

*An Act of
Loyalty*

by

Audrey Glenn

Verity Crofton wasn't sure how much time had passed since her husband of all of five minutes had been detained by hateful British soldiers. She'd been quite insensate to nearly everything after the initial horror of his arrest. She vaguely understood she'd been taken alone to the Beauforts' house, though she wasn't quite sure what room she was in.

For the last dozen days, she'd allowed herself to be happy, no matter the British Army's encroaching on Philadelphia, the fact that her parents and three of her sisters couldn't attend her wedding, and the uncertainty of all their future plans. And then, before they'd taken a step out of the churchyard and into their married lives, Henry had been arrested and would perhaps be executed for no reason she could understand.

For all she knew, the redcoats had already killed her husband.

She moaned. Henry was lost to her, and there was nothing

she could do about it.

“Will you take some wine?”

Verity tried to regain awareness of her surroundings. She was in her cousin’s drawing room, and Cassandra herself sat in the chair across from a couch Verity lay on. The dim light came from a fire and not through the windows, so hours must have passed since the awful moment at the church.

“Where is Mercy?” Verity whispered, longing for her sister’s comfort.

Cassandra laid a gentle hand on Verity’s shoulder. “David sent her back to Columbiafield while the coach was still able to pass.”

Better for Mercy to be safe with the rest of their family. At least, Verity hoped her sister was secure. “How will we know if she made it?” She couldn’t bear to think of Mercy captured by the redcoats.

“Fred and Sam know their business. They’ll not let Mercy fall into harm.”

Cassandra hadn’t precisely answered Verity’s question, but Verity was too exhausted from grief to argue. “And Henry—” she broke off. She couldn’t seem to utter any of the many questions searing her mind.

A new voice came from the doorway. “Henry will be perfectly well.”

Verity looked up to see David, still dressed in the embroidered waistcoat she’d made him a present of, which he’d donned in honor of her marriage. She realized the implications of David’s words and sat up abruptly. “Have you seen him?”

“No, but I know where he is.”

“Take me to him!” Verity pushed off of her chair’s arm and tried to stand.

“Sit,” Cassandra ordered. She pushed a crystal glass of

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wine into Verity's hands. "You need fortification."

"I wouldn't say no to a bit of fortification." David came fully into the room and rested at the other end of the couch from Verity. He accepted another glass from Cassandra and took a long sip before speaking further. "Now, it seems there is a little bit of confusion related to Mr. Duché."

Verity gripped her glass so tightly she feared she would break the stem. "What has Amity done now?"

David chuckled. "Not Amity. Officially, Mr. Duché was the chaplain to the Continental Congress, and that's given General Howe enough suspicion to detain him and his assistant rector. I daresay that as soon as we explain Henry's support for the British endeavor, he'll be released."

"Is General Howe here in Philadelphia?" Cassandra asked.

"No, he marched through Philadelphia to make camp at Germantown. General Cornwallis is in command here in the city, under Howe's direction."

Cassandra folded her hands primly in her lap. "I know Earl Cornwallis."

David looked at his wife in surprise. "I'd no idea you counted an earl among your friends."

"I knew him before he was married." Cassandra waved a hand as if to say that was all in the past.

"I see." David drained his glass. "Well, perhaps your flirtation with the earl will be a boon to us."

"A few dances is hardly a flirtation!" Cassandra protested. She reached over and squeezed David's hand. "But I'll gladly do whatever I can. We can pay him a call, as long as Jenny can stay with the girls."

Verity took a sip of the wine and found it very sweet. She'd no idea what plans Cassandra and David were making. All of her energy was spent keeping herself from drowning in the abyss of her grief.

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David turned Cassandra's hand over and pressed a kiss to her palm. "I rather think that between you and Mrs. Crofton entreating the earl, we'll find success."

