

Chapter One
Georgetown, Washington, D.C.
Friday, 2 September

Angelina led a life which required her to fib.

"How do you amuse yourself?" a stranger would ask.

"I do a little dressmaking," she would reply. "It has not been easy, with all the good men taken by the war."

She took pleasure in illicit trysts, in the veils and shadows of secrecy, until one day, this world began to crumble.

"Someone is talking about us," he said, standing by the window of the apartment he had chosen for her, in the West Village of Georgetown. The late afternoon sun slanted over his head, throwing his high cheekbones and the sharp bridge of his nose into relief, illuminating his thick, corn-colored hair.

Angelina was bending over the wet bar, mixing up a Mary Pickford. "Who?" she said, mainly for something to say. She was used to gossip and disapproving glances. People were so jealous, especially other women, even married women. One would think that women who had everything might be willing to help their less fortunate sisters, but that had never been Angelina's experience.

"I don't know."

Something about his voice caught her attention. She came around and handed him his drink. "You do not know?"

"No." He sipped without comment. Normally, he would wind one of her curls around his pinky finger, or smile, or make some remark to show that he appreciated what she had made for him. But not today.

The back of Angelina's neck stiffened. This was not good, something was worrying him.

Finally, he said, "A scandal would hurt my wife, and I cannot do that to a good woman."

She stood there, silent. If his wife was a good woman, what did that make her? She had known Scott McNair since he was a college student, well before his marriage, when she had been recently widowed, with two little girls to support. She had become complicit in satisfying his needs in return for money, jewelry, and clothes in the latest fashions. She expected him to terminate things once he married, but his wife did not like the pleasures of the marriage bed.

He put his drink down. "You do see that, don't you?"

She did not see at all. Why now? Why would a bit of gossip scare him off? She stared up into his face. Was there any way to plead her case? But his face, usually so open, was closed against her.

"I will give you something to cover your expenses for the next several months." He opened his billfold and dropped a wad of cash onto the mantle.

She could not move. She felt like a leaf dropped from a tree, curled up, and dead in the frosty air.

He went to the hatstand and took his hat. "Believe me, Angie, if I had any choice —" He hesitated for a long moment, his blue-gray eyes fixed on hers, and then the landlady banged a door downstairs.

He fled.

She waited for a second, five seconds, then went to the mantle, counting out the money. Five hundred dollars. At least he was generous, but it was not going to last forever. She stuffed it into her bodice, then twitched the drapes aside to survey the street.

He was gone.

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A few days later, Angelina found herself in Shepherd & Riley's bookstore. She needed to get something for Grace, who would be seventeen in a few days. She turned the pages of the volume in her hand. Perhaps *The Awakening* was not right for her dreamy daughter. It was expensive, and Angelina had money worries now that Scott had jilted her. She listlessly closed the book, trying not to think about him. As she pushed it back into its place the hairs on the backs of her arm prickled. Was someone watching her? Slowly, she turned.

He looked like a lover, with thick black hair for caressing and generous lips for kissing. But it was those dark eyes that caught and held, never letting go. *Bellissimo*.

He came forward, smiling.

"Mrs. Miller?" He took off his elegant Panama, balancing it gently in his long, tapering fingers.

Angelina started as she studied his face. No, she had never seen him before.

"How do you—?"

"Russell. At your service." He made a little bow that seemed both odd and old-fashioned. Angelina could not recall any man bowing to her, at least not recently.

She tilted her head to look up at him, showing off her slender neck. "Should I know you?"

He stared at her for a moment, his smile fading.

She moved closer. "We have met before?"

He glanced at the door, then scanned the bookstore, expertly taking it in, as if used to evaluating the shape of rooms, the placing of furniture such as bookcases, the position of windows in relation to the door.

Angelina followed his gaze, but all she could see were bored housewives in straw hats, and summer-colored dresses. They had open books in their laps or in their hands, pretending to read while staring at him avidly from the corners of their eyes.

"They have rich husbands," she remarked.

He turned back towards her, his hat still held lightly in the tips of those long fingers.

"Your life is not as predictable as theirs?"

Angelina raised her face to his and smiled. He was not merely good-looking.

"May I offer you tea?"

