

# *Yes and No*

by

*Diana Davis*

Owen Randolph jerked awake in a seated position and looked around the dim room to get his bearings. He wasn't at home, obviously; even the larger flat he and his mother and sisters now lived in didn't have a fireplace that large.

Just as his eyes adjusted to the firelight and the Hayeses' drawing room registered, Temperance Hayes shifted on the couch, snuggling closer. Judging from the weight of her head on his chest, they'd both dozed off, and likely her sister Constance was across the room asleep as well.

Owen wrapped his arms around Temperance and inhaled the cinnamon scent of her hair powder. Even five weeks after they'd finally settled things between them—better than he'd ever dared to dream—it was hard to fathom that he was courting the woman he'd loved since they were children.

He hugged her tighter, and Temperance stretched in his arms. She lifted her head and her gaze locked on his. Her hair was mussed and her lips parted, and the look in her eyes said she was thinking of the exact same thing as Owen.

"Your sister's just there," he whispered.

“She doesn’t care. I don’t care.” She seemed to be moving closer. “Do you?”

“I—” He found it difficult to finish because he’d bridged the last inch between their lips. She returned his kiss with such warmth that he couldn’t help but pull her closer. He hardly noticed what else she was doing beyond kissing him until she’d tugged the ribbon from his queue to run her fingers through his hair.

Across the room, her sister stirred, and Owen startled, drawing back from Temperance. She scowled in Constance’s direction, but her sister said nothing. Was she still asleep?

“I should probably go home,” Owen whispered.

Temperance slid her arms back around his neck and laid her head on one of them. “I wish you never had to leave.”

“What do you expect, my love? Did you wish for my mother and sisters to move into your servants’ quarters?”

She pulled back to look at his face. “They’d always be welcome. But that isn’t what I meant.”

“Oh?”

Even in the shadows, Temperance’s expression seemed quizzical. She sat back from him, and Owen instantly regretted whatever it was that he’d said wrong. He reached for her hand, but her fingers were fiddling with a black ribbon.

*His* ribbon, from his queue. “I’ll take that, thank you.”

Temperance held it out of his reach. “I think not, Owen dear. I happen to like your hair loose.”

He merely pursed his lips and leaned across her.

She angled back over the couch seat, keeping his ribbon just beyond his fingertips. “I think I shall keep this and wear it so that everyone will know you’re mine.”

Owen laughed. “Every man wears ribbons like that.” He stretched further, and Temperance shifted to extend her own reach. Owen moved to place one knee on the couch, certain

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he could win back the ribbon with just a few more inches. She laughed too, soft and musical, and he looked down at her.

She was lying on the couch now, and Owen realized he was more than leaning across her. He was practically lying on her. Once again, their eyes locked, and neither of them were laughing now.

Just as his lips touched Temperance's, Constance cleared her throat. Owen jumped back so fast he nearly fell off the couch, then he helped Temperance to sit up again. His face heated. Would Constance reproach them? Report them?

"Didn't mean to wake you, Connie," Temperance murmured.

"I've been awake the whole time," her sister said, amusement carrying in her tone. "My novel is most entertaining."

She didn't sound as though she were speaking of a book. Owen's cheeks burned twice as hot. She'd witnessed all of that?

"Probably time to retire now," Constance suggested. "Good night."

"Yes, good night." Owen was on his feet with a slight bow to Constance in an instant, then helped Temperance up too. She clung to his hand and ignored the sly look Constance gave them as she glided past.

Temperance grabbed her sister's elbow. "Give us a moment, won't you?"

"Follow quickly, Tippy," Constance said. "I'll wait on the stairs."

They followed her to the entryway and Constance slipped out of sight—but not out of hearing range.

Temperance tucked his hair behind his ears. Having it untied in front of her was . . . odd. Intimate. He only wore his hair loose for bed.

She took both of his hands, his ribbon laced between her

fingers so he still couldn't reclaim it. "I wish you never had to leave me," she whispered.

"Shall I tell Mother to pack up again?"

