

Prelude



THE FIRST LETTER ARRIVES:

*Alexander Hamilton to Margarita Schuyler
Morristown, New Jersey, February 1780*

Though I have not had the happiness of a personal acquaintance with you, I have had the good fortune to see several very pretty pictures of your person and mind which have inspired me with a more than common partiality for both. Among others your sister carries a beautiful copy constantly about her, elegantly drawn by herself, of which she has two or three times favoured me with a sight . . .

You will no doubt admit it as a full proof of my frankness and good opinion of you, that I with so little ceremony introduce myself to your acquaintance and at the first step make you my confident.

PEGGY SCHUYLER KICKED OUT FROM UNDER HER heavy blankets, too preoccupied with a letter she had received to sleep. It came from an aide-de-camp to General Washington who proclaimed to be besotted with her sister Eliza—some silver-tongued man named Alexander Hamilton.

She shoved back the green toile bed curtains, gasping as frigid air pierced her linen chemise. “Good God! Can it possibly be this cold? Again?”

Teeth chattering, Peggy stirred the embers in the fireplace and dropped a split log from the basket onto them with as little noise as possible. It was still dark. She didn’t want to wake her three younger brothers, slumbering next door. Endearing boys, but what a raucous rabble—especially the seven-year-old, Rensselaer, who had just gone through breeching and was racing around the house crowing about the fact he had finally graduated to wearing pants instead of dresses. For sure, he’d rouse little Cornelia, still in a trundle bed in her parents’ room. And Peggy wanted to analyze Alexander Hamilton’s words more closely, privately, without her mother insisting she read them aloud to the family.

The splintery wood sparked, sputtered, and caught flame as Peggy hurriedly bundled herself in shawls and slipped her feet into soft buckskin moccasins that the Oneida tribe once gave her father, General Philip Schuyler. They were artfully decorated with porcupine quills and blue-jay feathers.

Peggy never let her mother see that she had pilfered the colorful slippers from her father’s closet. They were definitely

not proper lady shoes. But her feet ached with a strange malady sometimes, especially on shivering days like this, and the moccasins were soft and forgiving. They also reminded Peggy of the vast New York wilderness just a few dozen miles north of their Albany mansion, and the elusive Iroquois who remained loyal to her father and the Patriot cause. Silently gliding through forests of towering oaks and chestnuts, they gathered information on Loyalist Tory Rangers who could strike the city at any moment.

Quaking, Peggy toasted herself by the fire. "It's cold enough for Hell to freeze over," she muttered. "All right, Lord, maybe this is proverb. Are you sending us a sign that our improbable Revolution may actually succeed? Please? If we just screw our courage to the sticking place?"

Peggy preferred quips to prayer, intelligent bargaining to pleading. Wit was her bayonet, her way of leading a charge. She detested the woman's role of patiently sitting, smiling like a painted fashion doll while men battled and argued philosophy that could end tyranny. But she knew talking out loud in this manner was ridiculous. Her imaginary conversations were a recent habit, born of being deserted by her two older sisters, with whom Peggy had shared her bed and her every thought for all twenty-one years of her life.

Born in less than three years from oldest to youngest, the Schuyler sisters had been a giggly, triplet-like brood, tight-knit and entwined. As a trio, they complemented and balanced one another, each recognizing and coaxing out

the best in the other two. Like pieces of those new jigsaw puzzles, only put together did the Schuyler sisters present a complete portrait, with the most beautiful and vibrant image of each clearer.

But Angelica had married, seduced by an ever-so-charming card gambler. And now Eliza, logically next in line to marry, was gone to Washington's winter headquarters at Morristown to visit their aunt and her husband, who was surgeon general to the Continental Army.

And Peggy? Here she remained in Albany, alone, feeling bereft not only of her big sisters' company but somehow of definition and purpose without her arms linked in theirs. She loved her little brothers and sister. But Peggy couldn't share her heart with them. They couldn't finish her sentences with her own thoughts the way Eliza and Angelica could.

Who was she without her big sisters? She had always been "and Peggy," introduced third whenever the Schuylers greeted guests to their family houses. Witty, elegant Angelica; kind, affable Eliza; *and* Peggy. Within the circle of family and friends she was always described according to her older sisters' attributes: "She's saucy like Angelica. She's artistic like Eliza."

