

QUAKER

BRIDES

# Honor

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*ROMANTIC TIMES*

# Honor

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*Honor*

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*Honor* is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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# Chapter 1

HIGH OAKS PLANTATION  
TIDEWATER, MARYLAND  
AUGUST 1819

Each time her grandfather struggled for another breath, Honor Penworthy's own lungs constricted. She stood beside the second-story window, trying to breathe normally, trying to catch a breeze in the heat. Behind her, the gaunt man lay on his canopied bed, his heart failing him. How long must he suffer before God would let him pass on?

Outside the window stretched their acres, including the tobacco fields, where dark heads covered with kerchiefs or straw hats bent to harvest the green-speared leaves. High Oaks—to her, the most beautiful plantation in Maryland. She felt a twinge of pain, of impending loss.

“The edict was impractical. And your . . . father was a

dreamer. But at least he had the sense to realize his irrational decision must be kept secret. Doesn't that tell you not to carry it out?" Each word in this last phrase slapped her, and each cost him.

Unable to ignore this challenge, she turned. In her grandfather's youth, the Society of Friends had dictated that all Friends should free their slaves. "My father remained Quaker." She said the bare words in a neutral voice, trying not to stir the still-smoldering coals.

"I remained a Christian," he fired back. "My forebears chose to leave the Anglican church to become Quaker. I chose to change back."

He'd made that choice because the Episcopal church didn't press its members to emancipate their slaves. All of the other Quakers in the county had left except for a few older, infirm widows—women who'd lost control of their land to sons. As a single woman, however, Honor could inherit and dispose of property legally.

Honor returned to his bedside. At the sight of her grandfather's ravaged face, pity and love surged through her.

As she approached, her grandfather's mouth pulled down and his nose wrinkled as if he were tasting bitter fruit.

Torn between love for her father and for her grandfather, she didn't want to fight with him, not now. "My father loved thee," she said to placate him.

"That is beside the . . . point. He should *never* have asked that promise of you. It was cowardly." He panted from the exertion.

Honor gazed at him levelly. The memory of her father's

untimely and unnecessary death still had the power to sweep away her calm, but one couldn't change history. Her grandfather's comment could lead them into harsh recriminations. And it proved that he knew he'd done wrong and had chosen the wide way, not the narrow gate. She chose her words deftly. "I believe that my father was right."

Grandfather's mouth tightened, twisted, not only because of her recalcitrance but also from a sudden pain. He gasped wildly for breath.

If only it weren't so hot. She slipped another white-cased down pillow under his chest and head, trying to ease his breathing. She blinked away tears, a woman's weapon she disdained.

"How will you . . . work the land without . . . our people?" he demanded in between gasps.

"Thee knows I cannot. And that once they are gone, there will be no way I can hold the land." She said the words calmly, but inside, fear frothed up. Freeing their slaves would irrevocably alter her life.

He slapped the coverlet with his gnarled fist. "This estate has been Penworthy land for four generations. Will you toss aside the land your great-great-grandfather cleared by hand and fought the Cherokee for?"

Honor felt the pull of her heritage, a cinching around her heart. "I know. It weighs on me," she admitted.

"Then why do it?"

He forced her to repeat her reasons. "I gave my father my promise, and I agree with him."

Her grandfather made a sound of disgust, a grating of rusted hinges. Then he glared at her from under bushy,

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willful brows. “Things have changed since your father left us. Did you even *notice* that our bank failed this year?”

The lump over Honor’s heart increased in weight, making it hard to breathe. “I am neither blind nor deaf. I am aware of the nationwide bank panic.”

“Are you aware that we’ve lost our cash assets? We only have the land and the people to work the land. *And debts.*”

“Debts?” That she hadn’t known.

“Yes, debt is a part of owning a plantation. And I’m afraid last year’s poor crop put us in a bad situation even before the bank panic.”

Honor looked into her grandfather’s cloudy, almost-blind eyes. “How bad?”

“If you free our people and sell the land, you will have nothing worthwhile left.”

A blow. She bent her head against one post of the canopied bed. The lump in her chest grew heavier still. “I didn’t think emancipation would come without cost.”

“I don’t believe you have any idea of how much it will cost you.” Disdain vibrated in each word. “Who will you be if you free our people and sell the plantation? If you aren’t the lady of High Oaks?”

She looked up at the gauzy canopy. “I’ll be Honor Penworthy, child of God.”

“You will be landless, husbandless, and alone,” he railed. A pause while he gathered strength, wheezing and coughing.

Honor helped him sip honey water.

“I don’t want you in that vulnerable position,” he said in a much-gentler tone, his love for her coming through.

“I won’t be here to protect you. You think that Martin boy will marry you, but he won’t. Not if you give up High Oaks.”

