

Read the first chapters of  
*I, Eliza Hamilton*  
by Susan Holloway Scott

*On sale September 26, 2017*

Prologue

*New York City, New York*  
*August 1804*

You know who I am.

As much as I would wish it otherwise, I cannot ignore the attention, not now. The sudden rush of interest and recognition as I step from my carriage, the bows and curtseys that quickly give way to the whispered explanations and curious stares with no respect for my mourning or the veil I hoped would keep the keenness of my suffering to myself.

Nor does it matter that I have my youngest children with me, Little Phil on one side and Betsey on the other, both clinging tightly to my hands and skirts. How can I guard my babies when strangers crowd so close? How can I defend them from those who would steal away not only our home, but also the sweet legacy of their father's love? What can I do, when I am all they have left in this world?

Yet I will be brave and strong for the sake of my children. *Our* children. That is what my husband would have wanted, and what I must do to honor his love. I must give no credence to the lies and calumnies his enemies continue to spread against him, and do my best to combat their slanders. I haven't faltered before, and I won't now, no matter how sorely tested I might be.

Love is not easy with a man chosen by Fate for greatness. My Alexander was such a one, a man so bold and brilliant that all others dulled in his company, just as the brightest comet that shoots across the night sky will make the other stars fade meekly in its trail. Yet he was so much more than what the world saw. I knew the rare kindness and gentleness he gave to those he cherished most, and the heartfelt tenderness that I miss more sorely than any words can describe.

I was not born as clever as my sister Angelica, nor so beautiful as my sister Peggy. I don't possess the gentle serenity that graced my friend Lady Washington, the regal elegance of Mrs. Jay, or the hospitable ease in company of Mrs. Madison. Yet I maintain I am the most blessed among women, because I alone had the love of my dear husband. He was mine, and I was his, and even through death our love will bind us forever together.

But that is what you don't know of me, isn't it? Not the scandals and the lies and the rumors, but the truth—not only of my Alexander, but of me, Eliza Schuyler Hamilton.

## Chapter One

*The Pastures*  
*Albany, Province of New York*  
*November 1777*

I was twenty years of age when I met Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton.

To be truthful, at first I found little that was memorable regarding him that evening. Because our country was mired in war and my father was a major general of the Continental Army, our house was frequently overrun with young officers, and I was hard-pressed to recall one from another.

But no: I shouldn't say that about Colonel Hamilton. He did immediately distinguish himself from the others, though not necessarily for reasons he might have wished.

Before he arrived, my family and our guests were gathered in the front parlor, as was our custom before we dined at The Pastures, our home here in Albany. Evening came early in November, and the candles were already lit, their glow soft against the yellow flocked-wool wallpaper. Papa was standing before the fireplace, where the heat of the fire would ease the perpetual ache of old wounds and gout in his knees for all that he was only forty-four, while my mother sat in the mahogany armchair beside him, her silk skirts spread gracefully around her as she greeted their guests. My younger sister Peggy and I stood waiting near one of the windows, dressed for evening with silk flowers in our hair and prepared to be charming and agreeable. We knew our roles with company. Our parents were proud of their reputation for hospitality, and Peggy and I were as much part of it as the rich meal and imported wines that would be served at table.

Yet we were also a home suffering beneath a cloud of disgrace. Although my father had served his country and his men with courage and efficiency, his political enemies in Congress had plotted against him, and after the fall of Fort Ticonderoga this past summer—a blow to the cause that even he could not have avoided—he had been removed from his command of the Northern Department. Papa had requested a court-martial to clear his name, but his request thus far had been ignored, and the fact that his replacement, General Horatio Gates, had employed Papa's forces and tactics to defeat the British at Saratoga had been especially bitter for Papa. He had considered his career for the Continental Army to be done, and he'd given up wearing his uniform. Although he spoke little of it to us, we understood the depths of his disappointment, and as a family we defended his reputation however we could.

Little wonder, then, that Peggy and I met the arrival of the aide-de-camp from the army's commander-in-chief with wariness, if not open suspicion. Was he bringing further humiliation to our poor father? Was he the bearer of more ill news from the army, more disgrace to tarnish our family's name?

