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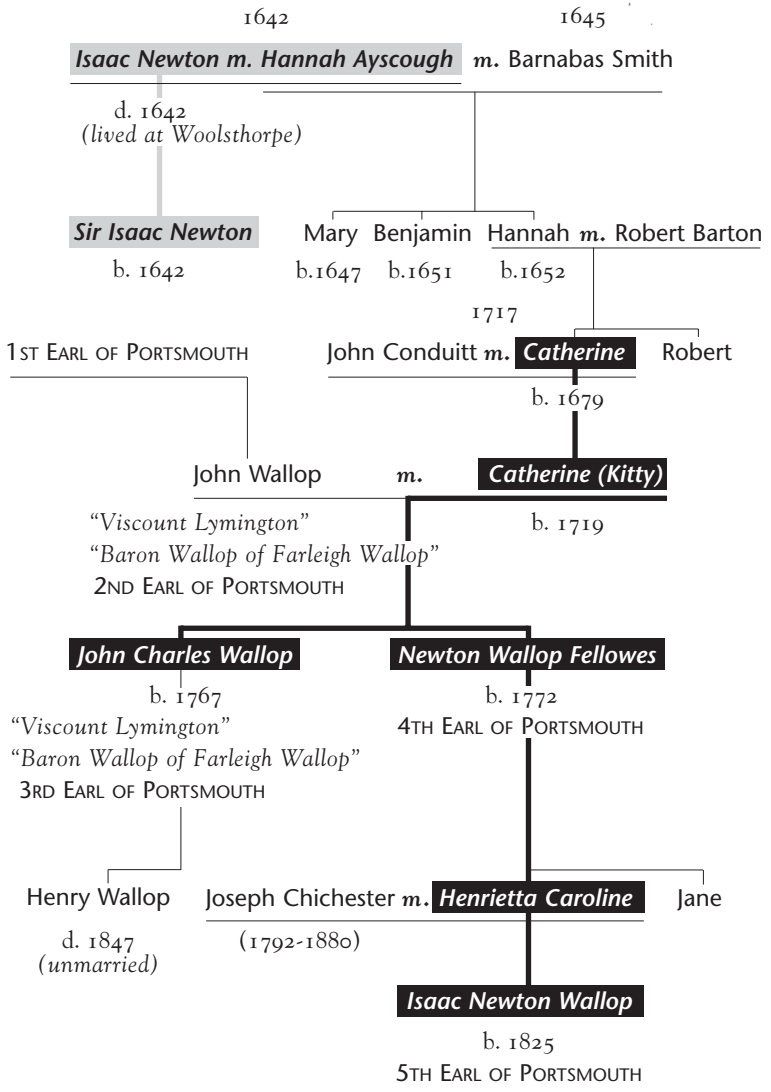
God in His wisdom saw to it that the world would never find Him through human wisdom." 1 CORINTHIANS 1:21

THE SUPREME GOD is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect. . . . He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient, that is, His duration reaches from eternity to eternity; His presence from infinity to infinity. . . . He is not eternity and infinity but eternal and infinite; He is not duration or space, but He endures and is present. He endures for ever, and is every where present; and by existing always and every where, He constitutes duration and space. In Him are all things contained and moved.

SIR ISAAC NEWTON
"General Scholium," The Principia

Genealogy



■ Trail of Newton's Papers (given to Catherine Conduitt)
■ Lineage of Sir Isaac Newton

PROLOGUE

GROSVENOR SQUARE, LONDON, 1819

"Miss Jane Fellowes?" Bowing, Thomas Norcross addressed the elder of the young ladies seated in the finely appointed parlor of Portsmouth House.

He and his two companions had been kept overlong in the reception room, and Thomas had begun to wonder if the object of his visit might be reluctant to admit him. The reason for Miss Fellowes's hesitation escaped him, for had he not politely answered her desperate missives—all five of them?

"I am Mrs. Joseph Chichester of Calverleigh Court in Devon," the lady replied, rising to offer him a curtsy. She held out a hand to indicate the lovely, auburn-haired creature who occupied a nearby settee. "This is Miss Fellowes, my younger sister."

"Ah," he said, giving the younger woman a smile. "Thomas Norcross, at your service."

"You have hardly been at my service, sir," she replied. Coming to her feet, she gave him the barest dip of her head. "You have thwarted my every attempt to speak to Mr. Isaac Milner."

At her sharp retort, the other two men stifled surprised laughter. "You are correct on all counts, Miss Fellowes," Thomas said. "Except in your assumption that the fault lies with me. Mr. Milner himself directed each letter I wrote to you."

"All the same. I have come to think ill of both of you."

At this, the shorter and rounder of Thomas's friends gave a hearty chuckle. "Well done, Norcross! We have all been waiting to meet a lady who did not swoon at your feet, and here she stands at last. Miss Fellowes, I am most heartily pleased to know you. My name is Charles Babbage, and this is John Waring."

The young woman curtsied and returned to her seat. "Mr. Norcross, I cannot imagine why you have left Cambridge and come down to London," she said as the men took places near the fire. "As you well know, my desire has been to speak with Mr. Milner. I am in need of the skills of a highly trained mathematician and scientist, one who understands the accomplishments of my ancestor, Sir Isaac Newton."

"But did you not receive my most recent message?" Thomas asked. "I added a note at the bottom to say I would arrive in London this morning in the hope of meeting with you to discuss this very matter."

She glanced at the fire, and he had the distinct impression that his letter lay among the ashes beneath the grate.

"I was unaware of your intentions," she said, lifting her delicate chin. "Yet what possible use can such a discussion be, Mr. Norcross? I must be frank. Your appearance here distresses me greatly. My sister and I wait vigil upon the expected death of our dear aunt, Lady Portsmouth, and we have no desire to dally in meaningless conversation with schoolboys."

"Schoolboys?" Thomas glanced at his companions in surprise.

"I assume you are pupils under the tutelage of Mr. Milner. You study at Cambridge, do you not?"

"Indeed we do, but we are hardly schoolboys, dear lady."