Intrigued, she accepted his arm. How glad she was she had chosen to wear a new frock, the olive-green silk, which set off her sherry-colored eyes. The brown high-heeled shoes drew attention to the hem, which was fashionably short at mid-calf. The brown cloche hat, trimmed with quail feathers, gave her extra height, for she was not tall. Angelina could not help smiling into the hard eyes of the left-behind women as she passed them on her way out into the street. *La gelosia*. How resentful they were.

He chose the nearest hotel, the Metropolitan on Pennsylvania Avenue, picking a table in the middle of the restaurant away from the windows and the noisy traffic outside. He selected a chair for Angelina, helping her into it before taking the opposite one, which gave him a good view of the door.

Angelina sat upright on her overstuffed seat, knees together, brown leather purse on her lap. She sensed there was some purpose here, some reason to meet her. Yet he said nothing. After offering her a cigarette from a monogrammed silver case, which she declined, he lit his from a matching silver lighter and smoked in silence for several moments.

She was just on the point of asking him again how he knew her name, when he tapped his cigarette ash into the ashtray and began, telling her that he had fought on the Italian Front in the recent war. Why was he telling her this? Did he want to boast about his war record? But no, he did not go into details, just narrated the bare facts. He spoke in a well-modulated baritone, which had an almost musical lilt to it, his eyes gazing into the glowing tip of his cigarette, or the bone-china bowl of his teacup. Perhaps he was telling her this in order to explain why he was studying to be a diplomat at the newly opened Georgetown School of Foreign Service. She stared at his closed face with its unreadable expression. Why would he be telling her that he had just begun to study there unless he wanted her to understand he was a pacifist? Perhaps he hoped this would distinguish him in some way. Finally, he raised his eyes.

"Mrs. Miller, please tell me about yourself."

Angelina sat still for a moment. "My husband died some years ago," she remarked quietly.

"Did you remarry?"

She laughed softly. "The war took all the good men away."

"Do you have children?"

Angelina, hesitating, sipped her tea. "I have two little girls."

His eyes locked onto hers. "How do you amuse yourself?"

"I do a little dressmaking," replied Angelina. "It has not been easy."

His face tightened into an expression of disapproval. He sipped his tea. "Do you have brothers or sisters?"

"I have two sisters."

His smile lifted a kind of heaviness that clung to him.

"Louisa married at sixteen, a lawyer who lives in New York City. Josephina is married to a doctor in Philadelphia."

He brightened. "Do they have children?"

"Oh yes." Angelina made a face. She was not close to her sisters or their families—they would not receive her. "Louisa has three girls, Josephina has three boys, and a girl named Paula, after *Zia* Paulina."

He leaned forward, his eyes fixed on her face. "How is—?" He paused. Angelina had the curious feeling he was about to ask after *Zia* Paulina, but that did not make sense. At that moment, the waiter appeared, and she glanced at her watch.

"*Dio!*" she exclaimed. "How time does fly. I promised Violet I would be back by five."

He rose to his feet as she stood, his face making some silent appeal. Perhaps he wanted to see her again. Angelina flashed a smile as she turned to go.

"Come to supper tomorrow, at seven."

He hovered, hat in hand, as if waiting. Angelina stopped suddenly, dumping her purse and gloves on a nearby chair.

"*Scusi*. Of course."

He stared at her for a long moment, then smiled.

Angelina rapidly opened her purse, took out an old envelope, and scribbled her address on the back using the stub of a worn-down pencil.

He examined the address, then scrutinized her.

Angelina's cheeks warmed. "You will come?" She picked up her purse and gloves.

He made her his little bow and waited while she hurried off.

Angelina took the Bridge Street cable car in the direction of Georgetown, taking a seat near the front as her stomach was having one of its moments of discomfort. The doctor had assured her the condition was nothing sinister; it was due to the difficulty of bringing Grace into this world, or perhaps that string of miscarriages following her birth. She leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes, allowing her thoughts to flow and distract her from the pain. Something about him touched her deeply, something that plucked at a memory. She was in Pennsylvania Station, New York City, twenty-three years ago. It was October 1898, and Angelina was waiting with her sisters. She was uncomfortably warm in the thick cotton dress worn on the long journey from *Italia*. She gazed around the station, bewildered by the crowds of people coming in and out. She had never seen so many before, they reminded her of ants crawling into and out of

the anthills back home on the farm. Before she had time to think, a train arrived. Louisa took her by the hand and led her into the carriage, while Josephina asked the porter to help her with their luggage. The train puffed out of New York, and she fell asleep. She awoke to the sound of her sisters' voices, heard the word *Papa*, and sat up.

