

THE MAJOR'S LADY



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BLUSHING BOOKS

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PROLOGUE



OCTOBER 31, 1780

At first, he wasn't sure if he was dead or alive. He could have been lying on the ground, experiencing Hell's first welcome as much as on the bloody, body-strewn battlefield that straddled the boundary line of North and South Carolina. Searing pain bit from all over, his right leg, shoulder and back. It was a struggle to draw breath and the result was a sound unlike any he had ever made.

The death rasp, he thought dully. Means...alive, still alive.

"Wes," John Paul cried, suddenly looming in front of him. He looked full of agonized concern, and his shirtfront was covered in blood. He was saying something, but there was so much noise that Wes couldn't make it out.

"—hear me?" John Paul asked. "We won! It's a high cost, but we stopped them." He looked up and frantically motioned to someone. "Get the doctor here, and hurry! The major's regained consciousness."

John Paul's call seemed to echo, or perhaps several men were

shouting the same order over and over again. Wes tried to recall what had happened, but all that came to him was a memory of thick, black smoke, the deafening noise of gun volley and the sound of men screaming and yelling.

It was a bad place to have held the battle because the enemy had taken control of the hills to the south and east, but they'd had no choice. They couldn't allow the enemy battalion to meet up with Cornwallis who was said to be in Charlotte. The Continental Army had to either defeat the Redcoats here or die trying. And die they might, he'd realized, they were so outnumbered.

It was coming back to him—the redcoats advancing with bayonets drawn, the sharpened steel flashing in the late afternoon sun. Patriot sharpshooters had picked the Redcoats off, and so many had fallen, and yet they'd kept coming, live soldiers stepping over the dead and wounded without so much as a glance downward. Wes had known they were running low on ammunition, and there seemed to be no end to the Redcoats coming through the pass between hills. As the sun lowered, casting the valley into deep shadow, he'd felt certain all would be lost. *'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,'* ran through his mind. "I will fear no evil," he'd mouthed in response to the unbidden thought. *Damn you, I will fear no evil!*

John Paul took hold of his hand and squeezed it. "Stay with me, my friend. The doctor is coming."

Wes didn't have the strength to reply.

"Do you remember what happened?" John Paul asked. "You were shot from your horse as you led the last charge."

What Wes was suddenly remembering was his brother's face. They had seen each other from across the field of battle, each in a different uniform. Alexander had been there. "Alex—"

John Paul nodded tersely. He looked around them before lowering his head again and sharing, "He got away. Retreated with—"

A loud cry drowned out the last of his statement. Wes's gaze

sought out the source of the cry, a group of men gathered around a large tree some thirty yards' distance away.

"Don't move," John Paul snapped. "You've lost enough blood."

Wes stared at the group, but he couldn't comprehend what the large, colorful objects dangling from the limbs of the large oak were. The realization hit with a sickening force. The objects were men in scarlet colored uniforms. The men, *his* men, were hanging the prisoners. Another had just been hoisted into the air to a loud cheer. The condemned man's body jerked violently and Wes felt the struggle in his own as he fought for a breath. This was wrong. Wrong! "Stop," was all he managed to get out before black spots danced in front of his eyes and a sick lightness of being began overwhelming him. He was dying and he wouldn't be able to stop the abuse. "Stop them."

"I tried, Wesley. They've gone mad."

"You have to."

John Paul stood. "Stop the hanging," he bellowed at the top of his lungs, starting toward the crowd with ferocity. "The major says to halt the executions immediately. Cut that man down!"

They were the last words Wesley heard before he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER 1



OCTOBER 30, 1783

"Why tomorrow?" John Paul demanded, scowling at Wes. The three of them, he, his wife and Wes were in the drawing room enjoying tea. Or he had been enjoying it until Wes announced he was leaving.

"Please don't raise your voice, dearest," Maggie said sweetly.

Wes found them amusingly predictable. Their concern for him was both real and evident, although it could not have taken more different forms. John Paul thought he could bellow some sense into him, while Maggie thought he should be handled delicately. Of course, neither approach would work. He was a hollow vessel filled with regret and memories so gory and painful they leached all the color and taste from life. The fact was he would never have what John Paul and Maggie had. He loved them both, but he also envied their happiness.

"Stay another month. Better yet, stay until Christmas," John Paul urged.

An exceptionally comely maid entered the room with a pot of

fresh tea and began filling cups. Eunice. Wasn't that her name? Wes had noticed her uncanny ability to convey sensual looking messages to him when no one else was looking. Maggie would have dismissed the girl on the spot had she witnessed it. Not that he was going to mention it.

There! The sultry little imp did it again. She narrowed her eyes at Wes and a corner of her mouth crooked up as if they were sharing some lurid joke, and she did this the instant Maggie's attention was diverted. Perhaps he might stay a bit longer after all and see just what the maid had in mind by those uncensored looks of hers. "Perhaps I will," he mused aloud.

