

# Lost and Found

by

*Diana Davis*

They were already late to supper, but Fischer Marks would not disturb this perfect moment for all the world. He pulled Constance Hayes closer to him on the garden bench—not that there was much space between them in the first place. She obliged him, however, nestling her head against his shoulder. The late summer breeze blew through the garden, rustling the tall lavender and the first of the winterberry holly. The sunset was beginning to turn the sky a stunning shade of salmon, and Constance was in his arms.

There was a war going on, debates in Congress, and plenty of other tumult he'd have to squeeze into *The Watchman* tomorrow, but here and now, all was right with the world.

“*Mademoiselle Mystérieuse?*” he murmured. He'd taken to calling her literally any literal or figurative translation of the word *dark*, her alias, this time opting for *Miss Mysterious*.

She raised her head and lifted her brilliant green eyes to

his. For the moment, he forgot what he was going to say. It probably wasn't important. Instead, he lowered his lips to meet hers. She kissed him back sweetly until she pulled herself even closer to him. Her hand landed on his waistcoat, and he covered it with his, until she slid her fingers up to twine in his hair.

He could do her one better than that. He broke their kiss just long enough to give her a mischievous grin, then leaned forward and scooped her up, pulling her onto his lap. Before she could—teasingly—protest, he kissed her again, and she returned his kiss with equal enthusiasm, wrapping her arms around his neck.

Fischer moved to trail kisses down her neck, and she sighed in delight. "I love you."

He slowly traced the tip of his nose back up her neck, eliciting a shiver before he placed a final kiss in the hollow beneath her ear. "Then marry me."

This time, her sigh was decidedly not delighted. "Fischer."

He fought back a sigh of his own. He was fairly certain that among other courting couples, talk of marriage was actually welcome. It usually did not mean an end to affections or ruining an evening.

But Constance pulled away. Still on his lap, her feet dangled helplessly above the gravel path, so Fischer obliged her and helped her to stand, even if it meant she'd be walking away from him.

Once she was a yard away, she turned back around. "Why do you keep asking?"

"Because I want to marry you."

Constance gave him a droll look and folded her arms. "And why do you want that?"

Fischer couldn't help but cock his head. Wasn't it obvious? "I love you?"

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She looked away, shaking her head, then turned away and started for the house.

“Constance.” He hurried to catch up to her, to catch her hand. “I’m sorry.”

She stopped. “Why do you keep asking?”

“Why do you keep saying no?”

“Do you not like courting me?”

Once again, Fischer could only look at her in confusion. “Of course. But I didn’t think courtship was an end to itself.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

It certainly seemed like it was what she meant if every time he brought up the subject of marriage, she asked him to wait a little longer. He was not growing impatient yet, but he was beginning to worry that “a little longer” would only continue to grow a little longer.

“*Mademoiselle Morose.*” He lifted her hand to his lips, kissed her knuckles and then each of her fingertips, until the consternation written between her brows began to ease, and she did not look so terrifyingly serious. “I love you. I do not want you to leave me, tonight or ever. I wish to have you here with me always.”

“So you can go off to the print shop in the morning?” She shrugged one shoulder. “There is no ‘always’ about it, *mon cœur.*”

“There would certainly be a lot less parading you across town to and from your parents’ house.”

“My home.”

Fischer nodded slowly, pretending to concentrate on the garden’s lavender Michaelmas daisies and red roses. Did she not wish to make *this* her home? Was that the problem? He realized the interior hadn’t much to recommend itself—it was small, and he and his sister had only meager furnishings—but he’d hoped that *he* might be a bit of an inducement.

Unless the opposite was true. “Do you . . . do I worry you?”  
“Worry?”

He managed a shrug. “That I will . . . fail you.” He didn’t know how to put it into words, but those covered a multitude of his own concerns: that he wasn’t good enough for her, that he’d hurt her, that he would fall short in some way that she needed him.

“No, dearest, no.” She placed her free hand on his cheek and waited until he met her eyes. “Not at all.”

He believed her at least enough to give her a quick kiss.

“Fischer?” she said softly. He looked to her again, but she was focused on his hand, still holding hers. “Don’t ask again.”

He couldn’t respond for a long moment, but finally said, “As you wish, *Mademoiselle Sombre*.” He’d hoped the endearment—dark as in gloomy—would lighten the mood, but his own tone was too serious.

Constance glanced at the sky and sighed. They both knew they should have started for her home long since.

Why did she not wish to make this her home? He took her inside and fetched his coat while she said goodbye to his sister, their ostensible but usually invisible chaperone. Did she not wish to live with Lydia? But they were one another’s closest friends.

Constance hugged Lydia and accepted his offered arm with her loveliest placid smile, so it didn’t seem either of them were the problem. Conversation, however, was strained at best, but, then, that seemed normal when one has just had one’s proposal of marriage rejected. Again.

