

A close-up, artistic photograph of a woman's profile. She is wearing a dark purple hat and has a large, vibrant yellow rose tucked into her dark, wavy hair. She is wearing a light pink top with white polka dots. The background is a soft, muted green. The overall aesthetic is elegant and vintage.

HEIRLOOM
SECRETS

Paint
and
Nectar

A NOVEL

ASHLEY CLARK

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearance of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the authors' imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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In memory of my Grandpaw Jim,
who loved bluebirds and gardens.
And from whom I got my knack for embellishment.

And to my other grandparents—Dolores, Melody, and Ernie—
for giving me the gift of family and all it means.

I am grateful for the heritage of faith
the four of you have given me.

The question is not what you look at,
but what you see.
—Henry David Thoreau



PROLOGUE

December 1861

Longitude Lane, Charleston, South Carolina

Not a day went by she didn't think about her daughter.

Where she may be, if she was safe . . . who'd bought her.

At first, Rose didn't sleep at all. Then she wasn't fit for work so they sold her too. That's how she ended up working as a house slave for Clara.

Clara was a girl herself back then.

Clara wasn't a girl no more. Rose had a plan, see. She'd been a real hard worker and real kind, too, with the hope of getting information about her daughter. Rose always'd known Clara wasn't too keen on slavery like her daddy was, but she never expected this. Never expected Clara was capable of what she'd just done.

They had to be careful. For Rose herself, for Ashley, and also for Clara. She didn't want Clara getting in trouble, and if Clara's father caught them . . .

But he wouldn't, so long as they stayed focused.

Rose reminded herself of yesterday's nightmare. How her jaw hurt real bad from clenching it in the night. Started off beautiful—Ashley skipping around in innocence, just a grinnin' at her mama—

and then those men snatched her and took her away. And Rose felt she was gonna be sick when she peeled herself out of bed this mornin'. Was like she'd lived the nightmare in real life all over again.

She needed to get to her daughter. She may've already taken too long.

Everything hinged on Clara's help.

Missus Clara cradled the silver spoon in the palms of her hands now. The sky above them darkened with clouds, and the ground below them shook with the thunder of cannons. Rose and Clara huddled together near the carriage house at the end of the garden, a shovel in Rose's grasp.

Clara looked at her with fiery eyes, and the message passed clearly between them.

It has to be now.

"He's coming," Clara said. She closed her hands around the spoon. "I can't believe Father promised him my heirloom silver as a gift." She raised her chin and held on to Rose's gaze, a move that caught Rose by surprise every time. She wasn't used to white folks looking directly at her like that. "Dowries aren't even fashionable any longer. Suppose he bargained for one in exchange for taking this troublemaker off Father's hands." Clara shook her head, a humorless chuckle escaping her mouth. "Oh, Rose, I'm afraid." She fussed with her lacy gloves. "I shouldn't admit that. But can we really do this? Bury the silver before they find it? Leave everything behind?"

Yes. No hesitatin'—yes.

"Missus, you stronger than you know, and braver too. God'll give you the strength to do the right thing. Now you want me to get started diggin' before the rain comes?"

"Yes." Clara placed a hand to the well-defined waistline her corset provided and drew in a deep breath. She glanced up to the heavens. "But you'd better make it fast. I fear we don't have much time before he arrives."

ONE

1929

Longitude Lane, Charleston, South Carolina

William wasn't born a thief. Never had been the type to pocket a trinket from the market or get a rush from taking something that didn't belong to him.

But was *imitation* really stealing?

Scratch that. He needn't think too long for the answer, or guilt might overshadow his resolve. His sister needed him, and he didn't have any room for thinking beyond that right now.

Anyhow, because of all this, the average person might wonder how he ended up in this room with this man. Well, the thought of it never even occurred to him until recently. His mother would have a conniption if she knew everything he'd gotten himself into.

But his mother was the reason for this. She'd sent his sister away. Wouldn't acknowledge Hannah was in the family way, wouldn't even talk about the baby except to say there were places for handling these things discreetly. William's sister would go to no such place, and that led him to his current circumstances.

Namely how William was in this room, with this man.

Suffice to say, what William lacked in criminal experience, he made up for in artistic skill. He could paint a nearly identical Rembrandt and no one would be the wiser. He had diligently studied

to play the piano like Gershwin. He would also like to think he had some people skills. Unfortunately, none of these things mattered to his mother, and they mattered even *less* to his father.