"Most certainly not," Babbage concurred. "Norcross received his master's degree three years ago, as did I, and he possesses the finest understanding of chemistry in the realm. Waring is highly acclaimed

for his work in the calculus, for which your ancestor was celebrated. And I myself am rather well known for my calculations."

"Babbage is constructing a table of logarithms," Waring explained. A medium-built man with a thick golden mustache that entirely covered his upper lip, he had been one of Thomas's closest friends for many years. "He hopes one day to publish it—a lofty goal, indeed. I am attempting to determine the maxima and minima of definite integrals."

"A new study in the calculus," Miss Fellowes said. "I read about it in the *Exeter Flying Post*."

Her softened tone gave Thomas reason to believe that she had decided to be impressed with Waring. Babbage, of course, was considered silly by all those who did not understand the vastness of his intellect. Thomas himself, it appeared, had earned the lady's eternal dislike.

"But Sir Isaac Newton was known for many things, Mr. Waring," she continued. "The calculus is only one of them."

"Apparently he delved into subjects unknown or unrecognized by his peers at the time of his death," Thomas spoke up. "In your letter to Mr. Milner, you wrote in great detail of a chest of Newton's papers in your possession, Miss Fellowes. Notebooks, bundles of documents, diaries."

"Yes, Mr. Norcross, the chest is filled with documents and other objects placed there by our great-grandmother upon the death of her uncle, Sir Isaac Newton."

"You mentioned a small jar. A jar with . . . I believe you said lightning coming from it?"

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Chichester groaned. "You did tell him after all, Jane?"

"Indeed, for I felt it essential to the story. You see, gentlemen,

when my sister placed her hand inside the chest, she was struck by something like lightning. She believed it emerged from the jar."

"But I am not absolutely certain of this," Mrs. Chichester protested. "I could have been mistaken. You must understand, gentlemen, that the situation at the time was most chaotic."

"I am sorry to counter you, Henrietta," Miss Fellowes said. "But it was not in the least chaotic. You must recall that at the moment of the incident, our uncle and aunt had been removed to their own chambers, and we were merely cleaning up the library. You put the inventory back into the box, and that is when you were struck."

"Yes, Jane, but I had fainted first."

"Not before you were struck—"

"No, but before I recalled it. It was only when I came round that I remembered the lightning."

"But you did recall it, Henrietta. You were quite certain—"

"I had been insensible for a great deal of time!"

"Hardly a minute!"

"I beg your pardon, ladies," Thomas cut in, exasperated. "Did you say there was an inventory?"

"Written by Catherine Conduitt," Miss Fellowes said, flashing her sister a last frown. "It is several pages in length."

"May I see it? Perhaps this inventory may offer a clue as to what caused such a marked response when you touched the box."

"Jane believes it is God." Mrs. Chichester leveled a gaze across the room. "She believes that the power of God is in the box, as it was with the ark of the covenant. She thinks it has been endowed with holiness."

"Really?" Babbage said with a laugh. "This is diverting, I must say. Norcross, you failed to mention that we were dealing with an artifact of such omnipotence."

Thomas regarded Miss Fellowes with bemusement as she rose and walked to the fire. Was this young woman no more than a silly ninny with a head full of feathers? After all, she could hardly be much older than twenty. Her glowing hair was perfectly coiffed into an artful extravaganza of braids, twists, and curls. And she was garbed in a white morning dress of clear lawn, trimmed with embroidered frills and mancherons—an attire that gave her more the image of an ethereal Grecian sprite than an intelligent woman with a good head on her shoulders. Indeed, she looked like a lady who should much prefer quilling and playing whist to engaging in any serious discussion.

As he was about to dismiss her and her quest entirely, Miss Fellowes folded her arms and faced the three visitors. "Appearances may be deceiving," she said. "The ark of the covenant was nothing more than a box built of acacia wood and lined with gold inside and out. The staff of Moses was nothing more than the branch of a tree. The fleece of Gideon was nothing more than a sheep's pelt. And yet God chose to endow these common objects with mystery, holiness, and great power. Why, gentlemen?"

She looked at each of the three in turn. When they did not respond, she spoke up again. "It is because, in His omniscient wisdom, God has often chosen to use not only flawed and sinful human beings but also common, earthly objects to reflect, contain, and demonstrate aspects of Himself."

"Jane," Mrs. Chichester said in a low voice, "must you preach at us?"

"I am setting out a theory," she returned.

"Do continue, Miss Fellowes," Thomas urged her, intrigued at her reasoned argument.

She nodded. "It cannot be denied that in the course of history, God has placed some of His essence into these earthly things—thereby giving the objects some qualities of the Almighty

Himself. The ark held God's holiest commandments, and, therefore, anyone who touched it was stricken dead at once. A burning bush in the desert revealed the essence of God to Moses, and the fire did not consume the bush. Even the hem of Jesus' garment translated His power to a sick woman who touched it, and she was healed of a life-long issue of blood."

"Indeed, Miss Fellowes," Thomas said, "but these were miracles recorded in the Bible. Eighteen centuries later, we do not possess any objects endowed with divine power."

"Not unless you can find the Holy Grail," Babbage chuckled.

"The shroud of Turin might be such an object." Waring had been stroking his mustache while Miss Fellowes spoke. "I have read accounts of the power of the shroud to heal those who look upon it. Clearly it is protected by God, for it has survived intact for more than a thousand years."

"Yes, Waring, but soon you will expect us to believe that every so-called splinter of the holy cross, every supposed twig from the crown of thorns, and every fragment of bone from every saint who ever walked the earth is a relic worthy of our adoration." Thomas stood. "Miss Fellowes, we are scientists and mathematicians. We do not rely on ancient legends or tales of miracles to add to man's knowledge. We require proof."

Miss Fellowes's eyebrows lifted. "Proof of the existence of God, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Fellowes," he said. "Final proof."

"If Sir Isaac Newton, one of your own, were to have written such a final proof, would you then accept the evidence that God exists?"

"If I were to read that proof, test it, and find it valid, I suppose I would."

