent the sailors dashing here and there as the first mate shouted further commands to the crew.

More sails were loosed. Wind glutted them like white pregnant bellies. Emeline stood frozen, watching the harried crew race about, their eyes sparking in fear. The ship veered to larboard. She caught the rail and slammed against the bulwarks.

“She’s running out her guns!” the first mate yelled.

Emeline dared a glance back out to sea. A Royal Navy frigate advanced toward them in a sea of raging white foam.

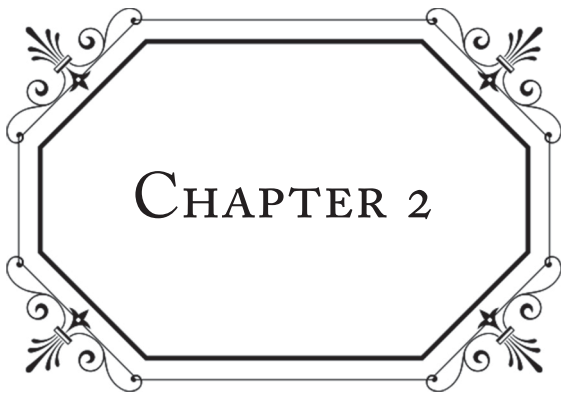
A spindle of terror wove down her back. She couldn’t move. Could hardly breathe.

A foul curse spewed from Captain Lansing’s lips, followed by something about bearing off and starboard guns. . . . Emeline could no longer make much sense of his words.

Boom! The roar shook both sky and brig. Her heart seized.

Someone shouted, “All hands down!”

Her last thought before dropping to all fours was that God so rarely answered her prayers.



CHAPTER 2

Captain's orders. You and Mrs. Keate stay here until it's safe." In his haste to join the battle, the sailor's mate all but shoved Emeline and the quartermaster's wife, Hannah, into the tiny cabin and slammed the door.

Safe? Emeline shared a terrified glance with Hannah as shouts ricocheted above them and feet pounded over the deck. The eerie grate of iron set every nerve at attention to what she assumed were the guns being run out.

"Now, now, dear." The older woman took Emeline's arm and tugged her to sit in one of the chairs. "It will be all ri', you'll see."

"All right—" The deck suddenly tilted. Emeline toppled from the chair, lost her footing, and slammed into the bulkhead. Dazed, she clawed the wood, her shriek drowned out by the mad dash of water against the hull.

"Oh dear, you hurt yourself." Hannah's kind face came into view as she dragged Emeline across the small space and forced her to sit. Within moments, a cloth pressed on her forehead.

"Just a wee scratch. Nothin' to worry about."

The wood creaked and groaned as the brig heaved to starboard. Emeline gripped the arms of the chair while Hannah merely bolstered her stance and remained in place. She withdrew the rag. A red line marred the gray fabric.

Boom! The distant explosion roared overhead. Emeline covered her

face and crouched into the chair, too afraid to scream or even breathe for fear the shot would crash through the cabin, through her body, and rip her to shreds.

It didn't. But it *did* hit above deck as the snap and crunch of wood pierced the air, followed by a gut-wrenching scream.

"I should see if the injured need help." Gripping the chair arms, Emeline attempted to rise, but the ship careened yet again, sending her hairbrush and toiletries crashing to the floor from the table.

Shouts increased in volume and intensity, the captain's chief among them. Wind slapped the sails, the sea roared against the hull, and footsteps pummeled the deck like an angry giant.

"You can't go up top now, dear. It is too dangerous."

Emeline wanted to cry, but her eyes were as dry as her throat. "This can't be happening!"

"Try to calm yourself." Hannah dabbed the cloth on her head again.

"Calm? How can I be calm when we are in the middle of a battle at sea?" Emeline eased the woman's arm away. "And against the mightiest navy on earth!"

This time Emeline made it to her feet and instantly regretted it as the brig pitched. She gripped the bunk chain before she toppled to the deck. It nearly yanked her arm out of its socket, and she fell anyway. Pain seared a trail up her tailbone.

Sinking onto the bunk for support, Hannah reached a hand for her. "Never you fear about that. God be wit' us."