Verity nearly dropped her glass in surprise. "Is Henry's mother here?" Last she'd heard, Mrs. Crofton was living on Henry's estate in England. He'd only written to her a few weeks before, not nearly enough time for her to receive the news of Henry's wedding and travel all the way to America. Unless Cassandra or Helen had thought to write to their Aunt Crofton when Henry and Verity had first become engaged?

Cassandra offered Verity a gentle smile. "You, dear. You are Mrs. Crofton now."

"Oh." She sat back against the couch. Of course. How foolish to forget, even for a moment. Even if she didn't feel like a wife, bereft as she was of her husband.

David eyed Verity with concern. "We'll do nothing tonight. General Cornwallis is sure to be busy, and you need to rest in preparation for your big role tomorrow." He imbued the last few words with extra significance as if he thought to rouse Verity better spirits.

Did David think she would be cheered by reciting a few lines of Shakespeare? She wasn't fourteen years old any longer. "My apologies, but I fear I lack the heart for playacting." She wouldn't perform in any capacity until—if—Henry regained his freedom.

"Not a play," David corrected. "You and Cassandra will accompany me on a social call to General Cornwallis, where we will inform him that Henry is loyal and lean upon the general to grant Henry's freedom as soon as possible."

Verity pressed a hand to her head. She could hardly string two thoughts together, much less successfully beg for her husband's life. "I don't know if I can manage it. You and Cassandra should go without me." General Cornwallis might

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think he was doing Henry a favor by keeping him away from his addlebrained wife.

Cassandra and David shared a look, and then Cassandra took Verity's hand. "We can certainly plead Henry's cause, but your sorrow at having been parted from him at the very hour of your marriage may well be more influential than anything we could say."

"You've been preparing your entire life for this," David added. "You will gather your courage and impress the general with such a performance as he's never seen."

Verity smiled weakly at the compliment. "What performance? There could be no truer role for me than that of a heartsick wife." Her voice tripped over her final word. Each reminder of the events of that morning caused her a new pang of regret.

"That's the spirit." Cassandra stood. "Now, come. We must put you to bed."

David stood also. "I think I'll go . . . out."

Cassandra stared incredulously at him. "Tonight?"

"Just to discover what I can?" He made his answer sound a question, as if he was seeking as much clarity as she was.

Cassandra put a hand to his chest. "Not tonight. There will be time for that tomorrow."

"But—"

"Please?"

David covered his wife's hand with his own. "Of course."

Verity meekly followed her cousin from the room, wondering what conditions Henry was passing the night in. As soon as she was settled, she'd pray for him, and for herself, that she'd have the strength to help him.



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Henry Crofton paced the long length of the Walnut Street Jail room for at least the hundredth time that day, wishing the noise of his shoes on the stone floor was enough to block out the sound of Mr. Duché's whining.

"A man of God who has dedicated his life to good works," Duché droned on.

"Forty-four," Henry muttered to himself, counting the steps. "Forty-five."

"The utter audacity!"

The presence of other prisoners would have made the detention more tolerable, or at least they would have provided some distraction over the long hours since Henry had been dragged from the arms of his wife. It seemed that in the confusion of patriots leaving Philadelphia and redcoats arriving, the usual jailers and criminally accused had vanished.

Captain Rogers, the surprising former acquaintance of David Beaufort, had marched Henry and Duché from St. Peter's straight to the Walnut Street Jail and ordered some of his men to guard the prisoners as if the British Army had always had the run of the place.

"And I haven't been given so much as a quill to dash off a message to my wife and children, who must be beside themselves with worry." Duché continued in much the same manner he had done since they'd arrived.

Henry had a wife, too, and he'd not been able to write her either. Poor, dearest Verity. Henry's chest grew tight with worry every time he thought of her distress at the church. He hoped her cousin had taken her home, hating to think of Verity alone in the rectory, worrying over him.

"I have only myself to blame."

That was new. Henry spun on his heel and saw Duché, sitting on the bench lining the room, head in hands.