"I ask you, Mr. Norcross, if there is a divine creator, a holy entity of supreme power and wisdom, an eternal being who had no begin-

ning and will have no end—do you suppose he would want a mere human like you to have proof of who he is and what he is made of? to be able to analyze and dissect him? to quantify and calculate everything about him?"

Thomas smiled. "I suppose not."

"If such a final proof had been written down by the greatest mathematician and scientist who ever lived . . . and if that document had been put into a simple metal box . . . and if there truly is a God . . . do you suppose it possible, Mr. Norcross, that the omniscient one would be well aware that humans might use a document of final proof for good or for evil . . . and that, therefore, he would place his holy protection upon that box?"

"Good gracious," Babbage said. "You make quite an argument, Miss Fellowes. I am intrigued."

Thomas took a step toward Miss Fellowes. "Where is the box, madam? Did you bring it with you to London?"

"It is stored among our trunks. Do you wish to see it?"

"Oh, not now, Sister, I beg you," Mrs. Chichester protested. "Dr. Williams is to arrive at any moment, and then we must have our daily interview of Dr. Nichols, who will doubtless require us to make yet another visit to the apothecary, and after that we are called to dinner. We really cannot take time for this today. I confess, the more I hear of the whole matter, the more preposterous it sounds to me."

"Henrietta, may I remind you that our aunt and our uncle were possibly both affected by their proximity to the box—as were you? If there is power in it to destroy, then perhaps there is power in it to heal. And that is our very purpose, is it not? To see our aunt healed?"

"Why do you not go and pray to your silly box then?" Mrs. Chichester rose and set her embroidery on the settee. "Forgive my shortness, but honestly, I weary exceedingly of this subject. I do

thank you, gentlemen, for humoring my sister and for listening to her sermons. Jane has always fancied herself a great debater, and she loves nothing more than to stir up controversy. You have been patient, but now I feel certain you have great and illustrious mathematical and chemical quandaries at hand, and you must wish to return to Cambridge before nightfall."

"Actually, no, Mrs. Chichester," Thomas said. "For the coming sennight, I reside at my family house in Berkeley Square, but a short distance from here. Waring stays nearby, while Babbage resides at his Mayfair house with his wife. Indeed, I believe I can speak for my friends in stating that we would be most interested in examining Newton's box and in assisting you in the determination of its properties. If there is some unexplained power to be found either in the box or in the document of proof, I am certain we would do our best to unveil it. As scientists, we enjoy nothing more than an enigma such as this. It is our greatest pleasure to decipher the indecipherable, to define the undefinable, and to demystify every mystery."

"Nevertheless, your investigation will have to wait until a later date, if at all," Mrs. Chichester said. "I have a sudden headache."

"But even as soon as tomorrow may be too late," her sister protested. "Our aunt may die before then."

"And with no one to attend her. Come, Sister, we must pay Lady Portsmouth a visit, for we have tarried too long. Gentlemen, please excuse us."

Her cheeks pink with fury, Miss Fellowes could hardly disobey. As the elder of the two and a married woman, Mrs. Chichester could determine who would and would not be seen and set the length of calls. She had the right to walk ahead of her sister, to be addressed first during introductions, to summon the servants, to pour the tea herself, and many other privileges.

"May we call again tomorrow, Mrs. Chichester?" Thomas asked as the two women walked past him. "And might we also have your permission to examine the box?"

Mrs. Chichester paused. "I do not wish for anyone to examine that box. It is not . . . it is not worthy of your time. The documents were studied years ago and were deemed of little value. They cannot have changed in their essence since that time. Good day, Mr. Norcross, Mr. Babbage, Mr. Waring."

The men bowed, and the two ladies left the room.

"Good heavens," Waring said. "Such a pair of tigresses! I am glad to be rid of them."

"Are you?" Babbage shook his head. "I am intrigued by Miss Fellowes's miraculous box, are you not, Norcross?"

Intrigued? Indeed, he was. A passion for science had always consumed him. But it was not only Sir Isaac Newton's legacy that Thomas found alluring—it was the chest's pert and pretty owner as well. He must see her again. But how to go about it? What ought he to do next? Where had such a creature come from, and how had he failed to know her before this moment?

ONE

EXETER, DEVON, ENGLAND
TWO WEEKS EARLIER

"Faith, Jane. We must have faith." Seated in a chill cell inside the Exeter gaol, the Honorable Newton Wallop Fellowes reached across the table and patted his daughter's hand. "God is with us."

"Father, how can you be so complacent?" Jane tossed her napkin onto the white tablecloth. As had become her custom, she had brought his breakfast from the inn where she was staying. At considerable cost to the Fellowes family, the Black Swan Inn provided Mr. Fellowes three good meals each day, clean table linens, and the appropriate silver. For a few shillings more, the guard on duty was happy to permit father and daughter to dine together.

Jane cast a glance at the *Exeter Flying Post,* which lay folded beside her father's plate. "The whole world, it would appear to me,

is going mad," she said. "A lack of reason and good sense is everywhere apparent, and yet we sit by and do nothing about it. We live in a realm whose rightful king is a lunatic. My sister has married a man with a fondness for traveling as far from home as possible, and consequently, she suffers the dire inability to produce an heir." Jane took up the letter that had just been brought in by the guard. "And now we learn that your brother is suffering yet another bout of dementia."

"The king, Henrietta, and John may all be slightly bereft of their faculties, my dear, but they are not the whole world."

"They are *my* whole world, Father. They . . . and you. These are all I shall ever want or need."

Jane studied the portly gentleman who sat across from her, his graying hair in want of a trim and the napkin beneath his chin sporting a dollop of strawberry jam. The filthy glass in the window behind him allowed only a little light to filter between the iron bars, but she knew her father was not well. How could he be healthy in this frigid stone cell with its leaky ceiling and muddy floor?

"The greatest madness of all," she continued, "belongs to the unknown villain who has accused you of sedition. Thanks to him, you have stood before neither a court nor a judge. Entirely without benefit of habeas corpus, you are imprisoned merely on suspicion of a crime."