The arts were a feminine study, his father repeatedly insisted, and according to him, the family business was where William belonged. But William had no interest in securing and growing the family fortune.

Therefore, William was plumb out of options.

As he stepped deeper into the famed Mr. Cadigan's study, he felt an odd wave of calm wash over him. He took in the room full of silver, the paintings poised along the furniture and walls, as if they were people in a train terminal, waiting for their next destination. He recognized a good many of the pieces from the newspapers.

Cadigan would, of course, ship these treasures out of Charleston at the first opportunity. No one would be the wiser in Boston or New York. Buyers would assume the southern gems had come from looted houses during the Civil War—not that they were recent acquisitions.

“Pinckney, you understand why you’re here?” Cadigan tapped his cigarette twice against the ashtray as a wild curl of smoke snaked upward from his nostrils. The study was dim, with only two Tiffany-style lamps to illuminate the wrinkled face of Mr. Cadigan and the moon-shaped scar above his lip. A souvenir of a recent job gone wrong. At least that’s the story he told.

“Yes, sir.” William crossed his arms over his chest. For the first time since approaching the house, his heart began to beat faster. The reality sank in. William only hoped his stance was strong enough to cover his hesitation before Cadigan would notice. “The watercolorist.”

Cadigan nodded. “That’s right. Her paintings are beginning to fetch a pretty sum around here, especially with the tourists. You study them, make copies, and I will do the rest of the work. If all goes well, she won’t even know we’ve forged her little treasures. But if anything goes wrong . . .” He puffed his cigarette once more.

“My policy is, new guy always takes the fall. Do a good job, and next time, you won’t be the new guy.”

William’s stomach turned. “I’m not a criminal.” It’s what he kept telling himself anytime the thought *imitation is stealing* made its rounds in his mind. “This is just a onetime shindig to help my sister stay afloat.”

Cadigan’s wicked grin blurred the clarity William had felt just moments prior. “Whatever you need to tell yourself, pretty boy. Look, do the job well and it’s your call if you need more work from us. But again—do it poorly, and you won’t have that choice.” He crossed his leg over his knee, and the tassels of his loafer shook. “Are we clear?”

William nodded once. “So, your guys will get me in this garden party, and then what? How do I find the paintings?”

“Patience, my boy. Your inexperience shows.” Cadigan tapped his cigarette once more. “You’ll befriend Eliza. The artist. Over the next few weeks, get her to trust you. Make her love you so much she would give you the originals if you asked her. In other words, make her love you so much that she practically robs herself.”

William swallowed hard. “When I paint the fakes and you sell them, then I get my money?” His sister and nephew needed the money yesterday—as the saying goes—so he didn’t have time to doubt the plan. At least it was something, and it’d keep her from riding the rails with that little boy in tow.

“Yes. When I do business, I never go back on my word.” Cadigan held out his hand, and William reached to shake it.

But as William turned to go, Cadigan stopped him. “One more thing . . .”

“What’s that?” William hoped this job wasn’t about to become more complicated.

“Be careful with Eliza. She’s . . . well, she’s quite charming. The last man I put on this job fell for her, only to be left pining like a puppy for weeks. This time, I want my paintings.”

William slid his hands into his pockets. “Charming or not, a

romantic entanglement is the last thing I need right now.” Without the financial means to support a wife, much less a family, he had no business falling in love—especially not with his sister counting on him. Lord knew how hard he had tried to find honest work before turning to this route.

Besides, William enjoyed the flirtations of a good many women and had yet to meet one he found interesting enough to commit his entire life to. Was that so wrong of him?

He was certain Eliza would be no different.



Eliza Jane had always been of the mind that enough lipstick could solve any problem. But when it came to making small talk with her father’s associates, there wasn’t enough lipstick in the world.

So imagine her pleasant surprise when a man who was tallish, with chestnut hair, a pleasant smile, and a sharp suit, came strolling through the gates of her garden. And imagine her further surprise at discovering he wasn’t as boring as the rest of them, for he grinned at her as if they were the only two in the garden.

Maybe it was the twilight or the gumdrop color of the camellias against the trees, blurring against the sky. But there was something interesting about him.

He allowed the men accompanying him to take the lead, making the necessary introductions. An apprentice, it would seem, from their brief words with her father. None of the other men made eye contact with Eliza, except to look her way and murmur how beautiful she was, how proud her father must be, blah blah blah.