"Oh, do, Wesley," Maggie urged. "You know we're going to throw a ball in December."

Wes almost replied, *and you know how I love a ball*, but Maggie, of all people, did not deserve sarcasm. Not only did she have an angelic look about her, with fair hair and porcelain skin, she had a kind heart. "You mentioned it," he replied with both patience and humor.

"It's time to celebrate," Maggie went on. "To get back to normal things." Maggie's gaze sought out her husband. "We should choose a date soon. Invitations need to go out."

John Paul grunted noncommittally and looked out the window at the rainy afternoon, thinking about what Wes had in mind to do tomorrow. For the last three years, on October thirty-first, it was the same thing, revisit the ghosts of his past in that damned valley where he'd very nearly died. It was one of Wesley's most unhealthy obsessions. John Paul had tried, but damned if he could think of a way of discouraging the practice. *Leave it behind, Wes*, he'd said a hundred times. *Move on with your life.*

"I have something to do tomorrow," Wes said to her, "but I could return. I might even stay for the ball."

"We'd love that," she said with a smile.

John Paul looked at him with a troubled expression on his face. "Forgo what you're planning to do tomorrow. Please."

Wes set down his cup and rose. "I can't," he replied. "And we've been through this before." He looked at Maggie. "If you'll excuse me?"

"Of course," she replied softly. She nodded as she watched Wes leave the room. His limp always tugged at her heart, although it was not so very pronounced. In fact, it seemed almost symbolic of the internal crippling from his war experience. At the beginning of the war, both John Paul and Wes had been so different. Young, wildly handsome, full of spirit and idealism. Well, John Paul had not been *wildly* handsome perhaps, except to her. She had loved him from their very first meeting and she still loved him that much and more, but he sometimes exasperated her. "John Paul," she said when Wes's footsteps could no longer be heard. "You should not push him to—"

John Paul shook his head and held up a hand, and Maggie bit her tongue yet again. "Then let's choose a date for the ball."

"Not now," he replied grumpily. "My head aches."

"You cannot cure him, my love."

He looked at her tenderly. "If only I could dissuade this punishment he puts himself through. You know he's going back to that damned valley."

She nodded.

"There's no reason for it."

"He feels a reason. And until he no longer feels it, he will go."

He frowned. "Must you always be so calm and wise and...right?"

She grinned and then chuckled. "I would like to think so."

"What do you think he has to do tomorrow?" Verity whispered from behind the door that connected the drawing room and the library. Verity was taller than the other maids, willowy with fair red hair and pale freckles. She'd been told she was pretty enough to be a front parlor maid, but Eunice was beautiful. If the position came open, she would surely get it.

"All I care about is that he's coming back," Eunice said with a gleam in her eye.

The housemaids quickly went back to their work before they

were caught eavesdropping. Verity lived in fear of being caught doing something wrong. If either the master or the mistress caught her, she might be sent packing, and if Mrs. Tidwell, the housekeeper, caught anyone misbehaving, there was punishment. She'd only received one punishment in her tenure at the Nordstrom home, a vicious spanking on her bare bottom and the backs of her legs with the back of a large wooden hairbrush, and she never wanted to receive another. That had been punishment for taking a nearly empty box of chocolates from a guest's room. The guest, one portly Mrs. Darren, had several boxes, so Verity thought she wouldn't notice. She'd been made to apologize and return the box, and then came the punishment.

Eunice had only been with the household for half a year and she had already been punished three or four times. It never seemed to faze her. Eunice was different, brave and daring and full of knowledge about things young ladies of good character were not supposed to know. Most of the other maids thought she was a bad seed and avoided her. Martha had called her vile once. It was the night she heard Eunice naming the five best areas of the body to tongue a man. Verity didn't remember all five, but most were places she never would have touched with her tongue or with anything else, for that matter. She strongly suspected Eunice said much of she did for the fun of shocking others.

Verity knew it was sinful to allow herself to be touched the way Eunice did in the late night when the others slept, but it was so pleasurable. Mostly, the touching was done in silence, if you didn't count the soft moaning, which her pillow mostly muffled, and the heavy breathing, which she couldn't help. Sometimes, though, Eunice would curl up to her and whisper in her ear, "You want it, don't you?"

Eunice's hand would stroke and tease through her nightgown before deftly, slowly, slipping underneath. Fingers moved between the crack of her arse and teased before moving the few inches forward to play in her wetness. "Oh, I feel a hungry pussy," Eunice

would breathe in her ear. "How many fingers would pussy like to eat tonight? One?" And in it would go. "Two?" Verity would be moaning into her pillow, but arching her back so Eunice could best position those magic fingers. "How about a nice, fat thumb? You like that? You want to be thumb fucked?"

The words were impossible to forget. Verity would try and go about her work the day after an encounter, but the words would keep repeating themselves over and over again in her mind, making her wet and needy all over again. Perhaps she would languish in Hell for her sin, but at least Eunice would be there, too.