Forty years had not stolen an ounce of vigor or vim from Hannah. Though they *had* rounded out her figure and added a few silver streaks to her chestnut hair. She had been Emeline's companion on the long journey across the pond, but in truth, she'd been more of a mother figure—something Emeline had not had since she was eight.

Taking Hannah's hand, she allowed the older lady to pull her up onto the cot. "How do you know God is not with the British?"

Hannah shrugged. "Don't matter wha' side 'e takes. 'E's still wit' you and me."

Stern voices—brisk and harried—echoed from above. The brig tilted

to starboard again. An explosion shook the ship so violently it seemed every timber would turn to dust. The sound pulsed in Emeline's ears. Beside her, Hannah's lips were moving, but Emeline could make nothing of the words. . . something about a broadside.

"We must 'ave fired a broadside," Hannah repeated, staring at Emeline with concern. "Are you all ri'?"

"I want to go above. What if the brig sinks and we drown, trapped in this cabin?" The irony was not lost on her that she'd only that morning been brooding on a watery death.

Easing an arm around her, Hannah drew her close, but Emeline leapt up, stumbled over the shifting deck, flung open the door, and barreled into the companionway. She supposed proper ladies didn't barge on deck in the middle of battle either, but if she were going to die, propriety made no difference.

Hannah's shouts followed behind her but were quickly muffled by the mayhem above. Emeline emerged into a scene of such chaos, blood, and destruction she nearly retreated back to her cabin. She *would* have retreated if a cloud of black smoke hadn't completely enveloped her, stealing her breath and stinging her eyes. Coughing, she batted it away, when a sailor rammed into her. She stumbled to the side. Hannah grabbed her arm before she fell and dragged her against the quarterdeck as the metallic scent of blood combined with gunpowder sent bile into her throat.

Men scurried back and forth, following the captain's orders. Gun crews swarmed the ten cannons—or *guns*, as they called them—on the port side, reloading them with shot and powder. A charred hole smoked from the starboard railing. A huge gouge had been blasted from the main mast between main and topsail. The enormous pole whined and teetered, remaining upright by a mere breath and a prayer. Splintered wood, stained with blood, showered the deck, slicing the bare feet of the sailors as they hurried past. Above, sails flapped impotently in search of wind. The brig slowed.

Curses showered on them from above where the captain stood.

"They've got the weather edge, Cap'n, and coming fast on our port quarter!"

An agonized moan drew Emeline's attention to a sailor sprawled over the deck by the foredeck ladder. Before Hannah could stop her, she gathered her skirts and dashed toward him, dropping to her knees at his side. A spear of wood protruded from his neck while blood gushed from a wound on his head. She scanned the scene, looking for anyone to assist her in bringing him below, when another boom split the sky. The sailors crouched.

Was this the end? Would she die aboard this ship? Her heart pounded in her ears, drowning out all other sound and slowing time. *Thump. . . thump . . . thump.* Sailors moved across the deck as if wading through oil. The captain was shouting something, his lips opening and closing ever so slowly, but his words sounded hollow and muffled. Emeline glanced down at the injured man and blinked, trying to regain her senses. Grabbing his hand, she closed her eyes. "Oh God, help us."

A splash sounded and the clamor on board resumed.

Emeline peered over the railing to see the British ship coming alongside with the muzzles of at least fifteen guns mocking them from its side.

A confident voice bellowed over the water. "This is His Britannic Majesty's frigate *Marauder*. Lay down your arms and surrender at once or be blown to bits!"



First Lieutenant Owen Masters took a position beside his captain on the main deck of HMS *Marauder* in preparation to receive the prisoners on board. Though the American merchant brig had put up a good fight, in the end they were no match for one of His Majesty's frigates. At least that's what Owen kept telling himself. . .that there had been nothing he could do to save them—not without exposing himself. Yet now as he watched the last of the cutters rowing their way, he cursed under his breath. Thus far, the *Marauder* had not captured an American prize, and hang it all, this complicated things.

Just when he was finally in a position to be of use to his country, now he had prisoners to protect.