As she stared at the flames, Peggy's hurt at being left behind turned to annoyance. It would be nice occasionally to be described purely as herself. In truth, with her sisters, Peggy was often reduced to confidante and accomplice. Rarely was she the center of anything. She was beginning to feel like Cinderella, always helping her sisters dress for balls

she wasn't attending, relegated to chores. Peggy was forever helping their mama and watching after the increasing brood of younger siblings.

And here was this letter, from another male intruder into the Schuyler sisterhood who seemed to think Peggy would happily become handmaiden to a romance that would take away her middle sister, too. This poet-penned aide-de-camp, this Alexander Hamilton, who wrote to introduce himself and to make Peggy his ally in his courtship of Eliza. And the bait to lure her in was complimenting her person and mind as Eliza had depicted it in a pretty miniature painting? As if Peggy was so easily manipulated by flattery.

But the thought that had kept her tossing and turning? Eliza was obviously falling for this man. Normally her gentle sister would be far too modest to show her artwork to anyone. This was dangerous. Peggy must remain a watchful sentry to Eliza's enormous heart. She had learned the pitfalls of not being on guard for a sister the hard way with Angelica.

After lighting a candle, Peggy pulled Hamilton's letter out from its hiding spot behind the cushion of a wingback armchair next to the hearth. She tucked her feet up under her, huddled in her shawls, and began to read.

I venture to tell you in confidence, that by some odd contrivance or other, your sister has found out the secret of interesting me in every thing that concerns her.

Hmpf. As if the sweet Eliza was some calculating enchantress, fumed Peggy. She squinted at the parchment.

The handwriting was neat and elegant. One would never

know Hamilton had written his appeal in the middle of a war. Or in a camp laid waste by four feet of snow that refused to melt—where stubborn, stoic Patriots slept crammed together in tiny log huts, lying side by side with their feet to a fire, to share body warmth and make it through the night without frostbite.

I have already confessed the influence your sister has gained over me; yet notwithstanding this, I have some things of a very serious and heinous nature to lay to her charge.

Peggy fairly growled at that line. What could Eliza possibly be guilty of?

She is most unmercifully handsome and so perverse that she has none of those affectations which are the prerogatives of beauty. Her good sense is destitute of . . . vanity and ostentation. . . . She has good nature affability and vivacity unembellished with that charming frivolousness which is justly deemed one of the principal accomplishments of a belle.

Hmpf again. Well, all right, he had that correct. Eliza was all earnestness. She did not play games. She did not pull on heartstrings for amusement. No, that was Angelica. The famed “thief of hearts,” as one officer had called her.

Peggy dropped Hamilton’s letter. Her room filled with the memory of her sisters’ mingled chimes of laughter. Their reading poetry aloud to one another’s sighs of romantic appreciation. Their harmless gossiping about the dashing soldiers surrounding their father when he commanded the Northern Army.

That had all changed the summer of 1777. When New

York was burning and Americans were dying in apocalyptic numbers. When Angelica made her own defiant claim for liberty and breathlessly whispered, “I have a secret. Tonight, my dearest sisters, I elope with John Carter! You must help me escape.”

Harper

Harper

PART ONE

1777

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

Harper

—Thomas Paine, “The Crisis, No. 1”

Harper

ONE



Almost Spring

There is something in the behavior of [General Schuyler's] daughters that makes you acquainted with them instantly. . . . I sat among them like an old Acquaintance, tho' this only the seventh day since my introduction. . . . [The girls] would not let me leave them without some mark of kindness, and therefore loaded me with Grapes which they plucked fresh from the vines themselves.

—Tench Tilghman, aide-de-camp to General George Washington

“IT IS YOUR PLAY, MADEMOISELLE.” JOHN CARTER smiled at Angelica as she hesitated over her cards. She and he were partners in a game of whist. Across the table, facing each other, Peggy and Eliza were paired against them.

Carter had laid down a six of spades, Peggy an eight of the same suit. To win the trick, Angelica needed to play a higher card than Peggy's but anticipate what Eliza might

hold in her hand. The deck from which they pulled was getting low. Her choice would likely determine the contest.