Colonel Hamilton himself did little to dispel our suspicions. When his name was called by one of our footmen, he remained standing alone in the room's arched doorway for a moment too long, appraising the room and all of us in it, before striding forward to present himself to my parents. It was rude, that pause, especially to my father, still his superior in rank, and it clearly appeared to be born of a surfeit of confidence and perhaps an arrogant desire to be noticed. As unmannerly as such a gambit might be, however, it was also effective.

"Look at that cocky fellow!" Peggy said to me from behind her spread fan, adding a shocked little hiss for emphasis. "You know who he is, don't you?"

"Colonel Alexander Hamilton," I said, letting contempt curl through my pronunciation. He wore the elegant blue uniform of an artilleryman, with buff facings, brass buttons, and buckskin breeches, yet it fit him ill, the wool coat hanging loosely about his frame, the cuffs threadbare, and the green sash of an aide-de-camp slung across his chest like an afterthought. No wonder, really: he was slight for a soldier, slender and boyish, with a wind-burned face and reddish-gold hair.

"I cannot fathom why he is here," Peggy said. "Aside from the fact, of course, that Papa invited him to join us, but then Papa invites everyone. They already met together this afternoon. What could Colonel Hamilton possibly have left to say? One would think a gentleman officer would have declined such an invitation under the circumstances, simply to be respectful."

I sniffed with disdain. "I doubt Colonel Hamilton has considered respect."

Peggy nodded, her gold earbobs swinging against her cheeks. "But Papa is smiling at him, and so is Mamma."

It was true. Our parents were conversing with the young colonel as if he were the most honored of guests. On the other hand, appearances could be deceiving where Papa was concerned. Our father was so much a Christian gentleman that if he chanced to step upon a den of copperheads in the forest, he'd bow and beg their pardon for having disturbed their rest with his boot.

"You can't deny that the colonel's a favorite of General Washington," Peggy continued, clearly persuading herself as much as she was me of the colonel's character. "Perhaps he's brought good news from His Excellency, not bad. Papa said Colonel Hamilton has come to Albany on an important military errand, which must be a great honor for a gentleman of his years."

"And how many years has the colonel seen?" I asked wryly. "Fifteen? Sixteen?"

"Hush," Peggy scolded. "Colonel Hamilton is twenty. Nor does he have a wife, which you know is why Mamma is now greeting him so warmly."

That went without saying. Although Peggy and I had always been expected to wed gentlemen from among the wealthy Dutch New York families much like our own, the war had changed everything. The times had become so

unpredictable and unsettled that no one was marrying anyone (except, of course, my older sister, Angelica, who had impetuously eloped with an Englishman the year before). All the gentlemen from Albany who ordinarily would have considered courting Peggy or me had joined the army instead, and thus Mamma wasn't above widening her nets for our matrimonial sakes. Twenty in an unmarried woman was a great deal older than twenty in a bachelor, and Mamma made sure that presentable young officers were always welcome at our house.

Including, it appeared, Colonel Hamilton. I cautiously continued my appraisal, still unwilling to abandon my earlier grudge against him. I supposed he was considered handsome, with regular features and a manly jaw. But he also possessed a longish nose that he held raised like an eager hound sniffing the air for a scent, and so intense a gaze that he was almost scowling as he listened to my father. Yet he *was* listening, respectfully, and not attempting to force his own opinions on Papa the way so many other young officers did. That was in his favor; perhaps he *had* brought Papa good news, and reluctantly my opinion of him rose a fraction.

"Papa said Colonel Hamilton was attending King's College before the war interrupted his studies," Peggy was saying. "He must be vastly clever. I wonder what his prospects might be?"

While I knew Peggy meant his prospects for inherited property and wealth (considerations we'd always been taught to value), I could only think instead of the colonel's prospects for survival in the army, and the war. I'd already seen too many gentlemen march away to battle and not return, and from unhappy experience I'd learned not so much to harden my heart, as to guard it against sorrow and loss. Given his size and stature, I doubted Colonel Hamilton's prospects in this way were very promising at all.

Yet even as these gloomy thoughts filled my head, the colonel bowed and turned away from my parents. His gaze met mine, and held it. He bowed in acknowledgment, his gaze still locked with mine. At once my face grew hot—what lady wishes to be caught boldly staring at a gentleman?—yet like a deer trapped frozen in a lantern's light, nothing could induce me to look away. His eyes were an unexpected blue, as bright as the summer sky, and at once bold and enticing, with more than a bit of sly humor besides.