The boat thudded against the hull, and a group of marines moved to

stand on either side of the entry port, arms at the ready. Second Lieutenant Benjamin Camp, whom Captain Blackwell had sent to inspect the American ship, leapt on board first, approached his captain, and handed him documents. Captain Blackwell quickly perused them. His subsequent “Humph” indicated they now had proof that the American ship was indeed a privateer.

The privateer’s captain and his officers clambered up the ladder and onto the main deck. Hatred burned in the American captain’s eyes as he jutted out his chin. More sailors leapt on board behind him.

Beside Owen, Captain Blackwell eyed the prisoners with disdain. “Welcome aboard His Majesty’s frigate *Marauder*.” He held up the documents. “I see you are the privateer *Charlotte* out of Baltimore.”

“We are but merchants, Captain”—their captain approached, his face moist with perspiration and red with anger—“returning from Calais with a cargo of—”

The remainder of his words were blown away in the wind as all eyes shifted in unison to the entry port where a woman was helped aboard by one of the prisoners. Not just any woman, but the most stunning creature Owen had ever seen. Apparently, by the gaping mouths and wide eyes of those around him, his opinion was shared by the crew. Sunlight glittered topaz in hair that dripped like sweet honey along her elegant neck. A modest gown of blue taffeta clung to a slight figure that exuded elegance and femininity. Men instantly drew close to help her aboard, but instead, she turned to assist an injured sailor behind her. A bloody bandage seemed to be all that held his neck to his head, and the tenderness with which she led him to the side made Owen swallow. She assisted three more injured men on board before she finally lifted eyes the color of emeralds to scan her surroundings. And the terror he saw within them made him want to dash to her side and offer his comfort.

An older woman climbed on board and joined her, followed by the last of the Americans and the ten British sailors who had accompanied Ben. Forty Americans in all. They’d left another forty on board the brig to be transported to a prison hulk in Plymouth—just enough men to be contained and not risk a mutiny.

The ship rolled over a wave as a blast of wind flapped a loose sail but offered little respite from the searing sun.

Captain Blackwell cleared his throat and addressed the American captain again. "You are no merchantmen, Captain. I have your letter of marque in hand."

"If you please," the American captain began with a smile that seemed to cost him dearly. "I'll agree to the letter, but we have made no use of it. As you can see, it is dated two years past, and since then, we have found no reason to attack British ships. In truth, we were conveying the ship owner's daughter back home." The gruff-looking man with a chest the size of a water barrel gestured toward the beautiful lady. "Then we were headed back to the West Indies."

"To pirate."

"To trade. As is our profession."

"Hmm. Eighty men. A large crew for a merchantman." Captain Blackwell chuckled and some of the sailors joined him.

The American captain's weather-lined face was devoid of amusement. "There are many dangers in these waters."

Captain Blackwell eyed the man from head to toe, then cast a cursory glance over the American crew. "Nevertheless, consider yourselves prisoners of the Crown. And your ship a prize of war."

The hot sun poured molten heat upon them, and the American captain wiped a sleeve over his forehead. "I assure you, we are no such thing!" He waved a hand toward the young lady. "Would a man allow his daughter to be escorted on a privateer?"

"A foolish man would, I'd say."

"I assure you, Captain. Mr. Baratt would never put his only daughter in danger."

"Then perhaps he should not have put her on a privateer during wartime."

Defeat lined the American captain's face as he shifted his stance. "What are you to do with us? With my brig?" The man glanced behind him at the *Charlotte*, where midshipmen prepared her to set sail.

"You will be put to work on board this ship until I can escort you to

a prison hulk in Canada. Meanwhile my prize crew will sail your brig to Plymouth to repair and refit her for service. Royal Navy service," he added sharply.

Sailcloth flapped impotently above them as grumbles traveled among the prisoners. From the looks of defiance on their faces, Owen believed that if they were armed, they'd brave an attack, even outnumbered six to one.

That's the spirit! He'd not seen another American since his rendezvous with a supply boat off the coast of Wilmington, North Carolina, a month past, and their presence brought a surge of patriotism.

"Dimsmore," Captain Blackwell addressed the marine first lieutenant. "Lock the prisoners below. Lieutenant Masters"—he turned to Owen—"see that the injured are taken to sick bay."

