



**Forever,
Sarah**

A Novel By

**Gerald W.
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By
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DEDICATION

For JeDonne

**FOREVER,
SARAH**


Prologue

Sarah would never have imagined that when she fell in love it would be with a man covered with filth, lying face-down in a pool of his own blood. At sixteen, she treasured much more romantic notions about what that profound moment would be like.

Her notions may have been romantic. The times in which she lived were not. They were extraordinary times.

But Sarah was an extraordinary girl.

At First Sight

he white clouds hanging low over the Avon River produced a familiar sight. On this morning, however, as sixteen-year-old Sarah walked the path between the river and her family's small cottage, the sulfurous stench of gunpowder filled the air with the odor of rotting eggs. Before now she had known that smell only in the roosting shed of her family's farm.

And the puffy clouds were not an early-morning fog of refreshing mist, hovering over the gently flowing waters, but rather smoke, which lay heavy in the air throughout the rural

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vale of Edgehill, nestled between the small villages of Edgecote and Banbury. The day before, a brutal battle had been fought nearby between the King's troops and those of Parliament. The first major clash of the English Civil War had begun in the middle of the afternoon and lasted until darkness made continuing the slaughter impossible.

Sarah and her family had spent the day huddled together in their home, listening to the sounds of warfare, of cannons booming and the earth thundering beneath the hooves of frightened horses; of musket fire and the screams of men whose flesh had been torn open by hot lead or the razor-sharp edge of a saber.

Then, through the night, they heard the even more terrifying sound of wounded and dying men crying out, hoping to be found and carried from the field of battle, wishing only to survive their injuries and be sent home to their families. Their desire for war and for the glory that it would bring may have burned the day before. It quickly cooled after their first actual experience with battle, of seeing death up close, of fearing that they would be killed, very likely for a cause few even understood regardless of which army they had joined.

Sarah had no desire to leave the safety of her home near the hamlet of Wormleighton, despite the fact that the morning had brought with it a startling quiet, a quiet no greater than that which always awakened this gentle countryside. It only seemed so after the violent furor of the day before.

The chirping of birds that had returned to the beech and cedar trees bordering the surrounding meadows, the clatter of

insects in the high grass now browned by the October air, even the crow of a rooster that had escaped the pillaging troops of Parliament; these familiar sounds did not encourage Sarah that the danger had passed.

But the family needed water, as two days earlier a squad from one of Parliament's troops had plundered their home, taking all the food and livestock they could slaughter and carry. Then, accusing the family of being supporters of the King, they had poisoned their well with lime.

They should have saved it for the shallow, wartime graves they would be digging for their dead, Sarah's father had muttered.

Now, for her family to have water until a new well could be dug would require catching it from rain or hauling it from the river, and that task had fallen to Sarah. She only hoped to be able to fill her buckets and return to the house before anyone saw her, especially soldiers.

Sarah did not understand the issues of government or questions of religion that had led to this conflict. She had heard her father speak of the King's insistence on his God-given responsibility to rule England and the rights that this charge afforded him. He had spoken as well about the men in Parliament who, in his opinion, were making unreasonable demands of the King.

Her father had spoken of the King's stubborn refusal to recognize Parliament's legitimate concerns and the Queen's lavish lifestyle, as well as her refusal to embrace the Church of England in order to practice her Catholicism, despite the fact

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that in England the rituals of the Roman Church had been declared those of an outlawed faith. For the Queen to practice that faith and for the King to allow it, Isaac had said, was a mistake, though not one which would challenge his own loyalty to the Crown.

To Sarah, it was a conflict in which finding the righteous cause was not easy.

Ultimately, she did not care about the weighty matters of state that had led her country into civil war and landed her home in the middle of that war's first major encounter. She knew only the fear in her heart and the worry in her mother's and father's eyes as they considered how to provide for their family during difficult times.

Though only sixteen, and a girl, Sarah was the eldest of seven children and felt it her duty to take on the responsibilities of an adult. She would not show her fear and would do all she could to lighten the load her parents carried. Like the soldiers who had fought the day before, valiantly fighting for the cause they had joined, Sarah would protect what she loved as well — her home and family.

With that determination, she cut her path through the acrid smoke to the stream beyond.

What she saw, however, tested her resolve.

The water was discolored, muddy, carrying debris of battle, probably even the blood of injured men who had washed their wounds in the river or died along the shore unattended.

Her head sank. She closed her eyes tightly. She did not have to *look* at the destruction. But nothing could prevent the

smell of war and death from assaulting her senses. After a few moments of quiet reflection, Sarah opened her eyes again.

The water would be polluted for many days, perhaps until a strong rain washed it clean. That left her with the immediate problem of finding fresh water for the day's needs.

Sarah paused.

A small spring flowed into the Avon River perhaps one hundred yards downstream. She would have to dig out a pool deep enough to sink her buckets, but the water would be clean and fresh.

Should she first return to her home and tell the family why she was taking so long? No. If she expected herself to help as an adult, she must act as one.

Sarah hurried toward the spring. No path opened the brush along the river to follow, and after a few moments, Sarah's dress caught on a bramble. She stopped to free herself, then froze, eyes wide.

A noise from close by invaded the morning quiet. The low moan might have been from an animal, but she knew it was the sound of a person, possibly a soldier who had been injured the day before. She heard the pained moan again, from the river bank close to where she stood.

Run! But she could not leave an injured man, maybe seriously injured and close to dying. Sarah freed her dress and stepped tentatively in the direction of the noise. The wounded soldier lay in the soft dirt along the grassy bank of the river in the shadows of the trees. Even so, Sarah could see that he was a young man, perhaps in his early twenties, but no more.

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In her small, rural world, Sarah had never before seen a man like this one. She knew him to be a soldier, though he had nothing of the look of the ones who had plundered her family's farm. This man wore a silken white shirt with lace at the cuffs and collar.

Covering his elegant clothing was a buff leather coat with the elbows cut out to allow his arms to move freely. His baggy pants were largely covered by knee-high leather boots. A bright red sash draped from shoulder to waist. His armor, a finely crafted cuirass and gauntlet for his left arm, lay on the ground beside him, as did his saber, scabbard, and pistol. Nearby lay his large felt hat decorated with a feather of bright red plumage that matched the color of his sash.

The man was as elegant as his clothing. His dark hair fell in long curly strands across his muscular shoulders. His small beard, neatly trimmed, framed parted pink lips that seemed too feminine for such a man. His eyes were closed, however, and he seemed almost at peace, except for the wound in his side that had been bleeding for some time.