"Dearest Jane, you fret too much about matters that are beyond your concern. You ought to go down the road to the library at the institution and read one of your scientific treatises. Hooke's *Micrographia* would do nicely. See if you can determine for us whether light is made up of waves or invisible particles."

Jane closed her eyes, recalling the horror of one particular day when she and her sister had observed a hanging on the gallows that

stood next to the library. She would never forget how—beckoned by the excited cries of the crowd crying out for a hanging—the two little girls had escaped from Billings, the family footman. Hand in hand, Jane and Henrietta had slipped out of the oak-paneled room with its bookshelf-lined walls. They grasped the banister and flew down the spiral staircase. And then they burst out into the hot summer air, ran past the cathedral, and headed straight into the throng of onlookers.

Shivers skittered down Jane's spine as she recalled the odor of human sweat and onions and broken leather shoes that had swirled around her head. Shouts of rage and excitement filled her ears. Rough linen skirts, brown cotton trousers, and thickly muscled arms formed a maze through which she led her older sister. Oh, it had seemed so thrilling to be away from the quiet opulence of their home and out among the common people!

But then Jane had fixed her eyes on the platform not two paces away. The condemned man stood just beyond her, his wooden shoes nicked and battered, his bare ankles covered with running sores, the hems of his trousers ragged and threadbare. He wore a wrinkled gray shirt of homespun wool; it was stained with sweat. His white hair ruffled in the breeze, and his blue eyes looked toward heaven.

The hangman had shoved a black hood over the criminal's head, grasped a thick rope, and pulled the noose down onto the criminal's shoulders. At that moment, a cry rang out—"No! No, don't kill my papa!"

It had been a girl, not much older than Jane. She broke from a small cluster of people hiding in the shadows of the library and ran for the gallows stairs, tears streaming down her cheeks. An old man turned and cuffed the child across the cheek. She stumbled, fell, and lay sobbing.

Jane had started toward the girl, but a roar from the crowd stopped her as everyone suddenly surged forward. Pressed against the wooden platform, Jane had heard the latch on the trapdoor snap open. The door swung down; the man dropped; the rope jerked taut. For a moment he struggled, writhing and choking. And then he fell still.

To this day, Jane could hear the gentle creak of the heavily laden rope. And she could see the dead man's daughter where she lay sobbing into the grass.

Jane feared she would not survive were her beloved father to be subjected to a similar fate. "Father," she whispered, reaching out with a trembling hand. "In one short month, you must be taken before the magistrate to face a possible penalty that is unbearable even to mention. Yet you do nothing to save your life."

"Now, now, my dear," he said as he cut into a crisp sausage. "Let us not recite all our woes at breakfast. If we are to have any entertainment at all, we must save a few for dinner."

"How can you find amusement in this? I assure you I am greatly distressed." She poured a measure of milk into a china cup, then filled it to the brim with strong, dark tea. Though their two-hundred-year-old manor house and their complacent life at Eggesford seemed a world away, Jane realized her father was determined to continue on as though nothing had gone awry.

"Vexation, dear girl," he said around a bite of egg, "has never done anyone the slightest good. Observe my poor brother as an example to the contrary. He is forever at sixes and sevens, and thanks to it, he has suffered the collapse of one marriage and great unhappiness in the second. No, I believe that a resolute, dispassionate serenity undergirded by an iron faith in God is the best way to go about one's life. Would you not agree?"

Jane sighed. "Of course, Father, you are right."

"I thank you, my dear, for you know it is my greatest pleasure to triumph over you in every debate." He lifted his teacup and gave her a salute. "Your kippers, I fear, are growing quite cold."

Shaking her head, Jane returned to her breakfast. She loved her father deeply, and she knew that without him, her own life would have little focus. For three years, since the marriage of her older sister, Jane had been the full-time caretaker of the widower and his household. They were a wealthy family, owning three large manor houses, more than three thousand acres in the Eggesford and Wembworthy parishes, as well as several other nearby estates, but she would not think of hiring anyone to take her place at her father's side.

Unfortunately, however, it was beginning to look as if Jane would be forced to marry, and the sooner the better. Although born into the Wallop family, Newton Fellowes had inherited his estates in Devon from his maternal uncle, Henry Arthur Fellowes, and he had taken on that family's surname. The task of childbearing, it seemed, must fall to Jane, for if her father died without a male heir, his entire property would be entailed upon a cousin.

"Father, I am sorry I cannot let this matter rest," she said, the very thought of marriage chilling her to the core. "You must give these matters due attention. Your life is at stake!"

"Yes, Jane. I know that." He set down his knife and fork. As he gazed at her, his brow furrowed with the tension that had plagued them from the moment they learned of the terrible charges against him. "I know I am accused of sedition against the Crown. I know my name is associated with those who would wish King George dead—as if his madness were not enough. I know also that I was said to be at a meeting I did not attend. As you are well aware, the Seditious Meetings Act bans assemblies of more than fifty men, and violation is punishable by death. An illegal assembly was held in Exeter for

the very purpose of protesting the suspension of habeas corpus, and two witnesses claim to have seen me there."

"They are lying!"

"Of course they are. But how to prove it? Moreover, my family seal was set upon funds that were not taken from my accounts. These accounts are . . . well, I am sorry to say, but they are in a bit of a shambles. Money has been taken from here and there for various projects."

"From here and there?" she cried.

"Jane, I know all these facts, but what am I to do about them? I can do nothing, my dear girl. Nothing but have faith."

"What is faith, Father? Sitting here in the Exeter gaol while unknown enemies plot against you? Believing that God will send a miracle to save you at the last moment? The innocent are not always saved."

"I am far from innocent, Jane." He lowered his head, shaking it sadly. "I am—I regret to say—as great a sinner as any man who has ever lived. But I am not guilty of sedition, and I believe that God will see to my deliverance."

"Is this the nature of God? Is this what it means to have faith? To do nothing but idly await one's destiny? To be at the merciless whim of the Almighty?" She pushed back from the table and stood. "If so, I want no part of such a God."