"And what of the ladies?" Owen gestured toward the two women backed against the railing as if they would rather jump overboard than face their fate. The younger one still attended the injured men by her side.

"Hmm." Blackwell rubbed his chin. "They do present a problem."

"A very eye-pleasing problem," Second Lieutenant Benjamin Camp whispered to Owen from his other side. The two shared a smile.

Dimsmore began rounding up the prisoners as Captain Blackwell made his way toward the women. He halted before them, and the younger one raised her brazen gaze to his. Though Owen detected a slight quiver in her lips, determination sparked in her eyes.

"Do you know medicine, miss?"

"A bit, Captain," she said without emotion.

"Good. We lost our ship's surgeon two weeks past. Lieutenant Masters, have one of the marines escort this woman and her companion"—he glanced at the older woman curiously—"to sick bay to attend the injured. Keep guard over them there. Then find them a cabin separate from the other prisoners."

"Aye, Captain."

Blackwell glanced up at the sun. "Raise all sails, Mr. Masters, and proceed to our destination. I'll be in my quarters." With that he spun on his heels and marched away.

Owen turned to face his friend. "Take us out, full and by, Mr. Camp."

"Aye, aye, full and by." Ben turned and began ordering the crew as Lieutenant Dimsmore shoved the prisoners down a hatch. The marine's cold eyes passed over Owen as they so often did, but this time, a malicious smile curled one side of his mouth. Certainly, the vile man did not suspect anything. Owen had been more than careful.

Shrugging off the thought, he scanned the crew. "Mr. Yonks, Mr. Manson, Mr. Denrick," he shouted, drawing the attention of three sailors. "Escort the injured to sick bay at once."

"Americans too, sir?" Manson asked.

"*All* the injured."

Above him, topmen unfurled sheets while sailors on both larboard and starboard watches hauled on the ties and halyards. Soon the lowered sails grabbed the wind like ravenous dogs, and the ship jerked to larboard. A cloud swallowed up the sun, offering them a reprieve from the heat.

A feminine shriek drew his gaze to the women where Denrick yanked the injured American from the younger lady's arms to drag him below.

"You're hurting him, you fiend!" Grabbing the injured sailor's shirt, she tugged him back, and for a moment the poor man pivoted back and forth like holystone over the deck.

Owen gripped her wrist and wrangled her from the man's shirt before nodding for Denrick to take him away. "You will attend to him soon enough, Miss. . .Miss. . ."

She jerked from his grasp and backed away. At least as far as the railing would allow. The older woman wove an arm through hers and faced Owen like an avenging angel.

"Miss Baratt," the younger woman finally said, her green eyes sparkling at him with both fear and anger.

"Very well, Miss Baratt and Miss. . .?" Owen lifted his brows at the other woman.

"Mrs. Keate, quartermaster's wife." Proud brown eyes flared at him from within a round, kind face.

"There is naught to fear. We are gentlemen here." Owen glanced over the marines standing nearby and selected one he trusted. "Mr. Blane, take

these women to sick bay and stand guard over them.”

“Naught to fear, you say?” Miss Baratt snipped. “There is much to fear. We are now prisoners of war, are we not?”

“We do not harm women.”

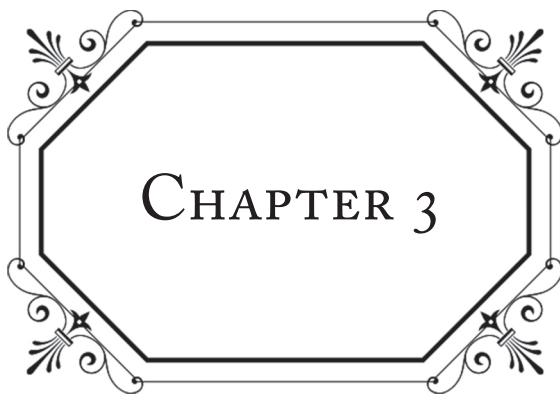
Mrs. Keate huffed. “Not wha’ I hear.”

The comely one said nothing, merely stared out at sea before those incriminating eyes met his again.

Blane nudged them from behind. “This way, ladies.”