"Dov'è Papa? Where is Papa?"

They exchanged glances. Angelina gazed around the compartment. Strangers avoided her stare.

"Where are they?"

Her sisters looked at each other.

Ordinarily, Angelina would have stamped her foot or screamed. But there was something about their silence that stopped her. How could that happen? How could you live elbow to elbow with your family for years, for ten years, for all of Angelina's life, and then vanish? Where were her father, stepmother and two younger half-brothers? Had they said *'addio'*? Angelina did not think so. In that moment, the future stretched blank before her, like a white sheet strung along a clothesline.

"Where are we going?"

"To live with Zia Paulina." She was Papa's younger sister, married to a wealthy lawyer.

"Georgetown." She tried out the unfamiliar name on her tongue. "I thought we were going to Chicago." Another unfamiliar name. Papa's relatives had been clamoring for him to come join them in Chicago. That was the reason why he had taken his family to the United States, an ocean away from Marostica, the little village in the Veneto where the Paganos had been tenant farmers for centuries, because the *padrone* had seized the land and now they had nowhere else to go.

The memory faded. Try as she might, she could remember nothing more. The cable car clanged, jerking her out of her reverie. It was about to cross the bridge into Georgetown. Angelina hurriedly gathered her purse and gloves; the next stop was hers.

She walked north on Montgomery for four blocks before turning east onto Beall Street. It was September, still warm, so Angelina was careful to walk slowly as she did not want to ruin her clothes with sweat stains. The thick air was redolent with brick pavement, and box hedge, mixed in with the harsh odor of petroleum fumes as an occasional motorized taxicab spluttered by belching dust.

Finally she was home, the modest house on Beall Street, where she lived with Zia Paulina and her daughters Violet and Grace. She opened the door, stepped inside, and tapped her way up the dark wooden staircase. The top floor had three bedrooms: a large front one for Zia Paulina, a large back one for Violet and Grace, and a small, dingy, middle one that was Angelina's. She knocked on the door that faced the stairs and, after waiting a moment, opened it.

Grace was propped up on her bed, reading, while Violet sat on a low upholstered chair in the corner, where light from two windows fell onto her mending. Next to Grace,

on a low nightstand, stood a statue of the Holy Mother, given to her by the nuns of the Convent of the Visitation. Angelina averted her gaze, made uncomfortable by evidence of her daughter's religiosity. She wished Zia Paulina did not encourage Grace to be so fanciful; it was not going to help her to cope with the real world. Next to Violet's bed was a pile of fashion magazines.

"When do you have your recital, *Graziella*?"

"Tomorrow night."

"Why do you ask?" said Violet.

"What time is it?" said Angelina.

"Professor Burneys wants us there at half past six," replied Grace.

"But a lot of people will be playing, won't they, Gracie?" put in Violet. "The Taussig sisters will sing, then there's Leo Smoot. He always bangs away at that piano for a while. It will probably go on for three hours at least."

"When are you playing?" said Angelina.

"I'm last," replied Grace.

Smiling, Angelina turned to Violet. "I think you should go with your sister."

"Why? I went last month. I'm tired of listening to sweet and serious, I want something jazzy you can dance to."

"Because she needs someone to walk with her."

"I was planning on spending the evening here, sewing." Violet gave her mother a look. She was making Grace a dress in honor of her sister's birthday—and usually, Angelina would have given into her wishes.

"I want you to go with your sister," she repeated.

"Why don't *you* go?" countered Violet.

Angelina hesitated.

"Who is he?"

"*Violetta!*" exclaimed Angelina. "That is no way to speak to your Mamma!"

Violet rose, folded her arms, and stared at her mother with a pair of bright blue eyes.

Angelina stared back, her sherry-colored eyes the exact same size and shape as her daughter's.

"Well?" asked Violet, after a pause.

"Mr. Russell is an excellent young man, a diplomat. I have invited him here for dinner."