"How would you prefer Him, dear girl? Would you put God inside a box, neatly contained, pinned down, and labeled like one of your insect specimens? Would you have everything about Him known, even His plans for your future? Is that what would make you happy?"

"If God could be contained and His essence understood, I should be very happy indeed," she replied. "I have never been fond of a mystery, as you well know. I always do my best to examine and decipher everything that is beyond my ken."

"Jane, Jane," he said. "You are far too spirited for your own good. Why, my dear, must you concern yourself with my fate? You must get on with your own life. Of what great value am I? I am an old man with gout in one foot, no wife to cheer me, and one of my two dear children already married and gone away."

"Father, you are everything to me." To her dismay, Jane felt hot tears fill her eyes. "If I could put God in a box and make my life turn out as I wished, I should want only to stay at Eggesford House with you."

"There, there, my child. Calm yourself." He rose and searched a moment for his spectacles. Finding them in the pocket of his frock coat, he set them on his nose and picked up his brother's letter. "Now then, I feel you are overwrought on all these counts. It is true that I may go to the gallows, but you will not be left homeless. Richard Dean called upon me two days ago, and despite my troubles, his interest in you remains keen. I think we ought to get on with this marriage business."

"I shall not marry Mr. Dean, Father. Not until your life is safe." She lifted her chin and looked him directly in the eye. "As God is my witness, I shall see your name cleared, Father. I shall do all in my power to save your life."

"Oh, dear me." He let out a long sigh. "Dear, dear me. I can see I have nothing left but to send you to Farleigh House."

"Farleigh House!"

"You must go and look after your uncle." He studied the letter his brother's steward had sent. "Yes, this is just the thing to keep you occupied, my dear. Indeed, I believe your sister would be pleased to accompany you, for Henrietta always enjoys a family crisis."

"Oh, Father, do be reasonable! She likes nothing more than utter stability, and I can do much to assist you if I stay here at your side!"

"No, my mind is settled. Billings may go with you—he has so little to do these days, and you will need a good footman. On the morrow, Jane, you must make your way to Farleigh."

"But the journey is one hundred fifty miles, and none of the family will be expecting us. No, I beg you. Please do not make me go to Farleigh. I must be allowed to stay here with you and see to your health."

"Nonsense. I shall do quite well on my own, and your uncle could use your assistance. You are a steady girl when you put your mind to it. As my dear brother lacks both steadiness and an able mind at the moment, I believe you will do him much good."

"Lady Portsmouth can care for her husband," Jane protested.

"Your aunt has gone into London."

"Aunt is in London? But how do you have this information?"

"She wrote to me. A letter." He cleared his throat and waved his daughter off with a dismissive gesture. "Enough, then. I shall not be swayed. Return to the inn and pack your trunks. I shall send a servant to Calverleigh Court for Henrietta, and the two of you can set off at dawn tomorrow."

"Father, I beg you to reconsider." She took two steps after him.

"I shall brook no further argument, Jane," he said, turning on her. "You will obey me, and you will go with your sister to Farleigh. There you will sit with your uncle in his library and read his books and try to make some sense of his conversation. You will not return to Devon until I send for you. And you will keep your mind entirely on matters other than the troubles of your father. Do you understand me, Jane?"

"Yes, sir." Though everything within her heart cried out against making this journey, she knew there was nothing to be done against it. She was intelligent and capable, but she would be prevented from

acting on her father's behalf. Instead, her lot lay in embroidering pillows, decorating bonnets, and bearing the children of a man she could hardly stand. With such a future laid out before her, she could not find any purpose at all in striving for love, for hope . . . or for faith.

"I cannot think why you must always be so obstinate, Jane." Henrietta Chichester drew a heated curling iron from the chimney of an oil lamp and clamped it on the ends of her sister's hair. "You would be much happier if you did as you were told. Leave all political matters to Father and Mr. Chichester. My husband is making every effort to find the perpetrator of these accusations of sedition. He and Father are great friends, for you know how they love to fish together for salmon in the River Taw, and there is nothing that Mr. Chichester would not do—"

"Henrietta! You are burning my curls!" Jane grabbed the iron and tugged it free as the stench of singed hair filled the small room of the Black Swan Inn. "Now look. It will crumble away, and all I shall have left will be a crisp stubble around my forehead. Honestly, Henrietta."

"I am sorry, Jane, but you always put me into such a stew." She turned away with a shrug. "It hardly matters how you look anyway. We are going off to Farleigh House, and we certainly shall have no visitors there, for who would come calling on our poor uncle? We shall have only the company of our aunt."

"Not even that, for Father tells me that Lady Portsmouth is away in London," Jane observed as she tried to salvage what was left of the curls that lay against her temples. If she had prettier hair instead of this odd auburn color, she might fret more over it. As it was, she

found her hair useful only in drawing attention to her eyes, which were olive green and rather attractive, she thought.

But she had never given much heed to appearance, for intellect interested her far more. To the improvement of her mind, she had given all her attention during the twenty-one years of her life, and she believed her mental prowess could rival any in the realm. One could easily ignore singed ringlets, Jane believed, when one's intelligence reigned supreme.

"How do you know our aunt is in London?" Henrietta asked as she handed Jane a yellow bonnet. "Father makes a great point to read me his correspondence when I visit, and I recall no recent news at all from Lady Portsmouth."

"Nor do I, yet he insisted he had received a letter from her." Tying the yellow silk ribbons beneath her chin, Jane frowned into the mirror. The mention of the secret correspondence had bothered her a great deal, for it was true that their father had always been eager to read any news to his daughters. Had this awful accusation of sedition caused him to engage in covert communications with his family and friends? Was he attempting to ferret out the cause of his troubles without telling Jane?

"Stop glowering!" Henrietta cried. "Honestly, Sister, you could be quite pretty if only you tried. But no, you will not try. You roam about outdoors without your bonnet—collecting your horrid insects and wading barefoot in the Taw and climbing trees—"

"I have not climbed a tree in at least two years, Henrietta."