And it was that humor that finally released me, too, for as soon as I saw the smile that began to play across his lips, I suddenly was able to shake myself free of his spell. I was no longer captivated; I was mortified. I'd already been shamed, but I needn't be laughed at as well, and swiftly I looked away before he'd find further amusement at my expense.

Flustered, I wanted nothing to do with the colonel now. To my relief, one of my mother's friends came sailing toward me on waves of taffeta and indignation, and for once I gratefully gave myself over to listening to her complaints about how the cobbles in the street before her house had made her carriage late.

At dinner, too, I was mercifully spared. We were short of ladies that night, and at the table I was surrounded by older gentlemen and gloomy talk of the

war. Colonel Hamilton, however, had been granted the choicest chair beside my father, and whenever I dared glance their way, the two seemed thoroughly fascinated with each other's opinions. I wasn't exactly jealous, but I did wonder what they discussed, and how much more interesting their conversation must be than those around me.

After dinner the party returned to the sitting room, where I played several pieces on the fortepiano and Peggy and I sang together, as we always did. Polite applause followed our performance, and as I rose from the bench, I knew the evening was mercifully nearly done. Soon carriages would be sent for and our guests would say their farewells, including Colonel Hamilton. Soon he would be gone, and with luck I'd never see him again.

But tonight luck was with him, not me. I'd scarcely stood from the fortepiano's bench when he appeared beside me.

"I must thank you for the pleasure of your songs, Miss Elizabeth," he said, bowing in a way that neatly blocked my escape. "You rival Calliope herself."

I busied myself with the sheet music to hide my discomfort. "You are too kind in your praise, Colonel Hamilton, too kind indeed."

He had appeared small when he'd stood next to my father, but here beside me I had to raise my gaze to meet his. Now his smile seemed warm and genuine, and without the mockery I'd been so certain I'd seen earlier, which confused me even more.

"So you know my name, Miss Elizabeth," he said, "even without an introduction. I am honored."

I blushed again, and hated my cheeks for betraying me.

"You are a guest in our home, Colonel Hamilton," I said briskly, squaring the edges of the sheet music into a tidy stack. "I would be remiss not to know your name."

But he was looking past me, to the window behind the fortepiano. "Your father told me I should admire the view from here, from the southeast."

Of course, the view was familiar to me, but I turned about anyway, seeing it anew through his eyes. Our house overlooked the part of Albany set aside for grazing cattle, with an unimpeded view of the surrounding lands. Above the dark hills, the night sky was pierced by only a handful of stars and a shivering new moon. As if to answer, the lanterns on the sloop tied to my family's dock in the river offered their own meager light, reflecting and dancing across the inky water.

"Your father is a fortunate man," the colonel said softly beside me, his hands clasped behind his waist as he considered the landscape. He didn't say it as a mere pleasantry, but as a definitive statement, and with a touch of wistfulness that clearly encompassed far more than the view alone.

"Papa chose this site himself for the house," I said, deciding to ignore whatever strange mood possessed the colonel. "He is so partial to how the lands slope away to the river that he won't permit the shutters to be closed against the windows at dusk. That's the North River, as we call it, though you likely know it as the Hudson, having sailed along it from New York to Albany."

"But I didn't," he said, turning to look back over his shoulder to me. "I rode directly from Valley Forge. Sixty miles, some days."

I frowned, skeptical. That was hard riding for any man. "Sixty miles in a single day?"

"For five days," he said, smiling again to take away any hint of boastfulness from his claim. "When His Excellency's orders require haste, they must be obeyed. Duty forbids me from saying more, Miss Elizabeth."

"Recall that I'm the daughter of a soldier, Colonel Hamilton," I said. I liked his smile, and I realized I wanted to hear more from him. "Discretion, even secrecy, are imperative for the security of the country. I know to respect the confidence of your orders."

He nodded, his expression stoic, while the candlelight from the sconce to his left turned his hair bright as flames around his face. I might not be entitled to learn the reasons for General Washington having sent him racing here at breakneck speed from Pennsylvania, but I could see the toll that that haste had taken upon the colonel. Now I saw the weariness around his eyes, and understood why his clothes hung loosely about his shoulders. To ride nearly three hundred miles in five days meant he'd barely paused to sleep, let alone eat. I respected him all the more for it.