"I should never have allowed that rebel congress to press

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me into offering a prayer at their treasonous meeting. I certainly would have put my foot down if I'd known I was to hang for it."

Now they were back on familiar territory. "We'll not hang," Henry refuted. He resumed his pacing, thinking privately that Duché had done far more than merely pray—he'd supported the vestry in crossing out all references to King George in the Book of Common Prayer. But that had had much more to do with Duché's fear of offending anyone powerful rather than patriotism.

The heavy wooden doors swung open, and Captain Rogers paraded in with the confident movements of a military man. Henry didn't recognize the other four men who followed him inside the room, none in uniform.

Duché got to his feet. "I demand to know when this insult against man and God will cease!"

Though Captain Rogers bowed from the neck, he didn't look the least bit impressed by Duché's words. "As I told you earlier, I'm acting under orders to detain men whose loyalty to the king is under scrutiny. I shall inform you as soon as I have more information to share." He turned to go.

"Wait!" Henry called.

Captain Rogers spun around and shot Henry an impatient look.

Henry would risk annoying the captain further if it meant getting into contact with Verity. "My wife." Henry nearly choked on the word and the reminder his new wife was not at his side as she ought to be. "May I write to her?"

Captain Rogers shook his head. "You're not permitted to send correspondence."

"Could I press you to deliver her news of my wellbeing?" Henry was desperate enough to try and importune a near stranger. "She'll be worried."

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The captain's face softened a little. "I'll see what I can do." With that, he left, ordering the doors closed behind him.

The newcomers scrutinized Duché and Henry with curious expressions.

"I am Mr. Duché, Rector of St. Peter's," Duché intoned.

The men introduced themselves in response. Henry tried to make note of their names, but his concern for Verity made him dull. Though they shared little biographical details, Henry supposed the men to be well-to-do tradesmen, or even middling gentlemen, judging by the sturdy but well-made quality of their wool coats of practical blue and brown. When it was his turn, Henry muttered his name and bobbed a quick bow.

One of them, whom Henry believed was called Mr. Combes, leaned forward conspiratorially. "Are you Sons of Liberty?"

"Certainly not!" Mr. Duché spat, as offended as if the man had accused him of consorting with the devil himself.

"Oh."

Mr. Combes looked to Henry, who shook his head. Despite marrying into a patriot family, counting Henry among the Sons of Liberty would be a stretch.

Combes didn't seem disturbed that Henry and Duché weren't of their number, if indeed he and his companions were Sons of Liberty. "If you don't have association with the patriots, you should have no problems after you take the oath."

"Oath?" Henry repeated. "What oath?" If it was a matter of pledging loyalty to the crown, Henry had already done that when he was ordained.

Even without further clarification, Combes's words seemed to have roused Duché, who jumped up and began thumping on one of the wooden doors until it slowly opened.

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One of the soldiers pointed a bayonet at Duché. "What?"

Duché ignored the impolite greeting. "I am prepared to swear to anything you like so that I might be made free."

Henry ground his teeth. Duché's lack of honor went further even than he'd supposed if he was willing to "swear to anything," as he put it, for so paltry a reward as his freedom. The man was a disgrace to the entire order of clergymen.

"I've been given no orders to let you go. Or to speak to you." The soldier frowned and started to close the doors.

"I don't care about your orders!" Duché yelled as the door closed in his face. "I want to speak to your superior!" he let out a strangled yell.

The strain of being arrested had clearly broken Duché's mind.

"To answer your question, sir, the British require an oath of loyalty to the king, same as the Continentals ask for to their cause," Combes informed Henry, pretending the scene with Duché hadn't happened.

Henry hadn't been asked to take an oath to the patriots, not even when the city had grown tense with expectation of the British Army. If his vows to God upon taking orders meant anything, they must be good enough for the army.