"And when was the last time you practiced the pianoforte? You used to be quite good when Mother was alive. Indeed, I believe you were on the path to becoming a lovely young lady. But the moment she died, you went completely wild and willful."

"I am not wild. I am curious."

"Of what use is curiosity? Oh, Jane, I beg you to follow our mother's wishes for you. Become a cultured and refined woman, a creature of many accomplishments, a credit to our sex. Marry Richard Dean, and settle down with him into a comfortable life."

Jane groaned. As much as possible, she put off talk of the necessity of a wedding. Not only was the thought of losing her father unbearable, but so was the man slated to become her spouse one day. It had been her late mother's fondest desire to unite her family with that of her closest friend, and Jane had always believed she would comply. But the notion had grown more deplorable over the years.

Though handsome and landed, Richard Dean was—in Jane's firm opinion—weak-minded, ill mannered, and witless. She avoided him, preferring instead to read books of science and mathematics in the library, to take long walks in the park surrounding the great house, or to sit beside the fire and engage her father and his friends in philosophical conversation.

"Live out your days as a wife and mother," Henrietta continued. "You, perhaps, will bear children and carry on the family line."

At the woeful look on her sister's face, Jane clasped her warmly. "You will bear children too, dearest. You have been married only these three years. There is much time."

"I hope . . ." Her eyes clouded with tears. "I hope you are right."

"Of course I am right. As Father says, we must have faith."

"I do pray, Jane. I ask God to grant me children. But thus far . . ."

"I shall join you in your prayers, Henrietta." Pulling on her gloves, she made her way to the door. "We both shall have much time for contemplation and prayer at Farleigh House, for there will be little in the way of amusement to fill the hours. How I wish I could stay and help Father."

Henrietta took her sister's hands and squeezed them tightly. "I beg you to be obedient for once, Jane. You must behave as a lady ought. Put away your books and your insects. See to your hair and your complexion. Attend the balls to which you are invited upon our return to Devon, and for heaven's sake, dance with Mr. Dean! He is ready to ask for your hand if you will only encourage and flatter him with your attentions."

Jane studied her sister's imploring blue eyes. "Very well," she said. "I shall try to be good."

"Thank you." With a sigh, Henrietta embraced her younger sister. "Now, Jane, please be on guard against our uncle while we are at Farleigh House, for he is likely to assault you should you stir up his senses in any way—and you know, Jane, how likely you are to annoy and vex and stir up everyone who crosses your path."

"Henrietta, how can you say such a thing?"

"How can I not? You adore argument and debate. You cannot sit still for more than two minutes. And you delight in challenging even the most innocent of statements. I greatly fear that you will provoke our uncle to further lunacy if you do not avoid him entirely."

"And this is your opinion of me?"

"Not my opinion alone. Everyone speaks of your boldness, your lack of ladylike refinement, your restless nature, your eagerness to contend—"

"Enough. Your censure has been harshly put, but I shall heed it." Jane glanced out the window at the waiting coach. "While at Farleigh House, I am determined to be the model of an accomplished lady. And if our father should one day hang from the gallows, I shall congratulate myself for my self-control in refraining from assisting him in any way. Good day, Sister."

As she stepped out into the corridor and walked toward the stairs,

she could hear Henrietta's cry of frustration echoing behind her. "Oh, Jane!"

Jane had always adored the Hampshire countryside. Rolling hills dotted with beech groves, scrub, and grazing sheep stretched out endlessly beyond the long, shiny glass windows of Farleigh House. Clear, pure rivers rose in the chalk hills and spilled downward, their borders outlined by shepherds' tracks and thick, green grass. Woodlands and hedgerows played host to rabbits, hedgehogs, dormice, crickets, bees, butterflies, and a variety of other creatures, while in the blue sky overhead wheeled skylarks, lapwings, curlews, and wheatears. It was a majestic place of utter serenity.

"Gwendolyn!" The bellow echoed through the house, bouncing from wall to wall and shivering against the porcelain statuary on the mantel. "Gwendolyn, Gwendolyn! Where are you, woman? I want my tea!"

As Jane turned from the window, her uncle threw open the door to the large drawing room and stumbled inside. "There you are, Gwendolyn," he cried. "I have a hole in my sock! My toe is cold!"

It was the first time Jane had seen John Wallop, third earl of Portsmouth, since her arrival at Farleigh House three days before. Henrietta had insisted the two women keep to themselves, and as their uncle rarely stirred from his library, they found their solitude rather easy to maintain. But now Henrietta had gone into the village on a mission to buy a pair of gloves, and Jane was left to face her uncle alone.

"Dearest uncle," she said softly, taking a step toward the man she hardly recognized. "It is I, your niece Jane Fellowes. I have come

from Devon with my sister, Henrietta, to look in on you. How are you feeling today?"

"A feeling is not a thing. A thing is tea, which is what I want." His bleary gray eyes attested to many days without sleep, and his white hair was badly in want of a wash and comb. "You are not Gwendolyn."

"No, Uncle," she said, her heart breaking at the sight of him. "I am Jane."

"Where is my tea, Jane? Tea is the thing. It is the only thing, and without it there is nothing. No thing. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I do, very clearly. I shall call for your tea at once." Suppressing the trepidation that rose inside her, she stepped to his side and slipped her arm through his. "May I help you back to the library, Uncle? For I shall have tea sent to us there."

"The library. Yes, indeed, very good-good-good-good. Do you know, Gwendolyn, that there sits the entire legacy of Sir Isaac Newton, our dearly departed son?"

"Sir Isaac Newton is not your son, my lord. He was your great-uncle."

"Uncle bunkle!" Tottering down the corridor, he nearly stumbled into a marble bust.

"Yes, Sir Isaac's half sister was Hannah Barton," Jane said, righting him as calmly as she could. She had heard many times the details of the family's connection to their famous ancestor. Indeed, the scientist was revered among the Wallops and Felloweses, and his legacy had been protected by them as though it were a rare jewel.