A pool of blood stained the ground where he lay.

He stirred slightly and grimaced although the pain did not waken him.

Sarah's eyes widened, and her feet seemed ready to act on their own and turn to run. Her look then softened as she licked lips that had gone dry. She would not run from danger. She would not leave a wounded man to die. And certainly she would not abandon one to whom she was feeling powerfully drawn.

Sarah crouched at his side and placed a gentle hand on his cheek. Despite the stubble, the man's unshaven skin was soft to the touch. Impulsively, her fingers traced the contours of the man's lips.

Alarming was the warmth she felt when she placed her hand against his skin. Already, the wound in his side had spread infection and he was running a fever. Having grown up on a farm, Sarah had learned early the lessons of life and death. She had joined her mother and father nursing animals that had fallen sick or suffered an injury. She had seen some survive and others not. She had never, however, grown indifferent to the sight of illness or death. She had wept often for the creatures she had cared for, tears of both sadness and of joy. Now, her heart filled with compassion for this wounded soldier, compassion and something more, something she had never felt before.

She must help this man.

She jumped to her feet and ran back to her home to get her father. Even before she ran, her heart was racing with the thrill that she had felt when she touched the warm skin of the wounded man.



When he finally stirred, the wounded soldier found himself snuggled deep in a feather bed, under a thick, down-filled comforter. With his first movement, Sarah rose from the chair where she had been keeping her vigil for eleven days.

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Her mother and father had not hesitated a moment to help the fallen soldier. Her mother had cleaned and stitched his wound, then treated it with an herb poultice of ground hawthorn root, yarrow leaves, and comfrey root that she changed twice each day.

They had learned from a letter he carried that his name was Arthur Tweed. Sarah knew from her father's observations that that was the name of a distinguished family from the southeastern part of England. His name, and the rank of his family, may have impressed her father. What had developed in Sarah over the past eleven days were feelings that had nothing to do with Mr. Tweed's family. She was drawn to this handsome young man, dressed in the garments of a soldier, a follower of the King.

Her father had referred to him as a Cavalier. Though Sarah was not exactly sure what that meant, she liked the sound of the word. The word "Cavalier" rolled from her tongue like fresh clotted cream. Sarah had begun to envision him attending the court of Charles I or dashing into battle against the enemies of the Crown. She could imagine the praise he would receive from a grateful King once he had returned, recuperated from his wound.

Then reality would enter her imaginings. To return to the court would mean returning to battle, to once again find himself in the path of danger. Romantic fancy clashed with the reality of the war that was splitting England. And with this reality, Sarah became keenly aware that whatever romantic notions she might wrap around Arthur's service to the King,

that service could well cost him his life. It had already almost done so at Edgehill, the first real battle at which the Royalists and the army of Parliament had engaged.

She wanted him to remain in her home as long as he could. She wanted him to stay with her family long enough to notice her and to be as drawn to her as she was to him.

Sarah found herself wishing her mother were not so talented an herbalist and healer, but then quietly chastised herself for such a thought. It would do little good for him to have remained longer in her home, only to experience a prolonged death for want of suitable care. Whatever her dreams might be, she lived in a world where reality was at times like a nightmare waking a child from sleep.

Still, she did dream. She was a young girl, and young girls dream. Sarah had sat as often as she could and watched Arthur. She would imagine to herself what it would be like were he to find her attractive. Sarah had no appreciation for her gentle beauty, the manner in which her hair curled around her ears and fell to her neck. Nor did she understand how a man would react to her intelligent eyes, her long lashes and full lips, the slight upturn of her nose, the fullness of her firm body as it grew into that of a woman.

Even less did she grasp how the quickness of her mind and the intensity of her spirit would appeal to a man of substance, a man whose interest in a woman did not rest only on the entertainment she might provide him. Living on a farm, Sarah rarely saw a man of an age or a lifestyle to appreciate these qualities, and she had no sense of them herself.

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Finally, after almost two weeks, Arthur's eyes opened. He squinted, adjusting to the dim light that edged its way into the room through a small window.

Sarah could tell from his expression that he had no idea where he was. Nor certainly who she might be.

He was awake enough, however, that his lips parted, the edges of his mouth turned up, and his cheeks lifted. Sarah's heart responded with a telling flutter. The feelings that had been growing in her for several days blossomed when she was finally able to see his dark, liquid eyes, which until now had remained shut.

Her face tinted red, though not so that this only partly awake soldier could notice.

"The last time I awoke from my sleep," Sarah's soldier whispered, "I was lying on hard ground and next to a snoring corporal who smelled worse than my horse." Sarah found no words and simply sat mute.

"I find this a much more pleasant awakening," Arthur smiled.

As the corners of his mouth turned up, dimples appeared in his cheeks. They made him look boyishly handsome.

Sarah jumped from her chair and darted through the door so quickly that she did not see Arthur's grin as he tried to lift himself before having to ease back into the bed.

"Not the response I would have hoped for," he muttered. Arthur surveyed the room. He had little light and even less to see, but a soldier always feels the need to assess his situation, even when snuggled in a feather bed, covered by a down com-

forter, and attended by a beautiful young woman.

“Well, it be good to see ye awake,” Bess Sexton said as she rolled into the room, followed closely by Sarah. Sarah’s mother spoke loudly, a touch of laughter in her voice. The large gap between her front teeth exaggerated her smile. “We weren’t right sure we were goin’ keep ye with us. But ye fever broke last night.” A slight shower of spittle shot through the gap in her teeth when she spoke.

Arthur snuggled into the comfort of the bed and managed to offer up his own grin. Sarah noted its warmth and how handsome this man became when the edges of his mouth turned up and his pink lips parted slightly.

“I am in your debt.” He spoke, with as much of a flourish as his condition would allow. His blue eyes sparkled.

Sarah felt herself slipping into those eyes as if into a pool of clear warm water. She noted the unusual contrast between the blue of his eyes and his dark coloring. But now that he was awake, she studied him again, as she had for days, and thought him certainly the most handsome man she’d ever seen.

“No man of ye King’s be in debt to this family. ‘Twas God what saved ye. Musket ball went clean through. Kept ye from dying. They be no surgeons nowheres near that could ‘ave ‘elpt. They all be with one army or t’other. I can tend a wound but have no skills to dig in a man’s flesh.”

“I am, nonetheless, your most grateful and humble servant,” Arthur said with a gallantry that suited him, and which had the grand ring of honesty. He seemed genuine, at ease.

