

The Patriot and the Loyalist

Angela K. Couch

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What People are Saying

A poignant blend of adversity and love set against the gritty backdrop of war, Angela Couch skillfully weaves a redemptive story that will keep fans of historical romance turning pages and rooting for a happily ever after.

~Heidi McCahan, author of *Unraveled* and
Covering Home

From the descriptive pen of award-winning historical author Angela K Couch comes an intriguing tale of lies and deceit that will keep you turning the pages way into the night. . . I always enjoy Angela's stories where history meets fiction. *The Patriot* and *The Loyalist* was no exception.

~Marion Ueckermann, USA Today Bestselling
Author

The Patriot and *the Loyalist* brings readers a Revolutionary War historical that will keep them reading both for the romance and the intrigue.

~Janet Ferguson, author of *Leaving Oxford*

Angela K Couch delivers once again. The only problem with *The Patriot* and *the Loyalist*—it is impossible to put aside. Filled with realistic characters, its wonderful storyline stays with you long after you finish reading.

~Lucy Nel, author of *The Widow's Captive*

1

South Carolina, November 1780

Daniel Reid slowed his horse and sucked air into his lungs as he reined to the road's grassy edge. Blood pulsated behind his ears but in no way drowned out the pounding hooves of the approaching soldiers, the green of their coats almost deceptive. He was used to scarlet, but no doubt they were British. He'd been warned of Colonel Tarleton and his Green Dragoons.

With a smile pressed on his lips, Daniel nodded to the commander of the orderly column. The gesture was not returned, only the narrowing of dark eyes—like a snake seeking the next target for his wrath. The colonel looked to the cane fastened to the side of the saddle. Stale breath leaked from Daniel's lungs, and he laid his fingers over the brass handle, hoping they believed he had need of the cane as he surveyed the rest of the well-armed cavalry.

Mud and manure-ridden boots. Dark scuffs across legs and sleeves. The acrid aroma of smoke. Horses walked with heads down, weary like the men who rode them. Obviously, they'd already had a long, productive day, and yet their polished blades glinted with the late afternoon sun, and the barrels of their muskets did not carry the stain of powder.

As the last soldier passed, Daniel pulled his bay mare back onto the road and encouraged her pace. He raised his gaze to the strip of blue high above the treed

banks of marsh and swamp. Sweat tickled the back of his neck. Nervousness, or the heavy humidity? Not that it mattered. He'd volunteered for this.

Thin swirls of smoke rose from the horizon, the first a mile off. Maybe two. Daniel spurred his mount in that direction. He'd never find Colonel Francis Marion if he avoided the prospect of danger.

The trees thinned into farmland and opened into fields left barren from harvest. The sky hazed behind the dissipating smoke. A crumbled barn, not much remaining of it but charred boards and glowing coals, stood not far from a grand house. Was this Tarleton's work? Or Colonel Marion's?

"Mama!"

The panicked cry followed a boy as he darted into the brick edifice he no doubt called home—much different from the two-room cabin Daniel had been raised in. Moments later, several young faces appeared in the crack of the open doorway. Dirty, tearstained faces. None were older than ten. Surely this was the work of the British and not the man he sought. Daniel had lost the taste for such deeds years ago. A man should be able to leave his woman and children safely at home. War belonged to men.

The oldest boy, a sandy-haired lad, stepped back out onto the porch and folded his arms across his chest. "What do you want here, Mister?"

Daniel swung out of his saddle and held his hands away from his sides. "Where are your folks?"

The scowl only deepened on the boy's face as he widened his stance. "You have no right on our land. You'd best get back on that horse of yours or I'll—"

The door pushed wide and a woman appeared, a lady, despite her disheveled appearance. "Hush,

James. We have no means of knowing who this man is."

"But Mother." He spun to her. "You should not be up. I can take care of this."

"I know you can, James, but I will be fine." With a hand on her son's shoulder, she gazed at Daniel. Though her chin showed confidence, her eyes pooled with the pain she tried to keep contained. "Who are you, sir?"

"I was passing by when I saw the smoke. Who did this?"

She straightened, wincing as she did so. "You have yet to answer me, sir."

Daniel couldn't help but glance around. This far behind enemy lines...yet to complete his mission, how much did he dare reveal? If only he could be certain Tarleton had done this misdeed. But he couldn't. "I am Sergeant Daniel Reid."

"Sergeant?"

He met her gaze, trying to read it. Not a single clue. "Of the Continental Army."