"Hannah Barton was the mother of Catherine Conduitt," she recited as she guided her uncle toward the library. "It was Catherine who looked after her uncle's home, and she was the one to whom Sir Isaac left all his possessions. Catherine was your grandmother."

"I love my nana. She tells me stories about Sir Isaac Newton."

"Does she? How good of her." Pushing open the door, Jane led him into the large, oak-paneled room. Expecting the familiar scent of musty books and aging leather, she was startled at the dreadful odor that met her. It was pungent, acrid, nauseating, and tinged with the odor of spoiled eggs. Supposing the smell to be caused by the pitiful man who inhabited the room, Jane blinked against the stinging in her eyes as she helped her uncle into a large chair that sat before a roaring fire.

"Here it is," he said, tapping on a rectangular metal chest, three feet in length and two feet both wide and high. "Here is his box. Sir Isaac's."

Though she had never been allowed to look inside the chest during her visits to Farleigh House, Jane knew it contained bundled diaries, letters, notebooks, and detailed scientific and mathematical treatises. Upon Newton's death in 1727, these documents had been examined by a man named Thomas Pellet. He selected out of them everything pertaining to the scientist's two great works, the *Principia Mathematica* and *Opticks*, and he published several of these. The rest of the writings were deemed of little value and were placed into this chest, where they had lain mouldering for nearly a hundred years.

"This was his too," Lord Portsmouth said, patting the arms of the large wing chair upholstered in a faded crimson. "I sit in it." He stretched out his legs and propped his stockinged feet on the revered chest. Jane noted that he did, indeed, have a large hole in his sock.

"We have his bed of crimson mohair hung with case curtains of crimson harrateen," he continued. "She wrote it all down, very carefully. There it is. Just inside the box." He leaned forward and gave Newton's chest a firm slap with his palm. "The entire inventory of his estate. 'The Inventory of Newton's Goods, Chattels, and Credits,

Taken 21–27 April 1727,' just as my grandmother wrote it down. There are his four landscapes. Look at them—look at them!"

Jane nodded at the familiar paintings hanging on the library walls. "Yes, Uncle, and his delft plates. I see them all, and they are well kept."

"A dinner service of forty plates, a full set of silverware, twenty-three glasses, and six dozen napkins. Two solid silver chamber pots and oh, how cold my toes are! Very cold feet. Where is the tea?"

Jane shrank into herself as he threw back his head and began to bellow again. "Tea! Tea! I must have my tea!"

Hurrying from the fire, she fled to the bell beside the library door. But as she tugged on the pull, the door opened and in marched an elegantly clad gentleman followed by a row of liveried assistants.

At the sight of his visitors, Jane's uncle began to screech. "No, no, no!" he cried, running from one side of the library to the other and tearing off his clothes.

Jane gaped as the uniformed men grabbed her uncle and wrestled him into submission. Before she could stop them, they had bound the poor man in iron manacles.

"Gwendolyn!" he sobbed as they lifted him onto a long reading table. "Oh, Gwendolyn, save me, my dear wife! Have pity upon me!"

"Dearest uncle!" Jane cried, racing toward him. But her attempt at assistance was blocked by the gentleman in the black frock coat.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, "but I cannot allow you to proceed."

"You cannot prevent me! This poor man is my uncle, and I refuse to see him so cruelly treated."

"I am Dr. Nichols, and I have been engaged by Lady Portsmouth as physician to her husband, the earl of Portsmouth," he explained, giving a crisp bow. With thick gray hair and blue eyes, he was a

handsome man, but his demeanor was marred by an air of cold aloofness. "I beg you to retire to your quarters, madam, for what we must undertake here is not pleasant to the untrained eye."

"If it is unpleasant, then you should refrain from doing it. Allow me to bring him a tray of tea, and perhaps he will grow more calm."

"Dear lady, this is a matter well beyond the healing powers of a pot of tea. I know well of what I speak, for I am a member of the Lunacy Commission in London, and I own a private asylum here in Hampshire. Indeed, on occasion, I have been solicited by the physicians to His Majesty, King George III, and my methods are used in the attempt to retrieve his sanity. You may be assured, madam, that your uncle is in the best of hands."

Jane gazed at the poor man who lay on the library table, his fingers swelling and turning purple from the strain of the manacles, and a line of drool running from his mouth onto the polished oak.

Her eyes filling with tears, Jane gave the physician a quick curtsy. "As you wish, sir," she said. "I shall leave you to your work."

As she shut the library door and ascended the steps to her room, she could hear her uncle begin to wail again.

AFTERWORD

While *Love's Proof* is a work of fiction, many of the characters and events are taken from the historical record. I include this information for those who would like to learn more about the English Regency and its figures.

ISAAC MILNER held the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics at Cambridge University from 1798 to 1819. Robert Woodhouse succeeded him. Charles Babbage held the chair from 1828 to 1838.

CHARLES BABBAGE is known as the "Father of Computing" because of his contributions to the basic design of the computer through his analytical machine. His difference engine was designed for the production of mathematical tables. Neither machine was ever built. Following the period in which *Love's Proof* is set, Babbage founded the Analytical Society, published a table of logarithms, held the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics, founded the Statistical Society of London, and invented the cowcatcher, the dynamometer, the standard railroad gauge, uniform postal rates, occulting lights, the Greenwich time signals, and the heliograph ophthalmoscope. Babbage was a firm believer in miracles, and his hobby was lockpicking. In 1827, Babbage's wife, Georgiana, died at the age of thirty-five. He grew more irascible, yet he remained a profound thinker throughout his life. Charles Babbage died in 1871.

JOHN CHARLES WALLOP, the third earl of Portsmouth, was born in 1767. Owner of Farleigh House and 3,500 acres near Basingstoke, he was a wealthy man. His first marriage was disastrous, and his second was hardly better. His only son, Henry Wallop, died unmarried in 1847. In 1850, Lord Portsmouth finally succumbed to the madness that had plagued him for many years. At that time, the title was transferred to his younger brother, Newton Wallop Fellowes.