Owen cursed under his breath as they were led belowdecks. How could he protect these innocent women? More importantly, how could he protect them *and* himself?

All while doing his job as an American spy.



CHAPTER 3

Arm in arm with Hannah, Emeline glanced over the filthy space that passed for sick bay and did her best to force back her tears. The marine, Mr. Blane, gave them one last shove from behind before he took his post against the bulkhead. Other sailors carried the injured—most of whom were moaning from their injuries—and deposited them on sailcloth laid across the floor as if they were naught but sacks of wheat.

Emeline held a hand to her nose as the stench of stale vomit and gun smoke as well as other indescribable odors assailed her. To her left, a cabinet full of what appeared to be medicines stood against the bulkhead. Beside it, chisels, hammers, saws, and every imaginable blade hung along the wall.

A table made from barrels shoved together with a bloodstained slab of wood on top stood in the center of the room. It wasn't really a room, but just the end of a long deck—second level down—that opened to a row of cannons still run out for battle.

In all honesty, it looked like a medieval torture chamber rather than a place where men were healed.

Even the ever-stout Hannah trembled beside her.

Why, God, why? When I promised I would behave.

She hadn't time to ponder the answer as a sailor flung the worst of the injured onto the table. "Here you go, miss." He gave her a salacious perusal before he left.

Groans of agony reached for her from all around, pleading with her

to do something. . .anything to ease their pain.

Emeline's breath came swift as she leaned toward her friend. "I don't know what I'm doing, Hannah."

"You did a fine job 'elping the men on board the *Charlotte*." Hannah patted her hand.

Emeline gulped and stared at the saw hanging on a hook. "But I did not have to cut off any legs!"

"Let's see wha' needs to be done first." Hannah squeezed her hand and gave her a nod of confidence that did naught to ease Emeline's nerves. "Sides, I thought you loved adventures, Em. Think of this as jist another one."

"I love exciting adventures, not *deadly* ones."

"Posh!" Hannah snorted. "If there weren't no risk, you wouldn't need faith."

But Emeline didn't need faith. She already believed God rewarded those who obeyed.

And punished those who didn't.

Nevertheless, she must do what she could for these poor men. Pushing aside fear for her own predicament, she rolled up her sleeves and approached the sailor on the table. He was British with a splinter the size of a sword blade stuck in his leg. Perspiration dotted his forehead, and his chest rose and fell erratically beneath a blood-splattered shirt. Wild eyes met hers as she examined the wound.

"You will be all right, sir." She attempted a smile. "Nothing a few stitches won't fix."

This seemed to allay his fears as he breathed out a huge sigh and nodded.

His confidence in her—though based on naught but his own foolish hope—gave her strength, and she got to work. With Hannah's help, she found needles, twine, laudanum, bandages, and several herbal tinctures. There were six injured sailors: two British and four Americans. Thank God, none of them required actual surgery. Regardless, the next several hours passed in a blur of removing splinters, cleaning out wounds, stitching gashes, and applying bandages.

All while trying to see in the fading light of a flickering lantern and maintain balance on a heaving deck.

An ache etching across her lower back and bloodstains splotching her gown, Emeline moved among the hammocks—where the marine had hoisted the injured after she tended them—offering them whiskey-tainted water.

As she did so, she also offered each a smile, even the two British sailors. One of them had barely a whisker on his chin, and she imagined he had a mother back home worried sick for the safety of her boy. The other—Thornhill he'd given as his name—was the first man she'd ministered to. Well into his fifties with a bulbous nose, arms as thick as masts, and a whitecap of hair atop his head, he had followed her every movement when she cleaned out the gaping wound on his leg. Yet nary a shriek, cry, or wince gave indication of his pain.

She set the ladle down on the table and rubbed the back of her neck. Now that the crises for these men were over, her own crisis rose to tighten around her heart. She was a British prisoner on board a British man-of-war during wartime. Could things get any worse?

A dozen possibilities rampaged across her mind—imprisonment in one of those dreadful prison ships, endless enslavement on board this ship, transport back to England to be tried as a traitor, abuse at the hands of her enemies, or perhaps—her heart nearly failed her at the thought—even ravishment.

