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TIMELESS

# When *the* Day Comes

BOOK 1

GABRIELLE MEYER



TIMELESS • 1

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BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438  
[www.bethanyhouse.com](http://www.bethanyhouse.com)

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Meyer, Gabrielle, author.

Title: When the day comes / Gabrielle Meyer.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House Publishers, a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, [2022] | Series: Timeless ; 1

Identifiers: LCCN 2021050662 | ISBN 9780764240171 (casebound) | ISBN  
9780764239748 (paperback) | ISBN 9781493437344 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3613.E956 W47 2022 | DDC 813/.6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021050662>

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover design by Jennifer Parker

Cover photography by Alexey Kazantsev / Trevillion Images

Author is represented by the Books & Such Literary Agency.

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28      7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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To David,  
my best friend and my hero.  
Thank you for this amazing life we've built, and for  
your endless sacrifice and devotion to our family.  
You truly are the best of us.  
I love you.

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He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

—Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

# 1



## WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

MAY 5, 1774

For as long as I could remember, my mama had told me that my life was a gift. But at the age of nineteen, I had yet to see how this life I was living—or rather, the *lives* I was living—could be anything other than a burden.

“Libby!” My younger sister Rebecca slammed open the door to the office where Mama and I were working on the weekly edition of the *Virginia Gazette*. “It’s that horrid Mister Jennings and the lawyer, Mister Randolph.” She was breathless, and her cheeks were red from the heat. She pointed at the window. “They’re coming this way. They’ll be here any second.”

I left the article I had been editing and went to the window. Through the wavy glass, the detestable old merchant was limping with purpose toward our home, his dirty wig askew and his cane digging into the hard-packed soil on Duke of Gloucester Street. Beside him was the formidable Mister John Randolph, lawyer to the governor, and one of the most ruthless men in Williamsburg.

Mama fixed Rebecca's white cap, then calmly laid her hands on Rebecca's thin shoulders. "Did you speak to them?"

"Nay." Rebecca shook her head, and for the first time, I saw that she was trembling. "I started to run the moment I saw them."

I quickly opened my top desk drawer and pulled out the small drawstring bag I kept in the hidden compartment. There weren't nearly enough coins to purchase the weekly necessities for our household of eight, let alone pay off our insurmountable debt. Mister Jennings was not the only person we were indebted to after Papa's death.

"Mayhap we can stall him," Mama said to me, her green eyes revealing the depth of her disquiet, though her voice was steady. "Tell him about the public printing contract we're hoping to obtain."

"We've put him off the last two times." I counted out the meager coins, hoping and praying it would appease the miser for a little longer. "I doubt he'll listen to our plea."

"What will he do, Libby?" Rebecca's large brown eyes filled with worry as she clenched the fabric of her too-small gown.

I put my hand under her chin. "Do not worry." I forced myself to smile, trying to banish her fears. "Mama and I will take care of this matter."

"Mistress Conant?" The men entered the front hall, one of them calling out to us. "We've come about the debt."

Though Mama was only forty-one, she had aged a great deal during Papa's illness. The weight of the debt and the responsibilities of supporting our family pressed upon her, as if she were carrying a physical burden.

I put my hand on her shoulder, wishing I could ease her cares. "This is my debt, as well," I said. "I will speak to Mister Jennings."

I left the office before Mama could protest and greeted the unwelcome visitors. "Good day," I said to them. "How may I help you?"

"I'd like to speak to your mother." Mister Jennings lifted his chin with purpose.

"If this is business concerning the printing shop, you may speak to me." I motioned for the men to enter the large sitting room across the hall.

Mama quietly joined us, closing the office door behind her to keep Rebecca out of sight. "We will both speak to you," she said in her gentle way.

The men moved into the sitting room, taking off their tri-corne hats as they turned to us. "I will curtail the formalities," Mister Jennings said. "I have brought my lawyer to show you I am serious, since you have ignored my last two attempts to collect the debt you owe."