He let out a short huff and turned to the long bench. "I suppose we should try and rest." Shaking his head, he pulled off the fine mauve velvet coat Beaufort lent him to be married in. It was hardly proper to remove his coat in a public place, but the day's events had taken him so far beyond what was correct that he could hardly be nice about manners. He rolled the coat up as carefully as he was able and placed it on the narrow wooden bench.

It was going to be a long night.

Verity, Cassandra, and David set out to importune General Cornwallis the next morning on foot, as both coachmen were at Columbiafield with all the rest of the people David wished to keep safe other than his wife and children.

David shook his head as he helped Verity and Cassandra over a pile of refuse on the sidewalk. "I'm going to have to find some kind of conveyance and driver, not to mention a different cook." David made a noise of disgust, appalled by the breakfast set before him by a man who claimed to have worked in the kitchens at City Tavern.

"And a new nursemaid," Cassandra added. Alexandra and Katherine had been left with a housemaid.

Verity's stomach had been churning too much for even the finest breakfast to tempt. As they walked through the neighborhood towards the center of town it seemed there were redcoats on every corner—marching briskly through the streets, talking in pairs, and even knocking on doors. "Do so many of the soldiers have friends here?" she asked, nodding in the direction of two redcoats perched on a set of marble stairs.

David's laugh wasn't particularly cheerful. "They are probably arranging quarter for officers. I expect such a visit myself."

"The officers expect to stay with the citizens?" There must have been a great many for there not to be room for them to stay at the city's inns and taverns.

"That is the way of things. I only hope we won't be forced to quarter anyone distasteful." His lip curled. Knowing David, he probably wasn't afraid of having to house someone of low status but a man of poor moral character. Cassandra patted

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him on the arm.

They passed by City Tavern and into the State House yard, where the number of soldiers exceeded the multitude they'd already passed by.

Verity stared up at the State House. She hadn't been to the grounds as much as Constance or even gone inside like Patience, but the landmark was ubiquitous to Philadelphia. "Is this where we're meeting the General?"

David gave a sharp nod. "We are to forget it was ever the seat of American government." He sighed heavily and then came to a standstill. "Verity, you must prepare yourself to hear some surprising things today."

Verity started to ask what sorts of surprising things David meant, but before she could speak, the man who'd arrested Henry approached them. Verity gripped David's arm. What awful tidings did the hateful man bear?

"Isn't that your friend?" Cassandra asked David.

David nodded and pressed ahead. "Lawrence!"

Verity stared incredulously. David actually sounded excited to see the man who'd ruined her life.

"Lord David," the man greeted. "How fortunate we meet." His gaze flicked to Verity. "Under slightly better circumstances than yesterday."

He remembered the wife of the man he'd arrested, did he? The last thing she recalled was Mercy shouting insults at the redcoat.

Verity looked to David, who only smiled affably. And Cassandra had just named the two men friends. "I don't understand."

"Forgive me! I haven't introduced Captain Rogers to you." David spoke as if they were paying a standard social call rather than a monster. "Cassandra, Verity, this is Captain Rogers."

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The Captain's bow was respectful. "Lady David. Mrs. Crofton. An honor to make your acquaintance."

Verity wouldn't have been moved to approve of him had he been the most well-mannered man in Philadelphia. "Where did you take my husband?" she demanded.

"He is in the Walnut Street Jail." Captain Rogers met her eyes, not seeming the least amount uncomfortable to enter in on the topic. "He was unharmed as of last night and very concerned for the anxiety his arrest must be causing you."

As of last night? The captain made it sound as if Henry was slated to be tortured at dawn. "I must see him!"

Captain Rogers shook his head. "They're being very cautious about those prisoners suspected to be rebels. They don't want to risk any secret information being passed."

"Henry is *not* a rebel," Verity insisted. "He's a vicar of the Church of England."

"Yes, his fellow vicar keeps reminding me." Captain Rogers's lips twisted into a grimace. "No matter what your husband is, it's beyond my authority to let you speak to him."

"There isn't anything you can do?" Verity begged.