Her shoulders sagged and trembled. "Praise the Lord."

Daniel's hands dropped to his sides. "So the British are responsible."

"Yes." She stepped around her son and sank to the top step. "My husband was General Richard Richardson. He was taken prisoner by the British because he refused to support them. He'd resigned the army already, but because he couldn't be bought, they hauled him away, keeping him locked up until he was ill. They let him come home to die. He passed away a couple of months ago."

"I'm sorry."

She shook her head as though to wave away his condolences, while glancing to the small family cemetery across the road. A mound of dirt stood dark between the headstones. "Tarleton dug up his body. He gave some excuse, but really he was treasure hunting." Her fingers hid her eyes. "What sort of monster digs up a man's grave?"

The boy set a protective hand on his mother's head. "Or burns animals to death."

Daniel cringed as he looked back at the remains of the barn. That explained the more pungent stench wafting on the air. "Do you know how to find or contact Colonel Marion?"

"No." Mrs. Richardson blinked hard. "I knew the British hoped to attract him here, so I sent one of my boys to warn him away. Who can say where he's gone."

James nodded. "Though, if he had come, the British wouldn't have had the nerve to flog a lady."

Daniel's gut twisted. The attractive, middle-aged woman was obviously used to a genteel living despite being displaced this far from a town. "Are you all right, ma'am?"

"I will be fine." Her jaw stiffened and raised a degree. "I only wish I could speed you on your way with the Colonel's location. You could ask at his plantation. Or check at Port's Ferry. Rumor has it he camped there most of last month." The lady waved him nearer and lowered her voice. "Or Thomas Amis's Mill. The Colonel has been there, as well." She pushed to her feet, her hand braced on the railing. "You are from the North?"

"New York."

She looked his homespun up and down. Not near

as fine as the uniform he'd worn the past three years. "I thought as much. Do not get lost in the swamps trying to locate him. Go to Georgetown and find Mister Lawrence Wilsby. He was a friend of my husband's and true to the cause. He might be able to help you."

"Thank you, but..." Daniel glanced to the barn, and then back to the three young boys who had made full appearance behind their mother and older brother.

A woman, her skin shades darker than his own tanned face, now stood in the doorway with a scowl.

Two men, their complexions even darker, moved around from the back of the house.

Slaves, probably—something quite foreign to him. In the Mohawk Valley, a man labored with his own hands, not someone else's. Daniel dragged his focus back to Mrs. Richardson. "Is there anything I can do?"

Her lips tightened as she shook her head. "I have the help I need. May God speed your way, Sergeant. And may scum like Tarleton reap His wrath."

Amen. Daniel mounted his mare.

The oldest boy moved to his side, eyeing the cane. "What is that for, sir? You don't seem to have a limp?"

Daniel gave the cane a pat. "This is to keep the British from asking any pressing questions about why I don't fight for them." He winked, and then with a tip of his hat, reined toward the road. "Thank you, ma'am."

He fought to keep his mind in the present as he encouraged his horse to a faster clip. But, as always, the image of a barn left in ash accompanied a spade full of guilt and the memory of a woman with hair like new corn silk.

Rachel Garnet.

He had prayed that three years would be enough

to rid her from his mind.

"Come on, Madam!" He nudged the animal with his knees, craving speed, as though the wind could snatch him from the past. Besides, if he kept up the pace, he could reach Georgetown before nightfall.

~*~

"Miss Reynolds, be reasonable. Let me send for our carriage to take you home."

Lydia shook her head and pulled up the hood of her cloak. "No, Mr. Hilliard." She slipped the letter he had given her into her reticule and tightened the strings. "It's not far, and I do not want anyone to know of this. Not yet." She needed time to think and make a plan.

Ester Hilliard stepped around her father, catching Lydia's arm before she could turn away. "Do not be foolish."

"With the British's presence in Georgetown and Major Layton billeted in our own home, it has never been safer," Lydia replied. But then Ester, three years her senior, always had been overly practical and reserved.

Lydia threw a farewell wave into the air and hurried out the door. Blackness had spread itself across the town, with nothing but the flicker of a few lamps illuminating the barren streets. The odd scarlet-clad soldier still stood watch, but the townsfolk appeared to be retired for the night. Lydia quickened her steps with the hope that everyone at home had done the same. If Charles found out she'd sneaked out alone instead of going to her bed with a headache as she had insinuated, she'd never hear the end of it. Especially if

he knew why. She needed to determine how to confront him. Soon.