Oh, she didn’t mean to be cruel. It was just that these businessmen could be *so dull* sometimes. It was almost as though they hadn’t eyes to see the color of the day as it slipped into night, and the color of the night as it slipped into morning.

Grandma Clara always used to say Eliza had been born with a

paintbrush in her hand. Eliza sighed. What would Gran say if she could be here now?

Someone cleared his throat. Eliza glanced up out of her reverie to find the handsome one looking at her. The half grin on his lips seemed to suggest he was humored by her attention waltzing off, and she liked him already for having that reaction.

“William, ma’am.” He dipped his chin as she took his hand, which he’d extended to her, as any good southern man worth his weight in salt ought to.

That is to say, too many men had lost all sense of common manners. You burn a few corsets, and the next thing you know, all sense of decorum goes out the window right along with those suffocating contraptions. Not all women were flappers, turning a blind eye to prohibition down at The Blind Tiger. Some of them still appreciated a man taking the effort to straighten his bow tie and look a woman in the eye.

Oh, times were hard, no doubt. While the rest of the country was roaring its way through the decade, Charleston was still reeling its way back from destruction. In many cases, by destroying itself. But there she went, getting lost in thought again.

“Eliza Jane,” she said. She always loved the melody of her own name.

“Beautiful.” William’s half grin deepened.

Her cheeks warmed in a blush. Her cheeks never warmed in a blush. She meant to ask him whether he meant her name or herself, but her father and aunt were standing directly opposite them, just within earshot, and she knew better than to walk straight into that one.

So instead she simply smiled back, sure he would understand.

The gramophone rang out a jazzy tune from the camellia “room” of the garden—situated just past where the guests were mingling around the fountains.

“May I?” William asked. He never had let go of her hand.

This time, it was Eliza’s turn to nod. And as she coozied closer

toward this stranger—William—she let the magic of the camellias enclose them for a few fine moments.

She breathed in the coffee bean aroma of him, and smelled something else she recognized. Paint? Was he also an artist?

Eliza watched as a bluebird perched, twittering away from the flowering tree above. And then she closed her eyes, as she always did when she was memorizing a moment she would later paint.

There are times in life—sometimes, not always—when the water on paper drips with the color of just the perfect hue, until the effect is something so ethereal that the artist knows it must simply be experienced because she can never produce it again.

And the color shifts over time, shifts still over sunlight, until the watercolors fade completely back into the paper itself, and all that's left is the memory.

The February blossoms were Eliza's favorite. Always had been. Well, maybe not always.

TWO

2020

Three days ago, Lucy met Declan at her sister's engagement party.

Two days ago, he called her to ask her on a date.

Last night, she spent the hour before midnight texting back and forth with him about favorite ice cream flavors, old movies, and beloved local spots around Charleston.

And in three minutes, Declan would be here to pick her up.

Lucy looked in the mirror, pinning, then unpinning, the silver headband in her hair, and then pinning it once more. *Humph.*

The extra-hold hairspray had been far too stiff, so she'd brushed it out in favor of a brand that promised lightly held waves. But now she had hair that was . . . well, confused. And she smelled like the beauty aisle at Walgreens.

She puckered her lips together, straightened her fitted skirt, and pushed the sleeves of her long sweater up to her elbows.

There.

At least her clothes looked the part. Her dear friend Harper would be proud of her.

She'd had an impossible time trying to come up with an outfit when he'd suggested Five Loaves—a personal favorite of hers—for their dinner. Normally, she wouldn't be so nervous and would show up to the eclectic local eatery in jeans and a T-shirt, but

seeing as how this was a date, a whole lot more planning had gone into this outfit. She needed to accomplish that messy-bun-and-graphic-tee look that actually requires twice the effort of a fully formal ensemble.

That is to say, this guy was a catch.

Lucy hadn't been able to get Declan out of her mind since she first met him last week at the party. He and his cousin Peter had left quite the impression, albeit for different reasons. Peter was . . . well, more Harper's type. Whether Harper saw it yet or not, Lucy had noticed a spark between those two as Peter listened intently to Harper talk about the dress she'd made for the Senior Show at their school. Lucy was excited to see what would happen next for Harper.

But in the meantime, Declan.