He’d only asked her three times over the last three months—unless one wished to count the time he’d asked immediately before asking to court her, but he never did. He’d tried his best to be patient, and he didn’t mean to exert pressure on her.

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Was that it? Had he pushed too hard? “I don’t mean to make you feel pressed,” Fischer said.

“I know.” Constance’s tone seemed completely unconcerned, but sometimes she worked so hard to not upset him that she was very difficult to read. For his part, he didn’t find her upsetting—not even her anger, which she only rarely allowed—but he was learning this was her way.

Tonight he couldn’t help it. He was caught up in the moment, enjoying her, and the words had just slipped out. That was really how it had been that very first time, and the second. It was less painful when the proposal was impromptu.

Last month, however, had been different. He had planned. He had gone out of his way to put together a special evening—no mean feat in a city that was adhering to Congress’s strict prohibitions on imports and entertainments. He’d gathered every book he could lay his hands on, coaxed Lydia to make pickled grapes, and dressed and groomed his very best in an attempt to impress Constance. He had poured out his heart to her and asked her to marry him.

But she was not ready.

“*Monsieur Grave*,” Constance cut into his thoughts. “I’ve hurt you.”

“*Bien sûr que non*,” he reassured her. Last month, it had taken him days—and two sweet letters from her—to gather the courage to approach her again, sure as he was that she meant to end their courtship. Today, he’d handle his disappointment without the fear that she meant to take her leave of him forever.

But not without the worry that she meant to merely court forever.

The long walk back to her house was mostly quiet. Constance did try to keep up her side of the conversation, but his own will to speak seemed to be snuffed out along with the

dying light. By the time they reached Society Hill, he had more to say to a passing lamplighter than to her. At her house, he was prepared to merely kiss her hand in the street, but Constance did not release his hand, tugging him inside to kiss him properly. He did his best to return her kiss, but his enthusiasm had fled as well.

Constance searched his eyes. "I love you, Fischer Marks."  
"I love you, *Jeanne Dark*."

She kissed him one last time before her younger sisters poked their heads in the entryway to make sport of them. Normally, Fischer would tease Verity and Mercy back by sweeping Constance into his arms for a passionate embrace, but tonight he took that as his cue to beg off supper with her family and leave.

Would she ever wish to marry him?



The morning after her swain's fourth proposal, Constance was in desperate need of sisterly advice. She walked to Papa's office and waved to her brother-in-law Owen there before she headed up the stairs to the flat he shared with her sister. Temperance answered right away, beaming. Though she had another three months until she was delivered, there was no mistaking the roundness of her belly that pulled her petticoat hem a few inches higher.

Temperance took her into their little drawing room. Constance had only a few memories of their years in this flat, but they were cozy and happy, most of them in this room, curled up with Mama and her sisters, reading or sewing.

Temperance eyed the walls as if that was what Constance had been looking at. "I know, I'm tired of this yellow as well.

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Do you think green would be strange in a drawing room?"

Constance laughed; their parents' house had a green drawing room. Temperance realized her mistake, placing her fingers to her temples. "I am so very forgetful lately!" She patted her stomach. "I'm going to blame him."

"Do you still think it's a boy?"

"Oh, definitely. Owen agrees."

"I agree to what?" Owen said from the door.

"You're a sneaky one!" Temperance's tone sounded displeased, but her expression was delighted. Owen took a seat on the couch next to Temperance, and she hopped up to perch on his knee instead. Owen placed a hand on her belly. She moved his fingers and held them against another spot. They exchanged a loving look.

Constance watched them with a pang. Would she ever sit like that with her husband?

Temperance kissed the end of Owen's nose. "I was just telling Constance you agree that the baby is a boy."

"Of course I agree."

Constance was sure he did; one did not disagree with Temperance Hayes Randolph if one wished to remain in her good graces. Or in good health.

"And how are you today, Constance?" Owen asked.

She'd really come here to seek Temperance's advice—her oldest sister had always been the one to understand even the most unintelligible of men—but when her brother-in-law asked, she knew he really wished to know. "I am . . . disconcerted."

Owen and Temperance exchanged a glance. "About what?" Owen asked.

Haltingly—and omitting certain details that she did not need to admit even to her own sister—Constance explained what had happened the night before. By the time she finished,

Owen and Temperance had gathered around her chair, Temperance holding her hand.

“Do you love Fischer?” Temperance asked.

“Of course I do; more than anything. But how does one know if one should marry?”

Temperance glanced at Owen. “I suppose it’s different for everyone,” she said. “But for me, I couldn’t imagine my life without Owen. And I’d tried very hard.”

“Yes, but once you were courting already? How did you know *you* were ready to be married?”