"I can tell you that His Excellency regrets the accusations that have been made regarding your father, Miss Elizabeth," he continued, still lowering his voice so none of the others might overhear. "There's no secret to it. Congress should not dictate military decisions tainted by politics. Nor does His Excellency find General Gates a particularly trustworthy successor."

"He isn't," I said, indignation welling up on my father's behalf. "The country, and the army with it, deserves much better than General Gates's self-righteous conniving. The man has merely reaped the success of what my father worked so hard to put in place. He has shown no regard for honor, or for the brave men from this state who fought for the cause of liberty, and not for him. Yet he was praised as a hero after Ticonderoga fell, an honor he'd no right to claim. None at all!"

The colonel's jaw tensed and he frowned, as if there was much he wished to say but couldn't. "You speak with passion, Miss Elizabeth."

"Pray do not forget that I am a Schuyler, sir," I declared fervently. "I know the cost of liberty, and victory besides."

He cocked a single brow with interest. "Those are brave words for a lady."

"Brave words born of truth, Colonel," I said, "and from what I have witnessed. Ill and in pain, my father insisted on his duties where others would have taken to their beds. When all others were fleeing Saratoga and the coming British, my mother bravely went toward them, to our farms and property there. With her own hand she set fire to the entire season's crops, acres of wheat and corn, to keep from feeding the enemy. Still, General Burgoyne and his officers commandeered our house in Saratoga as their own, and when they had drunk all my father's brandy and plundered my mother's goods, they burned our house,

our barns, our mills to the ground for sport before they surrendered to General Gates.”

It had been a shocking, sorrowful day when the news of that destruction had reached us. Our family had spent more time in that house in Saratoga than this one here in Albany, and I’d only but the sweetest memories of sleeping with our bedchamber windows open in the summer. I’d hear the breeze in the trees, and gathered berries in the fields, and danced with my sisters out of doors beneath the stars. Now that home and the trees and the berry fields were burned and blackened by war and my father’s name cast into disgrace, and with it all had gone much of my childhood innocence, too.

Yet the colonel said nothing in return, and I feared I’d prattled on too much. Many other families had lost their homes to the British, and most did not have a second house in which to live, as we did. Doubtless I sounded spoiled and indulged, a rich man’s daughter and nothing more. I tried to smile, tried to explain, tried to make light of what still hurt.

“There was an old tabby-cat at the house who always slept with me on my bed,” I said foolishly, unable to help myself. “Her name was Sally, and she had only one eye and a crooked tail, but she was the sweetest cat. The servants told me that one of the officers thought she was an ugly nuisance in the house, and had her thrown into the river to drown. And when afterward those same Englishmen —Burgoyne and his men—came to stay here in this house for ten days as prisoners-of-war, Papa obliged us to be as gracious to them as we would to any guest. He called it the fortunes of war, and said we must do it for the sake of liberty. Yet each time I dined with the English officers, or sang songs for them, all I could wonder was which one of them had drowned poor Sally in the river.”

I bowed my head, looking down at the ivory fan in my hand. I’d only made things worse, not better, and I blushed again from misery.

But the colonel wasn’t laughing at me. “Nothing about this war is easy.”

“Not for you,” I said ruefully. “You risk your life in battle, while I weep over a cat.”

“No,” he said firmly, so firmly that it startled me. “It’s not the cat alone that is causing you distress, is it?”

Taken aback, I shook my head warily, unsure of what he intended. “I don’t see what—”

“But you do, Miss Elizabeth.” There was a fresh intensity to his expression. “None of us can deny that this war has turned all our lives upside down. The old dreams of our future are gone. Nothing is as it was, and nothing is the way we’d always expected it would be. But this new country that we have claimed as our own will be better, braver, more glorious than anything the world has dared imagine.”

Other officers, including my father, spoke of the war in droning, practical terms of cannons and maneuvers, casualties and regiments. But none of them spoke like this, about dreams and glory, nor with this fervor. I understood now why Papa had been so intrigued with the colonel’s conversation at dinner: his manner was that exciting, and contagious, too.