Temperance didn't laugh. With only a small slice of the drawing room's firelight, Owen could just make out her somber eyes searching his. "I wish you never had to leave me because we shared a home—a home of our own."

It was his turn to look for answers in her gaze. From the moment they'd begun courting, they'd mentioned marriage, but he still hadn't dared—"Do you mean it? You wish to marry me?"

"More than anything. As soon as possible."

Owen slid his arms around her waist and spun her around once, their shoes and their muffled laughter echoing in the dark entryway. He set her down and kissed her thoroughly and long enough that Constance, still out of sight, cleared her throat again.

Owen pressed his forehead to hers. "I shall talk to your father in the morning."

"And then Mr. Duché?"

"The vicar?"

"Of course! Tomorrow is Saturday; you must talk to him so he can begin reading the banns this week!"

She really meant it when she said as soon as possible. "Immediately after your father," he vowed. Assuming Josiah Hayes gave his consent. But of course he would. He'd said himself he saw Owen as a son. He could have no objections to making that legal. Could he?

Temperance placed the ribbon in his hand. "Good night, Owen dearest."

"Wait." He tugged her back toward him to press a kiss to her palm. Then he carefully tied his ribbon back into its bow around her wrist. "Now all may know you're to be mine,

dove.”

The endearment he’d settled on and tested out in his mind for over a week slipped out, and Temperance edged backward. “What did you call me?”

“Dove?” He reached for her and she gave her hand to him. “Do you not like it?”

“I’m not . . . certain.” She was quiet a moment, but before she settled, her sister called her. Temperance released his hand and cradled the ribbon to her, forcing on a smile again.

“I love you,” Owen said as she retreated without turning away.

“I love you, too. Call on me as soon as you’ve talked to Papa and Mr. Duché.”

“You’ll be the first person I tell, I swear it.”

Temperance paused at the foot of the stairs to press the ribbon to her heart before she finally turned away. He watched to make sure she was safely up before he let himself out.

She really wished to marry him.

This was the greatest day of his life.



Temperance could barely sit still the next morning as she had Constance retie Owen’s ribbon around her wrist. She’d worn it all night, the only way to keep him close, to hold the memory of last night with her even after he’d left.

Finally, she’d managed to make herself clear to him. She’d tried for the last two weeks to imply that she wished to marry—now—and Owen, sweetly, stupidly, innocently, had misconstrued every one. If he hadn’t understood last night, she might have had to ask him herself, scandalous as that was.

Constance finished and squeezed her hand. “We’re so

happy for you.”

Patience looked up from her volume—history, not law, for once. “Owen is an excellent choice.”

“I think so too.” Temperance beamed.

“Mrs. Owen Randolph,” Verity sighed, and Mercy threw a pillow at her.

“But,” Constance continued, “whatever shall we do without you?”

“I won’t go far. I’m sure Papa will let the flat above his office to us.” Their cousins were in the middle of moving out. Certainly enough crates of their family’s goods had entered their new house, across the garden and through the mews from the Hayes home.

“Oh, the flat would be perfect,” Patience agreed. “What do we need to finish in your trousseau?”

“It’s been done for ages.” This was not the first time Temperance had considered marriage—she’d convinced herself Winthrop Morley was on the verge of proposing it for years, and Godfrey Sibbald had even asked. But this was the only time she’d felt this happy.

“Well, I would like to give you a gift.”

Temperance clasped Patience’s hand and her sister smiled at her. Temperance could not imagine Patience being this happy for her had she married Winthrop or Godfrey.

But Temperance could hardly blame her when she felt the same way.

She nearly suggested embroidering something small, a pocket perhaps—but this was Patience. She’d sooner stick herself with a needle than use it to work. “I could use a bit of lace for my collar. For my wedding day.”

Even Verity couldn’t help a giggle of delight. Mercy’s laugh was not quite as mirthful, but then she seemed to pride herself in her good sense when it came to men.

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Not that there was any better sense than marrying Owen Randolph at the earliest opportunity.

Patience hopped up. "I shall go to the market now."

"May I come with you?" Mercy asked. "I . . . need some ribbon."