NEWTON WALLOP FELLOWES inherited his estates in Devon from his maternal uncle, Henry Arthur Fellowes of Eggesford, and he took that family's surname. He owned manors in Witheridge, Eggesford, and Wembworthy. When Eggesford House burned down, the Fellowes family moved to Wembworthy full time. Newton Fellowes's elder brother, the third earl of Portsmouth, was declared insane in 1850, and Fellowes was named fourth earl of Portsmouth.

HENRIETTA CAROLINE FELLOWES, elder daughter of Newton Wallop Fellowes, married Joseph Chichester. He had inherited Calverleigh Court, where he and his wife resided. Isaac Newton Wallop was born in 1825 and became the fifth earl of Portsmouth. Joseph and Henrietta's descendants remained at Calverleigh Court until the last of the line sold it in 1930.

KING GEORGE III was king of England and Ireland from 1760 to 1820. He suffered recurring bouts of insanity, the last of which began in 1811 and continued, with intervals of senile lucidity, until his death on January 29, 1820. It is believed by some that he suffered from a form of porphyria, a genetic metabolic defect found in both the British and German royal families, which can cause agonizing pain, excited overactivity, paralysis, and delirium. The king's physicians—Sir George Baker, Dr. Warren, Dr. Francis Willis, and Dr.

John Willis—tried every possible means to cure His Majesty's insanity. Their treatments seem harsh and ineffective by today's standards, but they were common practices in that century.

GEORGE, PRINCE OF WALES, was appointed Prince Regent in 1810, and he carried out his father's official royal duties until the king's death in 1820. At this time he became King George IV. His life was plagued by scandals that included his secret marriage to a Catholic woman, Maria Fitzherbert; his flagrant promiscuity; and his drunkenness. He made an unsuccessful attempt to dissolve his unhappy marriage to Queen Caroline, who hated him. Despite all this, George IV is regarded today as a man of intelligence and influence.

MUSEUMS OF CURIOSITIES featured "natural wonders" such as bottled fetuses with extraordinary anomalies, stuffed exotic animals, and large crystals. They also housed "human oddities" who were believed to represent the variety and wonder found in God's creation. Parents considered it educational to take their children to a museum of curiosities. Not considered ordinary people, the human oddities were said to be "missing links" between animals and humans in the Great Chain of Being.

Although they were exploited by museum owners, these people were well cared for because of their economic value. Many earned wages and built lives for themselves away from the exhibition. It was not until the latter part of the century that medical professionals began to identify physical differences as medical conditions that ought to be treated. This medicalization made it shameful for decent people to view malformed or diseased bodies, and the museums took on the name "Freak Show."

SIR ISAAC NEWTON'S BOX was kept in a secure location by the earls of Portsmouth. The chest contained "parcels" and "packets" of

documents related to alchemical materials, and theological subjects (including his research on ancient chronology), along with Royal Mint administrative records. These papers had been studied shortly after Newton's death, and they were deemed of little value, due in part to his anti-Trinitarian views and to the scientific community's disregard for alchemy.

In July 1936, Viscount Lymington, a descendant of the earls of Portsmouth, offered the "Portsmouth Papers" for sale at Sotheby's auction house. Economist John Maynard Keynes bought the majority of the alchemical works, and when he died in 1946, his collection was bequeathed to King's College, Cambridge. Lord Wakefield purchased the papers relating to Newton's tenure at the Royal Mint, and he donated them immediately to the nation. They are now stored in the Public Record Office.

Abraham Shalom Yahuda, a Palestinian Jew who was an orientalist professor and a friend to Keynes and Albert Einstein, bought the theological documents. While he initially intended to capitalize on the value of the manuscripts, he later took an active scholarly interest in them. After his death in 1951, the collection was acquired by the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.

NEWTON'S PROOF OF GOD. Research indicates that Sir Isaac Newton relied on biblical prophecy in his attempt to prove—by reason alone—the existence of a creator. He believed that his scientific discoveries constituted evidence for the existence of an omnipotent and mathematically adroit God.

Newton established fifteen rules by which to examine Scripture. His areas of particular interest were the books of Daniel and Revelation. He was fascinated by the Temple of Solomon, and he believed that God, His universe, and the entire future of the world could be

represented by its geometric dimensions. His theological writings on this and other subjects are vast in number and incredibly complex. One scholar has written that Newton's study of chronology is "such an incredibly difficult work to decipher, that it will probably have to be passed one day through a computer." Another has described Newton's theological writings as "a rambling muddle."

The Newton Project, based at Cambridge University and Imperial College and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, was formed in 1998 to produce both electronic and printed editions of Newton's theological, alchemical, and Mint papers. Perhaps one day the use of a computer will allow scholars to penetrate Sir Isaac Newton's complex thinking and assemble an understanding of his attempt to prove the existence of God.

A Note from the Author

Dear friend,
Through the years, God has led people into my life who don't believe in Him. They simply do not believe there is a God. How can this be? I've wondered. It's so obvious!

Yes, it's obvious to me, but how can I prove what I see so clearly? Theologians have written brilliantly in defense of God's existence. But in the end, all the books, seminary courses, and sermons fall flat in the face of an unbeliever who demands, "Prove it."

When I learned that Sir Isaac Newton, one of the world's greatest thinkers, had attempted to do just that, I got as excited as Jane Fellowes and Thomas Norcross. As I researched *Love's Proof*, however, I learned the ultimate reality: God cannot be proven to exist, because such a truth must be accepted on faith. It is with the eyes of faith that I see Him so clearly.

Do you see Him, my dear friend? Do you know how much He loves you? He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to the cross in your place. That's the greatest love of all. But you have to have faith to accept it.

If you haven't accepted Him, I'd encourage you to set aside your doubts and fears. You don't have to do anything to "get ready" to know God. He loves you just the way you are. Close your eyes and take that leap of faith. You'll find yourself wrapped in His strong arms, where no one can steal you away.

The next steps to take are to read the Bible, find a church, and start spending time with other Christians, so you can learn more about God, who loves you so deeply. It's an abundant life!

Blessings,

Catherine Palmer