He leaned toward me, a fierceness in his blue eyes. Although I knew I should step back and away from him, the way I should with any man who was too forward with me, I didn't. Despite the fact that the rest of my family and our guests were not ten feet from us in the drawing room, my conversation with Colonel Hamilton had made me forget them all, and turned this window corner into a place so private that we might have stood in another house entirely.

"I knew from the first that you understood, Miss Elizabeth," he continued, lowering his voice like a conspirator. "I heard it in your speech, and see it in your face now. You understand the sacred rights of mankind, and perceive the injustice of how those rights have been taken from us. You crave liberty, and have no more patience with injustice or tyranny than I."

"I do, Colonel Hamilton," I said, pleased that he'd imbued me with such patriotic qualities instead of flattering me with compliments on my eyes or my complexion, the way most gentlemen would. "But I also know that these dreams and glories exact a terrible price."

He nodded solemnly. "They do indeed. That is why each time I am called to battle, I accept that 'Liberty or Death' is no empty, vainglorious slogan for me. If I die, I do so knowing that I have helped secure our country's dearest freedoms."

"How terribly melancholy!" I exclaimed. "A most noble sentiment, but consider how your loss would affect your poor mother, your sisters."

"I am quite without family, Miss Elizabeth, or even a true home of my own," he confessed. "My father left my mother at an early age on the Caribbean island of Nevis, and after she died I came alone to New York for my studies. I can be that most perfect soldier, free to sacrifice myself without thought of those I must leave behind."

I shook my head, unable to accept his grim explanation. Surrounded as I had always been by my own large and loving family, I couldn't conceive of being so utterly alone in the world.

"I—I shall add you to my prayers, Colonel Hamilton," I said. "I'll pray for your safe delivery in battle, and for God's blessings upon you as you triumph over our enemies."

"I am honored by your kindness," he said gravely, and bowed as gracefully as any French courtier might. "I cannot think of anything that would give me greater pleasure, Miss Elizabeth."

"Eliza," I said impulsively. "My friends call me Eliza."

"Then I shall call you Betsey, to set myself apart from your other friends." He smiled again, his blue eyes bright, and added a disarming little nod that made me smile in return. "Now that you've honored me once again with a pledge of friendship, Betsey, I shall remain always in your debt."

Too late I realized I shouldn't have smiled with such encouragement, or let him misinterpret my good wishes. I hadn't intended to pledge friendship, and no lady ever wished to have a gentleman in her debt. But before I could demur, my sister Peggy suddenly appeared, popping up like a sprite beside Colonel Hamilton.

"Mamma wishes you to come bid good night to our guests, Eliza," she said pointedly, seizing me by the arm to make sure I understood. Which of course I did: I'd been too long alone in the colonel's company, and Mamma—or worse, Papa—had noticed. "Pray excuse us, Colonel."

She didn't wait for me to speak, instead pulling me forcibly away from him and from the room. As soon as we were in the hall, I shook my arm free of her grasp.

"I don't require you to yoke yourself to me like that, Peggy," I said crossly. I followed her down the staircase to the front hall—not willingly, but because I knew I must. "That was rude of you, and you know it."

Peggy pursed her lips and raised her brows, a face full of smugness that I never liked to see.

"Then you can tell that to Mamma and Papa," she said as we hurried down the steps. "I was only obeying their wishes, which is more than you were doing."

"I was doing nothing wrong," I said defensively, though I knew that wasn't quite true. "I was discussing the war with Colonel Hamilton."

Peggy made that face again, but by now we were in the front hall, and I slipped into my place beside my mother. One by one, carriages were drawing up before our house and our guests were taking their leave. As usual, my parents bid each of them farewell in turn, with many promises of good wishes and returning calls.

Last of all came Colonel Hamilton. I didn't note what he said to my parents, because I was concentrating so hard on saying nothing foolish myself.

"Good night, Colonel Hamilton," I murmured, all I dared say as I dipped a slight curtsy.

"Good evening, Miss Elizabeth," he said. He bowed, and moved on to thank my mother.

And that was all. Four words, my full name, and perfect propriety. I should have been relieved (if, in honesty, a bit disappointed), except for how he looked at me as he spoke. His eyes crinkled at the corners and the slightest of smiles played upon his lips, as if together we shared the greatest, most amusing secret in the world. It was only there for the instant that he stood before me, and gone before he'd turned to my mother. Even as I hoped no one else had taken notice, I smiled swiftly in return, unable to help myself.