"Aren't we going to meet him?"

"Of course you are. But not right away. I would like to know him a little better." Angelina left before Violet could ask more questions.

Grace put her book down. "He must be someone, Violet," she observed.

"Otherwise, Mother would not have invited him to dinner."

Violet raised her eyes heavenward. "He's taken *her* fancy, that's obvious."

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"Thank you, Lucinda." Angelina tapped her way down the narrow wooden staircase the following evening as Zia Paulina's housekeeper disappeared into the kitchen bearing a large bouquet of golden marigolds, yellow Belladonna lilies, and white roses. Mr. Russell, immaculately attired in black tie, was evaluating the contents of the front parlor. Angelina turned, the silver beading of her green cocktail dress swaying, and tried to see it through his eyes. It was filled to overflowing with furniture. A loveseat faced the window, two armchairs sat by the window across from each other, and two more squatted further back in the room. These pieces of furniture were surrounded by several occasional tables covered in knickknacks.

She glanced at him. No doubt the furniture told a story of a family forced to abandon a large house, for a smaller one. Well, she did not want his charity.

"What would you like to drink?" she said.

"Whiskey and soda, but not too much whiskey, please," he replied.

While Angelina made his drink with ice, a generous dash of whiskey, a spritz of soda water, and a twirl of lemon, Mr. Russell crossed the room to study the portrait of Zia Paulina that Zio Luca had commissioned forty years ago, back in the 1880s, when she was his young bride.

Did he know Zia Paulina? Angelina handed him his drink, and then made the exact same drink, without the alcohol, under his watchful gaze.

"You do not drink?"

"It is not good for my stomach," she replied.

"Are you seeing a doctor?"

"He treats me with the mercury and the arsenic. I have a box of little pink pills."

As she rattled with nervous laughter, he winced in sympathy.

"I thought you said you had children."

"We are alone this evening."

Russell turned away, took an abstemious sip, and immediately put his glass down.

Angelina was not usually tongue-tied, but it was becoming clear that Russell was harder to reach than most men. Men usually liked it when you dressed up for them, gave them your undivided attention, and fixed their drinks expertly. But as the silence lengthened and stretched, Mr. Russell threw out subtle hints he did not want to be here. It did not make sense.

Just as she was on the point of asking him why Zia Paulina's portrait interested him so much, Lucinda appeared, announcing dinner.

Angelina had set the table with Zia Paulina's damask tablecloth, matching napkins, and best silver, selecting the tall candles that glowed in their silver sconces. Now, sitting opposite Mr. Russell, she hoped she had done something right. Lucinda's cooking was delicious, pumpkin soup, fried fish, and ice-cream topped with fresh

strawberries, but Mr. Russell ate sparingly and did not say much. The only time he smiled was after sipping his wine.

"Where did you get this? It's a Bardolino."

Angelina started. Most people wouldn't know about that kind of wine, as you could only get it in the Veneto, the region around *Venexia*, where Angelina and her family came from. It was almost impossible to get anything like that nowadays, now that prohibition gripped the country by its throat.

"You are from the Veneto?" she asked.

"I fought on the Italian Front," he parried.

There was a pause as he swirled the wine around in his glass.

"It's hard to get decent wine these days," he remarked. "How did you manage it?"

"We had supplies," she said. Dr. Jackson, who treated her for stomach cramps, knew she liked Italian wine.

Angelina looked at him again, this time veiling her gaze through her lashes.

"Where are you from?"

He studied his wine. "I was born in the United States."

"*Davvero?*" Angelina leaned forward to study his expression, but he kept his face averted. "So you do not know the Pagano family?"

"No." He drained his glass. She offered him more before going downstairs to make Italian-style coffee. When she came up the stairs from the basement kitchen, he was sitting in front of their boudoir grand, playing something from memory. It was something that Angelina had heard before but could not put a name to, the sort of thing Grace would know.

He rose instantly, accepting his coffee.

"Do not stop," she exclaimed. "I did not know you were a pianist."

"I'm not," he replied, stirring his coffee.

"But you play—*magnificamente*."

"I am out of practice."

"Do you have a piano in your lodgings?"

"Not yet." But he smiled. Taking the opportunity, she put down her coffee, and cranked the gramophone player. As the music took hold, she sashayed across the floor, her rope of pearls chinking.

