

The Second War Of Rebellion

A NOVEL

by

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Newcastlewest Books

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Please enjoy the opening pages of THE SECOND WAR OF REBELLION----

**ONE**

The alarm began downriver, the call passed from look-out to look-out, until the hoot reached Maddie's ears and she knew it was time to go. She picked her way along the top of the levee, tangling with the brush as she navigated over the flood gate. There was a big world out there, plenty of places for a twelve-year-old girl to make her way. She would not let them send her away to England.

A branch snagged the hem of her petticoat and the girl ripped the fabric rather than be delayed. So little time to escape, yet the going was slow on the banks of the Ashley. Maddie clambered down the levee, using a low hanging branch for support, and scanned the river for signs of a friendly but unknown face. She would make the wharf much faster if she went by water, but finding a pilot who did not know the Beauchamp family was not very likely. Even so, a boat represented her best hope for slipping past him.

Her plan was to get to Washington, to speak to President Jefferson. The runaway pressed the leather pouch she wore around her neck, her treasure hidden under her clothes. Two dollars, three cents and ten British shillings was not enough to buy passage, and probably not enough to pay for food. Better to starve, Maddie decided, than to become a prisoner in a foreign country, even if her late mother was said to have requested it on her death bed. She would hide herself in a

hogshead of rice, or stow away and closet herself behind bales of cotton. No one would take her from South Carolina and ship her off to England.

Back on top of the levee, she examined the faces on the many boats that were heading east, but the bargemen were long-time friends who would give her up if questioned. Her shoes slipped on the worn wooden frame as she scrambled over another sluice gate. In September, the gate would be opened at low tide and the rice bed would drain, baring strong stalks loaded down with golden grain. She would be gone, one way or the other, and would miss the excitement of chasing away foraging birds while the rice cutters mowed down the beds. Other adventures awaited, if President Jefferson could be made to see that a skilled artist should be part of the Corps of Discovery. She would not hesitate to stand at the foot of a seven foot tall beaver and create a detailed drawing. A woolly mastodon would not frighten her, and if unicorns did indeed exist in the Louisiana Territory, she would find one and make the most accurate depiction crafted by human hands.

Before any of that could happen, she had to get to Charleston. Already her legs were weary, weighed down by clots of mud that stuck to her boots. Again, Maddie looked out over the river, only to be hailed by an elderly gentleman who lived three plantations upriver from Riverside. Thinking quickly, Maddie waved back. Chances were good that he was returning to town for the sickly season, that he would not know that the Beauchamp girl had disappeared, at least until her escape was secure.

“Now where might you be heading, Miss Maddie, on this fine day?” he asked. One of his oarsmen held the launch steady while Maddie came aboard.

“Just into town,” she said. She dangled her feet over the side to wash off the mud, which then soaked into her stockings and painted them black.

The gentleman asked no further questions, instead turning the conversation to the weather, which was most decidedly pleasant for mid-May, and then asked after the health of her grandparents, her brother the sailor, and her brother the planter. Dull inanity came to an abrupt halt when the tiller man noticed some sort of blockage ahead.

“Something big moving up river?” the gentleman asked, his skinny old neck stretching to see around a bend. The oarsmen pulled closer to the bank before stopping to watch that ‘something big’ pass by.

“Will you look at that there,” the tiller man said.

Like the Red Sea parting, all traffic on the river shifted to the banks. Though impatient to be on her way, Maddie was curious, and she scooted across the bench to see what was so fascinating. A long boat pulled by sixteen oars glided with smooth precision down the very middle of the Ashley. A colorful pendant hung limp from the stern, right behind a tall, dark, scowling devil who was seated on an indigo blue velvet cushion. His coal-black eyes stared straight ahead, a man with a single-minded purpose. His navy blue uniform was spotless, his decorations shining, and his silk stockings were so white that his shins glowed. Slowly, carefully, Maddie slid back across the seat until she felt branches scratch her cheek.

“Still thinks he’s cock of the walk,” the gentleman mumbled. “Strutting up the Ashley, and don’t we all remember him and his kind, raiding our plantations and leaving our people to starve.”