The guilt in her tone turned the tenor of the room toward suspicion. "What gown have you ruined now?" Verity asked.

"It's only a small tear, and she didn't mean to. She's only a kitten."

Verity sighed. Patience motioned for Mercy to join her, likely as much to spare her Verity's temper as to actually fix the gown, and they departed.

Verity turned to Temperance. "Shall I embroider you a handkerchief? Something that symbolizes love. Turtledoves?"

That stirred up the only unhappy memory from the night before. Why had Owen dubbed her "dove"?

"What's the matter?" Verity asked, suddenly concerned.

"Nothing, just . . ." Temperance turned to Constance, a blessed peacemaker if there ever were one. "What does a dove symbolize to you?"

"The Holy Spirit?" Constance turned her reply up at the end. "And peace."

"Innocence," Verity suggested. "Purity."

Temperance nodded. All things she'd thought of. While she was pleased her future husband saw her as pure—and she was, despite Winthrop's persistence—she wasn't sure what any of those other things had to do with her.

Verity took one hand and Constance the other. "Whatever's the matter?" Verity asked.

Temperance sighed. She could never say something that they might misunderstand about Owen. "It's very important, don't you think, for your husband to know you very well before you marry?"

“Of course,” Constance said. “How could you ever be comfortable with a stranger?”

“To not be known by your one true love would be the greatest tragedy.” Verity sighed, and then looked as though she wished to run off to use the subject for her latest theatrical.

“But,” Constance continued before Verity abandoned them, “you’ve known Owen since you were five years old.”

“Longer than I’ve been alive,” Verity added.

“Yes,” Temperance agreed. And if Owen Randolph could know her so little to think that she was all peace and innocence and the Holy Spirit . . .

If that was who he thought she was, she would quickly make him unhappy.

And if the man who’d known her longest believed that of her, she had no business marrying him. Or anyone else, if she ever recovered from losing Owen.

Should they be married?



Owen paced outside of Josiah Hayes’s study long enough that the unruly clerks were all distracted from their jobs of researching and copying. He hectored them every few minutes to try to keep them on task, but found he could not do the same.

An important client had come in first thing that morning and had yet to leave. Hopefully Temperance wasn’t bearing the wait for Owen as poorly as he was bearing the wait for her father.

Whatever Hayes’s case was, it had to be important or delicate to warrant a two-hour meeting this early. The last



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few weeks, Owen had tried to avoid Hayes when he was working on a challenging case. Owen had just begun to establish himself as independent from his former master, and they had some tricky ground still to traverse in that regard.

Owen was trying fruitlessly to find the correct volume of cases—the year he needed kept slipping out of his focus—when the study door finally swung open. Hayes escorted his client to the door, chatting sociably.

Owen could hardly wait until the client was on the street before he approached Hayes. “Hayes, sir?”

That was another tricky area. It still didn’t feel right to not address him as at least Mister.

“Yes?”

“May I meet with you?” He gestured toward the study.

“Of course, my boy.” The avuncular smile and endearment settled a little of Owen’s nerves. Hayes had liked him enough to help sponsor him through the College of Philadelphia and apprentice him afterward. Every hope Owen had of addressing Temperance, let alone marrying her, was her own father’s doing.

Owen closed the door behind them and Hayes took his seat at the desk. Rather like a throne, though Owen had sat there himself a few times—several of them with Temperance sitting in the leather chair he was taking now.

“What can I do for you?” Hayes asked.

“Well, um, Hayes—Mr. Hayes.” Owen attempted to swallow, and, when that didn’t work, cleared his throat.

“Is this a legal matter?”

“No, actually, it’s personal.”

Hayes inclined his head in patrician curiosity and gestured for Owen to continue.

He steeled himself and pushed the words out all at once. “I wish to marry your daughter.”

Hayes startled right out of his gentlemanly air. "Oh. Patience?"

"What?"

"You wish to marry Patience?"

Owen could only shake his head, mute. He worked with Patience when she was doing legal research here, and he quite liked her, but even she'd said they would never contemplate such a thing. Though perhaps it had crossed her mind.

"No?" Owen finally managed. "Temperance?"