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Still, when Bess Sexton threw back the comforter and he found himself covered only from the waist down, Sarah saw the shyness of the man as his face flushed a bright red.

Sarah's mother smiled. "Never ye mind. She's seed this much of ye already." Then she added with a quick wink and large gap-toothed grin, "It be only me what's seen any more." Again, a gentle shower accompanied her words.

Arthur laughed as deeply as his wound would allow. His laughter was music to Sarah as he acknowledged the splendid humor of this direct country woman who was examining his wound with a touch so gentle that it contrasted with the boldness of her manner.

As she peeled back the poultice bandage, he looked away, and his eyes studied the second floor room of the Sexton's small cottage.

The room was not overly large, having just enough space for the bed and a chest along the wall. The rough-hewn beams of the ceiling were low and the one narrow window allowed barely enough light to see.

"There," Sarah's mother said matter-of-factly as she finished replacing his bandages and threw the comforter back over Arthur, "that ought to 'ave ye fit for a while. Not likely to have anymore danger of that wound poisonin' again, not if we keep it clean and let my poultice work."

Arthur nodded and continued smiling broadly.

"Time to get somethin' into ye more than broth."

"I am hungry," Arthur responded.

"Good," Bess replied. "A hearty appetite always be a sign

of mendin'. I'll be back in a moment. I've a fine pot of warm stew with a few bits of hare on the fire."

"I'll go, Mother." Sarah spoke up quickly. If her mother left, she'd be alone with this man who increasingly disturbed her, ever since he had first smiled. It was a pleasant sense of being disturbed, but one that stirred unfamiliar and powerful emotions nonetheless.

"No, ye won't. Ye stay 'ere an' keep Mr. Tweed company. I've also got to send Seth 'long on a few errands. 'E'll not likely take 'is orders from ye," Bess called out as she left the room and started downstairs.

Sarah blushed. But her mother was right. Her younger brother, three years behind her, was never fond of being told what to do by his sister.

"You know my name?" Arthur asked.

Sarah looked at the floor. "Father found a letter."

Arthur laughed. "Please, it's all right. I don't mind his going through my things." Sarah lifted her head.

Arthur gave her yet another smile. "What's your name?" he asked. "And your family name?"

"I'm Sarah. My father is Isaac Sexton, and my mother Elizabeth. He calls her Bess. Everyone does."

"Freeholders?" Arthur asked, using the term that the English applied to men of modest, though independent, means.

Sarah nodded, and Arthur settled back.

"How can you tell?" Sarah asked, and then blushed that she had dared to question him.

"A lot of people would have been afraid to take a soldier of

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the King into their homes for fear of Parliament's finding out." Sarah looked blankly. "Your father obviously is independent enough to take such risks," Arthur explained.

"My father would never turn away a wounded soldier any more than he would an injured animal he found." Sarah's cheeks turned pink as she heard her words.

How could she compare Mr. Tweed to a wounded animal?

Arthur laughed. "I don't mind the comparison at all. I am grateful."

Sarah's eyes twinkled their relief. "It must be awful. The fighting, everything."

Arthur nodded. "The last thing I remember is trying to get across the river, back to the Prince's encampment."

"The Prince?" Sarah said.

"Prince Rupert. The King's nephew. I serve in his cavalry. Our charge went well at first. Then everything became so disorganized. The regiments floundered. Everywhere I looked, there were soldiers, boys really, who had been made to think of themselves as men. But who turned to boys again once they saw what it meant to be in a battle. Lying close to the ground to hide. Crying. Holding their hands over wounds, their own, another's. And so many dead." Arthur shook his head and then turned a very serious eye toward Sarah.

"Do you know how the battle fared for the King?"

"I've heard a little," she said, "from my father talking, but I don't really understand much about such things."

Arthur smiled. "As well you shouldn't." He paused a few moments, and his eyebrows knitted tightly.

“The problem is, I fear, that neither do His Majesty’s advisors, except for Prince Rupert. There’s a man that knows how to plan a battle. But the King’s other generals... well, I am sure this is all boring blather to a girl like you. No doubt you’d rather—”

“I’m sixteen,” Sarah sputtered.

“And almost a woman,” Arthur smiled.

Sarah’s eyes turned dark, and she frowned.

“But a woman should have more important things on her mind than the rambling of a soldier.”

“No,” Sarah answered, not sure how to feel about his referring to her as a woman. “I’m very interested in anything that threatens our King. I don’t know much, but I know about Parliament’s men. They took most all we have and poisoned our well. The day right before the battle.”

Arthur again drew up his eyes and looked at her. “Guess all the troops from both sides are scavenging food. But why’d they poison your water?”

“Said they figured my father to be a King’s man.”

“And is he?” Arthur asked.

Sarah paused, then spoke with great pride. “We’re a King’s family.”

Arthur tossed her yet again a smile that warmed her all over.

Perhaps, Sarah hoped, he was realizing that she was not so young really, despite the fact that she had about her a quiet modesty. Sarah wore simple garments of homespun cloth, but underneath was developing a woman’s body. Already her

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breasts were becoming full and her mouth well-shaped. With her golden hair pulled back, her slender neck showed her delicacy.

What gave her away more than any other feature, and showed her not to be a child, however, were her deep green eyes hidden behind long lashes that curled handsomely and fluttered when she smiled.

Sarah had no idea how more commanding she was than the ladies whom he had met at court.

Nor could she know that he had long ago grown weary of the scheming minds, covered by a silly feigned innocence, which characterized the women at court. Women already wedded flirting with young Cavaliers; others betrothed to one man, yet paying attention to every gallant but the one to whom they were promised.

Sarah would surely have blushed to learn that Arthur much preferred her, blessed by nature with a beauty the women at court could not have acquired despite their best efforts and lavish expenditure on clothes, perfumes, and powders.



“That’s the thing of it,” Isaac Sexton said. “If it weren’t for Mr. Pym an’ the likes of ‘em in Parliament, spreadin’ their lies about the Queen, these ‘prentices and shop keepers would as like be for the King as for anybody.”

Arthur nodded. He had been sitting with Isaac Sexton in

the front room of the downstairs of the Sexton home for nearly an hour, enjoying the warmth of a small fire that caused shadows to echo from the walls. Pleased to be freed from the confines of his room, he was now spending his twelfth day with his hosts and knew that he would have to leave the following morning and return to his troop in Prince Rupert's cavalry.

He had found Isaac and his family as warm as the fire he was now enjoying, and Mistress Sexton's careful attention to his wound had left him strong enough to return to his duty.

