

Deleted Scene from *AMERICA'S FIRST DAUGHTER: POLLY FALLS* (c. 1797)

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The crash ripped through the house like cannon shot, sending me to my feet with a squalling infant at my breast and two children clinging to my skirts. My Ann was five years old now, and though she had become accustomed to the sound of hammers and shovels as my father demolished his home to make way for a grander vision, her eyes flew wide when the servants started shouting and hollering. Then Jeff began to howl, as if he'd stepped on another nail, as he was wont to do as a boy who kicked off his shoes whenever he could. And my darling new baby Ellen—the second of her name, and dear enough to me for two babes—began to cry.

Before I could quiet them, Sally burst into the room where her own little Harriet was crawling about. “Come quick, Miss Patsy! It’s your sister.”

One look at the panicked expression on Sally’s face and I surrendered my baby into the arms of a servant and fastened my gown. Together, Sally and I raced past canvas drapes and scaffolding to the back to the dining room where a half dozen slave boys crowded over a gaping chasm. Working together to pull up wooden planks, they called, “Can you hear us, Miss Polly?”

She’d fallen straight through the rotting floor boards into the basement. And never in all my life will I shake the sight of looking down into a hole to see that my poor little sister buried under a heap of dirt and splintered wood, laying sprawled like a broken doll on the cellar floor.

I screamed before I could stop myself. “Polly! Open your eyes!”

She fluttered her lashes only a little, as if they were too heavy with dirt and debris to lift. Then she groaned and tried to lift her head, while the boys all shouted at her not to move. When they’d pulled the most dangerous beams out of the way, one of them lowered himself down into the basement to help her up. The same impulse sent both Sally and I to the floor where we reached out our hands for Polly’s. Together we grasped hold of her wrists, while the boy lifted her up—then we pulled her the rest of the way.

Next thing I knew, I was there cradling her, tears on my cheeks, checking for broken bones. “Fetch a doctor!” I shouted at one of the boys.

But Polly, pale as death and trembling all over, murmured, “I—I don’t think I’m hurt. Just shaken.”

I didn’t believe her. Neither did Sally. We both checked her, then and there, for broken bones. Prodding at her everywhere, praising god she was alive. “What happened?” I asked.

In answer, Polly sobbed with the fright of it all. “I was coming back with tea, when my shoe caught the edge of a floorboard and I stumbled. Next thing I knew I broke through the wood and was tumbling down, down, down...” Her eyes landed on little rosette-painted pottery shards by my feet. “Oh, I’m so sorry. I think I broke one of your fancy tea cups.”

She might have broken her delicate little neck! “Fie on teacups, Polly. Where do you hurt?”

Her ankle was a tiny bit sore, and she'd scraped her elbow, but otherwise, miraculously, she'd escaped without harm. And while Sally went to fetch a bandage, I rocked my sister in my arms. "What a fright you gave us!"

"I'm just glad I was the one who fell through the floor, and not one of your adorable little ones."

"You *are* one of my adorable little ones Polly," I said, kissing her head like I did my babies. We were sisters, that much was true, but my mother's death had made us more than that. And I had just been reminded, powerfully, of just how dear my sister was to me.

With a play-pretend pout, she said, "If you don't stop treating me like a child and start calling me *Maria*, cousin Jack will never work up the courage to ask Papa's permission to woo me."

"You think that's what's stopping him?"

"What else? Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Frank already love me. I am a well-bred, French educated convent girl. And, as you say, I'm *adorable*. What more can Jack want in a wife?"

My nerves so on end from fright, I found this terribly funny. I laughed with abandon, until she whispered, "This house is a danger."

I knew why she whispered. With my father's new duties in the capital, neither of us wanted to add to his burdens by giving him more worry. He hadn't campaigned for the presidency; he was the natural choice of Republican electors. They had championed him in the papers while the Federalists triumphed by savaging him.

In the end, John Adams would be the second President of the United States. And we might all have rested easier, were it not for the meddling of Alexander Hamilton. By trying to manipulate the vote in favor of his own candidate, my father's bitter rival accidentally managed, with excruciating irony, to elect my father to the vice-presidency.

It was, by all accounts, a nearly useless office—especially when the man who occupied it led a different political party than the President himself. But my father could not be seen to refuse the vice presidency without tarnishing his image as a patriot and likely giving grave offense to John Adams himself, who was, in spite of the strains of recent years, still held by us in warm regard. Though they were avowed Federalists now, Papa and I remembered with fondness our warm friendship with the Adams family in France. And Polly still cherished memories of Abigail Adams, who had cared for her when she first crossed the ocean.

When I asked my father if he was disappointed by the result of the election, he re-affirmed his warm hopes for Mr. Adams, and insisted, "I protest before my god that I shall, from the bottom of my heart, rejoice at escaping the Presidency. No man will ever bring out of that office the reputation which carries him into it. The honeymoon would be short and its moments of ecstasy would be ransomed by years of torment and hatred. I've no ambition to govern men. Our Eastern friend will be struggling with the storm which is gathering over us, perhaps be shipwrecked in it. This is certainly not a moment to covet the helm."

Indeed, the infamous Jay Treaty had stoked up such resentment in Europe, where America was now seen as a false friend and betrayer of liberty, that we now had to worry about war with both Britain *and* France. And in this crisis, my father was obliged to accept a public office that would,

despite all his protestations to the contrary, take him from his farm and from his family—both of which were in sad disrepair.

In all, his retirement had lasted two years.

And without him, Monticello could be no home for us.

When Tom heard about my sister's plunge through the floor, it made him more determined than ever to be master of his own home—telling me to pack up my sister and the children, because it was time for us to go.