Put your backs into it, Maddie longed to shout to the boys who rested on their oars, goggle-eyed at the spectacle of a British admiral in all his imperious glory. A low-hanging branch caught her hair and the riverbank caught her eye. Spotting a likely-looking sliver of solid ground, Maddie jumped out of the boat and pulled herself up the levee, clawing at the mud as she sought a handhold. She made the top and started running, north to the river road, putting distance between herself and the stranger who had come to take her away, the distance between liberty and tyranny.

## TWO

The same weathered boards groaned under his feet when Jack stepped onto the pier at Riverside Plantation. Tangled memories twisted around his neck and choked him, while his mind bent to the cruelty of time’s passage. Over twenty years since he asked Sarah for her hand, when he was a foolish boy who thought himself a very wise man. A wiser man stole his love and he could only watch fifteen years slide by before he returned to South Carolina to court a widow, when he strode along this same path through the riot of color that was the formal garden. The last three years were the cruelest of all, three years without Sarah, three years as a grieving man waiting for peace so that he could transport her daughter to his home in England.

Crushed oyster shells flipped off the backs of his shoes as he walked up the path to the big house. Over twenty years of bitter enmity between the English peer and Sarah’s father. What legal technicalities might Mr. Mahon have contrived this time, to deny Jack yet again? Ever since he set sail from Portsmouth, with the ink not yet dry on the Treaty of Amiens, he had been plagued with worry. He was a sailor, a tactician, a commander, but not a legal scholar. He had no arms to defend against logic and argument, to rebut a skilled lawyer like Richard Mahon. To fail Sarah, as he had failed her back in 1780, was inconceivable. He had to win, at any and all costs.

The door of the house opened and a sense of dread filled Jack’s mind until he thought his head would burst. A younger version of Sarah’s old footman relieved the Admiral of his hat and gloves. The entry hall was exactly as Jack remembered it, down to the inlaid table and its bowl of flowers that changed with the seasons. A scent of roses reached his nose, the white roses that Sarah brought to Farthingmill Abbey; a clumsy accident with the pruning shears, sepsis, fever, rapid decline; he had ripped out the roses with his bare hands, a man gone mad. The vivid scenes triggered by the sweet aroma turned his stomach.

The route was well known, with not a stick of furniture moved. Not a single painting was rearranged. Every aspect of the drawing room was identical, so much so that Jack expected Sarah to walk in at any moment, to tell him he had been dreaming. No soft footsteps echoed down the corridor. The wind had shifted, conditions had altered. For three solitary years Jack had prepared

to become a father and he would not yield to Mr. Mahon's pleas. Taking a seat near an open window, he hugged his leather portfolio to his chest like a shield.

He was admiring the view of the gardens when the carved cypress doors flew open and Ethan charged into the room, his hair dripping wet and his vest unbuttoned, as if he had just come from a dip in the river.

"Not too taxing of a voyage, I trust," the young man said, pumping Jack's hand with the joy of a reunion. The schoolboy Jack met in London was now a grown man with too many burdens heaped on thin shoulders. It was Ethan who managed the Beauchamp empire, had been at it since his mother died. Little wonder that he was all in favor of his sister being turned over to someone else, recognizing the limits of his endurance. He was Jack's strongest ally.

"A pleasure cruise," Jack said.

"Yes, the peace," Ethan said. He took the portfolio from Jack and placed it on a table that was set up in a corner of the room, not unlike an arrangement suitable for a card party. "Will it translate into peaceful trade; that is our chief concern in Charleston."

"It is highly doubtful that the peace will last," Jack said. "We destroyed Bonaparte's navy at Abukir Bay. We will not allow him to use the guise of peace to rebuild it."

Good breeding and manners were on display as Ethan poured out two glasses of sweet wine, his ease implying a long practice at entertaining. "Very soon, America will double in size and Mr. Bonaparte will be the beneficiary of the exchange. Several million dollars into his coffers, sir, to your detriment and the detriment of our Treasury. However, it is my experience that land has such value that one does not decline the opportunity to increase one's holdings."