Alec Martin had courted her, but no, she no longer thought they would marry. A sliver of a different sort of pain pierced her.

The floor outside the door creaked, distracting them. Honor turned at the sound of footsteps she recognized. “Darah?” she called.

“I want to see her,” Grandfather said, looking away.

Honor moved quickly and opened the door.

Darah paused at the head of the stairs. She was almost four years younger than Honor’s twenty-four, very slight and pretty, with soft-brown eyes and matching brown hair.

“Cousin, come here. Our grandfather wishes thee.”

Darah reluctantly glanced into Honor’s eyes—at first like a frightened doe and then with something else Honor had never seen in her cousin before. Defiance?

Darah slipped past her into the room. “Grandfather?”

He studied his hands, now clutching the light blanket. “Honor, leave us. I wish to speak to Darah alone.”

*Why?* Worry stirred. She ignored it. “And I must see to a few of our people who are ailing.” Honor bowed her head and stepped outside, shutting the door. She went down the stairs to gather her medicine chest, remembering that later she must meet with the overseer. The plantation work could not be put aside because her grandfather’s heart was failing. She tried to take a deep breath, but the weight over her heart would not budge.

Honor hated to see her grandfather suffer, and she hated to disappoint him. But her course had been set since

she was a child. She shuttered her mind against the opposition she knew she would stir up.



Later that afternoon, Honor was walking down the path to the kitchen when she glimpsed her cousin Darah stepping into a carriage farther down their drive. Was it the Martin carriage? “Darah!” she called. “Where is thee going?”

Though she must have heard, Darah did not even turn. Honor watched the carriage drive away. Why had the Martin carriage come for her cousin? Honor and Alec had not been a couple for several months now, but he still entered her thoughts at will.

Her maid, Royale—a year older than Honor and more beautiful than her, with light-caramel skin and unusual green eyes—met her on the path. She asked after one of Honor’s patients. “How the baby doing?”

“Better.” Honor handed Royale the heavy wooden medicine chest. Moving under the shade of an ancient oak, she pressed a handkerchief to her forehead, blotting it. “Who is with my grandfather?”

“His man is sitting with him.”

“Then I can take time to cut flowers for Grandfather’s room.” Honor dreaded going back into the room and awaiting death.

Royale bowed her head, wrapped as usual in a red kerchief. She always seemed to want to hide her golden-brown hair. “I’ll bring out your flower basket.”

They parted, and Honor headed farther from the house

toward the lush and sculptured garden. The daisies and purple coneflowers would be in bloom.

The heaviness she'd carried since the bank panic, and since she had parted with Alec Martin, had become a tombstone over her heart. A sudden breeze stirred the leaves overhead, sounding like gentle, mocking laughter.

Honor tried to concentrate on cutting the flowers, and only on that, but failed. She tried to envision her future and failed at that, too.



“What about me?”

The familiar voice startled her, and she looked up from the flowers she was cutting. One thing Honor had always liked about Alec Martin was that he didn't bore her with idle social chatter. She thought she understood his abrupt question. He had no doubt heard her grandfather was nearing death and wanted to know if this affected her decision not to accept his proposal.

Alec leaned against a maple, his dark horse grazing nearby. He was as handsome as ever—lithe and of medium height, with wavy black hair. The urge to run to him nearly overpowered her. Yet his words held her in place.

“You are so lovely, Honor, even in this situation.”

His praise brought back sweet memories of his compliments about her flaxen hair and fair complexion. He'd called her beautiful. She felt again his lips on hers. Sudden irrational elation blossomed within, and she moved forward, seeking his comfort. “Alec.”

“Is it true?” he asked.

His sharp tone stopped her.

“Are you still determined to free your people?” He picked up a fallen branch and began to whip the air with it. “Destroy High Oaks?”

His question and his savage movements rendered her mute for a time. In her naiveté, she’d allowed Alec to court her. But six months ago, when her grandfather began to fail, she’d revealed her secret resolve to liberate her slaves. And it had broken them apart.

Watching his slashing motions, she held on to her composure. “Thee knows quite well,” she said at last, “that I am.”

He threw away the branch and advanced on her. “Why? Freeing your people makes no logical sense.” His voice increased in intensity and anger with each step he took. “It’s just a woman’s weakness, and I never thought you would be so foolish. It’s time you grew up, Honor.”

The unveiled fury in Alec’s tone alarmed her. He sounded almost dangerous. *My nerves are strained; that’s all.* And then, recalling Darah and the Martin carriage, “Does thee know where Darah is?”

Alec brushed aside her question with an irritated shake of his head. He reached her and gripped her arms, and the cut flowers fell from her hands. “Why are you doing this? If you didn’t want to marry me, why not just say so?”