"We have not ignored you, Mister Jennings." Mama's patient voice never wavered. She clasped her hands in front of her apron. "We simply do not have the money available. My husband was sick for many years and—"

"That is not my concern." Mister Jennings pointed his cane at her. "He purchased printing supplies from me on credit for years, always making an excuse about his ill health."

"We needed those supplies to operate our business," I said in defense of my father, who had died just six months ago.

"If you do not have the money," Mister Jennings said, appearing not to care about our plight, "then I will give you two options, which my lawyer is here to witness today. You can either be thrown into the public gaol until the sum is collected, or . . ." His eyes glowed with intent as he lowered his cane to the floor. "You can indenture your little moppet to me. The one with the dark hair."

Revulsion climbed my throat as I saw the look in his eyes. "Never," I said, clenching my hands together. "We would never indenture Rebecca to you or anyone else."

"Then it will be the gaol for your mother."

A shudder ran down my spine at the thought of the public



gaol. It was a rat-infested eyesore behind the capitol building, not to mention an embarrassment to anyone cast into shackles there.

Mama stepped forward, putting her hand on my arm. “We are awaiting the burgesses’ decision this very day. If we’re awarded the public printing contract, we will have your payment for you posthaste. You have my word.”

“Your word?” Mister Jennings spat. “What good is the word of a woman?”

I wanted to lash out at his comment, but Mama’s grip on my arm tightened and I held my tongue. I had little sway with him or anyone else in Williamsburg simply because I was a woman. Even when Papa had been too ill to run the press and I had taken over, very few people would deal with me. Since his death, it had become even worse.

“You’ve been warned,” Mister Randolph said, handing over a piece of paper. “If you do not pay what is owed by the end of this month, you will either face debtor’s prison or be forced to indenture one of your household to Mister Jennings for the sum owed.”

“I want the girl,” Mister Jennings said to Mister Randolph.

The lawyer didn’t respond to his client but merely put his hat on and left the sitting room.

Mister Jennings followed in his footsteps. “You said I could have the girl.”

After the front door slammed shut, Mama sat on one of the Windsor chairs and put her face in her ink-stained hands, wilting like a parched flower.

“He cannot do either,” I said, trying to alleviate our fears.

“He can and he will.” Mama looked up at me. “Where is news of the burgesses’ decision? It should have come by now.”

I paced to the window, feeling helpless in the face of our debt. With Papa’s passing, we had lost many of our newspaper subscribers and advertisers. Yet we were not without hope. Mama had applied for the public printing contract, which would en-

sure some income. But four others—all men—had also applied for the contract.

“I cannot wait here for the news,” I said to her as I left the sitting room and took my bonnet off the front hook. “I shall walk to the capitol and see what has been decided.”

Without waiting for Mama to comment, I pushed open the door. She would caution me to stay and await a messenger, but I could not.

The bell on the door rang as I stepped into the warm day. Spring had unfolded its gentle arms around Williamsburg, and like any good embrace, it tried to warm my soul and comfort me. Yet little had given me solace lately—both here and in my other path.

Hundreds of people walked in and out of the businesses lining Duke of Gloucester Street. Coaches, wagons, and single riders clogged the usually quiet capital. Overnight, it seemed, Williamsburg had doubled in size with the arrival of the representatives of the House of Burgesses. The assembly had convened that morning at the governor’s request, which was why we anticipated news soon.

Would I even see Henry in this commotion? For surely Henry was the one who would bring me the news.

I walked with purpose toward the capitol, taking note of the people passing me. As the editor of the *Virginia Gazette*, it was my job to know as much as possible about the people and the events transpiring in and around Williamsburg. I had to fight to learn the news, since I was rarely invited to the gatherings my male counterparts attended. But no matter how much they learned, I knew so much more than any of them could ever imagine about the events that would soon transpire.

I knew these things because I lived two lives simultaneously—one in 1774 and one in 1914. When I fell asleep in one path, I woke up in the other, back and forth, with no time passing in either one while I was away. It had been this way since the day

I was born. But all of that would change on my twenty-first birthday when I was given the choice to forfeit one path and stay in the other forever.

I already knew which one I would choose.