The methodic plodding of hooves on the next street only brushed her mind. Raucous laughter startled her and jerked her attention to the Coat of Arms Tavern. Men's and women's voices mingled together. Lydia frowned and pulled her cape closer around her shoulders. She could not understand what would drive a woman to degrade herself so, flinging her attentions at a man for the sake of her purse. She hurried past the establishment and to the end of the block. Even for the sake of a roof over her head she would not concede—though more and more it seemed that was where she stood with Charles, her late sister's husband. He would no doubt extend an offer of marriage, but Lydia had no desire to sell herself in any form.

She tightened her grip on her reticule. The letter within represented so much more than a new life. It was freedom. A surge of anticipation propelled her forward, and she darted across the road—directly into the muscular shoulder of a horse.

Snorting in surprise, the animal reared.

Lydia scampered out of the way. But not fast enough to be missed by a sharp hoof. Pain seared her shin and she fell on her backside with a thud.

"Madam, whoa!" The man reined his horse back a few steps before flying from the saddle and to Lydia's side. He reached for her arm. "I am so sorry, miss."

She warned him away with a glare and the wave of a hand, and then pushed to her feet, careful to avoid putting her weight on her injured leg as she smoothed her skirts over it. "I can manage on my own, sir. You would do well to watch where you lead that beast."

"Pardon me, but it was you who walked into us."

She glanced past him to the horse that stood with head low, looking far more apologetic than its master. Or perhaps the animal was merely weary from a long day and many miles. Sweat shimmered on the heavy coat in the dim light of the nearest lamp—a coat ready for a colder winter than Georgetown, or anywhere in South Carolina, would know.

"That may be, sir, but..." Lydia looked back to the man.

His clothes, from the knee-high boots meeting his breeches, to a homespun shirt and woolen coat, were nondescript, but that could be said of little else concerning this stranger. He towered over her. Dark waves descended from under his tricorn hat to where they were tied at the nape of his neck. The whiskers shadowing the attractive slope of his jaw showed a week's growth—if her brother-in-law's face could be any means of measurement. And his eyes appeared black like coals.

The pain in her leg pulled her attention back to the present. "Here in the south a gentleman does not place blame on a lady for something when they share equal fault." Though, who could say how far from a gentleman this rogue fell?

He swept the tricorn hat from his head and offered the slightest bow. "I do apologize. And you are correct. It was my fault entirely." His words came with neither humor, nor the attempt to patronize. He seemed as weary as his horse. Which begged the question why? Obviously a northerner, what were his affiliations with the south, Georgetown in particular? Where did his loyalties lie?

"How far have you come today?"

The man shoved his hat on his head and turned to his bay mare, his large hands working to straighten the reins across the animal's shoulders. "Probably fifty miles."

"And the day before that?"

He glanced back at her with raised brow. "A ways."

"And have you reached your destination, or do you have farther yet to go? Perhaps Charles Town?" Did he side with Britain, or the rebels? Something about him suggested the latter.

"That will be determined by what tomorrow brings." He nodded to her. "But for tonight, I should leave you to continue home, while I find lodging."

The noise spilling to the street from the tavern drew both their gazes.

"Good evening then, sir." Lydia took a step away. Her bruised, and possibly cut, shin spiked pain through her leg and she bit back a surprised gasp. Powerful fingers wrapped around her arm.

"You're hurt."

"It is nothing." She started walking, trying her best not to limp, and very aware that he hadn't yet released her. She swatted his hand away. Were all New Englanders so brazen?

"If you won't let *me* help you, then at least allow Madam to make recompense."

She kept walking.

He continued to follow.

"Madam?"

"My mare." His chuckle held no mirth.

She glanced back at him. "You named your horse *Madam*?"

"As a filly she was particularly...haughty. And my

sisters disliked the name." He cracked a smile. "I assure you she is safe to ride and can carry you wherever you need."

"I do not need to be carried anywhere." Lydia again quickened her pace despite the discomfort. "My home is not much farther."

"You expect me to simply walk away after trampling you with my horse? That would hardly be the gentlemanly thing to do." He continued to keep pace with her, his gait smooth.

"And I would hardly mistake you for a gentleman." She sensed him stiffen beside her, but if he was determined to see her home, she would resume her interrogation. Maybe this northerner had information useful to the British. "I would guess farmer or laborer. Or soldier? But then why would you ride with no uniform?" She turned to him so she could see his face clearly in the light of the lamp they approached. Ignoring the ache in her leg, Lydia flashed him a smile. She leaned closer and lowered her voice to the breath of a whisper. "You are a Patriot, aren't you? A spy?"