Her heart skipped a beat just thinking about him. Their conversation had flowed so easily, and she was a bundle of nervous excitement thinking about where tonight's date may lead.

One minute to go—

The doorbell rang.

Lucy blew out a deep breath. So, he was punctual. She wouldn't hold it against him.

She reached for the door handle, and there he stood, with one hand casually in the pocket of his jeans and the other holding a small bouquet of little flowers out toward her.

Was this guy for real?

"Hello, Lucy." His tone was rich.

She took the bundle of flowers from him. "Hello, Declan."

Lucy hesitated a moment, inhaling the fragrance of the bouquet and truly appreciating the gift before she carried the flowers into the kitchen and arranged them in a vase. "Let me get these situated, and I'll be right back."

When she returned, he held open the door. She stepped back toward the entry, ducking under his arm. "Thank you," she said, feeling confident about her graceful move. Only she misjudged

and stepped closer to him than she meant to, bumping awkwardly into him. The fragrance of his cologne and the warmth of his body swirled toward her as she looked up at him.

She bit her bottom lip. “Sorry.” She smirked, trying to make light of the misstep.

His gaze drifted from her eyes to her nose to her lips, where it landed until she blinked. “That’s okay.”

She quickly put two feet between them and locked the door.

Her heart thumped against her chest, and the back of her neck tickled. She took a deep breath. She needed to get her head on straight. She needed to get to know the guy better, and she couldn’t do that by tripping over him or babbling.

Declan glanced up toward the emergent stars as the streetlamps flickered on for the evening. “Nice weather tonight if you’re up for the walk,” he said. “Or I could drive us.”

Lucy slung her purse over her shoulder. “Walking is good.” She nodded. Yes, that would give her something to do with her nerves.

“That’ll work well. Our reservation isn’t for thirty minutes anyway.” He looked over at her as they both stepped onto the sidewalk. She considered whether he might try to hold her hand and whether she would let him.

“I remember you mentioning Five Loaves when we talked at your sister’s party,” he added.

“Wait.” Lucy reached out to touch his elbow without thinking. She dropped her fingers from his soft sweater. Was that cashmere? “That’s why you suggested it?” she asked. Kudos to him for not only listening to her that intently but also for remembering.

His eyes danced as his walking pace slowed. “Is that a problem?”

“No.” Lucy drew out the word. “I just . . .” She shrugged. “I am pleasantly surprised at the attention to detail is all.”

He gently reached for the small of her back to steer her around the corner. “Well, get used to it, because for better or worse, you’ve got my undivided attention for the rest of the evening.”

Lucy laughed. She did wonder for a moment whether he was a

little *too* charming, just playing the Matthew McConaughey role of her dreams, but she was going to enjoy this while it lasted, before she had to get back to college next week. And then after that . . . well, if Declan could juggle getting to know her in a nearby-but-still-different city, who knew where things might lead.

A little bird fluttered from tree to tree along the sidewalk, and the two of them turned in tandem toward King Street, neither of them looking to the other for direction, both of them following memory and their feet—the well-worn patterns that come from years of having walked a certain way and a certain direction, the surety that comes from familiarity . . . in this case, the familiarity of what locals called the Holy City.

“Funny how our paths have never crossed before,” Declan said. “Since we both grew up in Charleston.”

“Who’s to say they haven’t?” Lucy adjusted the purse at her shoulder and looked up at him with a grin. “I mean, at any given time, we could’ve walked by each other on the street. On field trips as children, or visits to Blue Bicycle Books, or brunch at Hominy Grill. Do you remember that place?”

“Do I *remember* that place? Are you kidding? I still have dreams about their jalapeño hush puppies. It’s a shame they closed down.”

Lucy and Declan turned onto King Street as twilight deepened, and along with it, the magic of the city grew.

“Yeah, there was always such a long line to get in that restaurant, but the food was worth it, for sure. It was a real gem. I was sorry to see the city lose it.” As they strolled past the storefronts, Lucy noticed a plaque honoring the Charleston Preservation Society’s role in preserving one of the buildings. “I’m a big believer in preserving old things.”

Declan rubbed his chin with his thumb. “Hmm.”

“Hmm?” Lucy crossed her arms, turning to him. “What does that mean? You disagree?”

“Oh I wouldn’t say I *disagree*, necessarily. Obviously we can all appreciate walking past the church George Washington attended

during his time here or the remaining walls of the original colony of Charles Town.”