I approached the Raleigh Tavern, halfway between my home and the capitol, and finally saw him.

Henry Montgomery.

He strode down the street toward me, two other burgesses flanking him. They were deep in conversation and did not see me. I recognized Mister George Washington, who had served in the House of Burgesses for many years, and Mister Thomas Jefferson, who had been added just five years before. They were both powerful men and, I knew from my life in 1914, would both go on to become famous Founding Fathers, American presidents, and important figures in the history of the United States. I still marveled every day that I was here, watching history unfold with my own eyes. And I knew exactly how much work and sacrifice these men had before them.

But I did not know anything about Henry's future. For reasons unknown to me, his name was not one I heard repeated in my other path, and I did not try to discover why. I could not. It was one of the many things Mama had warned me about since I was young: never search for answers about either path. If God wanted me to know, I would know. And I must not, for any reason, try to change either path with the foreknowledge I might obtain. To do so meant I would forfeit the path I tried to alter.

Something I feared almost daily, for I did not want to give up 1774.

"Miss Conant," Mister Jefferson said upon seeing me, his brown-haired tie wig peeking out from beneath his tricorne hat. He stopped and gave me a bow, lifting his hat from his head. Elegance and masculinity emanated from his every move. He was a handsome man, and he wielded it. "It's a pleasure to see you again."

“And you, Mister Jefferson.”

Both Henry and Mister Washington offered me a bow as they removed their hats. I curtsied and caught Henry’s eye, my heart beating faster at the sight of him.

He stood shoulder to shoulder with these two large and imposing men. His legs and arms were well-formed beneath his tailored breeches and waistcoat. Life on board the merchant schooners his family owned had shaped him into a fine-looking man. But it was his handsome face—or rather, his eyes, which were a shade of blue I had never seen in anyone else—that had captivated me since I was a child.

“I was just on my way to see you,” Henry said to me, slipping his hat under his arm. His chestnut-brown hair was clubbed at the back. He was one of the few men I knew who did not wear a wig or hair powder.

“I hope you have good news.” Mama and I needed some good news right now, though I held on to my hope with a loose grasp.

“Aye.”

He smiled, as did Mister Jefferson and Mister Washington, and I knew it was good news indeed. Relief washed over me, making my legs feel weak and shaky.

“Are you on your way home?” Henry asked. “May I walk with you?”

I nodded eagerly, longing to hear him confirm the news.

“We will meet you back here,” Mister Washington said to Henry. “We have much to discuss.” He bowed again in my direction. “I hope you’ll save me a dance at the governor’s ball tonight, Miss Conant.”

“The ball?”

“As our new public printer,” Mister Jefferson said, “your invitation will be forthcoming.”

Mister Jefferson and Mister Washington bowed and left us to enter the tavern.

I turned to Henry. “The public printer?”

“Aye.” The grin that lit his face almost made me forget about everything else. “Your mother’s petition to become the public printer has been accepted.”

I briefly closed my eyes, thanking God for His provision. It could not come at a better time.

“I daresay Washington felt liable for your family, in a way,” Henry said as we began to walk. “After all, he was the one who asked your father to leave Maryland and set up his print shop in Williamsburg.”

“I daresay Mama deserves the contract,” I countered, teasing and reprimanding my old friend, not wanting to believe Mister Washington would take pity upon us. “She works harder than anyone I know. I would hope we won the contract on our own merit.”

“You have both done well in light of your hardships,” Henry agreed. “Though we’re well aware she could not do it without you. It was because she listed you as co-owner of the press that your bid won in a tight vote. You’ve earned the respect of several burgesses, Libby, but there are those who would see you fail.”

Emotion clogged my throat as the reality of this decision settled on me. The endless hours I had worked these past months had taken an enormous mental and physical toll, not to mention the toll it had taken on my personal life. There had not been time for courting or pursuing a husband as many of my friends had done. And the one man I would pursue—Henry—had been out of my reach for years.

I straightened my back and lifted my chin. I could not show the strain to Henry or anyone else. I must be as strong and relentless as the businessmen around me—and even more so.

“’Tis good to see you again, Libby.”