"Which made it impossible for the Crown to convince your Congress of the folly of such an action," Jack said. He had hoped that Maddie would race in, as eager to meet him as he was to meet her, but the house remained eerily quiet. "A more persuasive argument would have been to give the land over as a spoil of war, should our countries have formed an alliance."

"I fear the Crown sees quite clearly the hazards of such a scenario," Ethan said. "What are we, sir? Friends, not quite, neither are we enemies."

"Let us get better acquainted, Ethan," Jack said. "Your country is too new while mine is old and set in its ways. The new boy at school, would you say? Perhaps we need a round of fisticuffs to define ourselves to one another."

"Stephen and I comported ourselves with honor," Ethan said, laughing over antics that seemed from another era altogether.

"As for trade prospects, I would advise you that war is expected to resume in a matter of months."

"In which case, why not allow my sister to remain here, in perfect safety from piracy and French attack?" So calm, so reasonable, so exactly like his late father. Yet based on Ethan's previous correspondence, it could only be a question concocted by his grandfather and inserted into an obedient mouth.

"There can be no question as to your mother's intentions," Jack said. He could hear her still, her voice weak as the end approached, as she whispered that Maddie was his daughter. The

child's life was placed in his hands at that moment; no one could deny it, and he intended to cherish and protect that young life.

"Of course, but can we not consider Maddie's happiness? She is quite content with her established routine. As to my uncle's inconvenience, I can assure you, sir, that he finds Maddie's care to be no burden at all when she resides with him during the school term," Ethan said. He grew restless, taking a few steps to the left and to the right before finding a spot to lean against the fireplace mantle. Above him, a bull's-eye mirror reflected a portrait of Sarah with her two sons, painted before the reconciliation that brought Jack back from the darkness. "Would Maddie not thrive in an atmosphere of love and caring here, as well, if not better, than a land where she is a stranger?"

Thanks to three years of correspondence, Jack had fleshed out an unflattering picture of what all that love and caring had created. From Ethan and Stephen he compiled a distressing timeline that was everything Sarah did not want for her only daughter. "Love is one thing, Ethan, while coddling is quite another. The child requires a firm hand and discipline to rein in her willfulness. What man would take her as a wife? A fortune hunter? A wastrel, a drunkard?"

"Who will wipe her tears while you are at sea?" Ethan's tone was blunt, in the way that his father had mastered, cutting through to the heart of a matter with a single sentence.

The footman broke the tension when he knocked and opened the door, announcing the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Mahon. Sweat formed on Jack's temples and dripped from his hair, created a rivulet that ran down his back, puddled and pooled behind his knees. He snatched a hasty glance, to make sure that his portfolio was still within reach, his last remaining weapon in a critical battle. What faith could he place in a letter and a legal document from England, when he was facing the crystalline-pure hatred of an American father? Well-deserved hatred, Jack knew, because he had ruined Sarah.

Time had not been kind to Mr. Mahon, who shuffled into the drawing room with his shoulders hunched. As for Mrs. Mahon, she carried herself with an elegance befitting Charleston royalty, but her hair was completely gray and her step was noticeably slower. Her eyes were unusually sharp, hawk-like in the way her gaze settled onto Jack's gold service medal. The chill of her greeting shivered down his spine.

"Where is your sister?" Mr. Mahon directed his question to Ethan, who shrugged as he took the old man's bundle of legal documents and placed them on the table next to Jack's meager offering.

"The plantation is being searched," Ethan said. Mrs. Mahon sank into a chair at the news, her hand fluttering up to her temple as if she had developed a severe headache.

"Then we shall proceed without her," Mr. Mahon said. "Come, Mr. Ashford, the sooner we conclude, the shorter will be the time in which I must endure the pain of my grandchild being torn from my side."

With Mahon's unblinking gaze fixed on him, Jack settled into a seat at what was apparently a conference table. The first volley had been fired, in the form of address. Jack was not Mr. Ashford, he was Lord Bransmore, and Mr. Mahon made it quite clear where things stood

between them. Jack tugged at the string that held his portfolio together and the sheaf of papers tumbled out.