“But?”

Declan hesitated, letting out a deep breath. “But I would also add that the city isn’t a museum. There’s a balance to be had to encourage progress.” He shrugged. “Sometimes structures have to be torn down to make that happen.” He shook his head. “But look, I see why you feel strongly about preservation, and I respect that. I do.”

Lucy tilted her head to the side, trying to read in between the lines of his comment. At first, he had seemed apathetic toward the cause of preservation—and preservation was not a passive retreat—but on the other hand, his comments about the Revolutionary-era buildings all through the historical district suggested he both knew and cared.

She wouldn’t press it for the time being. She had a whole lot more to learn about him before concerning herself with their respective thoughts on the future of the city.

As they approached the building where she and Declan had met last week, Lucy leaned closer to get another look through the windows. Harper had talked nonstop the entire drive back to Savannah about how perfect the storefront would be for a dress shop on King Street.

But as Lucy leaned closer, the silvery, leaf-patterned headband in her hair came loose from its pins and tumbled toward the sidewalk. Lucy tried to catch it but grasped only air.

Declan bent down to pick it up for her, and Lucy realized it’d broken in two.

“Well, that’s disappointing,” Declan said, holding up the headband where it’d snapped down the middle. “But you know what? I bet I can get this fixed for you. My mother has got an entire room full of crafting odds and ends. I’m sure she can do something.”

Lucy smiled up at him. “Really?”

“Absolutely. No use in throwing away a perfectly good headband.”

He held it up once more before slipping it into the pocket of his khakis. “Why, it’s practically a crown.”

Lucy’s smile turned into a grin. His generous offer warmed her like a cup of hot cocoa on a chilly day.

They both picked up their pace down King Street, and Lucy enjoyed peering into the windows of the antique shops, boutiques, and bookstores they passed. Passersby were walking back and forth to restaurants, and the fact she was here on a date with Declan settled in, sending another flutter of butterflies within Lucy.

“Let’s play a game,” Declan said. “I’ll give you a phrase, and we both say the first thing that comes to mind.”

Lucy slid her hands into the pockets of her long sweater. “Okay.”
“Best dessert in Charleston.”

She didn’t even have to think. “Christophe—”

“—Christophe Artisan Chocolatier,” he said in tandem.

They both started laughing.

“That was easy,” Lucy said. She clapped her hands together.
“Oh, I have one! Favorite place to watch the sunset.”

“Pineapple—”

“—Fountain.” She nodded. “Because sometimes you can see dolphins from the pier.”

“Exactly.” Declan pointed toward her. “Most important meal of the week?”

“Sunday lunch,” Lucy said and grinned, crossing her arms.
“After church.”

Declan nodded. “When I was a kid, we would walk home from church and catch up with the neighbors on their porches and in their yards gardening. Do people still do that?”

The streetlamp cast a glow upon them, and Lucy shuffled her feet. “I don’t know. But they should. I did that as a kid too. Only I get the impression my walk home was a little longer. Sometimes we drove to church.” She laughed. “Did you grow up South of Broad?”

“I did. Actually, I still live there. My parents live near the Battery,

and I live a block up from Rainbow Row in one of those renovated historical properties.”

“Wow,” Lucy mouthed. “Living the dream. I bet you pinch yourself every morning, waking up to that view.”

Declan studied her a long moment. “You know what? I work so much, I often forget to enjoy it. Thank you.” He held her gaze. “For the reminder.”

His brown eyes were more tempting than Christophe’s chocolate.

Lucy’s grin softened as the church bells chimed behind them. “You’re welcome.”

The sudden sound of Declan’s phone startled her.

“I am so sorry.” He pulled it from his pants pocket. “This is my mom. I need to take the call.”

“Of course.” Lucy waved her hand toward him.

Declan unlocked his phone, looking up at the old, two-story building beside them as he answered. “Hey, Mom—everything okay?” He froze. “*What?* When?” He shook his head. “And you’re all right? Have the police arrived?” Long pause. “I’ll be right there.”

Declan pocketed his phone and looked toward Lucy. “I am so sorry. We’re going to miss our dinner reservation. My parents have been robbed.”



Lucy saw the flashing lights of the police vehicles lining the curb outside his parents’ house long before she noticed the residence itself.

She covered her mouth with her hand. “Oh my word, Declan. I’m so sorry.” She reached out to touch his arm, letting her fingers linger against the cashmere this time. “They’re all okay though, right?”