Oh God, I'm so sorry for whatever I've done to deserve this.

If she had known what would happen, she *would* have jumped overboard that morning. Like Jonah tossed into the sea to save the ship from calamity, perhaps she could have spared the crew of the *Charlotte* from enduring a punishment meant only for her.



Standing on the quarterdeck, feet spread apart for balance, Owen squinted against the sun slipping behind the American coastline to his left. Per his captain's orders and the fleet's command, they had sailed on a north-northwestern course all afternoon toward the Chesapeake, where

they were to team up with Admiral Cockburn's fleet blockading the bay. Captain Blackwell had come on the bridge once or twice to check on things, but otherwise he remained below as was his way. Unless of course, they came across another ship. That he trusted Owen with the command of the *Marauder* never failed to make him smile. If the captain only knew. . .

"Two points to larboard, Mr. Pardy," Owen commanded the helmsman then turned to the master. "Take in fore-topsail, if you please."

The master began braying a string of orders, sending sailors scrambling to task.

Owen gazed at the patch of land barely visible off the larboard beam. *America!* How he missed his homeland. It mattered not that he'd been absent for eight years, he couldn't wait to return. *Had* returned in fact two years ago just before the war broke out. He'd recently passed the lieutenant's exam and the *Marauder* had been assigned to transport British prisoners, who'd escaped from England to America, back to stand trial. He'd managed to slip away from the shore party and make his way home to his mother, who lived in Norfolk with her brother and his family.

Granted, they were overjoyed to see him again, grown and successful and "finally making something of himself." His mother wept continually, refusing to stop embracing him. But when he expressed a desire to become a privateer in what would surely soon be a war with Britain, his uncle, who had recently been appointed general counsel for the Department of the Navy, pleaded with him to return to the British fleet and spy for America.

Owen instantly regretted telling him that the *Marauder's* next assignment was to cruise the American coast. Besides, how could he convey information from a ship he so rarely left?

"Just one bit of vital information. That's all we need," his uncle had said. "Egad, but you are in the perfect position on board a frigate. The Royal Navy use their frigates to pass messages between other ships in the fleet, do they not? You'll be privy to most of their plans."

"But certainly I can do more good for my country as a privateer!" Owen returned.

His uncle had leapt to his feet, eyes flashing. “We have many privateers, but if you agree, only one spy on a British ship. Think of what you could learn. A major attack at sea or land, and you would know of it!” His uncle took up a pace before the hearth. “When you come across information that will affect the outcome of the war, desert your ship and bring it to us. War will break out soon, boy. Madison has had enough of British aggression. Our army and navy are nothing compared to Britain’s. Wars are won by good intelligence, Owen, and spies provide that. We need as many men on the inside as we can get.”

Owen rubbed the back of his neck. “Even if I am privy to battle plans, how am I to get them to authorities on land?”

“Supplies—you’ll need to come ashore for supplies. And surely your ship will take part in land raids. Jump overboard when you are close to shore, if you have to. You can find me at the Department of the Navy in Washington. Your country needs you, boy. Now more than ever.”

Owen could not deny the pride he’d felt at his uncle’s confidence in him. He’d never known his father. The man had abandoned him and his mother when Owen was ten. Hence, he’d never known a man’s instruction or guidance or a father’s pride in his accomplishments. Still, when he had hesitated, his uncle had sealed the deal with an offer too good to refuse. If Owen provided crucial information, his uncle would fund a privateer for him to captain for the remainder of the war.

A brisk wind swept over the ship, and Owen closed his eyes for a moment, breathing it in, listening to the creak of wood, dash of water, and clap of sheets. To have his own ship to command, to be free of British regulations and rules, to sail upon the seas wherever he wished. . .and all in the service of his country. It would be a dream come true!

Yet so far, he’d not been privy to any crucial information. Things were about to change, however. Joining the blockade fleet would grant him opportunities to go ashore on supply runs and raids, where it would be easy to desert the Royal Navy and gain his freedom.

He only needed one piece of information—battle plans, tactics, something huge that would greatly affect the outcome of the war, something he could pass on to the American generals that would change the course