The captain shook his head. "I'm truly sorry."

"We understand." Cassandra addressed her next comment to Verity. "Don't worry. We have a solid course of action before us."

David explained the plan to Captain Rogers. "We're going to attempt a meeting with General Cornwallis."

"I daresay you'll manage it." Captain Rogers cracked a grin. "It's certainly more likely Lord David will succeed than Lieutenant Beaufort."

"Good to be myself again." David smiled politely. "Where do you lodge, Captain?"

Captain Rogers jerked his head to the other side of the State House yard, where canvas tents formed neat rows. "For

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now, that tent, but hopefully not for long.”

“We’d be pleased to have you as a guest in our home.”

Verity’s eyes widened. David wanted this *particular* red-coat to live with his family?

The captain’s broad smile indicated genuine delight. “I’d be honored.”

David clapped him on the arm. “I’ll put in a word with the general.” Cassandra curtsied, the men bowed to each other, and Captain Rogers went on his way.

Verity realized too late she hadn’t curtsied. She looked back, but Captain Rogers, walking at a brisk clip, had almost made it past the stone wall. “Surprising things, you said?” Her voice trembled a little. The entire interchange with the red-coat had been shocking.

David lowered his voice so much that Verity had to lean in close to catch his words. “When we meet with the general you must act as if we have always been Loyalists. Can you do that? More than just Henry’s life may depend on it.”

“I . . .” Verity took a deep breath. As David said the day before, this was just one more role. “I can.” Despite her hesitancy, she would do whatever it took to free Henry.

“I know it.” David patted her hand. “One thing more—we’re going to avoid mentioning Henry’s profession. I’d like to try and keep him from being associated with Mr. Duché.”

Verity frowned, guessing how much Henry would dislike such subterfuge. He was proud to be a vicar. Still, she could see the merit in avoiding any connection between Henry and the man who’d once been chaplain to the Continental Congress.

They were admitted inside the State House on what Verity assumed was the strength of David’s title alone, though they were forced to wait some time for a response as to whether the general would meet with them.

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Everything on the ground floor seemed to be in chaos, with chairs from the assembly and court rooms pushed to either side of the wide antechamber to make room for rows of cots. Most of Verity's family would likely have been appalled to see the seat of American government, as David styled it, transformed into a barracks.

Best not to think about Papa or the others, not when she had a job to do. She was the wife of a Loyalist and therefore delighted to see her mother country succeed.

Verity took a deep breath and smiled benignly at two young soldiers moving a bench. One of them startled and dropped his load.

David snickered while Cassandra hid a laugh in her hand.

Another soldier came to fetch them upstairs to an upper room which must have been familiar to David but which Verity had never seen before.

A fine mahogany desk resided in the center of a moderately-sized room, with windows behind overlooking the State House yard.

The man sitting behind the table stood at once when they entered. He was forty or so years old, wearing his own hair, powdered gray, his long face lined with cares. He looked much like any of Verity's father's friends and associates.

Verity glanced from him to David. David exuded nobility, but nothing about the general would have marked him an earl.

David bowed deeply. "General Lord Cornwallis."

The general returned the bow. "Lord David. Pleasure to meet you. I knew your father, though not very well."

Verity couldn't resist glancing at David to see how he took the mention of his parent, whom she'd never heard him speak of, but David only inclined his head, face a mask of politeness.

"May I make you known to my wife?" he asked. Cassandra stepped forward.

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General Cornwallis's expression changed at once from polite to delighted. "It can't be Miss Crofton." He stepped forward and brought Cassandra's outstretched hand to his lips.

"I see you remember her." David's smile seemed a little forced.

"It's Lady David now, my lord." Cassandra curtsied deeply.

"How lovely to see you here! And quite unexpected." The general still held Cassandra's hand.

David cleared his throat. "And may I also have the privilege of making you known to my wife's cousin?"

"It would be my pleasure," the general assured him.