Again, her sister looked to her husband. “I don’t know if anyone ever is. Cassandra keeps telling me that you can never be ready to be a mother.” Her fingers rested on her belly as if she weren’t even aware her hand had moved.

“But it was very like what Temperance said,” Owen said. “I didn’t want to be apart from her.”

“For a minute,” Temperance agreed.

Fischer’s shop was considerably further from his home than a flight of stairs. Would she see even less of him if they were married? Constance didn’t like that thought at all.

“I know Owen only works downstairs,” Constance said, “but you are still apart much of the time.”

Temperance and Owen turned to one another then, but Temperance quickly looked away, not meeting Constance’s eyes either. Whatever she’d just said, Constance was certain she’d erred. “What’s wrong?”

When Temperance said nothing, Owen gently supplied the answer. “My detachment is leaving soon, meeting General Washington in New York.”

Constance gasped. The Light Horse was being called to the war? Surely that was more of a trial than spending most of the day a few steps or even across town from your beloved. “When do you leave?”



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“In a few days.”

“You haven’t said anything.”

Temperance nodded. “We didn’t want to upset anyone too soon.”

A thousand questions streamed through Constance’s mind. Would David go with him? Would they be in danger? Were they being called into battle?

And what if . . . ?

Constance quickly turned the conversation another direction, before she could even think such a horrible thing. After a few moments, Owen took his leave to brief Joyce on one of his cases the clerk would be taking when Owen left.

Constance gave her sister and her husband space for a lingering kiss before she joined her sister at the door. “How are you bearing up?” Constance murmured.

Temperance’s gaze fell to her rounded stomach. “It’s difficult, and I hate every minute.” She gave a shuddering sigh. “Even if the worst happened—which it will not—but even if it did, I’m glad to have had this much time with Owen.”

Constance embraced her sister. Before she closed the apartment door, Temperance flashed a brilliant smile. “Don’t worry yourself. Owen and I shall have decades together.” Constance pretended not to hear the faint “Shan’t we?” through the closed door.

Constance was even more unsettled now than before and certainly less certain about marriage. If the unspeakable happened, would Temperance feel that same way? And with a babe, by herself?

A block before Fischer’s shop, Constance paused. She’d only go in if she passed, and if she went in, she might never wish to leave. She had no desire to part with Fischer, ever. She’d brought him in the house last night because she wasn’t ready to take her leave. She never was. And she did want to

marry him—of course she did—but she simply couldn't picture her world if she changed its axis so suddenly. How was she supposed to leave her parents' home, the streets and neighbors she'd known since she was five, and somehow start over in another house with different people and neighbors and streets, make that place her haven?

Having Fischer by her side was surely a start, but for the rest of it? That seemed awfully hard.

Constance turned off High Street and realized she would pass directly by the draper's where her other married sister lived. Constance was not as close to Patience as she had once been—Fischer had courted Patience first, briefly, foolishly—but she was trying very hard not to let that make things between them awkward.

Gilbert was away from their flat, in session with the Continental Congress, and Patience seemed to have been working at her writing desk, probably legal research for a case for Papa or Owen. "I don't mean to interrupt," Constance said.

"It's all right." Patience welcomed her in. "How is your beau?"

With Patience married—and expecting a baby of her own, just a few months after Temperance—and Fischer courting Constance, they had almost moved past the awkwardness that might have accompanied such a situation. Her asking was still a bit strained. Not that Patience loved Fischer; she hadn't. She'd only ever loved her husband.

And that was why Constance had come. "How did you know you should marry Gilbert?"

Patience tilted her head. "It was the only thing that made sense. I loved him beyond all reason. Why wouldn't I marry him?"

"Oh, I didn't mean you shouldn't have."

Her sister watched her for a moment. "Do you mean to

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marry Fischer?"

Constance sighed. "Yes. I love him, and I do want to be with him, all the time. I just . . . it would be such a big change."

"That's true," Patience admitted. "Living with someone else—with different tastes and habits and standards—is a big adjustment."

She hadn't even thought about that aspect. Constance rubbed her temples.

"But you work together to see it through," Patience finished. "If you love one another."

That was the one thing she was certain of: she loved Fischer Marks.

She was just terrified and the prospect of losing her only home.

Perhaps that wasn't exactly what would happen. Temperance and Patience were still welcome at their house at any time. But it was always different. They no longer belonged there. The sleeping arrangements had changed, the drawers in the clothespresses, their seats at the dining room table and the drawing room and the church pew, all the little pieces of their lives that had fit together so perfectly before were now just gone, changed forever, lost.

And they had each taken pieces of Constance with them.

"Do you miss living at home?" Constance asked.

Patience thought a moment. "I miss living with people who understand all my private jests from childhood, who have already learned how much space I need, who already know how I like my eggs and porridge and tea—well, coffee these days." She took Constance's hand. "You all will always understand me in a different way than Gilbert does or ever can. But—forgive me—I wouldn't trade it for a minute."