“Yeah.” He blew out a deep breath. “They don’t even know when exactly they were robbed, because they’ve been on vacation in Europe and don’t take out the family silver all that often. Could’ve been days, weeks, maybe even months.”

Lucy frowned as they approached the property's wrought-iron gate. "I don't understand. Wouldn't they have noticed signs of forced entry?"

"Not necessarily." Declan shook his head. "It has all the markings of the work of a notorious silver thief. The guy just recently got out of jail. Took them two decades to find him the first time around. His whole shtick is slipping into homes undetected, then taking only the inheritance-quality silver. He leaves the imitation stuff and is meticulous to detail so he doesn't trigger any alarms. We're talking—he's willing to take hours to get inside and will replace any glass or fencing he may have to break for entry."

"Why go to all the trouble?"

Declan approached the gate of the home, Lucy following close behind. "That way, any trace of him will have vanished by the time the family notices and reports the theft." A man Lucy assumed to be his father, who was talking to two police officers, waved them closer. "I know all about this guy because he's robbed us before. Guess he didn't find what he was looking for, so he came back."

Lucy's eyes widened. "You mean he returned as soon as he was released?" What a bold move.

Declan shrugged. "Obviously I can't be sure, but that would be my guess." The two of them reached Declan's father and the officers.

"I'm sorry," one of the officers said. "This is a crime scene. You'll need to stay back."

"They're with me," his father said to the police. "This is my son."

The man nodded. "In that case, I'm sorry about the theft. We're going to do everything we can to hold the perpetrator accountable, but I do have to warn you, whoever did this was savvy." His expression was grim. "We're not optimistic we can get your heirlooms back to you."

Declan rubbed his face with his hands. Lucy didn't know what to do. She wanted to console him and seem supportive, but she also didn't know the extent of what had been stolen or what meaning

it all might have to their family, and she didn't want to sound as though she were offering a pithy apology on their behalf. So she just stood there beside him.

"If that's all, sir, we're going to interview your wife now. Give us a call if you can think of anything else that may help with the case." At that, the officers moved across the lawn toward the entryway of what could only be called a mansion.

Lucy looked at it for the very first time, and that's when it hit her.

She was standing in front of the Pinckney mansion.

The Pinckney mansion.

Which meant Declan was one of *the* Pinckneys.

Not a second cousin of an ancestor who'd gone astray or a fancy-last-name-with-little-wealth situation like her own clan of Legares, but honest-to-goodness heirs to the fortune, Jane Austen style. We're talking Darcy level here, only southern.

Declan's father grew increasingly red in the face. "You and I both know what that thief was after." He spoke as though Lucy weren't even standing there.

Declan crossed his arms. "Careful, Dad . . . we don't know that for sure."

"Yes, we most certainly do." He huffed in anger. "That thief thinks *we* have it! The Revolutionary-era silver." The man threw up his hands. "But we know the truth. Those fools, those Legares, stole it from us generations ago, and now their selfish act haunts us still."

Declan's gaze grew stony. "You think he's going to keep robbing us until he finds it?"

"Of course I do. He clearly wants it for his private collection, rather than the pieces he melts down. The guy is brazen, and we know his MO from when he robbed us years ago. When he wants something for his private collection, he is relentless. The Paul Revere-signed heirloom silver is invaluable. It's the sort of thing you'd stop at nothing to get."

Declan clenched his jaw. “What’s our move, then?”

“We stop at nothing to get it.” The man’s face grew even redder still. “From the Legares.”

Declan said nothing. Only nodded, agreeing.

Lucy’s heart began racing, like a spy with a secret. *Hold up a minute!* she wanted to yell. *My family doesn’t have the silver either!* In the old anecdote she’d always heard, it was the Pinckneys who’d stolen it. So if Declan’s father didn’t have it, where could it be?

Was it lost forever?

She may never know. But she did know one thing.

The past fifteen minutes had brought out a different side of Declan.

And she didn’t like what she saw.

Their earlier conversation on King Street echoed through her mind, in particular Declan’s words: “*I see why you feel strongly about preservation, and I respect that. I do.*”

She couldn’t believe he had the gall to say he respected preservation. Not when their family business was the largest modern development company in the city.

Some things, it seemed, were too good to be true.

Good-bye, Mr. Darcy.