Verity curtsied deeply. "An honor to meet you, my lord."

General Cornwallis bowed in turn to Verity before addressing Cassandra once more. "One day, I should love to reminisce with you about the past, Lady David. If I have time before I leave, of course." He motioned for the soldier who'd led David and Verity to bring forward three chairs before the table. "Please, sit."

David helped Cassandra to sit, but his hand tightened on the back of his chair before he took a seat. Verity scrutinized the wooden Windsor pieces before taking her own seat. They didn't look special to her, but they must have significance to David. Perhaps they'd come from the Congress floor?

"I thought we'd have the privilege of the Army's presence for quite some time," David said, once the general had resumed his seat. "But you make it sound as if you won't be here long."

General Cornwallis chuckled. "Well, the army will be here until the rebellion is subdued, but I am to England for a visit with my wife and children. I have been due leave for a twelvemonth."

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Cassandra smiled. "You must be very anxious to be reunited with your family."

The general placed a hand to his heart. "That nonsense at Trenton prevented my going to them at the new year. You can hardly imagine my distress at having been parted from them so long."

Though David had been involved with Washington's crossing of the Delaware and subsequent victory in New Jersey, he maintained his composure. "With such tender sentiments, I feel certain you are just the person for us to appeal to. Mrs. Crofton's husband was unaccountably taken prisoner yesterday under suspicion of disloyalty." David made it sound as ridiculous as if Henry was accused of practicing witchcraft or some such.

"Under General Howe's order, there were many such men detained." General Cornwallis slightly emphasized his colleague's name, but Verity didn't know if he meant to imply he wasn't in agreement with the order or that he had no power to thwart it. "We can't be too careful with these colonists until we know if their loyalties lie with England. Some of them have not our esteemed lineage to tie them to king and country."

It was Verity's time to speak on Henry's behalf. "My husband was born in England, and he owns property in Wiltshire." She adopted what she hoped was a decent approximation of her sister Temperance's most appealing expression. "I'm certain you can clear up this issue and return my husband to me."

"Landed gentleman, you say?" The general looked to David for confirmation, who nodded. General Cornwallis began shuffling through a pile of papers. "Crofton, hmm." He pulled one out. "Oh." His tone was flat. "The vicar. I heard he was preaching rebellion."

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“You are thinking of Mr. Duché, the rector of St. Peter’s church,” Verity hastened to say. Let Mr. Duché sort out his own affairs; the Duchés wouldn’t do anything to save Henry. “My husband was sent here by the Bishop of London to investigate that matter.”

The general placed his paper back onto the table. “Well, if things are as you say, we should be able to clear things up by having your husband take an oath of loyalty.”

Verity’s spirits soared. An oath could be the work of a few minutes at most. “Could we go now and ask him to take it?”

General Cornwallis offered her a tight smile. “I’m very busy, but I will certainly give the order to allow it.”

Verity didn’t like the sound of that. Who could tell when such an order would be carried out? “I’m sure a word from you would ensure my husband could take the oath quickly.”

“It would mean a great deal to us.” Cassandra’s winning smile seemed to be enough to sway the general, who placed a hand over his heart as if she’d said something poetically affecting.

David grimaced.

“Very well.” General Cornwallis motioned to a soldier at the door. “Let the man be brought here.” He moved a paper on his desk and then glanced at David as if he’d experienced a sudden thought. “We can have you take the oath alongside your cousin-in-law.”

“Wonderful.” There was nothing in David’s tone to give away any hesitation he might have felt at the pronouncement.

The general’s attention reverted back to Cassandra. “Now, while we wait, do you remember the last time we met?”

“An Assembly, wasn’t it?” Cassandra recalled.

“Excellent memory.” General Cornwallis smiled approvingly. “It was the very same evening I was introduced to my bride, in fact.”

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David sat up a little straighter. “Oh, I’m sure we would love to hear about the countess.”