“’Tis good to see you too, Henry.”

“How long has it been?”

“Christmastide, surely,” I responded, knowing full well that we had not seen each other since Christmas Day at Bruton

Parish Church. Our interactions were few, but whenever I saw him, all time passed from my thoughts, and I was cast back to our early years together.

“I’m sorry to have missed your father’s funeral.” Henry’s voice was low and filled with concern. “If there’s anything—”

“Thank you.” I stopped him from making an offer that would embarrass me. Papa had been sick for years, and we had been ready for his death—if one can be ready for such things.

“I heard you put a paper to press the day he passed.” Henry didn’t hide his admiration or surprise. “A remarkable feat, surely one that would silence any naysayers.”

I tried not to think about those who had slandered our good name since Papa’s passing. Losing him was a devastating blow, but it was made worse by men who assumed we were incapable of running the press now that he was gone. But what choice did Mama and I have? If we stopped printing, we would be destitute. The very thought of debtor’s prison—or worse, my sisters being indentured to the likes of Mister Jennings—had driven me every waking moment. I had much to prove as an editor and businesswoman—and even more as a sister and daughter. I could not fail.

“How was the first session?” I asked, ready to change the subject.

His face turned somber, and his gaze hardened as he stared straight ahead. For almost a decade, tensions had been building with England and had finally come to a head just this past December during the famed Boston Tea Party. Word had arrived within the past weeks that the British Parliament had passed the Boston Port Act and planned to close the port of Boston on the first of June. Parliament would keep it closed until the local merchants repaid the lost revenue from the ninety thousand pounds of tea tossed into Boston Harbor.

“We will show solidarity with Boston,” Henry said with certainty.

“How?”

“’Tis not my place to share our plan until we’ve gained enough support to pass it in the house. But do not fear.” He smiled at me. “As our duly-elected public printer, you will be the first to know.”

We arrived back at the print shop far too soon.

“Would you like to join us for supper?” I asked, though we had scarcely enough to feed ourselves, let alone a guest.

He shook his head, his gaze resting on my face, and I wondered if he enjoyed seeing me again as much as I enjoyed seeing him. He had always been the kindest boy I knew and had grown into a man of good reputation. I had known since I was young that he would marry someone of his own social standing, and there were rumors that the bride had already been chosen.

“I must return to the Raleigh. Will you save me a dance at the governor’s ball tonight?” he asked.

The ball. I had almost forgotten. Mama would be so pleased. “Aye.”

With that, Henry bowed and took his leave.

As I watched him walk back to the Raleigh Tavern, slipping his tricorne on his head, I couldn’t help the twinge of jealousy that I was not joining him and the others to make history.



The Palace Green was lined with torches as Mama and I walked toward the governor’s palace that evening, our hearts a little lighter at the news of the contract, though it would not solve all our problems. It was just Mama and me. Hannah and Rebecca were only eight and nine and were too young to attend. They had been left at home with Mariah, the enslaved woman Papa had bought for Mama upon their wedding twenty-one years ago. Mama’s twentieth-century mind abhorred slavery in any form, and she had worked tirelessly to have Papa free Mariah, but

it wasn't until Papa's death that Mariah had finally been freed. Upon her freedom, she had chosen to stay with us as a hired servant and had married Abraham, a free black man, who served as our man-of-all-work. They were more like family than employees and lived above the kitchen in the yard behind our house.

Dozens of coaches lined the drive, filled with the wealthiest and most prominent citizens of Virginia. Over a hundred burghesses convened in Williamsburg each spring, and with them, wives, children, and servants. All of the best social events took place in the month they stayed in the capital. It reminded me of the social season I was currently enduring in my other time path in London, 1914. Just the thought of waking up tomorrow to face the daunting schedule Mother Wells had planned made my stomach turn.

"You know," Mama said, "I can always tell when your mind is on your other life."

I couldn't hide much from Mama. She knew me better than anyone.

"Didn't you find it hard to separate the two?" I asked her.

"I did," she conceded.

"And don't you still find yourself thinking about the 1990s?"