Mr. Mahon took one, no doubt because he recognized the handwriting of his dearest friend, a fellow barrister who was forced into exile after the loyalists he supported were soundly defeated. "You are to be commended, sir," Mr. Mahon said. "A personal recommendation from a man I consider my brother, who would school me in British law when I know it yet, despite the passage of years and the introduction of new laws that are far superior to anything Parliament might concoct in its entire existence."

"Beyond all laws, sir, there is Sarah's wish to consider," Jack said.

He looked to Ethan to verify the mumblings of a dying woman, but the poor boy had been distraught at the time and might not have heard clearly.

"We cannot, of course, be unquestionably certain as to the actual words," Ethan said. "Although I believe she was fully aware of what she was asking of us."

"Lucid or not, she could not have thought the matter through," Mr. Mahon said. "Her intention was to vouchsafe the safety and security of all her children. It was an easy matter to leave the land to Ethan and the sea to Stephen. What were her intentions in regard to Madeleine?"

"To see her brought up so that she might take her rightful place in the world," Mrs. Mahon said. "As would any mother wish for her daughters."

"That being the case, why can this not be accomplished with equal success in America?" Mr. Mahon asked. "Not to deny you your rights, of course, Mr. Ashford. But to ensure Maddie's rights as a human being."

"You wish her happiness, do you not, Mr. Ashford?" Mrs. Mahon asked.

"Can we anticipate a gentleman of your stature to abandon his calling, turn all aside, and dedicate himself to child rearing?" Mr. Mahon continued. More than ever, Jack felt as if he were on trial, without a witness to speak on his behalf.

How best to counter Mr. Mahon without appearing condescending? The details of Maddie's new life were in the hands of a paid staff, a veritable army. The child would be taught by the finest teachers that a peer's money could buy, given access to the most elegant society in the world, and to imply that Jack had to take up permanent residence in his library to be a good father amounted to some tenuous arguments that were preposterous. The fact that Mr. Mahon would squabble over the point proved how determined he was to win, and how very much he loved his grandchild.

"We know what Sarah desired, sir, based on the nature of her request." Jack wanted to mop the sweat from his forehead but to do so would make him appear weak. "For my part, I deeply regret the delay in my arrival, but given the circumstances, you cannot fault me for waiting until combat ceased. Did I not readily agree that it was best for Madeleine to remain under your care until such time as we now find ourselves?"

“Yes, I concede that point,” Mr. Mahon said. “But you cannot deny that the child has never met you, does not know you beyond whatever fanciful tales my daughter might have shared. Would it not be better to develop a rapport before absconding with her?”

“Please, become our honored guest for as long as might be practicable,” Mrs. Mahon said. “Become acquainted with Maddie, and she with you. She is a very loving child, truly, Mr. Ashford, given the time to warm to you.”

“Time is a luxury we do not have, Mrs. Mahon, as much as I realize the wisdom of your advice,” Jack said. “We cannot recover the three years that have passed. The time remaining for education and training is therefore much shorter than ideal, and cannot be wasted on something that will come about in due time, whether here or in England.”

The look that passed from husband to wife to grandson spoke volumes in a language that Jack did not understand. Words of rebuttal came to his mind, but he had yet to form a cogent sentence before Mr. Mahon slid a document across the table and then nudged the inkwell closer to Jack’s right hand. “Formalizing the adoption,” the old lawyer said. As soon as Jack signed, Ethan whisked the paper away and sanded the still wet ink.

Another stack appeared. “In the event of your demise, guardianship.” The process was repeated, again and again, as Jack agreed to anything and everything without so much as reading the first word of every contract he made. Settlements for Sarah’s estate, a settlement for Maddie outright, emancipation at eighteen, it was all made legal and binding but Jack did not care. He had loved Sarah in a way he did not realize was possible, an all-consuming love that he would share with Madeleine. His heart was breaking at the thought of losing the child he longed to nurture like a delicate flower, to help her blossom. No law made by man could crush the joy he would find in the years to come.