While General Cornwallis launched into a story about the night he met his wife, Verity stood and edged her way to the door. It was probably rude to go without taking her leave from an earl, but she wished to wait in the yard to share a private moment with Henry.

She hadn’t exactly convinced the general to set Henry free—Cassandra’s presence had been quite a bit more influential—but she’d accomplished her aim. As soon as he took the oath, he would be free.



Henry was marched out of the jail by an unfamiliar soldier, Duché sputtering in protest that he wasn’t to leave as well. Henry hastily retied his stock around his neck as he walked. He had barely been given enough time to put his coat back on.

He looked sideways at his captor. “Where are you taking me?”

“To General Cornwallis.”

“You said that, but where is the general?”

The soldier pointed towards the State House. “There.” Not a military camp, then.

Henry trudged alongside the officer towards the building’s entrance and caught sight of someone coming out. Henry squinted at the figure—a woman. It couldn’t be Verity.

It was. She was in his arms nearly before he opened them to her. He held her close, heedless of the soldier. “What are you doing here?”

She spoke at the same time. “I’ve been so worried for

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you.”

“I’m perfectly well, my frightful appearance notwithstanding.” Henry looked into the eyes of his love. “You look very well. Have you been staying with the Beauforts?”

“Yes.”

Verity glanced at the soldier, who bowed and then stepped away, keeping Henry in his sight. She continued speaking to Henry. “They’re inside talking to the general. He said they’ll let you go just as soon as you swear an oath of loyalty.”

“Oh, that.” He wrinkled his nose.

“Had you already heard?”

“Yes, and I’m sure I can dispense with it.” He’d been giving the matter a great deal of thought. If he could only have a chance to argue his case to someone in charge, he’d explain that he’d already sworn an oath to the king when he became a clergyman.

Verity shook her head. “I doubt they’ll let you free without taking it. The general said that even David will have to take it.”

Henry nodded. “That only makes sense.”

Verity raised her eyebrows at him.

Didn’t she understand? Henry lowered his voice. “Beaufort is one of the Sons of Liberty. He took up arms against the British. He signed the Declaration. Naturally, they’d want his word as a gentleman that he’s mended his ways.”

Verity was already shaking her head again. “Mr. Duché was the Congress chaplain. David and I only told General Cornwallis you own property in England, but he’d already associated you in his mind with Duché’s supposed treason.”

Blast Duché. The man was like a millstone around Henry’s neck. “I’m sure I can convince General Cornwallis I’m not disloyal if I could just have a chance to speak to him.”

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“Make the oath,” Verity urged him. “The only thing that matters is to see you free.”

He tried to make her understand. “I’ve already pledged myself to God and king. Once I remind the general of that, there shouldn’t be a problem.”

“What of your vow to God yesterday at the church?” Verity clutched Henry’s arm. “Did you mean it?”

“Of course!” He would uphold every word of his promises to love and cherish her.

“Then please just make the oath. Don’t argue and put yourself under further suspicion. I can’t bear it.”

Henry looked into his wife’s eyes, principles warring with his heart.

It only took a moment to make his decision.

Before Henry could tell her, the soldier stepped close once more. “Best not to keep the general waiting.”

Henry tucked Verity’s arm into his and followed the soldier into the State House and up the stairs into the general’s office.

Beaufort introduced Henry to General Cornwallis as Cassandra’s cousin, which seemed to raise Henry in the earl’s esteem. “Ah, quite a family reunion, then. Well, I’m certain Lady David isn’t harboring any rebellious traitors in her family, but we must take care of the formalities.”

Henry managed to keep his face impassive. Did the general have no idea that Beaufort was a member of the Continental Congress who’d signed the Declaration and served under Washington? Not that Henry was planning to draw attention to those facts.

Verity’s hand tightened on his arm, and Henry rubbed his thumb over her knuckles reassuringly. All would be well.

General Cornwallis motioned to a piece of paper. “If you’ll just repeat after me, Mr. Crofton.”