"Temperance?" If it were possible, Hayes was even more startled.

"Yes?"

"Are you asking me?"

"Asking for your blessing?" His voice seemed to have crept higher until the last word was nearly a squeak.

"Oh." The syllable was not one of realization—it was one of pain. Pity. "Is that why you've been at supper so much of late?"

He nodded. Was that not expected when one was courting? Was he doing it wrong?

"I see." Hayes pulled his thin lips inward until they disappeared entirely. "Owen, my boy, you must understand: Temperance has always had a mind of her own."

"I know her, sir. For twenty years now." And loved her nearly every minute of that time.

"Yes." The word lingered in the air. Did Hayes know his daughter's heart better than Owen did?

No. She was the one who'd brought up the subject last night. This was not something he'd misconstrued, not a pledge he'd drawn from her unwillingly. It hadn't even been twelve hours since she'd pressed his ribbon around her wrist to her heart, love gleaming in her green eyes.

The memory mustered Owen's courage again. "I'm asking

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for your blessing to marry your daughter Temperance.”

“My boy.” Defeat still rang in Hayes’s words.

Did he not wish for Owen to marry her, then? His heart that had been full to overflowing the night before felt as though it would shatter at any second.

He could not marry Temperance.

Her father didn’t think he was good enough.

Hayes opened and closed his mouth, then attempted again. “My dear boy.” His words were warm, but his eyes still held that pain. “I would urge you to . . . seek another wife.” His gaze shifted away. “To deal more justly with yourself.”

The fire’s crackle was the only sound for a long moment. “Ah,” Owen said at last. The syllable was born more of sheer pain than understanding. “Forgive me.” His own voice sounded as hollow as his chest felt.

“I would—” Hayes stopped himself and turned away, closing his eyes as if it pained him to say any of this.

“I understand,” Owen managed.

“Thank you.”

Owen pulled himself to his feet and somehow managed to move them to the door. He detoured only to fetch a law volume and his greatcoat, still necessary on an early April morning, before he strode from the building.

He was supposed to go straight from talking to Hayes to talk to Mr. Duché and then to Temperance.

None of that would happen. How could he tell Temperance?

He couldn’t.

He didn’t know where he would go, beyond home, but he couldn’t stay a minute longer in that office surrounded by all the shards of his dreams.

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Temperance was worried absolutely sick. She felt sicker than Constance after a carriage ride through the cattle market. It was a wonder she hadn't already cast up the little she'd been able to eat.

Where on earth was Owen? He'd said he would talk to Papa first thing in the morning, then the vicar, then come to her. Now it was past dark, and there'd been no word nor sign from him all day.

She rubbed at the ribbon on her wrist. She'd worried at it so much today that Constance had had to retie it almost hourly, reassuring her that all would be well.

The only reprieve Temperance had had was to instead worry over how undovelike she was. Thinking of it again only redoubled the wobbling in her stomach.

The front door opened and Temperance leapt off the drawing room couch. She flew to the doorway, but only Papa stood in the entryway, alone.

"Good evening, my dear," he greeted her.

"Did you see Owen today?" Temperance just stopped herself from asking whether Owen had asked for her hand.

Papa narrowed his eyes, mystified. "Oh, yes, child."

Strange how that little word could sound so kind now and so cruel at other times. "Did you speak with him?"

"I speak with him nearly every day." He tipped his head quizzically. "Why are you asking after him?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I didn't realize you really remembered him."

She took two steps toward him. "Remembered—Papa, you've supped with him yourself, four times a week for the last month!"

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Papa smiled and looked away as if he were embarrassed. "Yes, I think he might have taken a fancy to you."

"A . . . fancy?" Yes, generally one fancied one's fiancée?

"Poor boy. I'm sure he'll find someone else to make him happy."

"Someone else?" Temperance's sick stomach went cold. Owen couldn't have—impossible. What was Papa saying?

Papa chuckled. "I know, you have your own sights set on someone more—"

"Papa! Owen and I have been courting for the last five weeks!"

The color drained from his face. "No."

"Yes! We wish to be married!"