Isaac had agreed to take him to Oxford where Arthur would be able to rejoin the King's army. The roads remained somewhat safe, and they would be able to make the trip in only three or four days, even riding Isaac's farm wagon, pulled by a horse so old that Parliament's men had left it when they had pillaged the farm.

"If only the King 'ad marched on London. Rather than make for Oxford," Isaac continued, his jaw set and his green eyes narrowed. Again, he paused, this time to move to the fire, where he poked a small twig into the coals and then used the burning end to light the bowl of a long-stemmed pipe that he kept close at hand. After puffing a few moments and then releasing a stream of smoke into the air, he spoke again.

"The moment Essex moved 'is army to War'ick, them what advises the King should 'ave seen what an opportunity they 'ad."

Isaac Sexton had the look of a typical English farmer. His stocky frame stood on strong legs. His round head sprouted

tufts of hair, and his eyes had the constant squint and web of lines at the corners of a man who had lived his life in the bright sun. His fingers were thick and knotted and marked with scars from a lifetime of hard work.

“You’re no doubt right.” Arthur nodded. Isaac had a fine mind for battle strategy even though he’d never served as a soldier, and was a devoted King’s man as well.

Many in the Midlands of England had sided with Parliament. The landowners there relied on the port of London for shipping the wool they produced and the crops they grew to make a living. They did business with the merchants who supported the Parliament. Their purses determined their allegiance.

The King’s support lay more in the West, in Cornwall and Wales, and in the northern areas where many Catholics lived and practiced their faith privately, more secure because of the Queen’s beliefs than they would have been otherwise.

But Isaac was as devoted to the Crown as any man in Charles I’s army.

“I have to think they must have felt their men not ready for such a march. Not so quickly after a battle.”

“Aye, aye. Likely they’d ‘ad ‘nough. But it’d be well worth lightin’ a fire under ‘em to end this bloody war right off. I fear there be many a battle yet to fight now. And a ‘eavy price for all that, God ‘elp us.”

Arthur’s smile hid the fact that he knew how true Isaac Sexton’s dismal prophecy would likely prove to be. All the King needed was to retake London, and Parliament would

have little chance of continuing its revolt.

Those apprentices and shopkeepers about which Isaac had spoken and who comprised the bulk of Essex's army would have quickly turned for the King were they to see him march triumphantly into the city. Even the city guard and the trained bands from London would have been able to mount little resistance.

It would then be a small matter of arresting the malignants in Parliament and returning England to its rightful government, the rule of God's anointed King, Charles I.

The King had fled London to protect his Catholic Queen from a hostile Parliament, and now, it seemed, he had lost his chance to retake that city and save the nation from a prolonged war.

"Well, we'll not settle anythin' 'ere tonight an' the mornin' comes early," Isaac said as he rose.

Arthur stood as well, though his social position would not have required him to do so for a man of such common birth. He had, however, grown not only to appreciate this man's help, but to respect his character as well.

They studied each other a few moments. Arthur wasn't exactly sure what he saw in the man's eyes. But they shared a profound loyalty to the King, a distaste for the war that was now confronting them, and a strength of spirit that transcended social barriers.

"Sleep well, sir," Arthur said, extending his hand and again ignoring the demands of social class to embrace those of courtesy and respect.

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Isaac accepted the offer, and two strong men clasped hands and shared unspoken hopes.

“You don’t tarry long. You’ve a ‘ard day ahead of you if you’ve set your mind to leave for Oxford on the morrow.”

Arthur nodded, but then sat. Isaac ascended the stairs to join his wife who had retired a good bit earlier.

As he looked into the flames, Arthur began to recall the battle almost two weeks earlier. As best he could tell, it had been a conflict led by confused officers and fought by terrified men, few of them soldiers and even fewer knowing much about what they were fighting for, except the loyalty they felt to the officer who had mustered them into duty.

Arthur’s father and brother had fought in the Palatinate for Prince Rupert’s father, Lord Protector Frederick, and had been able to secure for his son a position with the young Prince as a result.

Rupert’s mother was the sister to Charles I, and the Prince had traveled to England to assist his much-loved uncle as soon as the King’s quarrel with Parliament had become violent and he had raised the royal standard at Nottingham. Though she was Catholic and his own father a Protestant, the young Prince was especially fond of the Queen.

Arthur shared these bonds of loyalty as well, though based on beliefs and not the ties of blood. But as much as he tried to think about his devotion to Prince Rupert, to keep his mind on his duty and to ponder the outcome of the Battle of Edgehill, Arthur could not maintain his focus for long.

Then his thoughts went back to Sarah and those eyes that

looked at him with such a powerful interest. At least he hoped it was interest, and not simple curiosity. He hoped very much that what she felt was what a young woman might feel for a man. She had not seen him at his best. And for that matter, he knew that he should not be concerning himself with a girl so much beneath his social station, and so young as well.

But that was not to be helped, not when the girl possessed such haunting eyes, eyes which even now he could envision as if she were standing in front of him.

How was he supposed to occupy himself with thoughts of war when the much more pleasant memory of this girl kept intruding upon his thinking? And for one quick moment, Arthur even allowed himself to wonder how he was supposed to return to the King's army when doing so might very well mean never seeing her again.

He had almost died at Edgehill. The next battle, wherever it might be fought, could be different. The next time he might not survive.

The only solace Arthur could find was in the thought that to be worthy of this young woman he must maintain his honor, he must serve the King.



Although Arthur and her father spoke in soft voices, Sarah could make out every word that passed between them. Arthur had remained in the small room in the house that Sarah and her sisters occupied. They had moved to share a straw tick on

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the floor of the small storage room next to the kitchen and close enough to the front for her to hear all that was said.

Beside her, three-year-old Emmy, a child with hair so blond that it would shine in the sun like golden honey, and the equally fair Mary, a year younger, slept soundly. The other children shared a small bed in their parents' room.

Sarah listened as the men talked of battles and strategy. But her mind was on neither battles nor strategy. Rather, she was picturing Arthur, seeing in her mind's eye what she felt in her heart, the two of them walking hand in hand, speaking words of devotion.

He just *had* to have noticed her, seen that she was not a child, but rather a woman. He had used the word to refer to her, but only in a spirit of light-hearted jest. He displayed warm feelings for her parents. Even though he was from a family with social position, he might take notice of her. He could certainly see that hers was a family as devoted to the King as anyone from a more prominent place in society.

They shared much.

No, Sarah thought, they shared nothing, not really, and she would have to face that fact. He was a man who could marry into any of England's finest families and improve his wealth and position in society. She was a simple farm girl who dared not hope for more than to marry a good man from a nearby farm and bear him many children, boys if they were lucky.

