

Deleted scene from *AMERICA'S FIRST DAUGHTER: HE IS HANDSOME* (c. December 1789)

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There is something to be said for persistence.

We'd scarcely unpacked before Tom Randolph rode into our drive atop his father's bay horse.

He came on some pretext of having business in the area, and hoped he might be welcome to stay the Christmas holiday. Without realizing what I'd been fleeing from, my father bid him welcome and told him to stay as long as he liked.

Then again, I'm not sure it would've mattered if Papa had known how desperately I wanted to escape the attentions of Tom Randolph. The truth is, Papa was never able to deny his hospitality to anybody—a thing I lament now even more than I did then.

Tom had virtually *followed* us all the way from Tuckahoe and now made little secret of his desire for my company. Which made me all the more grateful that my Carr cousins had come to stay for the holiday too. The conditions of the house were rough, but we all made do, huddling together before a fire like frontiersman, until, on Christmas Day, Papa took Sally for a ride into town to pick up some candle snuffers and other supplies at the store where her sister Mary had taken up with a white man. Like their mother before them, Sally and Mary Hemings had *both* become mistresses to white men. And again, I wondered bitterly if that was the natural fate of pretty mulatto girls, or if it'd been by design...

I stood at the front window watching Papa and Sally ride off, and seeing me there, Tom invited me to play in the snow. Moody and cross that I couldn't escape Tom, I refused. "I don't play," I said. "I'm not a child."

"No," he said, his voice dropping suggestively. "You are a woman grown. And I'm man enough to appreciate it..."

*Any other girl would welcome his heated gaze*, I thought. So why did he chase after me?

Every day I asked my Papa if a letter had come for me from France.

*Has William written? Does William care that I'm gone? Does he want me to return to him, in spite of all?*

These were the thoughts that consumed my every waking moment, plunging me further into despair. And I wanted to be alone with that pain, with that secret agony. It felt nothing but disloyal to even smile at Tom Randolph, who had the eagerness of a puppy.

"Come on, Patsy!" my little sister cried. "Come outside with us. The Carr brothers are challenging Tom to a contest on the ice."

And where I could refuse Tom, I could not refuse my sister. Before long, with our shepherd puppies nipping at our heels, Polly and I were sliding on the ice with Dabney and Tom. I didn't want to enjoy myself. I didn't want even to smile. And when Tom initiated a little war game with

snowballs, I hit a patch of ice, which sent me slipping down hard, knocking the wind from my lungs.

In that instant, all I could see was the face of William Short all those years ago when we fell together in the snow. The way his little finger had clasped mine, and the way I'd felt, so innocently, as if our hearts had touched. That was, I think, the very last moment, I was an innocent. The last time I ever believed in the sweetness or goodness of romantic love. It was before I ever knew of my father's mistress. Before I knew the true misery of heartbreak.

Now another man lay down beside me in the cold, whispering sweet things into my ear that were as like to melt away to nothing as our bed of snow. He took the liberty of pressing his whole body against my side in such a reckless manner that I could feel his desire. *Desire*. He had somehow convinced himself that he wanted me. I will say this of Tom—he never made me guess what he thought or felt about anything and he wasn't afraid to feel things deeply. His excitement, his fears, his happiness and pains were all very close to his skin. And now they were close to mine. "Miss Jefferson, I am smitten. I love you and cannot imagine being happy without you."

Bitter laughter threatened to break free of me. "How very...flattering. But you should say nothing so rash. We've scarcely spent a week in each other's company."

"To the contrary, we've known each other since we were children. Now I'm twenty-one and you are seventeen and there's nothing to stop us from doing as nature urges."

*As nature urges*. Well then.

In France, William Short had accustomed me to the *art* of seduction, but there was no playfulness or guile in Tom Randolph. In truth, he was about as different a man as William Short as there could be. In looks, he was dark. In temperament, he was direct, serious, proud, and mercurial. The gleam in his eye wasn't mischief, but a predatory spark. And by my utter indifference to him, I had inadvertently set myself up as the fox to his hound.

Some part of me ought to have taken a warning to the way his blood ran hot at the sight of me helpless and mired in the snow.

But in that moment, Tom's attention distracted me from all that troubled me. And I couldn't avoid him, since I was obliged to return to Tuckahoe as a guest at his sister's extravagant wedding.

There was a saying in Virginia that nobody was good enough for a Randolph except for another Randolph. And I was there to witness Judith Randolph of the Tuckahoe Randolphs sweep down the elegant walnut staircase of her father's home and pledge her life and love to Richard Randolph of the Matoax Randolphs.

The Matoax Randolphs also claimed descent from Pocahontas and all shared the family's dark, slightly wild, good looks. The groom and his brothers were all swaggering southern boys who loved pranks and politics. Between bites of dinner, Richard loudly decried the sins of his ancestors in ever bringing slaves to our country, and when it was time to dance, his two equally opinionated brothers boasted of the fine traditions of our tobacco culture and made a contest of dancing with every lady there.

But Tom kept me close to his side and so it was that on the very last day of the most eventful year of my life, I spent its waning hours dancing with a man who simply would not let me go...

You see, there was never in all the world a more eager suitor as Tom Randolph. For all that he exasperated me that Christmas holiday, his sheer *relentlessness* helped me forget the pain of losing Mr. Short, of leaving my friends in Paris, of knowing my father's secrets and seeing the evidence, all around me, of his financial distress. How was I to think of such things when, after escorting me home, Thomas Mann Randolph Jr. the heir to Tuckahoe, bent one knee and asked my hand in marriage?

"I—I will think on it," was my reply, holding onto the rail of my father's front porch.

"Say that you'll marry me, Patsy." The way he held his hands as if over a heart that might burst out of his chest if his desires were not satisfied, terrified me more than a little. "How long will you see fit to keep me in the misery of suspense?"

We were only a few days into the new year. Two years, Mr. Short had waited for me before he declared that he would wait no more. The young Mr. Randolph, I was certain, would never wait that long. I would have to give him an answer, and soon.

"He is handsome," Polly said that night in the room we shared. "He likes books, too. He's had his nose in Papa's library every day since he got here."

Yes. Tom Randolph fancied himself an intellectual, I knew. At supper every evening, where we served a very spare table for want of supplies on our mountain, he engaged Papa in philosophical talk. He was no match for my father, but then again, who was?