2

Daniel froze at her words. A Patriot? A spy? One of those could be refuted. He'd been sent to deliver a message, not size up the enemy's positions. Despite his surprise at her turn of questioning, he held his stoic expression—though perhaps his eyes narrowed a little before he managed a laugh. "Is that the usual occupation of strangers to Georgetown?"

The young woman relaxed back a step, the pain of her leg evident in the motion. "It is not so easy to ascertain."

He again allowed a throaty chuckle. "I would think a town serving as a British stronghold would ward off traitors to the crown, and spies..." He looked about, taking in the patchwork of light and shadow cast upon the streets. "I'm sure talk of such is unsafe, even for a girl of the town."

Her chin rose at the use of the term "girl", much like Fannie or Nora's did when he teased them. Susanna and Rose on the other hand, only seemed to enjoy his playful harassment. The image of his sisters pinched in his chest. More than three years since he'd been home. Three years since he'd ridden away from the Mohawk Valley and his family to join the Continental Army. Three years and, instead of returning as he ought, he'd only distanced himself more.

"Now you insinuate that I might be disloyal?"

Fine lace cuffs hung like banners from the maiden's elbows as she folded her arms.

Daniel peered at her all the harder, not sure how to interpret the underlying tone of her words. Perhaps she was a Patriot as well. Perhaps she'd be able to help him.

But, in the middle of Georgetown, with British sentinels within a block of where they stood, the risk was too great until he could be certain. He shook his head. "Of course not. You have given me no reason to doubt your devotion to our King." With a smile, he gestured ahead of them. "But 'tis late, and I've come a long way. Let me assist you onto my horse and deliver you safely home."

Light from the nearest lamp flickered in her eyes. He couldn't make out the color but they were pale. Very different from his sisters', or even Rachel's—he chastised his thoughts for their betrayal. The young woman's hair appeared as dark as his own. Too bad the sun wasn't bright overhead. He would have liked to see her in the light of day. As it was, the shadows lay across the delicate features of her face, leaving much to his imagination.

After a moment of deliberation, she sighed. "Very well. Since you are responsible for my predicament."

Daniel stepped around her, leading the mare to her side.

She winced as she lifted her foot to the stirrup.

The mare nudged his arm with her nose as though also placing blame on him. More likely Madam only wished for him to speed things along. It had been a long day for them both. Quick enough to not give the woman time to protest, Daniel set his hands to her waist and boosted her atop.

She gasped and worked to tug her full skirts over her legs.

Turning to grant her some privacy, Daniel waited a minute and then clicked his tongue to encourage Madam to follow. "Which way?"

"Right at the next corner, and then go straight."

He answered with a nod, though his legs protested against moving. He almost needed the cane strapped to his saddle for more than his deception, but he decided against the effort of utilizing it. There were not many King's soldiers out tonight, and a bit of a limp came naturally with his muscles so stiff. He needed a walk after endless miles astride a horse. Hopefully, another day and he'd complete his mission.

But then what?

Daniel frowned. He was officially discharged from the army. Would he enlist again for possibly another three years? He'd be nearing thirty by then, with no land, wife, or children of his own. He had nothing. But what other option was there? Return to the Mohawk Valley and join the local militia? He could help on his parents' farm, and do his best to stay clear of Rachel and her husband. Not so easy with Fannie now married to Rachel's brother and them having a young'un.

"So what does bring you to Georgetown?"

Daniel blew out his breath, wishing it were as easy to empty his mind as his lungs. "Land." He'd rehearsed his story well. "I'm tired of harsh winters and short summers."

"You want to buy a farm?"

He glanced back. "Is that so surprising to you?"

She settled into the saddle and shrugged. "I suppose not. The area has been in such upheaval the

last few years, but I suppose you cannot put aside your life forever." Sorrow tugged at her last few words.

Daniel paused to look up.

She stared at her hands resting over the pommel, the tie of a fancy pouch woven between her fingers.

"I just realized I don't know your name. But I would like to."

Her gaze dropped to his. Hesitation. She shifted in the saddle. "Such an introduction would hardly be considered proper." She tugged her hood to better hide her face as she glanced left and right. "Lydia Reynolds."

He inclined his head in a nod. "*Miss Reynolds?*"

"Yes."

Daniel couldn't help a smile from easing onto his lips, though her marital status should mean nothing to him. "'Tis a pleasure." He turned and started walking again.