This man who was so handsome and who had so captured her imagination surely had many opportunities to pursue

beautiful women, maybe even ladies at the King's court.

Sarah knew nothing, really, about life at court beyond what a young girl's imaginings might offer and then embellish with romantic fancy. She would hear from time to time an idle word in passing, usually a remark about the Queen's being Catholic or the extravagances for which the court of Charles I was known.

Sarah did, however, know that she could not possibly be the only girl, or woman, to have observed Arthur's gentle smile and easy manner, and the way his curly hair fell across his shoulders and down his back. She had seen him when helping her mother attend his wounds. She had tried hard not to reveal to her mother her appreciation for this man's well-muscled body. She could not, however, hide it from herself. He was not simply a fit figure, he was startlingly handsome.

After a while, Sarah heard the slow, deliberate, and familiar clumping of her father's ascent up the stairs. She did not, however, hear a second set of footsteps to indicate that Arthur had also retired for the evening. He must have remained in the front room.

The idea of his leaving moved her heart, but not with the flutter she had experienced before. She knew how to settle her anxious feelings, but was tentative, reluctant to show Arthur the affection she felt for him for fear that he would find her a silly girl. Still, he would be leaving in the morning. If she was going to do something, she had best do it while she still had the opportunity.

Would it be so bad to be seen as bold? What if she did

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embarrass herself? He was leaving in the morning. If he was going to forget her, it might as well be for being too bold than for lack of trying to give him something to remember



Arthur looked up to find Sarah caught in the flickering shadows.

She looked different to him than she had before. Her hair, the color of straw bleached by the sun, and her blossoming body, though well covered by night clothing, captured him. His gaze was drawn to the delicate fingers that he knew by their look were gentle. Her full lips caught the light from the fire and glowed like ripe fruit. Her hair curled around delicate ears and tumbled along the curve of her neck.

The unsettled feelings he had been experiencing whenever he was around her now fell into place.

This girl was going to be a larger part of his life than he would have thought five minutes earlier. No matter that she came from a lower social class, no matter the complications of war, no matter the fact that he had to leave with the morning, no matter the difference in age, he would return to see Sarah Sexton. That promise Arthur made to himself, though he was not yet ready to make that same vow to her as he had many more possible encounters with death ahead of him.

He would not make a commitment that he might not be able to honor, for any reason.

Arthur spoke quietly. "You should have been asleep hours

ago.”

Sarah smiled, but this time she did not blush as she usually did when he addressed her. She nodded, then spoke. “I was listening to you and Father speak of the war.”

Arthur shrugged. “Rather tedious business, I would think.”

“No.” Sarah spoke quickly. “I *want* to know what is happening, *and* why.”

“I’m not sure anyone knows why. Not really.” Arthur responded, as his eyes grew dark and his shoulders slumped. “It should never have come to war.”

“But Parliament should be loyal to the King,” Sarah said as she moved directly to the chair where her father had been sitting. She did not even consider how her doing so might be seen as an inappropriate sign of familiarity. She was anxious to learn all that she could about what had caused England to become involved in war, just as she wanted to know all she could about Arthur.

Arthur nodded. “True, but the King is stubborn. And made his own mistakes. Don’t misunderstand. I’m a King’s man and will die in his service if I must—”

“No!” Sarah shouted, and then withdrew. “I mean, you must do all you can to serve the King, but be as safe as possible.”

His shoulders bounced as Arthur laughed out loud. “I’ll remember that each time I go into battle.”

“You must promise me that you will,” Sarah said and smiled the largest smile Arthur had seen from her.

Forever, Sarah

Without thinking, he moved to take Sarah's hand, grinned, and spoke quietly. "You have my word, as a member of the cavalry of Prince Rupert and a loyal follower of King Charles I. I shall do all that I can to escape harm while doing my duty to my country, my King, and...my lady." With that he bent his head and allowed his lips to brush the back of Sarah's hand.

Sarah blushed hot from his touch. The unfamiliar heat flowed through her body.

The room was quiet for several moments. Shadows slipped along the walls as the flames in the fire flickered.

After a few awkward moments, Arthur gathered himself, settled into his chair.

"Perhaps you could get someone to help you and write to me. For any soldier away from his home and missing his family, letters are always—"

"I can write," Sarah blurted. "Father has always felt that a woman should know enough to read the Bible and write. He taught me, and my brothers and sisters."

Arthur smiled again. "Then by all means you must write to me, and I to you as well."

"I'd like that. Only I've never sent a letter; if you'll tell me how, where to send it..."

"I'm not sure myself how to post a letter since I don't know where I'll be even a week from now. But when I do find out, I'll see to it that you know. I can only tell you that I belong to the King's court. And where the King resides lies the court."

In truth, Arthur had not been overly affected by the behavior he observed at the court of Charles I, where, despite the King's own moral severity, the men and women who attended the Queen led lives of sensuous indulgence.

The King's love for his wife blinded him to the fact that much of the difficulty he experienced with the zealots in Parliament had been the result of the Queen's presence and the behavior of those she favored. She openly acknowledged her Catholic beliefs and participated in masses said by French priests who had accompanied her from her home.

Arthur's family were Anglicans, but they adhered to a stricter morality than did many of their social standing, more akin to that of the Puritans and the simple country folk such as the Sextons.

Arthur did not, however, respond to Sarah only because of his appreciation for her obvious virtue and that of her family. He was struck by the girl's beauty, by the eyes that studied him with such intensity, by the long gentle fingers, the haunting green eyes and curled lashes, and by the woman that she had become.

But most of all, he felt affection that he continued to struggle to admit to himself, though his feelings for her were fixed; he had fallen in love with Sarah.

The clatter of horses approaching the house broke the moment.

Arthur and Sarah jumped from their chairs.

While he stood aside, Sarah peered through the small window of the front room.

Forever, Sarah

“Can you see?” Arthur whispered.

“There’s a bit of moonlight. I think four riders just across the way at the barn.”

“Do you recognize them?”

Sarah shook her head.

She still kept a close watch out the window, trying to stay back enough to not be seen.

“Soldiers, though?” he asked.

“Yes, but I don’t...Like the men who poisoned our well!” She gasped suddenly. “Not the same men maybe, but dressed alike.”

“Dressed how? Tell me!” He trusted this girl’s judgment but not her knowledge of the many styles of military dress that were being used by both sides of the conflict.

“They are wearing yellow leather coats, like yours, and boots as well.”