The piles of paper were divided into two, with a copy for Jack and a copy for Mr. Mahon, to avoid any questions in the future. Mr. Mahon seemed exhausted by the activity. “Ultimately, Mr. Ashford, I believe that my daughter knew quite well what was best for her children. Just as I believe she knew that Stephen would run away to sea from the moment he was born, and that is why she did nothing to stop him.”

In war, a commander had to look the enemy square in the face, to deny his own fear behind a façade of fearless indifference to fate. Jack forced himself to meet Mr. Mahon’s cold grey eye, only to blink first. In victory, Mr. Mahon smirked. Without asking the question directly, he had his answer. It was true that Stephen Beauchamp was the son of Jack Ashford.

“Forgive me if I sound harsh, but I must wonder if you are attempting to keep her from me,” Jack said. “Her continued absence concerns me.”

“Not at all,” Ethan said. “It is just that, you see, Maddie has developed a tendency to follow her own counsel.”

“She has developed a habit of disappearing into the woods when it suits her fancy,” Mr. Mahon said. “When she must do something that she does not wish to do.”

“If wishes were horses,” Jack said.

“My digestion does not allow for a long delay,” Mr. Mahon said. “Shall we dine without her, or shall I dine alone?”

“Let her go hungry,” Ethan said. “How else is she to learn that guests are not to be kept waiting?”

The table was too large for the small party that clustered at one end, an awkward gathering of four in a room designed to hold ten times that number. Jack paid a compliment to Riverside’s cook, repeated himself he feared, and Mrs. Mahon gamely steered the conversation on to a different tack. She described in detail the book she had compiled for her granddaughter, a collection of receipts and household advice that was akin to a housewife’s Bible. It was Mrs. Mahon’s knowledge, acquired over decades of experience as the mistress of a large estate, and it was the sort of knowledge that was not imparted in a schoolroom. What other secrets did women hold, to be handed down the generations, outside the view of men? Again, Jack was plagued by doubt about his ability to mold the girl into the woman who would be a credit to her mother’s memory. He found his mind wandering, his gaze shifting towards the doorway, over to the pier glasses that reflected the empty chair and the untouched plate.

Recollections of Ethan’s school days and his British friends filled out a conversation that Mr. Mahon did not try to join. An invitation was extended to them all, to call on the Admiral’s flag ship, but only Ethan had any interest, and only because his schoolmate Edmund Powell was serving as a midshipman. The dessert plates were cleared away and Jack was half-delighted that the meal was ending, while dreading the artificial conviviality that would be the final course. The footmen proceeded to remove the tablecloth when a sudden flurry of footsteps and hissed warnings drifted into the room. A tall, thin woman dragging a mud lark appeared in the doorway, gave the dirty child a shove, and harrumphed her righteous indignation by way of a farewell.

“Looks like someone was frog-gigging,” Mr. Mahon said. He smiled with a grandfather’s indulgence as he held out his arms, rewarding bad conduct with a loving embrace.

“Baby girl, you dishonor your family,” Mrs. Mahon said.

A whisper passed between the girl and Mr. Mahon. “It is not my place any longer to forgive you,” he said. With his arm around her waist, he turned the child so that she was face to face with Jack. “Your stepdaughter, sir. Be courteous to your stepfather, Maddie.”

Madeleine Beauchamp Ashford was not a replica of Sarah. This girl was like a newborn foal, all gangly limbs too long to move with grace. Her eyes were an indistinct brown, while her hair glowed with copper glints that were surely a nod to the Mahon bloodline. She met Jack’s eyes for the briefest of moments, and he read her heart as easily as he judged every new sailor who came aboard his ship. Jack and Madeleine were drawing from the same deep well, and neither had yet plumbed the depths. Behind a façade of bravado was a frightened, lonely child without a rudder or moorings. He reached out, to wrap her in a comforting embrace, but the way that she turned away from him was a sign that he was three years too late for such gestures of affection.



Mrs. Mahon picked dead leaves and twigs from Maddie's untamed curls, an impossible task that added to the grandmother's distress. At last, she gave up and sent Maddie to her seat directly across from Jack. "Shall I ask Cook to prepare a little something for you, baby girl?"

She shook her head to negate the suggestion and whispered something in Mrs. Mahon's ear. It was obvious that she was acting as if Jack did not exist, and in a way intended to broadcast the fact.