“Hearts is trump,” he reminded her. “I wonder. What will be your trick?” A mischievous challenge flickered in Carter’s blue-sky eyes. “Have you counted the cards in the previous rounds? May I hint at the solution?”

“Oh, but that would be cheating, Mr. Carter!” Eliza protested. “Partners sharing intelligence is against the rules.”

Angelica flushed at his implication that she had not been keeping track of the played cards or analyzing her opponents’ strategy—both key to winning whist. Lifting her chin, she lightly retorted, “*Chaque joueur doit accepter les cartes que la vie lui distribué. Mais une fois qu’il les a en main, lui seul peut décider comment jouer ses cartes pour gagner la partie. . . .*”

“Ahhhh.” Carter nodded, not taking his eyes off her. “You have read the French philosopher Voltaire.”

“I have read a great many things, sir. This may not be London, but we are still enlightened. You should see my father’s library.”

“I have not been invited.”

“*C’est facile à remédier. Après ça tours, alors.*”

Eliza held her cards to her face like a fan and whispered behind them, “I hate it when you speak French, Angelica. You know how I struggle with it.”

But Angelica did not break her gaze with Carter to respond.

So Peggy did instead. “All she said, sister, is that a player must accept the hand life deals, and only she may decide how

to play those cards in order to win her game with fate.”

Eliza smiled gratefully.

Peggy didn't translate that Angelica planned to take Carter into Philip Schuyler's library after the card game. Eliza would be shocked at the implication of such a tête-à-tête. Perhaps Peggy would simply accompany them, claiming she wanted to retrieve a book from the two hundred shelved there. She'd been plaguing her pretty sister by shadowing her and her admirers to interrupt their wooing ever since Peggy was twelve years old and Angelica turned fifteen. That's when her eldest sister's first suitors had begun to flock to the family's hilltop Georgian mansion. It had been a favorite amusement for a preadolescent Peggy—when she first resented Angelica suddenly treating her like a child and crowding her out of their sisterly triumvirate by sharing secrets about her romances with Eliza but not Peggy—and the cause of much hair-pulling between them.

It was so odd. The expanse of years between them was so elastic, sometimes no space of consequence at all and other times feeling as insurmountable as a chasm. Now that she was eighteen and Angelica twenty-one, the difference felt like nothing. Although tonight, Peggy was feeling a canyon-wide draft of cold air between them again.

Angelica did not play her card. The look between her and Carter was searing.

To Eliza, Peggy said, “I suspect our Angelica is deciding whether to play an ace . . . or a jack . . . saving her ace of spades for the next trick.” She paused. “I suggest your jack,

Angelica.” Peggy gave her eldest sister a slight kick under the table to make her play her card while she looked pointedly at Carter to add: “It is always best to shed a knave.”

He roared with laughter. “Touché! A hit, Miss Peggy, a palpable hit.”

Peggy recognized that Carter was quoting from the sword-fight scene in the play *Hamlet* with his comment. She read, too, after all. Perhaps Carter knew that and was trying to play to her vanity about her intellectualism. She refused to take the lure. Peggy didn’t much like the man. For one thing, he was born to British aristocracy. There was something too courtly, too frivolous, too showy about him in his beige-and-green-striped coat, his silk waistcoat embroidered with pink and green flower sprigs. He had actually donned an old-world wig for the evening, which hardly any real Patriot did.

Yes, Mr. Carter had reportedly fled England to join the cause. Yes, he was as beautiful a man as had ever graced their home. Yes, his European sophistication was exhilarating, especially for Angelica, who had essentially grown up in New York City when their father served in the colony’s assembly. Now occupied by the British, New York City was forbidden enemy territory. The Schuyler sisters were relegated to their hometown of Albany. With its somber Dutch culture and architecture, trading outpost atmosphere, and narrow, muddy streets, it hardly compared.

So Angelica was restless—despite the young soldiers occupying the city’s garrison and the parade of statesmen who visited to confer about the war with their father. Peggy’s

personal favorite had been Benjamin Franklin. He'd called her "wild Peggy." The way he said it had been more compliment than criticism. His sardonic commentary made her laugh.