He hesitated. She secured his hand. He drew back. She put her other hand on his shoulder. Again, he withdrew. They danced awkwardly, Angelina wondering how it would feel to be in his arms.

Just as the gramophone wound down, a female voice said, "Come on, Gracie, don't be such a slowpoke. Let's go meet this paragon."

Mr. Russell froze. He scrutinized Violet, then Angelina. Violet was a taller version of Angelina, her oval face framed by golden curls, not chestnut, her eyes blue, not brown.

Russell's lips were just framing an expression of disapproval when Grace stepped around Violet. His pupils expanded, making his dark eyes look even darker. There was something almost greedy in this look he bestowed on Grace.

Violet came forward. "I'm Violet Miller. And you are?"

"Russell. At your service." As he made his small bow, Violet's eyes widened. Then his eyes locked onto Grace again. The child looked charming in Zia Paulina's cast-off ivory-colored frock overlaid in lace, which came down to her ankles. The candlelight suffusing the room caught her nutmeg-colored hair, making it gleam.

"You didn't tell me your daughters were exquisite young women."

"Whatever have you been saying to Mr. Russell, Mother dear?" remarked Violet. "Didn't you tell him I was eighteen?"

Angelina swallowed and lowered her head. Violet was her best friend, her loyal supporter, but she wasn't the most tactful person in the world. Couldn't she see how much it hurt to have a potential suitor figuring out the mother's age from the ages of her daughters?

"This is my sister Grace," continued Violet. "She turns seventeen tomorrow."

Grace took one tentative step forward and gave Russell her hand.

Slowly, gently, he brushed his lips over the back of her hand, making a gesture that again was both odd and old-fashioned. Angelina watched, her shoulders slumping, but she forced herself to curve the corners of her pressed-together lips upward into a smile.

"Mr. Russell is a diplomat," she remarked. "He has come to take up a position in the District." She ushered everyone into the front parlor.

"Are you a diplomat?" Violet sat down on the loveseat next to Angelina.

He smiled, amused at her directness. "I am studying at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. I have to know about international trade, law, and political science, as well as diplomacy. The State Department is eager to have us once we graduate, because Georgetown is the only school in the country offering a foreign service course."

"How do you know Mother?"

"I met her in Shepherd & Riley's." He coughed. "How do you amuse yourself?"

"I sew. I want to be a fashion designer and have my own shop in Georgetown."

"I didn't know you wanted to own your own boutique." Angelina lowered her head. Why was she telling Russell this when she had not told her mamma?

"You have been preoccupied," replied Violet. "I've talked with Auntie P., and she's agreed to find someone to help me."

Angelina's cheeks burned. "You might have asked me, *Violetta cara*."

There was silence.

"Would you like coffee?" Angelina turned to Grace.

"Yes, please," she murmured.

"We've just come from Professor Burneys'," remarked Violet as Angelina poured, "where Grace played her violin."

He put his coffee cup down and addressed Grace directly. "I am passionate about music. I would love to hear you play."

Grace cast her eyes down into her coffee, reminding Angelina suddenly of one of Raffaello's *Madonnas*.

"You look tired, Gracie," put in Violet. "You had a long evening." She turned to him. "Grace was supposed to be playing the Brahms *A Major Sonata*, but the pianist didn't show. She had to switch gears, and do some insipid Mozart instead."

"I know that Brahms sonata," he remarked. "The cross-rhythms are not easy for the pianist, but if you would like me to try—"

A sudden change took place. From lying back in her seat wreathed in her own thoughts, which often gave her an otherworldly quality, Grace actually raised her head, and looked straight at him for the first time.

"I was so disappointed I couldn't play it this evening."

A dazzling smile radiated over his face.

Sighing, Angelina led the way into the back parlor, where the baby grand stood. He sat on the piano stool and began to wrestle with the Brahms, while Grace took her violin out of its silken wraps, placed it on the piano, put rosin onto her bow, and massaged the fingers of her left hand.

Eventually, he turned to her and played the D minor chord so she could tune her violin. Then Grace placed her instrument under her chin, raised her bow, and they began. He played the wistful opening, which Grace replied to with a descending phrase of sweet sadness. He continued, and she replied. For many measures they conducted this sweetly musical conversation until Grace interrupted with a fiery outburst, introducing a surprising passion to her playing.