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Henry clenched and unclenched his jaw. He didn't like it, but his principles didn't stand a chance when it came to making Verity happy. "I'm ready." He didn't even try to argue.

"I acknowledge—" General Cornwallis broke off. "Lord David, you might as well take the oath now, while you're here."

Henry raised an eyebrow. Lord and Lady David now, were they?

"Of course." If Beaufort found the ordeal of swearing the oath as distasteful as Henry, he made no sign of it as he stepped towards the general's desk.

"Where was I?" The general squinted at the paper. "Ah yes. I acknowledge the colonies to be sovereign to George the Third, King of Great Britain . . ."

There here was nothing too objectionable in that. Henry and Beaufort obediently repeated that part of the oath.

". . . and I swear allegiance and obedience to said King George . . ."

Henry frowned. He'd already given his allegiance to the king when he was ordained a priest. Obedience was a whole separate issue.

He looked to his wife and saw Verity's shoulders sink. She offered him a small, miserable smile and then a nod of encouragement. She would accept Henry's decision if he didn't take the oath.

General Cornwallis looked expectantly at Henry. Beaufort had already repeated the line.

Henry could hardly honor and keep his wife from the inside of a jail. "And I swear allegiance and obedience to said King George."

Beaufort and Henry finished off the oath by promising to defend the king and his land against traitors.

"We'd be honored to host you in our home," Cassandra

Audrey Glenn

told the general, then Beaufort seconded the invitation and asked about housing a captain who used to work for his family.

Henry looked about. Was he free to go? He caught Verity's eye, and the pair made their way to the door.

"I'm sorry," Verity whispered to Henry on the stairs.

Henry raised an eyebrow in confusion. "Why should you be sorry?"

"You didn't want to take the oath, but you did." Verity looked down dejectedly. "If it wasn't for me, you would've been able to stick to your principles."

Henry paused on the steps leading out of the State House. He'd soon settle her fears. "There's only one thing I can think of worse than having to take the oath, and that's remaining parted from you any longer."

Verity's adoring look would have melted the coldest heart. "I'm relieved to begin the rest of our lives together."

Cassandra and David caught up to them outside the State House.

Henry bowed from the neck. "Thank you for your assistance in freeing me."

"Anything for our cousins." Beaufort inclined his head in return. "I'm happy my family name is finally worth something."

Verity looked at Beaufort as they passed out of the yard. "Is it strange to be Lord David again?"

"It's just another role." Verity and Beaufort smiled at each other.

"Did you mind taking the oath, dearest?" Cassandra's voice was too low to carry past their quartet.

"I'll do what I must to keep my family safe." Beaufort looked at his wife. "Does that make me despicable?"

Cassandra hugged Beaufort's arm. "You are the furthest

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thing from despicable.”

“Thank you.” He managed a half-smile and turned to Henry. “You should leave this city at once.”

“Leave?” Henry and Verity had intended to return to the rectory after their wedding the day before and remain in Philadelphia to continue to assist the poor of the parish.

“British supplies have been hindered by Forts Mifflin and Mercer.” David spoke in the merest whisper. “Already people buy up the food remaining in this city. We cannot know when there will be more.”

The poor of the city were already wretched. If hard times were coming, how would they fare without someone to help them? Henry looked at Verity.

“If you wish to stay in Philadelphia, I’m sure I can manage.” Her expression was earnest enough to cause Henry pain. Verity trusted him to choose for her.

“Your duty is to Verity now.” Cassandra’s prompting was gentle but firm.

Henry nodded. “We’ll leave for England as soon as we can. I’ve been away from my home far too long.” He pressed Verity’s hand. “If that’s all right with you, of course.”

“I will be happy as long as we are together,” Verity assured him.

“Forever,” Henry agreed. “I can’t abide by anything else.” They made their way back to the Beauforts’ home, free and safe, at least for the time being. Ready to take up where they’d left off at the church.

The End