As to Carter? Peggy just couldn't trust a man whose eyelashes were longer and thicker than her own. He also couldn't seem to answer to his whereabouts in the past few years without squirming a bit. Besides, he had been ordered by Congress to audit their father's military account books, to investigate its accusations that General Schuyler had mishandled the Patriot invasion of Canada the previous winter. That alone was enough to damn Carter in Peggy's mind.

She glared at him. The criticism of her father for the Canadian debacle was so unfair. No one had anticipated that Quebec would put up such a fight. Everyone assumed French Canadians would want to throw off British rule, too, even become the fourteenth American state. Yet, as commander of the Northern Army, Schuyler was blamed for Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery choosing to storm Quebec City during a blizzard and the disastrous retreat that followed.

Her father wasn't even there! He'd been ravaged by a horrendous flare-up of gout and remained in camp at the army's surgeon insistence. He was so ill Peggy's mother dared the harrowing journey north to care for him with her special teas. Peggy and Eliza had accompanied Catharine on that hazardous trek. Someone had to. Their mother was six months pregnant at the time—she could miscarry on the journey.

Thinking on the risks her mother had taken to save her husband's life and the poor untrained huntsmen-soldiers who slogged through the wilds of northern New York to take on British forces made playing the card game whist seem a superficial pastime indeed.

"Eliza"—Peggy broke the silence of waiting for Angelica's next play—"do you remember when we went to Ticonderoga to care for Papa?"

"How could I forget?" Eliza answered. "Oh my goodness, Mr. Carter, the things we saw."

Angelica frowned over her cards.

"Indeed so. But you were very brave, Eliza. Why, we nearly lost her at the very beginning of our journey, Mr. Carter. You see, our father had made himself deathly ill in service to our country. Knowing how concerned he is—*always*—for the welfare of his soldiers—even when he is racked with violent fluxes—we stopped first at our Saratoga farm to gather supplies for the fort. At Papa's own expense, of course. When we crossed the Hudson River, our wagon was so laden it tipped the flat-bottomed ferry. We nearly dumped our beloved Eliza into the currents. She would have been swept away, for sure."

"Good God, Miss Eliza! I am grateful you were spared."

Angelica shot Peggy a withering look, clearly annoyed that Peggy was hogging Carter's attention and sharing a story about an adventure she'd missed, choosing instead to stay in New York City to enjoy what would end up being its last season of Patriot balls.

Peggy ignored Angelica's glare to continue bedeviling her. "Oh, but that was only the beginning, Mr. Carter! For days, our wagon jolted along that path on the river's eastern shore. Whenever the wagon's wheels stuck fast in mud, Mama had to get out and yank on the oxen. Oh, how she pled with those stupid beasts. Eliza and I had to push from behind."

"What?" Carter asked. "You didn't have a military escort to help?"

"Oh no, Mr. Carter." Peggy smiled prettily to hide her inward smirk at her sudden mental picture of the immaculately dressed Carter trying to brave the wilderness road. Why couldn't Angelica see him for a popinjay fop? But aloud she said, "Following our papa's unselfish example, we only asked for one guide. We did not want to take any more men from the defense of our nation."

Peggy was about to continue her travelogue when she was suddenly beset with harsher memories of that exhausting, one-hundred-mile journey through the forbidding forests. She shivered involuntarily, even though she sat next to a fire blazing brightly in their ornate yellow parlor, soft with a florid Brussels carpet and cushioned chairs. How she, Eliza, and their mother had shivered back then—through bone-chilling downpours, and terrorized by the howls of wolves hunting in the thick, primeval woods all around them. What else, who else might be out there in the shadows was their constant question.

They had been so relieved to reach the safety of their

halfway point—Fort Edward—hoping for a cot and a hot meal. But the fort was a burned-out ruin, and the soldiers holding the skeletal fortification had no provisions. In pity for the bedraggled women, they managed to shoot a bear and cook it over open fires to feed them. That scorched fresh-kill bear meat had tasted better than any carefully dressed turkey presented in their mansion's elegant dining room. It tasted of staggeringly beautiful, untamed frontiers, of a gut euphoria at reaching safety after being in danger, of a freedom from Old Europe parlor-room niceties and banalities.