“Their weapons?”

“I see swords,” Sarah responded, “and they are carrying some kind of gun, I don’t know. And rounded helmets. They are all wearing—”

“Harquebusiers,” Arthur muttered. “Parliament’s lobsters,” he then added, using the term of derision that the Cavaliers had adopted to refer to these heavily armored members of Parliament’s army. Though ridiculed by their foes, harquebusiers, named for the short carbine they carried, were often the better trained and most radical of the enemy. The term lobster had first been used when Sir Arthur Haselrig, one of the most fanatic members of Parliament, had equipped

an entire regiment of harquebusiers from his own funds.

They were not men to take lightly.

Arthur thought for a minute. "Quickly, get your father."

"What about you?" Sarah asked. Her face flushed.

"I don't know, but hurry and get—"

Isaac and Bess Sexton came hurrying down the stairs, she in her nightshirt and he with a pair of woolen trousers thrown over his sleeping garments.

While Bess quickly gathered the other children and hurried them back up the stairs, Isaac took charge of the situation.

He brought with him a settling calmness.

"We've little time. Sarah, go take Mr. Tweed through to the back and when you 'ear me open the door and speak, slip out to the root cellar. I'll 'andle these gen'lemen. You should be safe 'nough there, to be sure. 'Ide Mr. Tweed in the root cellar and throw some straw 'round to cover the floorboard. Then stay put, girl. Do you understand?"

Sarah nodded, and Isaac then looked to Arthur.

He nodded as well. Arthur said, "If they find me, you'll be in serious—"

"They won't. Now go."

Sarah and Arthur slipped to the back of the house.

The men outside were talking in loud voices as they approached the front door and the waiting Isaac Sexton.



Forever, Sarah

Isaac opened the door and greeted the Roundheads loudly enough to cover any noise Sarah and Arthur might make leaving the house.

They had begun to flee when, suddenly, Arthur stopped short. “Wait, if they find anything that tells them I’ve been there, your father will be in trouble. Serious trouble. I can’t leave him to face that alone.” Arthur turned abruptly and headed back to the house, leaving Sarah frozen.

The moment he entered the house, Arthur made out loud, threatening voices in the front room. Then he heard Isaac Sexton’s protest.

“As it come to this then, that Parliament sends soldiers into our ‘omes to accuse us of treachery and deny us our rights as subjects of the King.”

“Aye,” a rough voice responded, the sound of the influence of drink making it all the more threatening. “En’mies to the Parliament ain’ got rights. Seein’ as they’s been a Royalist ‘ide out ‘ere.”

“You’ve no proof of that,” Isaac responded, his voice strong, not wavering.

“We’ve no need of proof. They’s talk ‘nough of such business. It ain’ all you farmers be traitors. Ye got neighbors that don’ fancy no King. An’ don’ fancy no Royalists ‘iding out.” That same threatening voice.

Arthur had to do something. Talking with these men would be no use. He inched toward the front room, ignoring the pain in his side. When he finally could move along the hallway from the back of the house and peek at the men as-

sembled in the front room, he could see Isaac.

He had been forced to sit as four staggering men stood over him.

The largest man was well over six feet tall, and so heavy that his body pushed against his armor. Face flushed from his drinking and his anger, he was clearly the one in charge, as he waved a pistol menacingly.

It was loaded and charged. The threat was not idle.

Still, Isaac was completely calm.

Arthur stepped forward where he could be seen. "You've no reason to threaten this honest fellow," Arthur said matter-of-factly.

Everyone jumped when he spoke.

"He and his family took me in, but only because I needed help and threatened them with the King's name if they refused me."

The soldier who had been hovering over Isaac raised his pistol, aiming it at Arthur's head. "I'll not likely believe that bit of posh. But it don' min'. Long as we 'ave you." He smiled an almost toothless brown grin and motioned for the others to take Arthur.

The front door of Isaac's house flew open. All the men paused.

The grinding of horses' hooves on firm ground filled the night air.

The Roundhead soldiers stood dumb until the big man shouted. "Catch the 'orses. An' see who's out there what untied 'em." The other three men looked confused. "Go on. I can

Forever, Sarah

‘andle these two.”

The other three dashed through the door.

In their rush and panic, not to mention their half-drunken state, none had even bothered to wonder why the door had suddenly opened.

The three dashed into the night and disappeared while the big man turned back to Arthur and Isaac.

“There’s naught you can do,” he growled. “I’ll see both you and ‘em who stole our ‘orses in chains.” He glared at his prisoners. “Ye don’ move. I’d not think twice ‘bout burnin’ ye with lead.” Arthur and Isaac both remained still but watching as difficult minutes passed. The corporal glared at his prisoners.

Arthur and Isaac stared back.

Suddenly, Sarah stuck her head through the still-opened door. She was holding the reins from a waiting and struggling horse, so that she could barely stand still.

Her arms were stretched as she fought the determined animal, her green eyes wide.

Both Arthur and Isaac stood, stunned.

The big man turned to her.

Arthur seized the chance and brushed aside the threatening pistol. He struck the big man with such a powerful blow that he fell in a heap in the floor where he lay unconscious.

The pistol discharged, but fortunately it was pointed at the floor and the ball lodged in the wood.

“Sarah,” Isaac said as he stepped outside to his waiting daughter and helped her hold the struggling animal.

Bess then rushed through the front room to join her husband.

The three of them took a moment to embrace and reassure each other. The whole time Sarah fought the tugs of the horse. She held tightly and refused to let the animal have its way.

Sarah turned to Arthur, who had also now joined the huddled group. "I kept hold of this horse for you. You must go."

Arthur managed to control of the animal once he got the reins in his hands.

The horse relaxed its fighting, somehow feeling that now it was in the hands of an experienced horseman.

"There'll be trouble for you for this," Arthur said as he turned his dark eyes on Isaac.

"Aye," Sexton said, "but nought you can do to stop that now. Letting 'em take you won't do anythin' to 'elp me. Them that went for their 'orses. They'll be back any moment. You must go now."

Arthur nodded.

When his gaze found Sarah, her eyes had widened. Her hands trembled as they clutched at the air.

She, too, might well suffer for helping him.

"You must go!" she shouted.

"Just ride off to Oxford?" Arthur's eyes burned.

"You must. Your duty to the King." Sarah's eyes remained wide but clear.

"I can't!"

"No, son," Isaac said, "go now."

Arthur paused then nodded. He turned back to Sarah. He

Forever, Sarah

took her hand in his gentle grip. “Seems the King has a new, and very brave soldier. Remember your promise to me.”