She was quiet for a moment as a sadness overtook her. Mama was also a time-crosser. Her second path had begun in the year 1973. Just like me, Mama had gone back and forth between her two lives for twenty-one years. She had chosen which one to forfeit and which to keep on her twenty-first birthday, just as I would, and just as all the other time-crossers in our family had done before us. We were each given just twenty-one years to choose.

Long ago, I had decided to remain forever in the 1700s, though I couldn't make my final decision for over a year. I must endure my 1914 path for thirteen more months. I had no other choice.

"It's been almost twenty-one years since I made my final decision," Mama said with a sigh. "Of course I think about it from



time to time. It took me years not to let words or thoughts from my other path slip into my conversations here. What would someone say if I told them to take a chill pill or said ‘as if?’” She chuckled and then sighed. “I often wonder what happened to my other mom and dad and siblings, but it all seems like a dream to me now. I’m supposed to be here to guide you and to help the American Revolution. I’ve been waiting for this all of my life.”

I knew exactly how she felt. We couldn’t change history, but we did know how it would play out.

We walked in silence past torches that flickered their shadows upon the ground. The sound of horses’ hooves clipped on the gravel, and a gentle wind blew through the tops of the trees overhead. I loved that Mama knew all about my other life. She was the only person I could talk to about my troubles. She understood my longing for the modern conveniences I enjoyed in 1914: the electricity, telephones, and automobiles. And she told me about the ones yet to come: televisions, computers, microwaves, and more. I marveled at human inventions, even if I struggled to understand them at times.

If anyone in 1774 ever heard us discussing such things, we’d be labeled lunatics—or worse. So we did not discuss our time paths with anyone else. Not even my little sisters knew about Mama and me—and neither had Papa. Rebecca and Hannah were not time-crossers, so there was no reason to tell them. Only those of us with the sunburst birthmark over our heart were time-crossers. From the stories Mama’s marked mother had told her, it had been this way as far back as anyone could remember. We knew there were others outside our family, but they rarely crossed our paths. My grandmother had met one in her second path, in 2022. She had known her from her marking, but they had not shared stories for fear of changing history.

Someday, if I had a daughter, she might or might not have the mark. There was no way of knowing. God was the Author of our lives, and only He controlled who bore the gift.

*If I ever had a child. I had not yet decided if I wanted to pass this gift on to another generation. Was it right to saddle a child with this kind of existence?*

“Hold your head up, Libby,” Mama said, reaching out and taking my hand in hers. “And put aside your troubles for tonight. It’s not every day we get invited to the palace. You only have thirteen more months until your twenty-first birthday. We’ve navigated your other path thus far. There shouldn’t be any reason we won’t continue.”

Her words gave me hope and brought a lighter step to my slipped feet.

We arrived at the palace entrance and showed our invitation to the footman, who wore a soft blue livery, and then we passed through the reception room and entered the long hallway leading into the ballroom.

The palace was thick with Virginians laughing and visiting. I knew many of these people by name, though I would consider only a few of them my friends. Most had been subscribers to our newspaper since Papa had started it, though we had lost more than I’d care to admit after his death. I saw George Washington, as well as Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Peyton Randolph, and several other men whose names would be recorded in history books.

Thankfully, the nasty Mister Jennings wasn’t present.

“Mistress Conant and Miss Conant,” the footman announced as we stepped into the large blue ballroom. A few people looked our way, but most continued, unaffected by our arrival.

“There’s Mister Washington,” Mama said. “I must thank him for his support of our contract.”

I could have followed her, but I had spied someone else I’d rather speak to.

Henry.

He stood near one of the massive windows, a glass in his hand as he spoke to Governor Lord Dunmore and his wife,

Lady Charlotte. Henry's father, Lord Ashbury, and his mother, Lady Gwendolyn, also stood in the small group. Whatever the five of them were discussing, it looked rather grim, if Henry's face was any indication.

"Have you heard the latest gossip?" a feminine voice asked close to my side.

I turned and found my friend, Sophia Charlton, looking in the same direction.