Soon afterward, one of the footmen closed the door behind the colonel, the last guest of the evening. At once my mother began giving brisk orders to the servants so that the house would be put back to order, while my father tested the lock on the front door, the way he did every night before retiring. Peggy turned to climb the stairs to bed and I began to follow, believing I'd escaped.

I hadn't.

"Eliza, a moment," Papa said, and reluctantly I paused. Peggy stopped, too, eager to listen, but a curt nod from Papa sent her on her way up the stairs and out of hearing.

I turned to face him, my hand on the twisting newel post. Because I remained standing on the bottom step, we were nearly eye to eye.

"Colonel Hamilton is an agreeable young gentleman, isn't he?" he said.

"Yes, Papa," I said warily.

"A young man with great promise," Papa continued. "Intelligent, perceptive. Resourceful and persistent, too, to hear His Excellency tell it."

I nodded, wishing for all the world that I'd been able to flee upstairs with my sister.

"You appeared to enjoy Colonel Hamilton's company, Eliza," he said, not a rebuke, but a statement. "He's a charming fellow, is he not?"

"He is," I agreed uneasily. Papa had never been one for guile or trickery, but I couldn't see where all this was leading us. "We spoke of the war."

Papa smiled. "I expected so," he said, "for war is much on his mind, as it would be for any officer. Although speaking of war is hardly the way for a gentleman to win a lovely young miss."

"He wasn't trying to win me, Papa," I said, rankling a bit at that "lovely young miss." Among the three of us sisters, Peggy was the beautiful one and Angelica the most clever. I was somewhere in the middle, exactly where I'd been born, pretty enough and clever enough. But Papa insisted on praising my appearance whenever he'd the chance, as if repetition were sufficient to make me over into Venus herself. He meant well, I know—he always did—but still I wished he'd recognize my other qualities, too, the ones my sisters didn't possess, such as how well I could ride a horse, or how skilled I'd become at managing the household affairs with Mamma.

"Gentlemen don't always make their intentions apparent at first," Papa continued. "I saw the attention he paid toward you."

How many times this night had I blushed? "I assure you, Papa, that our conversation was entirely innocent of—of any intention."

Papa's smile faded. "I am glad of that," he said more seriously. "I wouldn't want you to consider an attachment to him."

"Oh, Papa!" I exclaimed with dismay, my cheeks growing warmer still. "After a single conversation?"

"I am serious, Elizabeth," Papa said. "Colonel Hamilton is a young officer with much to recommend him. I liked him very much. He is entirely devoted to the cause and to this country. Perhaps *too* devoted. According to His Excellency, the colonel is brave to the point of being reckless in battle—the first to engage and the last to leave the fray."

Sadly, I couldn't argue with Papa, not after all Colonel Hamilton had said to me earlier. Liberty or death, indeed.

"I've seen it before in other young officers," Papa continued, "and to my sorrow I'm certain I shall see it again. While courageous, even admirable, such men do not have long lives as soldiers. He'll return to Pennsylvania tomorrow, and I fear that will be the last we'll see of him. I would be surprised if he survives to his next birthday."

“Yes, Papa,” I agreed softly. I wished that what he’d said wasn’t true, and I wished even more that we all lived in different, more peaceful times.

“Yes.” There was sadness and regret in Papa’s face as he doubtless remembered all those other brave young soldiers, now lost, who’d served with him. “You can understand why I caution against him, Elizabeth. There are plenty of other young gentlemen in the world for you. Perhaps they may appear less dashing or less handsome, but they will be steady by your side, and love you more than glory or fame. That’s what matters most. It’s late now. Time for you to find your bed.”

He kissed me on the forehead, and added a fond pat to my shoulder as I turned and slowly climbed the stairs. He was a wise man, my father, and wanted only the best for me. I knew that. I was always grateful for his wisdom and guidance, as any daughter would be. He’d been right: most likely I would never again meet Colonel Hamilton in this life. Forgetting him should be easy enough, just as he would forget me.

But still, I added him to my prayers that night, exactly as I’d promised, and as I drifted to sleep I thought of how he’d smiled when he’d called me Betsey. . . .