Sarah smiled and blushed slightly, but then turned a warm crimson when he bent toward her, brushed her tangled hair back from her face, and kissed her cheek, holding his lips against her skin for a few precious moments.

Then, stepping back and mounting the horse, he turned his attention away from his rescuer and back to his hosts.

“Thank you,” he said quietly, and then lifted himself into the saddle.

Isaac smiled.

“God speed, young man.”

Arthur spurred his mount and rode out of Sarah’s life with a flourish, a decided contrast with the way he had entered it.

“Promise?” her father asked as Arthur disappeared in the night.

“Yes, father.” Sarah smiled as she turned back toward the open door of their cottage.

“That’s just the right word. Promise.”

A Debt Repaid

Each time the hay cart tripped through yet another rain-carved rut in the well-traveled road between Edgecote and Warwick, the cramps in Isaac Sexton's muscles shot painful spasms through his legs.

Shackled, and crowded into the bed of the cart with four other men, he had been on the road for several hours. All of them were beginning to smell from days of wearing the same clothes and being shuttled about with no time or opportunity to clean themselves.

Forever, Sarah

The others were clearly not the sort with whom Isaac was used to associating, but for the moment, they were companions of a sort.

All had been declared enemies of Parliament.

The night that Arthur had escaped, the Parliamentary harquebusiers caught their horses within the hour. The corporal in charge of their patrol had gathered himself from the blow from Arthur even more quickly and taken Isaac into custody.

That had been several nights earlier, and since then Isaac had been locked in his own grainery and kept under armed guard. He was an enemy to Parliament, the corporal had said, a charge repeated by his commander, who had then ordered Isaac to be carried to Warwick where his fate would be decided by men under Lord Essex's command.

Unfortunately, the same corporal responsible for his capture had been put in charge of taking Isaac and these others, accused of one crime or the other, to learn their fates.

He had taken especial pains to make sure that the trip was as difficult as possible for Isaac. He had been not only shackled at the ankles; his hands were manacled as well, an unnecessary precaution intended simply to increase the discomfort of the man the corporal blamed for his being dressed down for drinking while on duty and allowing a Royalist officer to escape his grasp.

Despite its being a fall day, the sun was especially warm, and Isaac had no hat to shade his face. Sweat dripped from his nose and chin, and his face was quickly reddening from the

unusually bright fall sun.

The corporal, whose name Isaac had learned was Rowe, spurred his horse to ride next to the cart. There, where he could be easily seen, he drank long from a canteen. Water spilled around his gaping mouth and ran down his chin and fleshy neck.

Isaac did not turn away; instead he stared into the man's red-streaked eyes.

Corporal Rowe looked back a moment, snorted his contempt for his prisoner, and then rode on past the cart to take a position a hundred feet or so ahead of the others.

Four other men, similarly dressed and armed, rode behind, paying little attention to their guard duties. Accompanying insignificant prisoners was easy.

The driver was a farmer who obviously had no care one way or the other for what was happening so long as he got paid for whatever task he was given.

One of the men, a frail and tattered fellow accused of stealing from the corpses of men who had fallen at Edgehill, smiled at Isaac through broken teeth. "At one, 'e don' fancy ye now do 'e?" Isaac had no suitable response, so the cart grew quiet again.

•

"There." Arthur pointed.

The two other horsemen hiding in the shelter of an overgrown hedgerow nodded.

Forever, Sarah

“That corporal in front,” he continued, “he’ll likely run as quick as we show. I’ve had dealings with him before.”

“The ones behind the cart as well, I’d wager,” responded Granville Fane, the nephew of the Second Earl of Westmorland, Sir Mildmay Fane, whose family was prominent in the Midlands. He and Arthur had been childhood friends as their fathers had served together in the Low Countries during the wars with Spain.

While Arthur was a lean, handsome man, Granville was all arms and legs. His hair had never decided whether it was blond or red, only that it would have the texture of a curry brush and stick out in several directions. His ready smile and good humor, however, made him an agreeable companion.

He was, as well, an able soldier, one who, like Arthur, was devoted to the cause of Charles I, not simply to the life at court that went with being one of Prince Rupert’s officers.

The third man, Josiah Kirby, came from no distinguished family, was much too young, really, to be serving in the Royalist army. Young and inexperienced as he was, he was as loyal to the King as the most battle-tested mercenary.

Arthur winced just slightly as he raised himself in his saddle. His wound had continued to heal as a result of Mistress Sexton’s attention, but the soreness was not yet gone.

He had, however, asked Prince Rupert’s help as soon as he had arrived at Oxford, following two days of hard riding after his escape. Arthur was sure that Isaac would be taken and that learning his fate would be simple enough.

For a shilling or two, the common folk living in the Mid-

lands were more than willing to help out the King's troops with information. And Arthur discovered that Isaac was being taken to Lord Essex's encampment where, in time, he would likely be tried for treason.

The charge was harsh for simply helping a wounded soldier, but many in Parliament and Essex's army wanted to emphasize to the people of England that standing with the King came at a price. They further hoped to announce by their actions that no matter his efforts, Charles I would not be able to protect them.

Prince Rupert, however, had readily agreed to let Arthur and two other experienced cavalrymen attempt a rescue of Isaac Sexton. He would have sent more, but the King was uncertain of his next move, and Prince Rupert was still hoping for a march on London. He did not want to have too many of his men away on other business were his uncle to see the wisdom of an aggressive move before Essex was ready to block his way.

With the Prince's blessing, Arthur sought to help the man who had saved him from imprisonment, possibly his life, and perhaps see once again the young woman who had stolen his heart.

"He's almost close enough," Arthur whispered, working hard to hold his mount.

The horse quivered as if it felt the tension of its rider.

"Remember, give me a minute to see what the corporal does and be ready to deal with the others should they try to interfere."

Forever, Sarah

Arthur spurred his horse and charged out of the brush and up the bank, so quickly that he had brought his pistol to bear on the startled Corporal Rowe before he'd had a chance even to think about reaching for his own weapon.

"I believe, *sir*," Arthur said, "we've a bit of *unfinished* business."

Corporal Rowe froze, his mouth gaping and the tip of his tongue resting stupidly on his lower lip.

Arthur smiled.

The crack of a pistol shot split the air. Corporal Rowe cowered. Arthur raised himself in his saddle.

One of the other harquebusiers had charged ahead of the cart and was attempting to support his corporal.

Josiah Kirby had put a quick stop to the effort.