As Peggy had torn the meat off her roasting stick with her teeth, one of the soldiers proclaimed her as good a woodsman as ever a boy was. Catharine had been horrified. Peggy had grinned, grease running down her chin, loving the compliment.

Harper

Carter tapped his cards on the table, interrupting Peggy's musings. He laid them facedown, crossed his arms, leaned back, and tossed a dimpled smile of encouragement toward Angelica. Smooth, unblemished features; wide-set, luminous eyes framed by almost feminine brows. God, he was irritating with his sculpture-perfect face, his pampered refinement!

"Have you ever eaten bear meat, Mr. Carter?" Peggy asked abruptly.

He startled. "No, I have not, Miss Peggy." But he was clearly amused by the out-of-the-blue question. "Is it good?"

"Deeee-li-cious." Peggy drew out the word.

This time Angelica kicked her under the table.

Carter went back to dreamily staring at Angelica. The

man had recently finished his Congress-ordered audit and found Schuyler's records beyond reproach. But still he lingered about their house, like a bee drunk on honeysuckle. Peggy kept expecting her father to shoo him off. But Schuyler seemed to think Carter might be useful for intelligence gathering among Loyalists, since he was such a recent émigré from Great Britain.

That, at least, Peggy could understand. Having an ear to Tory homes was critically important. Longtime neighbors who remained loyal to the Crown had proven quite dangerous. Just a few weeks before, her father had uncovered a Tory plot to blow up Albany's powder magazine and set fire to the city. The wretches had even planted incendiaries all around town. Peggy had known one of the conspirators all her life.

But did this highborn Carter have what it took to be a spy? How Peggy wished she could volunteer for that job instead. She could dress up and act like a boy to hide her identity, just like Viola did in her favorite Shakespeare play, *Twelfth Night*. Shaking her head slightly, Peggy snapped herself back to their card game. "Angelica, play your card. We are all waiting."

"I would happily wait a century if your sister asked it of me," said Carter. "Frankly, each card she plays, Miss Peggy, brings our game closer to its end. A melancholy thing."

Eliza sighed, charmed. Of course Eliza would be charmed.

Ever so slowly, Angelica pulled out a card and laid it on the table. The queen of hearts. "Voilà! I believe hearts rule?"

A delighted grin lit up Carter's countenance. "The queen

of hearts commands all she surveys or touches.” He bowed slightly.

Oh, for pity’s sake. Peggy rolled her eyes. Angelica was a smarter player than that. There was no need to pull out such cannon fire for this trick. By Peggy’s calculations, Angelica had the spades to win the play easily without resorting to a trump. It was pure flirtation. Deftly done, though, she had to admit.

“Well, with that move, we can only capitulate, Peggy.” Eliza tossed down her cards and held her hand to her heart. She was in complete awe of her big sister’s coquettish word-play.

Angelica stood. Shaking out her sapphire satin skirt and the tiers of creamy lace peeking out from her elbow-length sleeves, she asked, “*Voulez-vous voir la bibliothèque maintenant?*”

“*Ah, oui!*” Carter rose. “*Est-il permis d’examiner les volumes?*”

The impertinence! Did he have permission to examine the volumes, indeed. I should say not! thought Peggy. Seeing Eliza’s hurt at being excluded once again by Angelica’s French gave her an idea. “Eliza,” she chirped, and purposefully mistranslated: “Mr. Carter was just saying how much he longed to hear you play the pianoforte.”

How that sweet, heart-shaped face brightened. And how Angelica’s clouded.

Again, Carter burst out laughing.

Well, at least he had a sense of humor, thought Peggy.

“Mademoiselle.” He held out his hand to Eliza to escort

her across the parlor. Eliza giggled, blushed, and took it. She settled in front of a polished mahogany square-box piano, her billowing pink taffeta gown making a pretty picture against the room's gold-flocked wallpaper.

Eliza took a deep breath before beginning the Allegro first movement of a Haydn sonata. With nimble delicacy, her fingers danced up and down the octaves in crystalline runs. Then, with the piece's Andante, Eliza shifted moods, drawing out the expressive melody, lingering over its melancholy phrases. She swayed slightly as she touched the ivory keys, in complete communion with the lyrical movement, becoming a graceful personification of its airy, sublime tune.