They didn't go far before she spoke. "And what of your name, or do you purposefully desire it to remain a mystery. I must admit to not being fond of secrets."

"Daniel Reid."

"And you were a farmer up north?"

"I was."

"But the winters are too cold and summers too short?"

"That they are."

"It is a strange time of year to be seeking land, is it not?"

His smile stretched into a grin. This was almost as much fun as bantering with one of his sisters. "I don't think so. I finished harvest at home in time for winter, sold my crops, and now here I am. If all goes well, I'll be ready to plant by spring."

"I suppose so." The old saddle squeaked as she shifted.

His hand tapped out his thoughts against his leg. Maybe he would be able to ask her for more help, after all. "Are you familiar with a Lawrence Wilsby? I am told he might know of some land for sale in the area."

"I am acquainted with Mister Wilsby. Though, I was unaware he had any dealings with the buying or selling of farms."

One step closer to finding Colonel Marion. Daniel kept his eagerness contained, his tone casual interest. "Then perhaps you would be willing to introduce me to him tomorrow? I'd be indebted to you."

"Hold up here."

Not quite the answer he expected. He surveyed the stable to their right. "I find it hard to believe you reside in a livery."

Without waiting for his assistance, she slid from the saddle with only a short groan when her feet met the ground. "I do not. You might find one useful, though, and there is an inn across the way." She brushed past him with a definite favoring of her left leg. Maybe he needed to offer her the use of his cane.

"But what about you? And of Mister Wilsby tomorrow?"

She didn't look back. "If I can get away, I will meet you here at noon."

Then, like a phantom of the night, she vanished between two buildings. Gone. Still, his smile remained.

~*~

"Say nothing of this to Master Selby." Lydia winced as the heavy binding tightened around the

bruised scrape on her leg and Molly tied off the bandage, her dark fingers nimble. If Charles did ask, Lydia would make up some excuse like walking into... She glanced around her bedchamber. The stool at her dressing table seemed the only likely object she might have cracked her shin against.

The girl stood and folded layers of petticoats down over the bandage. Though she attended Lydia, Molly, like all the slaves attached to the estate and shipping company, now belonged to Charles. Except Eli. She hadn't known it until last night, but the aged Negro had remained her grandparents' property even though they had sent him to America with Lydia's mother upon her marriage. And now, with the passing of her grandparents, and she the only heir, the slave belonged to her. As did the cottage near Brighton.

Lydia scooted to the edge of her bed and smoothed the pale blue fabric of her gown. "Thank you, Molly." She stole one last glance to the pillow concealing the letter Mr. Hilliard had received from the officiators of her grandparents' modest estate. She'd read it over and over last night after she'd sneaked back into her room, and then again this morning. She could not hesitate. Now was the time for action—before anyone thought to question her tardiness for breakfast.

She opened the door to infectious giggling coming from the nursery. The baby's chortle drew her across the hall. It was all too easy to picture little Margaret with her wispy curls and full cheeks. Lydia forced herself to turn away. No attachments. Especially when she would be leaving so very soon. Her leg felt much better than last night, and she made a quick retreat, descending the stairs and pushing into the dining

parlor.

Charles already sat at the head of the table, the place that had been Father's before the *Magellan* was sunk by Continental Navy's frigates. Even three and a half years had not made her brother-in-law's place as the head of the family and sole owner of the shipping company any more acceptable to her. Especially now that her sister, poor Margaret, rested in the cemetery with Mother and the boys. Lydia sat in her chair, her enthusiasm draining away. Only she remained of the South Carolina Reynolds. Her family had helped build this town, this colony, and soon she would also abandon it. Just as well. Neither Georgetown nor South Carolina held anything for her now.

"Good morning, my dear," Charles crooned, his blue gaze following her to the table. "I do hope you feel better this morning."

"Yes. Quite." She glanced around. No other place settings were present. "Where is Major Layton this morning? He is not joining us?"

Charles sipped his wine, waiting to answer. "Colonel Tarleton asked for him to take his regiment north toward Camden, if I heard correctly. It appears that rascal Marion has been playing a sly fox again and giving the colonel quite the hunt."

Over the past year, Francis Marion had become quite the nuisance to the British and Loyalists, and she hoped Tarleton found him—though she didn't care for the man's manners. Thankfully, the officer who billeted with them did not let his eyes wander *quite* so freely.

"You look far too relieved by Major Layton's absence." Charles set his fork beside his plate and touched the napkin to the corners of his mouth.