The three other Roundheads wheeled their mounts when their companion fell, a hole blown clear through the upper part of his chest where his armor opened just below his throat.

Even the cart driver jumped down and fled across the field opposite the attacking Cavaliers.

"Let them go," Arthur said, as his companions joined him and he sensed their desire to ride down the fleeing men.

The panicked corporal had said nothing thus far, but fear had chiseled itself into his face.

"We'd make short work of them now. Especially with a marksman like Josiah here," Granville said, smiling broadly at the Roundheads fleeing danger.

"No doubt, but we have business here," Arthur said.

Turning to Corporal Rowe, he added, "Drop your arms

slowly. Do nothing to make me leave you lying in the dirt like that rash fellow.”

Corporal Rowe glanced blankly at the fallen harquebusier, then dropped his carbine and pistol, unbuckled his hauberk, and let his sword fall away.

“Well done.” Arthur smiled. “Now, let’s you unshackle those men back there.”



“I think that by now,” Arthur observed, as they sat around the fireplace in the Sexton home, “Essex’s officers will be too occupied with other things to worry about retrieving a few lost prisoners.” The statement brought various mutters of agreement and relief from Isaac, Bess, Sarah, and Granville.

“Although,” Granville smiled his infectious grin, “I’d hope you can stay clear of that Roundhead corporal, eh. He seemed less than pleased to see you again.”

Sarah looked at the laughter that surrounded her with an uncomfortable disbelief. She was as overjoyed as anyone to see her father released, and the man she loved back in their home, so soon after watching him ride into the night and thinking then that he might never return.

This relief, however, did not raise her spirits enough to see any humor in a remark that indicated that Arthur might find himself endangered by his efforts to help her father, or at risk for any reason at all in fact.

“Yes,” Arthur said with a laugh. “I think our corporal

Forever, Sarah

takes himself a bit too serious. But then he seems to constantly be misplacing his prisoners, so I suppose he's a right to his lack of humor."

Again, laughter filled the room.

Although Josiah had returned to Prince Rupert's camp, Granville had joined Arthur and Isaac on their return to the Sexton farm. He had immediately been welcomed as if an old family friend.

"How can you laugh about that man? He would harm you were he given the chance!" Sarah exclaimed, standing. "He would kill you all if he had the opportunity!" Flushed with anger and then embarrassment at so quickly altering the spirit of celebration, Sarah hurried to the front door and stepped out into the chill of the autumn night with no idea where she was going.

She shouldn't have allowed her passion to overcome her better judgment and in so doing alter an atmosphere of festivity to one of sobriety.

But she was not sorry for the depth of her feelings, nor for allowing those feelings to show, save for the fact that she should have been able to share the others' good spirits.

Her father was freed. Arthur was back in her home. He was, in all likelihood, correct that the Roundheads would not pursue the matter further. She should feel relieved by the turn of events. Haunting her, however, was the picture of Arthur lying wounded after the Battle of Edgehill, next to the river where she had first seen him.

That image haunted Sarah—that he would once again be

wounded, and perhaps the next time too seriously to recover—that even a jest about a soldier with an overly inflated sense of self-worth caused her too much worry to laugh.

To be so assertive was not appropriate for a girl, but she would not refrain from expressing herself, regardless of the role society expected of her.

Arthur's gentle touch on her shoulder summoned Sarah from her thoughts.

She turned to him, tears on her cheeks and pleading in her eyes.

He opened his arms and folded her into his embrace. Arthur held her tightly, tucking her head under his chin so that her damp cheek lay against his chest.

For minutes, Sarah kept her arms folded so that her chin could rest on her fisted hands and Arthur could hold her securely in that safe position.

The evening was calm, with only the occasional snort from a horse in the barn or the lowing of cattle interrupting the quiet.

The strong beat of Arthur's heart reassured her. No other message, no words, just the security of his embrace; that was all she sought or needed. The comfort she felt made her bold.

"I love you, Sarah," Arthur whispered into her ear.

His breath on her neck created an unfamiliar stir in her.

"I'll return to see you when I can, if you will allow. And when this war has ended, then—"

"Arthur," Sarah said as she pulled back to look directly at him.

Forever, Sarah

Her saying his name stopped his words. He looked into her eyes.

She felt he must be seeing every secret locked in her heart. And when he smiled, those beautiful pink lips that she had studied so often parting slightly, Sarah knew that her secrets were safe.

Even in the dim light of the evening she could see clearly Arthur's love. "I love you as well. You must know that."

He nodded, and his smile broadened.

"We will speak of what happens when this war ends, when it has ended," she said.

Arthur began, "But I know now, dear Sarah—"

"And I will be here waiting, my love. I will be here waiting."

Although Arthur was smiling and his eyes sparkling, Sarah could tell that he saw a young woman capable of love, not a girl filled with the blush of innocent infatuation.

Despite her desire, that woman would not allow him to make any further commitment in the heat of the moment, during a time when all over England passions were distorted by cruel realities.

But her wisdom in this, too, would have been obvious to him were she to have shared her thoughts.

She chose, however, not to do so.

She decided, instead, to savor this moment when she had from him an affirmation of love which she so desired and had given to him the same.



The next morning, for the second time in less than two weeks, Sarah had to watch Arthur ride out of her life and back into danger. The first time he had left, he had spurred his horse into the night so suddenly that she had had no time to anticipate the event. Now he left her after a night during which she had moved from moments of sheer joy, to fear and despair, and back again.

None of that showed, however, as Arthur was about to mount his horse. He and Sarah stood awkwardly, with the others all around.

Finally, Isaac said, "Well, one of you best 'ug the other or we'll be 'ere the rest of the day waitin'."

Sarah stepped back, startled by her father's statement.

Then his easy smile, and that of her mother, left her further surprised, but also comforted.

She allowed the embrace from Arthur without discomfort or embarrassment.

When, however, he and Granville were down the road and out of hearing, Sarah spoke her mind. "Father, you put Mr. Tweed in an awkward position," she scolded.

"Naught so awkward as the one 'e was in not knowin' whether to 'ug the woman he wishes to marry." Isaac laughed as he turned to get about his business.

"He spoke to you of marrying me?"

"'E didn't 'ave to, daughter. 'Is 'opes are as obvious as yours."

Forever, Sarah

Sarah's face flushed, and words caught in her throat.

Her mother, however, took her by the hand and smiled her gap-toothed grin.

Sarah could not know what the years would hold, only that the man she loved was riding back into danger because his sense of honor demanded that he do so.

All she could know was that she would wait for him, love him, and pray that God would keep him safe.

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