Horror filled Papa's expression. "What have I done?"

Temperance grasped his arms. "What did you do?"

"He came to ask your hand this morning—I didn't know—I didn't think he had any hope!"

"You didn't—you told him no?" She paced across the entryway and back. How devastating that must have been—little wonder he hadn't come to see her today. "Oh, my poor Owen."

"I thought you still had your cap set at Godfrey Sibbald."

"Papa, that was over months ago!" It was actually more like weeks, but that was no matter.

"You wore his diamonds just last month."

"No, those have long gone." She held up her wrist. "This is Owen's hair ribbon!"

Papa only looked confused at that argument.

"You would not really withhold your blessing, would you? Because I will marry him anyway." She defied anyone to stop her.

Papa patted her shoulder. "I would be proud to call him my son-in-law, and you could not do better for yourself."

“That’s certainly true, but how am I to marry him when you’ve told him no?”

“I’ll make this right,” Papa vowed. “I’ll speak to him first thing Monday.”

“You cannot be serious.” Owen would surely try to avoid the man who’d withheld his love that way. “We must speak to him tonight, and then to Mr. Duché so he can read the banns tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Yes, I’d wish to be married as soon as possible.”

Papa took in yet another shock. He seemed to be getting better at that with each one. “Do you know where his new home is?”

“No.” She’d wanted to help his family move house, but David had hired some of Nathaniel’s crew to move all their things in two hours. Before and since, Owen was always here, insisting his sisters would never give them any space to visit.

“David!” Temperance cried. “David will know!”

She grabbed her father’s hand and dragged him through the house, the garden and the mews to the Beauforts’ new home behind theirs. They were still moving a few things in, but she hoped they’d made the transition themselves by now.

“David!” Temperance shouted once they’d reached the dining room.

“Is all well?” asked his wife, Cassandra, seated at the dining table, though the plate before her had been emptied. “David is upstairs getting ready to leave. Meeting.”

“He can’t attend a meeting. He must take us to Owen’s right away. It’s an emergency!”

Cassandra’s skeptical look said she was not entirely sure she believed Temperance, but she rose from the table, revealing her rounded belly. “I’ll go get him.”

David was still adjusting his shirt ruffles when he reached

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the dining room moments later. “Is Owen well?”

“Probably not,” Temperance pronounced. “Papa told him he couldn’t marry me.”

David turned to Papa, indignant on his friend’s behalf. “Any man should think it a privilege to have Owen Randolph court his daughter.”

“I daresay I’ve loved Owen longer than you have,” Papa said. “I didn’t realize Temperance returned his affections.”

“Ah, this must be remedied, right away. Do you know where Sterling Alley is? Off Race Street, behind the German church.”

“The Calvinists or the Lutherans?”

David hesitated. “I’m not certain. Perhaps I ought to take you.”

“Only if we hurry.” Temperance took David’s hand. “We must speak to Mr. Duché tonight if we’re to be married by the end of the month.”

“I’m coming with you.” Cassandra turned to lead them out.

“Are you certain, my love?” David asked. “Remember last week?”

“Yes.” Cassandra’s shoulders dropped and she grimaced, cradling her belly. “I won’t be able to walk as fast as you mean to, and I won’t keep you. You’ll want my cloak, Temperance.”

“Thank you, cousins.” Temperance embraced Cassandra and kissed David on the cheek. “Let’s hurry.”



Owen stared at the law book on his family’s table, but he couldn’t seem to read the words. Hardly mattered. It wasn’t even the right volume.

He would have let someone else answer the knock at the door, but Meg was at the baker's still, Mother hunched over two pots of laundry, and Nancy was winding a ball of yarn off the skein looped over Bess's hands. They looked to him with pleading eyes.

Rose could—Rose couldn't. She lived at the Beauforts' now.

With a sigh, Owen roused himself and went to the door. Josiah Hayes stood in the corridor.

Before Owen could shrink back from the man who'd denied Owen his daughter, he spotted that daughter standing next to Hayes. And beside her, David Beaufort.