"Really?"

"It is not easy, adjusting to a new life with a new person,

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but I love him more every day.” Patience squeezed her hand. “So if you’re asking whether I recommend marriage, I do.”

Constance laughed.

Perhaps . . . perhaps instead of losing pieces of herself, she would find new pieces to love.



Fischer wanted exactly one thing when he arrived home from the print shop the next night: to fall directly into bed. They’d had to print an extra edition of *The Watchman* today about the latest dispatches from New York. They’d gotten better information on losing Kip’s Bay and the city of New York, as well as the Battle of Harlem Heights, which they’d kept. Unfortunately, the latest dispatches said a good part of the city had burned.

Now he simply didn’t have any energy left, not even to visit Constance. And especially not to visit with Constance in her drawing room where they were sure to be supervised by at least three pairs of vigilant eyes, as if they knew exactly how little chaperoning they had at his house.

Most of all, he had no energy to visit with Constance while worrying she would never wish to marry him.

“Fischer!” Lydia caught him on the third stair. “I need you to go get a bunch of grapes from the garden.”

“You can’t do that yourself?”

“I’m making your supper, I’ll have you know.”

Fischer sighed. It was nearly dark, but he knew the garden well enough to find the grape arbor and pluck a bunch even in the dead of night.

When he stepped into the garden, however, it was not dark. It seemed like every lamp, lantern, candlestick and taper

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in his house—no, far more than he owned—lined the gravel path leading to the grape arbor, and there, on their bench, sat Constance in his favorite gown of hers, cherry blossom pink, adorned with ruffles.

He hurried to her, and she met him in front of the arbor. “I didn’t think I’d get to see you today,” Fischer said.

“I was beginning to think I wasn’t going to see you either.”

“I just arrived home. Long day.”

Constance frowned, but pushed past her disappointment.

Fischer gestured at the little flames. “What’s all this?”

“Lydia might have helped a little.”

“Have you been waiting long?” Several of the candles were little more than nubs.

Constance bit her lip. “Yes,” she finally confessed.

“I’m sorry.” Fischer slid his arms around her waist and pulled her close and did his best not to wonder at the display—or whether she would ever marry him.

He could enjoy being with her right now for as long as possible. And he wouldn’t ask again, no matter how much the words tried to fight their way free, no matter how perfect the moment—this moment—was.

“Fischer?” Constance began. “I love you. I love your sense of humor and your honesty, your passion for patriotism and your written words. I love the silliest things, how you dress and wear your hair and always note what I’m wearing and listen to the little details and tell me everything. I love you more with every passing day.”

By the time she finished her speech, Fischer couldn’t grin any more broadly. “I love you, too.”

“I’m sorry that I’ve been so hesitant. I was afraid.”

“Of me?”

She shook her head. “Of losing . . . my home? A part of me? I don’t know how to explain it.”

Fischer released her waist to take hold of her hands and kiss each of them.

“But I have much more to gain.” She took a step back as if holding him at arm’s length. “Fischer Marks, will you marry me?”

Even after her decorating the garden and her speechifying, Fischer startled. “Did you just propose marriage to me?”

“I did. Will you accept?” She looked up at him, her green eyes wide and full of hope in the lamplight.

“May I think about it?”

“Fischer!” She pretended to walk away, but he kept hold of her hand and tugged her back to him, wrapping his arms around her waist again.

“Constance Hayes, I love you. I love how you’re the only person I’ve ever known who makes me feel . . . not only accepted, but like I can accept myself. I love how you are wonderfully unassuming and yet in a heartbeat, you can rally, even when it seems impossible. I love that you take care of others and put up with every ridiculous thing I do and believe in me. I love that you’re willing to trust me with your future.”

He paused to kiss her, gently and slowly, and he almost forgot to finish his own speech. When he finally remembered himself, he added, “I would be honored to marry you. Tomorrow, if you’ll have me.”

“It might take a little longer than that.”

“Within the week?”

“I think it will take a little longer than that.”

“Within the fortnight?”

Constance paused, a little smile playing at the corners of her mouth. “That can probably be arranged.”

He had been joking—but Constance, he could see, was not. “Do you mean it, *Mademoiselle Dark*?” he asked.

She grinned. “Do you mean ‘*Madame Marks*’?”

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He swung her around until they were both laughing dizzily. Then he put her down and kissed her until they were both dizzier still. And very late for supper indeed.

*Post Script*

Did you catch that Owen isn't at Constance and Fischer's wedding in *Integrity's Choice*? You can read more about

Owen's 1776 tour with the Light Horse in the story "Christmas Crossing," found in [\*A Colonial Christmas!\*](#)