"I don't believe anything I haven't read in the newspapers," I said with a cheeky smile, torn between wanting to know what she'd heard and not wanting to spread gossip. But I was the newspaper editor, and it was my job to know everything, was it not? "What have you heard?"

"That Governor Dunmore has chosen a husband for his eldest daughter, Lady Catherine." Sophia's dark brown eyes were almost black as she waited for my reaction.

"She's but fourteen."

"Are you not curious who the groom shall be?"

"What does it matter?" I tried to appear uninterested, yet I had already heard the rumors and knew her answer would matter a great deal.

"'Tis Henry Montgomery."

I did not respond for a moment, praying the rumor was not true yet unable to deny what I had long suspected. "But he is three and twenty," I said as a way to cover my true feelings.

"And what is nine years?" Sophia asked, lifting her bare shoulder. "Henry is one of the youngest burgesses ever to grace the house—not to mention a newly elected assembly clerk—and Governor Dunmore has high hopes for him. There are tight bonds between their families that transcend the age difference."

"She's still a child." Even as the words came out of my mouth, I knew they would mean nothing to Sophia. We both knew of younger girls marrying. At the age of nineteen—almost

twenty—I was deemed an old maid, but there had been little time to worry about such things while running the printing press.

“I have heard they intend to wait,” Sophia said, “for a year or more, until this business with the rebels dies down.”

A year? How I wished to tell Sophia that we would not see the end of the rebellion for almost a decade, but of course I could not.

“Do you think they’re discussing the terms of the agreement now?” Sophia asked as she tipped her head in contemplation. “He does not look pleased, if they are.”

No, Henry did not look pleased. His eyes were hooded, and his forehead was pressed into a frown. How I wished to ask him if it were true. It would make sense for their families’ sakes, but it went against everything that made sense to me.

Henry’s gaze locked on mine, and his countenance softened. I longed to tell him he did not have to do anything he did not want to do, but I wasn’t foolish. How many of us were allowed to do the things we truly wanted? Even in my 1914 life, I was rarely at my leisure to go and do as I pleased. Mama claimed that in the 1990s, things were much different. Women were doctors and lawyers and professors. Some were even in the clergy—had even gone to outer space, though I could hardly believe such a thing. In the future, people were not dependent on one another for their lives like we were in 1774 and even 1914. Marriage was a necessity to boost one’s social standing, to solidify family ties, to have security and purpose—all things Henry’s family would desire for him.

“It looks as if he’s coming this way.” Sophia ran her gloved hand down the stiff stomacher of her rose-colored silk gown. It was flawless, just as she was flawless, her curls in perfect order.

Henry crossed the ballroom toward us. The violinist was tuning his strings, and Lord Dunmore was escorting his wife into the middle of the room to open the ball with a minuet.

Henry came to stop in front of us. While he bowed, Sophia and I offered curtsies.

“Good evening,” he said. “How do you do, Miss Charlton?”

“I’m well, my lord,” Sophia said as she straightened from her curtsy. She addressed Henry properly, though I knew how much he detested such things. He had been born and raised on American soil, and his heart belonged to her cause. Ever since I could remember, he had made his position on the nobility plain—at least to me. He felt, like many others, that there was no place for the aristocracy in America.

I agreed, which made my path in 1914 all the more ironic and disheartening.

Henry turned to me. “I believe I requested the honor of a dance, Miss Conant. Will you allow me the pleasure?”

My smile was quick and, I daresay, radiant. The first dance of the evening was the most important for status and social standing. It would be led by Governor Dunmore and his wife, and each couple would follow them in descending order of importance. Henry would be near the front of the line. To be asked by him was truly an honor. “Indeed, I will.”

He took my hand and led me to the center of the room, the full skirts of my gown brushing against his legs as we went. Governor and Lady Dunmore looked in our direction, as did Henry’s parents, who had also joined the dance. Governor Dunmore raised his eyebrow at me, while Lady Dunmore’s look was more curious than condescending. I was sure they did not know me, since we had not had an occasion to cross paths.

But Henry’s parents did know me—had known me since I was a child.

And they did not look pleased to see me on Henry’s arm.