Angelina was not knowledgeable about classical music, preferring popular songs and the Italian folk music of her youth, but she could see that Russell was unusually good. He played with a lightness of touch that allowed him to bring out the rhythms from the thick texture of the piece, making it interesting in a way Grace's normal accompanist did not. Unfortunately, the Brahms sonata was darkly passionate. Unfortunately, they both played it extremely well. Angelina clenched her porcelain coffee cup in her slender fingers as she flicked her eyes from one face to the other. Grace wore her usual dreamy look, but her cheeks were tinged with a faint pinkness. Russell's dark gaze never left her. How he managed to play those fistfuls of notes without glancing at the music, Angelina would never know.

Her stomach wound itself into a knot as the piece continued. It couldn't be true—it wasn't true. She could hardly bear to think about it. This had never happened to her

before, she had always been the one to attract male attention. But men did not look at her in the way he was gazing at Grace. They looked aroused, or bored, or amused, or cynical. But not tender, not with that soft expression.

What would happen if he returned and asked permission to be Grace's suitor? Well, she would not stand for it. *Per l'amor di Dio*, for the love of God, Grace was only seventeen, and it was the height of rudeness to abandon the mother for the daughter. If he did return, she would see that he was sent away.

Finally, the sonata ended.

No one clapped.

Russell sat still for several moments, then rose and softly closed the piano lid. He took his hat from the hatstand and bestowed one last, long look upon Grace.

"That was miraculous." He placed his Panama on his head, and hurried away.

"What a dangerous man," Angelina remarked as soon as Russell shut the door behind him. "His behavior was unnerving. Look at the way he eyed Grace."

Grace glanced up from the task of putting her violin away. "I thought his manners were charming and very correct."

Angelina stared. Grace was not given to speaking up.

"He wasn't quite what you'd hoped for, was he, Mother dear?" remarked Violet.

"I was trying to help *you*," said Angelina, her cheeks warming.

Violet folded her arms and gave her a look.

"I'm never going to invite him again." Angelina weaved unsteadily on her high heels as she made her way towards the stairs and the privacy of her dingy room.

"You won't have to," replied Violet. "He'll be back."

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More Information about Farewell My Life:

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More Information about Thwarted Queen:

Title: Thwarted Queen: The Entire Saga of the Yorks, Lancasters & Nevilles whose family feud inspired Game of Thrones.

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A short synopsis:

It is 1483. Cecylee, Queen By Right, the King's mother is distraught by the news of her son's sudden death. The King of England was only forty years old, and had seemed in good health. A strong king who held together various political factions, with his death, all hell broke loose. If this sounds familiar, it may be because Season One of Game of Thrones takes its inspiration from the sudden death of a strong king (Robert Baratheon or Edward IV) and the war that broke out between the Starks and the Lannisters, or the Yorks and the Lancasters.

It is told mainly in the voice of Lady Cecylee Neville (1415-1495), the Thwarted Queen, but other voices are important to this tale, not least those of the Londoners, who forged their own political destiny by engaging in public debate with the powerful aristocrats of the time - Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (the King's uncle), Richard, Duke of York (the King's cousin) and Richard, Earl of Warwick, (known as Warwick the Kingmaker) - and set the stage for American Democracy.

Reviews of Thwarted Queen:

"Extremely interesting and cleverly written-I was completely enthralled!" - *Lucy Bertoldi, Historical Novel Society.*

"A gripping, well-researched historical novel, revealing a violent age. Cecylee and the other characters are well-drawn, with great subtlety and depth." - *Lindsay Townsend, author of "To Touch the Knight."*

"The author immerses the reader in a complex and vivid world that is depicted with persuasive confidence." - *Curtis Sittenfeld, author of "American Wife."*

"A wonderful novel to introduce Cecily Neville and historical biographical fiction to young female readers." - *Mirella Patzer, author of "The Pendant."*

"Haggard delivers a swift epic that is both entertaining and informing. The writing is crisp and clear, the characters well-defined, and the emotion overflowing. This book has something for everyone—romance, intrigue, and plenty of action." - *US Review of Books, May 2012.*