

Patricia M. Muhammad  
presents

# Hidden Valor

## Places

Throughout Europe, 18<sup>th</sup> century London, England was a place known for its culture, especially in etiquette and decorum. The ruler of their monarchy was either king or queen. They were housed in main royal palace. Yet others could call this place home as well, for there were plenty of chambers for them to attain their rest. These were members of the gentry who were of high station. They were of course members of the king's court. The king's court was where patricians would gather to spend their leisure, to obtain favour with the Crown and engage in nefarious activity in the hopes of toppling an ennobled or two from their high station. One day the king's court became the scene of excitement. The king and queen entertained a land dispute between a courtier and Duke Everett. The Crown ruled in the other's favour. For a few moments, this would be the extent of enlivened activity that the palace would witness. However, matters quickly changed. Murder. Yes, within the royal grounds, a courtier has been killed. The Crown ordered all members of the king's court who were present on the grounds to be sequestered until the offenders could be apprehended. A young maiden, a beautiful duchess had been caught in the midst of the fray. She had left her familiar place, her home, seeking to present herself at the king's court within her own right. Yet, it was primarily curiosity which led her to the royal palace—or perhaps fate. Nonetheless, she would become more familiar with the king's court, this place where vying for greater status and being ostentatious was the norm, more than she had anticipated. Not too long after the royal declaration, courtiers engaged in unseemly gossip, alleging that somehow Duke Everett was responsible for the murders. The king and queen had already known this to be false. Duchess Arabella was soon to be exonerated as well. Yet this did not prevent the king and queen from taking extraordinary measures. Perhaps they assumed in this place which is most secure with royal guards and protocols set in place and they soon were to increase the orders of those currently stationed. This place which had now closed its gates and shuttered its doors had become Duchess Arabella and Duke Everett's new home—for now. The walls of the palace bounced the echoes of those present. The king and queen observed. They lived long enough in the royal palace, bred in royal protocol and learned much of their regal forbears of what certain of the ennobled were unabashedly willing to do in order to have their way. Deceit, of course, slander, yet another of their dubious ammunition

and even on the rare occasion such as this, murder. For a member of the gentry to conspire with others to implement such an ignoble act, that is to kill innocents for their sport and based in their insatiable ego, is to tarnish the regal nature of this ancient institution. This is what the Crown hoped to rectify. Here is where Duchess Arabella and Duke Everett would become better acquainted with one another. They dined together in a private forth as directed by the Crown. Their innocence was not to be tainted by the still at large perpetrator(s) of such heinous acts. Soon after their evening meal, a royal butler and maidservant would introduce the duke and duchess to their new quarters. Unfamiliar as they were to each of them, they had every amenity that the era dictated. Arabella and Everett had now entered two private bedchambers. Yet, private was relative. They soon would discover an open space which lied between the two quarters. But first they must rest if they are able. Duchess Arabella examines her assigned chambers. She and Everett will have their own servants. Arabella looks to the chandelier that hung in this place, they were tiny mirrors reflecting a new circumstance that she had not assumed she would be in. Yet her presence at the royal palace, in these very bedchambers would catapult her into the next phase of her life. She had desired, after all, to be presented of her own status. The most common manner in which a fair maiden is to achieve this is by the hand of a handsome courtier. The duchess noticed Everett's aesthetically pleasing presence, though this she would not readily disclose. One day they both discovered that center space. This place became a bridge between the two. Duke Everett cared for her. He helped her to her bedchambers through this secret entry when she sat with him by candlelight as they discussed their unusual circumstance. They reflected. They spoke. In time, the courtiers began to care for one another with adoring depth. While the chaos of murder lied just outside the doors of their bedchambers, Arabella and Everett found a comforting place within each other.

Their newly discovered entryway not only led to each other's chambers, but it opened the duke and duchess to a winding path, a staircase set in darkness, to a lower level. The duke and duchess decided to venture there on occasion. Candlelight was the only way for them to see what was before them. It was a dangerous trek, but once they discovered the abandoned level, they found a place where they could truly rest within the palace. The royal servants had prepared their bedchambers with luxe bedding, their brocade drapes had been cleaned and handled with care and their bathing areas enclosed with Oriental screens which only added to the décor. Yet the duke and duchess barely paid much attention to these overt aesthetics. What they sought was a place where their eyes could focus on each other seamlessly, where objects could not easily topple by the gush of wind had they left their windows opened. The brightness of the chandeliers were beautiful, but they could not match the brilliance that the duke and duchess found in each other's eyes. Had they been of another plane, perhaps neither would need candlelight to see their way through to this other place. The lower level was essentially empty. The only other company present while Duke Everett and Duchess Arabella were down there were their shadows and their echoes. Yet this place down below held its secrets and they would soon discover how they related to the

murder up above. In the meantime, these two patricians rested. He would lay against the wall on the floor. No there was no fanciful cushioned stool with ornate legs or a cherry wood-framed tufted settee for them to sit or lie. For Arabella and Everett the floor which supported them was sufficient for them to have their solace. One day while they were in this place, the duke noticed something odd about one of the walls towards their left. It was embossed with etchings that did not match the rest of the level. He also noticed a matter peculiar regarding the moulding center of the ceiling where an elaborate chandelier probably once hung. As much as they sought to not be distracted, this garnered their attention. However, they also may be the very matters they needed to become familiar which in order for them to have the future they desired together. The sequestration in the royal palace, their time alone within the lower level, all of it was fashioned by destiny for Duchess Arabella and Duke Everett to have their due, a lifetime of felicity reserved for they alone.

Soon they would return up above. Duke Everett reported his discovery. These were indeed clues as to the perpetrator(s) motives for the murders. The king and queen thanked the duke for his service. He and Arabella left this place. They were both elated to now be in the House of Carrington, the very manor in which Duke Everett was lord of. Their intent to settle and prepare for their wedding was soon interrupted as the Crown called for the duke's return to the royal palace. There had been another murder. Duchess Arabella refused to leave her betrothed's side, even in the presence of the king and queen. This place held great concern, but her foremost priority was the care of her fiancé and their home. Arabella vowed to support her husband, especially in his service to the Crown. The king and queen allowed this as service to Duke Everett allowed his mind to be free to competently serve the Crown. Those of the throne, along with Duke Everett's help were soon able to resolve the murders. Duke Everett guided Duchess Arabella along with the king and queen and royal guards to the lower level, that once sacred place that he and his betrothed thought not to ever tell of its existence to anyone. The queen and king could hear behind that wall with the etchings, for it was not a true part of the palace's architecture. This lead to an opening where a boastful confession could be heard by all, and at least one more person has now been murdered.

However, Duke Everett and Duchess Arabella are able to leave for the House of Carrington without interruption. They are wed. Duchess Arabella had unwittingly set herself upon an unyielding path which led her to where she desired to be. She was now in his place with her husband. Now they were now home.