“Thee isn’t making sense, Alec Martin,” she said, reverting to the formality they usually observed in the company of others. “My decision to honor my father’s wish has nothing to do with us.” *Or it shouldn’t, not if thee truly loved me.*

His grip became painful. She struggled to pull free, but his grasp only tightened.

“Thee will leave bruises,” she snapped. “Let go.”

With a throaty growl he released her, and she staggered backward.

“I’ll go, but just remember this is all your doing, not mine. I intended to marry you and join our two plantations. With your grandfather’s gold, we would have been able to salvage everything.” He stalked to his horse and mounted. “And we could have been together as we should be. Just remember—this is all your willfulness, your fault, Honor!” He tossed her one final fiery glance and then kicked his horse into a gallop.

His words jumbled in her head until she couldn’t sort them out. She realized she was rubbing her arms where he had gripped them. Until now, she had never seen the slightest bit of temper from him—not toward her, at least.

Royale ran to her side. “Miss Honor, please come.” Her voice was shrill. “Miss Darah’s maid is packing her clothing!”

Honor could only stare at her.

Insistent, Royale nudged her toward the house, leaving the fallen flowers behind. Raising their hems, the two of them hurried inside and up the stairs. But in Darah’s room, the maid would only tell her that Miss Darah and she would be staying nearby with Alec Martin’s aunt.

“But Grandfather is . . .” Honor’s voice failed her.

“Miss Darah will come to visit,” the maid said, avoiding Honor’s eyes as she folded all of Darah’s possessions neatly, packing a trunk and valises.

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Honor stared at the young woman. Though her heart was in tumult, her mind was clear. Darah was leaving because she did not want to be associated with Honor and what she meant to do.

And Darah was going to stay with Alec's aunt. Honor didn't have to be brilliant to know exactly what that meant. So that was the way it was going to be. Matters would not work out with Alec. Her last thin lace of hope dissolved.

For a moment she pressed a hand over her heart, longing for peace, for the ease of swimming with the current rather than against it. But she couldn't go against her conscience, against her father's dearest wish.

And her father had counseled her with Luke chapter 12: "*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division. . . . The father shall be divided against the son.*" And now she against her family and even the man she'd once thought would be the father of her children. "*Your fault*" echoed in her mind, mocking her.



Less than a week later, Honor stood at the graveside alone—or that was how she felt. A large crowd of neighbors and distant relatives had come to see Charles Whitehead Penworthy laid to rest in the family cemetery on a hill overlooking the plantation. Honor's black mourning dress and bonnet soaked up the August heat and the dazzling sunlight that was more appropriate for a wedding than this funeral.

Darah stood on the other side of the grave, staring

downward, and had not once looked in Honor's direction. Alec lurked behind Darah among the mourners, his curled hat brim shielding her from his gaze. No one had spoken to Honor except for the Episcopal priest who was officiating. And he had said as little as possible.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," the priest intoned. He sprinkled some earth over the coffin, which was being lowered into the grave.

Honor's self-control melted. She could not hold back the sobs, not even with her handkerchief pressed over her mouth. Not only was she losing her grandfather, whom she'd loved, but also Darah, Alec, and her life here—everything.

The mourners turned from the graveside and headed not toward the house as expected, but toward their carriages.

This brought Honor up short. A buffet had been prepared in the house, as was customary. "Isn't thee staying?" she blurted out.

The crowd halted, but none turned to her. Their backs erected an unbroken wall.

The priest, by her side, cleared his throat. "Miss Penworthy, your intentions are known. Perhaps you need to reconsider. Freeing your slaves is an act of willful disobedience to your grandfather. He discussed this with me on his deathbed. Won't you change your mind and not do this dreadful thing?"

Sorrow turned to shock and then to boiling anger. Honor shook with it. "Thee has made thyself clear." Then she glared into his face. "It is better to obey God than man."

A collective gasp swept the mourners, and they all

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hurried away from her, the women lifting their skirts and nearly running.

The priest sent her an acid glance and hastened after the others. Even Darah, on Alec's arm, left with everyone else and without a backward glance.

Honor watched them go, her tears falling.

"Miss Honor," Royale said, appearing beside her, "come to the house."

Honor let Royale urge her down the hillside, but she soon became aware that another set of mourners followed them at a respectful distance. She halted and reversed to look at the slaves, who had gathered apart at the graveside. They would soon be free. Why not begin now? "Thee are invited to the big house. Refreshments have been prepared."

Their faces registered shock. Except for the house servants, such as Royale, the other slaves had never entered the big house.

She motioned toward them, trying to smile around her tears. "The food will go to waste. Please gather on the porch to enter the dining room for the buffet."

At the front of the crowd, her aged butler was startled but recovered presently. "You heard Miss Honor. Please follow me. And watch your manners."

