

## Chapter 1

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, August 7, 1776

War! Its blood-thirsty tentacles had found Christopher Ludwick again.

A sudden chill rippled down his back. He glanced at his wife, Catharine, to see if she felt it too.

No. The chill was not from a draft through the sitting-room window but from an article in *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*. He glanced back at the headline in Philadelphia's German-language newspaper: The Hessians Are Coming. They're coming even here to America, a world away from his homeland, an eternity away from nightmares that still sometimes invaded his sleep.

The sharp crack of rifle shots, the wailing cries of anguish from wounded men knowing they were drawing their last breaths. Christopher, the former Christoff Ludwig, the former Hessian, felt again the sting of a sword to his stomach, the prick of the bayonet to his forearm, leaving wounds visible forty years later.

He skipped a breath at the newspaper's revelation. Icy tendrils trickled along his back, turning to an iron grip on his stomach. Yes, war had once been his companion. He'd joined willingly, expecting adventure and excitement, but he'd dug too many graves. Lost too many friends. Squandered too much time, not to mention treasure. The companion of his youthful dreams had now turned nemesis, staring him down again. A relentless predator, demanding attention, commanding submission. A perverse, rabid beast—like a fox throttling a rabbit.

Only I've always been the rabbit. No more.

The difference today? Until now the American enemy had worn a red coat, carried a long

rifle, and spoken English. This morning, another enemy was joining the fray, a foe who wore green with crimson facing, brandished death, and spoke his native German.

Christopher finished the article, folded the newspaper, and laid it atop the latest *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Turning to the love of his life, he said in a hushed voice, his heavy accent heightened by the burden of his decision. “My dear lady, I must take my actions to Congress, then to the battlefield.”

As if she read his mind, Catharine nodded. More than once, they had discussed what Christopher would do if Hessians ever stepped foot on American soil.

Catharine’s delightful dark eyes locked on his, then, downcast, she dropped her gaze to her hands, laid her knitting on a side table, and whispered, “I know.”