He'd scarcely have believed Hayes would follow him to his home to further humiliate him, but with both Temperance and David there, what more would he have to say?

"May we come in?" Hayes asked.

Owen stepped back to admit them. Temperance reached for his hand—she still wore his hair ribbon—but he hardly thought that was wise now. He gave her fingers a quick squeeze and released her.

Mother looked up from the washing. She took in the company with wary surprise, and Owen was glad for the little he'd explained about how his morning had gone.

"Mr. Hayes," Mother greeted, "Mr. Beaufort, Temperance. Good evening. We'll . . . leave you." She motioned to Nancy and Bess to follow her to the bedroom. They still only had two rooms, but they were twice the size of their last flat, and all of Owen's sisters had a real bed to sleep in now.

Still, it was hardly a way to recommend himself as a son-in-law to someone as wealthy as Josiah Hayes.

Temperance looked from his face to his hands in concern. "May we have a moment?"

David and Hayes glanced at one another but stepped back



into the corridor.

Whatever could Temperance want to say with her father on the other side of the door? It wasn't as though she could suggest elopement.

Of course, Owen knew better than to put that past her.

"You called me *dove*?" Temperance asked.

Not at all what he was expecting. "Yes? I call my sisters ducklings, and I wanted something to call you. Did you not like it?" Did it matter if her father wouldn't allow them to marry?

"I—I am not very like a dove."

"How do you mean?"

She looked down. "You know that I am not gentle. Or peaceful. Or all innocence. Don't you?"

"I've seen that you're not with others, yes." He barely dared to take her hands. "But to me, you are."

"Do you really think so?"

Owen lifted her hand to kiss it. "Of course, dove. *My* dove."

She moved as if to kiss him, but Owen dropped her hands and stepped back. "Temperance, your father—"

"Oh, yes, just a moment." She fetched Hayes and David from the corridor.

Silence settled awkwardly over them until David made a little gesture as if to say *proceed*.

"Owen," Hayes began, "I am so terribly sorry. I had no idea Temperance already returned your affections. And—well, as you said, you know her."

Temperance scowled at her father. "How do you mean?"

"Only that I thought you were still courting with Godfrey Sibbald, and I wanted to spare him that pain."

Ah. That had been an unhappy time for him as well, but it had brought them together in the end.

Then . . . did Hayes mean to give them his consent? Owen barely dared to hope. He reached for her hand again. "I would ask your blessing to marry Temperance."

Hayes took him by the shoulders. "You have it, my boy. With all my heart."

Temperance threw her arms around Owen's neck and kissed him before he could make any response to Hayes.

"I love you!" Temperance declared.

"I love you, too." He stared into her green eyes, once again unable to believe that she would be his after all. There was nothing else to do for it. He laughed and kissed her again. One arm around her waist, he turned to give Hayes and David hearty handshakes.

"Come," Temperance said, "we must hurry if we wish Mr. Duché to read the banns tomorrow."

"I'd be happy to pay the license fee if you'd rather," David offered.

Temperance opened her mouth, probably to accept, but Owen spoke first. "We couldn't possibly impose. I'm sure Temperance could use the time to ensure everything is in order."

She sighed. "I suppose. If Mr. Duché will read the banns tomorrow—" She paused in thought. "We could be married on the twenty-fourth."

"That's a Monday?" David spoke as if checking a mental calendar.

"Yes, the day after the third banns."

David shook his head with a smile. "You certainly waste no time."

"You wouldn't, either, if you were this close to becoming Mrs. Owen Randolph." Temperance pulled away, tugging at Owen's hand. "Let us hurry."

"One moment, let me tell Mother." He kissed Temper-

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ance once more before he had to let her go, however briefly.

But soon he'd never have to let her go.

Owen informed Mother of his good fortune, and another round of hugs and kisses was exchanged. Once they were underway, with Temperance on his arm, he felt compelled to shake Hayes's hand again. "Thank you, sir."

"Of course. Nothing could make me happier."

Owen looked down at Temperance, at the love in her eyes, the ribbon on her wrist. "Not nearly as happy as you've made us," Owen said.

*The End*