"Today, I would like us all to take coffee together," Ethan said. "Would you mind if we continued en famille, Mr. Ashford? Under the circumstances, perhaps it would be best to limit any absences."

"Splendid idea, Ethan," Jack said. Splendid, not to be forced to sit under the glowering stare of Mr. Mahon, for there was not enough wine in the world to make that tolerable. "Then I can tell you all of my recent encounter with Stephen, shortly after I left England to come here."

"You see him more than we do," Ethan said. "Considering the distance, it does not surprise me."

"As he no doubt told you, he was frocked, in spite of President Jefferson's attempts to rid the military of Federalist sympathizers," Mr. Mahon said.

"No matter the government, sir, we are all cursed with politicians who would insert their opinions despite their complete lack of competence," Jack said. There was something about Maddie that reminded him of Stephen, perhaps a trait inherited from Sarah that was lying just below the surface, ready to sprout. The child had the potential to outshine her mother if properly cultivated. Not impossible to imagine her as a duchess, as the brightest light in London society, outshining all four of Richmond's daughters put together. So many times, he and Sarah had spoken of her coming out, of her future. How would he bring any of it about if he could not find a way to penetrate the hard shell around Madeleine's heart?

"You are excused, Maddie, to amend your toilette," Mrs. Mahon said. "I don't know why Afi didn't clean you up before delivering you."

"Don't we," Ethan mumbled.

After Maddie was gone, the young man sent the servants out of the room and refilled the wine glasses himself. "I hope you will overlook Maddie's behavior, sir. You are, after all, a stranger to her. In Charleston, we are accustomed to knowing everyone down to their distant relations."

How much poison had been dripped into Madeleine's ears, not only since Sarah's passing but even before? The wildest exaggeration, the most far-fetched caricature could have been painted on her malleable mind, all with the intention of disrupting Jack's claim. There had been a time when Mahon had plotted and schemed to keep Sarah from him, but Jack was no longer the twenty-five-year old lieutenant and he would not surrender. He would overcome all obstacles and win Maddie's heart. He was going to be the best father the world had ever seen.

"Her brothers went to England for an education, and now it is Madeleine's turn," Jack said. "A reasonable approach, in my opinion, to ease her distress."

“We have schools in these United States,” Mr. Mahon said. He had sent his son to Boston for his education, just to make the point, and none could argue that the younger Mahon was not prospering as a lawyer and land owner.

“The finest education will be found in England, for the time being,” Jack said. “The quality cannot be denied.”

“Six years is not such a long time in one’s life,” Ethan said.

“It is the blink of an old man’s eye,” Mr. Mahon said. With the shadows growing darker in the unlit room, Jack could not help but notice that the gentleman’s face had taken on a gaunt appearance, more skeletal and pallid. “You have fond memories of your school days, Ethan, but will your sister find as much enjoyment in her pursuit, which will take place in solitude?”

“We must all do what is asked of us,” Ethan said. “Or would I have been within my rights to abandon all that my father built up, so that I could complete my education to my satisfaction?”

“Stephen’s choice was not made lightly,” Mr. Mahon said. “Is not one man risking his life enough sacrifice for this family? Is it too much to ask that you contribute in an area where you far exceed your brother’s capacities?”

Chastened, the young man fixed his gaze on his empty glass. “I am, of course, grateful for your help and guidance,” he said. “As I am grateful to my stepfather for accepting an onerous burden that I have, in part, made worse through overindulgence and misplaced sympathy.”

“Not a burden, Ethan, but an honor,” Jack said.

Just as the peace was temporary, and Jack would return to the sea, all was temporary. In his mind, he played out Madeleine’s future departure, his paternal kiss on her cheek, his fatherly blessing as she spread her wings, the nestling making ready to fly. When next she set foot in Charleston, Madeleine would be a woman like her mother, molded into a lady who was prepared to take her rightful place in society. How exactly he would accomplish all that was as unknown to him as the vagaries of parenthood. In all their imaginings, neither he nor Sarah had ever contemplated their little family without its beloved matriarch.