Angelica and Peggy smiled at each other, all irritation between them extinguished. Their middle sister had that effect on them. Angelica and Peggy could be spit and rasp. Eliza was balm. She might not read as much as they. She might not speak French well, nor quip with their alacrity, but she far surpassed them in the arts and in the sincerity of her joys. Her music was magic.

Peggy glanced up at Carter, who stood directly behind Angelica. He was as rapt as they. Peggy softened. All right, he had a soul. Peggy always warmed to anyone who appreciated Eliza.

Coming to the end of her incantation, Eliza reluctantly pulled her hands back from the keyboard. She turned to face her listeners as they clapped—Carter impressed, Angelica and Peggy filled with affectionate pride.

“Sing with me, sisters,” Eliza beckoned.

“Please, dear ladies, grant me that rapture,” exclaimed Carter. “I will hold the image to my heart all my life, a shield against future unhappiness.”

Angelica beamed.

Oh my, thought Peggy, how her sister succumbed to poetic rhetoric. How she wore her passionate heart on her sleeve. Who was Peggy to break it? She relented and decided to help rather than hinder Angelica’s obvious love affair. She wasn’t that good of a singer anyway. “Not I, Mr. Carter. I feel a bit hoarse. But Angelica has the voice of a seraphim angel.”

Mouthing “thank you,” Angelica swept across the floor to join Eliza.

The two conferred in whispers, holding their lips to each other’s ears, their enormous nut-brown eyes and luxurious dark curls lovely mirror images. Peggy had the same eyes, the same curls—although hers tended to frizz—and the same dimpled cleft in her chin. But her sisters were graced with their mother’s long neck, high cheekbones, and delicate jawline. Peggy had inherited their father’s more aquiline nose, his slightly longer face and crooked teeth. Still attractive, she knew, but not as softly alluring. Whenever she saw her older sisters framed together like this, she felt a jealous pang, a fear of inadequacy. They were much to live up to.

Her sisters chose their aria. As Angelica’s dulcet voice lilted through the room, Carter remained mesmerized.

“Can you play any of the music from *The Beggar’s Opera*, Miss Eliza?” he asked when the girls concluded.

“Goodness, sir, no,” demurred Eliza. The work was a

wildly popular satire of Italian opera, but scandalous in its featuring of London's thieves, prostitutes, and debtors' prisons.

"I know it!" Angelica piped up.

They all did, of course. But only Angelica would admit so.

"Please, then, permit me." Carter cleared his throat and began a cappella the lines sung by the rogue Macheath. "*Were I laid in Greenland's coast, and in my arms embraced my lass . . .*"

His tenor voice was as resonant and silky as any actor's Peggy had seen in New York City theater. She felt her left eyebrow shoot up in approval, an unconscious reaction that she knew gave away her thoughts.

The song was a back-and-forth between Macheath and the heroine. Carter strode across the floor to take Angelica's hands so they could harmonize together. She joined in singing:

*"And I would love you all the day,
Every night would kiss and play,
If with me you'd fondly stray
Over the hills and far away . . ."*

They stopped and simultaneously drew in a sharp breath. Before Peggy could interrupt, Carter leaned over and kissed Angelica. On her mouth, lingering, searching, in a way that made Peggy blush for her sister. Angelica did not draw back.

"Sir! What is the meaning of this?"

"Papa!" the girls squeaked.

None of them had heard the enormous back door of the hall open, their father handing his cloak and tricorne hat to Prince, his personal attendant and the enslaved servant he trusted to greet all guests to the mansion. Nor had they heard

Schuyler enter the room. They were that bewitched by Carter's musical seduction.

"I repeat, sir," Schuyler bellowed. "What is the meaning of your behavior?"

Tall, muscular, lithe, their father—when he wasn't ill—exuded a commanding prowess. He'd spent years traversing New York's upper lakes and dense forests—first learning to trap and trade with the Iroquois, then as a colonel in the French and Indian War. The Oneida—one of the Iroquois Confederacy's six tribes—had named him *Thoniondakayon*, one who walks young with old wisdom. With such bearing, rarely did Schuyler need to raise his voice.

