

Eliza Confronts A Nemesis  
A Deleted Scene from MY DEAR HAMILTON  
by  
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“Did he shoot at Burr?” I asked, standing in my brother-in-law’s nearly empty library, the furniture having been sent ahead, the books already packed in boxes.

“Hmm?” Church asked, distractedly staring out the window as servants carefully piled framed artwork and busts into the wagon in the drive.

“I want to know if my husband fired his pistol at Aaron Burr.”

Church snorted. “How the devil would I know? I wasn’t there. Pendleton was.”

But I couldn't let him dismiss me this time. “Pendleton, who went to Weehawken to cut away a bullet that would have only redeemed my husband if it were still in the tree. Did he take it as a trophy, or to cover it up, just as Alexander wanted?”

Church pinched at the bridge of his nose. “As I said, I wasn’t there.”

“But Pendleton must have told you.” My voice lowered in anger. “You must’ve discussed it when he returned the pistols to you. Burr claimed Alexander put his spectacles on to sight his pistol, to aim—a clear sign that he meant to fire rather than throw away his shot. Is that a lie?”

Church turned, plainly exasperated with me. “Do you suppose, Elizabeth, that a lawyer of Burr’s caliber could not come up with a better lie? You knew Hamilton as well as anyone could know him. Is it not precisely what he would do to trick a man into shooting him?”

A little hiss of air escaped me. “You—you think he wanted Burr to—” I couldn’t finish, such was my shock. Even as tears welled in my eyes, I sputtered with a half-hysterical, half-distraught laughter that I had to suppress with the back of my hand pressed to my lips.

*You knew Hamilton as well as anyone could know him,* Church had said.

But I wasn't certain that I'd known him at all.

"Mother," called my son from the hall, then stepped inside to wrap his arms around me, to calm my laughter. It was Johnny, in uniform, on leave from the war, come to help me cart away chairs and lamps and other items my brother-in-law didn't plan to take with him. And some items that Alexander had left in trust with Church. Including his Last Will, now, after ten years, in my possession.

"I'll take her home to the Grange," Johnny said to his uncle, as if it was a matter of some concern to him anymore. "I've decided—I've decided to resign my commission. To help." With the children, and with an income, he meant. Without Angelica, and without Church, my family was more vulnerable than ever to the threat of poverty.

And, so, upon taking leave of John Barker Church for what would be the last time, I went with Johnny to my much-neglected house at the Grange. Some years before, it had been put up for public auction to pay for Alexander's debts, and I had been able to purchase it back at half its value through some mysterious mechanism that I was sure might one day yet mean my ruin.

As if Alexander had cared about that.

What a jaded eye I cast upon the wording of the will. *I pray God that something may remain for the maintenance and education of my dear wife and children. But should it on the contrary, probably her own patrimonial resources will preserve her from indigence.*

The most brilliant financial mind in the country went to his death pretending to himself there was some chance he was not in debt, and that I would *probably* be rescued from indigence by my father. Why should he worry for the fate of his wife and all his children when his *honor* was at stake? Well, what was left of it now?

His bank dissolved. His country at war. His name a curse.

*But his glory*, I thought, bitterly. He kept that safe enough. And I was reminded of a solitary trunk in the attic that I hadn't examined in years, for fear it would undo me. An engraved wooden strongbox with leather buckles where Alexander kept his old military uniforms and ornamental swords.

And I wondered if that is where I would find the answers...

Perhaps Alexander had kept some treasured token of his love affair with

Angelica just as she kept that garter. Or perhaps, I would find a matching ring, with a clipping of her hair, and then all my doubts would vanish. Knowing he was to duel, he'd have hidden anything incriminating or entrusted it to someone to destroy if he died.

Alexander was too smart for me. Too smart for everyone, except Aaron Burr...