Angelica's creamy, soft hands balled into fists at her side. Peggy could imagine Angelica's silk-slipped foot stamping with indignation under her gown—a gesture that always preceded impassioned speeches about her rights, peppered with quotes from Thomas Paine.

Schuyler's shout brought their mother scampering down the staircase, from where she had been putting her thirteenth child to bed. Having lost six children in infancy already, Catharine tended her babies with an anxious carefulness herself, despite having several enslaved female attendants who could help.

"Kitty." Schuyler turned to her. "Why were you not chaperoning?"

Catharine looked with bewilderment at her daughters before answering in her blunt Dutch-housewife way: "I expect them to safeguard one another's virtue."

“They have failed one another in that tonight.”

“How so, sir?”

“I just caught Angelica . . . here, in our parlor . . . behaving . . . allowing this man liberties.”

Catharine frowned. She wagged her finger at Angelica as if she were a toddler. “I should have known. I have never been able to teach you proper modesty, daughter, or proper restraint.”

Angelica’s face turned red with humiliation. “And who was it failed you in that regard, Mama?” she shot back. “When Papa was courting you?”

Peggy’s and Eliza’s mouths popped open at Angelica’s salvo. No one had ever dared acknowledge the fact she had been born only five months past her parents’ wedding day. A shocked silence fell. The clock ticked; the fire in the hearth popped and threw sparks; one of the grooms could be heard calling for lanterns to be lit in the back courtyard.

Angelica stood her ground, smoothed her skirts, and took advantage of her command of the stage. “I love him, Papa.”

At that Carter gasped. But it took him only a moment to regain his gallantry. He bowed low. “General Schuyler, may I ask the honor of your daughter’s hand in marriage?”

Eliza about swooned at the romance of all she was witnessing.

Peggy inwardly groaned. Angelica seemed more defiant than beguiled by love. She longed to ask her sister what in the world she was thinking.

But Schuyler's reaction was immediate and vehement.
"Good Lord, man. No!"

"Papa!" Angelica wailed.

"My beloved child," he began.

"I am no child!"

"Then do not act like one, Engeltje." When their father used the original Dutch version of their Christian names, the sisters knew they were in serious trouble.

"I do not have time to debate this," he continued, holding his hand up to stop Angelica's protest. "Canadian Oneida have warned me of British plans. As soon as the roads thaw, they will invade New York, coming south from Quebec down Lake Champlain. General Burgoyne has amassed eight thousand British and Hessian soldiers. One hundred pieces of artillery. Those numbers triple ours."

"*Goede God*," murmured Catharine.

"He is also recruiting Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, and Mohawks as scouts and New York Loyalists to join his ranks.

"At dawn, I must ride for Philadelphia to meet with Congress. First to deal with the nonsense this man"—he gestured toward Carter—"was sent to investigate me for. And then to plead for more troops, more horses, more salted meat, more ammunition." He rubbed his forehead. "I swear Congress expects us to fight on nothing but self-sacrifice and rhetoric."

Schuyler paced, worrying more to himself than to the other people in the room. "The war could be lost right here in the coming weeks."

“But, Papa,” Angelica interrupted him, “this has nothing to do with Mr. Carter and me.”

Absorbed by impending catastrophe, Schuyler didn’t hear her.

“Papa?”

He paced on.

Angelica reached out and stopped him. He blinked, then focused on his daughter. Somehow his voice gentled. “You cannot marry this man, Angelica. I am not even certain of his real name. Carter is an alias. I have just learned that he fled England because of a duel. Perhaps over a woman. Perhaps over a gambling debt. I do not care which. This man is not for you.”

Oh, Papa, thought Peggy sadly. How could he know so little about Angelica’s willfulness? Now that he’d commanded her obedience and denied her wants, Angelica wouldn’t give a fig what he might uncover about Carter. Intrigue would only make her suitor more romantic and tantalizing in Angelica’s mind.

Schuyler swung around to face down Carter. “Be gone, sir. Do not return to this house. You are no longer welcome around my daughters.”