Their people, numbering over a hundred, cast worried glances at her as they trailed after the butler, grouped in families.

Royale touched Honor's arm, tentative comfort.

Honor pressed her hand over Royale's, feeling the weight of grief on her shoulders. If she had the choice, she would have sunk to the green grass and closed her

swollen, painful eyes. "Go on and help. I want to spend a few moments at my grandfather's grave."

Royale squeezed her hand and walked toward the house.

Honor watched her go, then returned to stand beside the new mound of earth. Grandfather had been buried next to the grandmother Honor had never known. Nearby lay her own father and alongside him her mother, who had died giving birth to Honor. She gazed at the graves, and moments passed. "I hate to leave thee," she whispered.



Lying on top of the rose-colored silk coverlet of her canopied bed, Honor woke at Royale's touch.

"Miss Honor, the lawyer Mr. Bradenton here to see you."

"What time is it?" Honor sat up, trying to clear her fuzzy head. The heat of the day was suffocating. She reached for her fan.

"It be near half past three o'clock."

Almost two hours after the funeral luncheon had ended. Had the lawyer come already for the formal reading of her grandfather's will? Her heart sagged, and she let her hand drop. "How do I look?"

"I best fix your hair." Royale offered Honor a hand and led her to the vanity, where Honor sat.

The commonplace occurrence of Royale dressing her hair soothed Honor's ragged emotions. When Royale was done, Honor caught her hand and pressed it to her cheek in thanks. "Soon thee will be free," she murmured.

Royale smiled but only in obedience, her eyes troubled.

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*What is she thinking?* Honor rose and headed down the stairs.

The butler met her at the bottom. “Miss Honor, Mr. Bradenton brought Miss Darah with him, and they are waiting in your grandfather’s office.”

The news that the two had come together felt ominous to Honor. “Thank thee.” She walked to the small office at the back of the first floor and entered. Mr. Bradenton was ensconced behind her grandfather’s desk, and Darah perched on one of two chairs that had been placed opposite the lawyer. Loss stabbed Honor. Her grandfather belonged at that desk.

Darah did not look up but focused on the lawyer’s lined face.

Honor sat beside her, but never before had she felt so unwelcome or awkward in this room. “Darah. Mr. Bradenton.”

He nodded sharply once and began reading without any preamble of polite conversation. “The last will and testament of Charles Whitehead Penworthy. ‘First, I leave a message for my granddaughter Darah. Marry wisely. You have a propensity to take people at their word. You should not.’”

The lawyer paused to pierce Honor with a withering look. “Second, to my granddaughter Honor Anne Penworthy, who is wise and foolish at the same time. Honor, since you intend to squander it, I am taking away your inheritance. Darah May Manning, not you, will inherit High Oaks.”

At first Honor couldn’t think; then came a roaring in

her ears. Finally a coldness drenched her from her head down to her toes. “But Darah isn’t his heir. She is the daughter of my mother’s sister.”

Mr. Bradenton raked her with disapproval. “Your grandfather summoned me a few days ago to change his will—and chose Miss Darah as the only other young person even distantly related to him. Miss Darah’s mother was a distant cousin of the Penworthys.”

The lawyer’s face hardened. “Your grandfather said that you insisted on keeping your ill-considered promise to your father to free your people upon inheriting this plantation. So Charles changed his will and disinherited you. You can of course go to court, but I doubt any judge in Maryland will counter Charles’s wishes as stated and duly signed.”

“May I see the will?” Honor asked, unable to believe the lawyer.

He handed the parchment to her.

She took it. At first she couldn’t focus her eyes, but at last the words became clear. It was true. Her grandfather had disinherited her in favor of Darah. The coldness drenched her again. Her hand shook as she returned the will to Mr. Bradenton.

Through it all, Darah had not moved, had barely breathed. Her calm attention focused on the lawyer. *She knew*. Betrayal dug its teeth into Honor.

Mr. Bradenton lifted another page. “There is a third stipulation. Honor, you are allowed to take your clothing, your mother’s jewelry, your father’s personal Bible, one hundred dollars in gold and silver, and your maid, Royale.

That is all.” He turned to Darah. “You are instructed not to give her anything else, or you will lose the inheritance.”

Darah nodded, just a flicker of acquiescence.

The man pinned Honor with his gaze. “Your grandfather said that since you hold *with such little regard* what your family has labored over a hundred years to amass, you should leave with just enough to keep you from penury. You are a disgrace to your grandfather and an affront to every other landed family in this county.” His voice quavered with disapproval.

Honor wanted to speak, but the words jammed in her tight throat. Her coldness turned to heat, anger at this betrayal.

In his lifetime, the land and the people had been her grandfather’s. But they should have passed, unhindered, to her—the grandchild, daughter of his only son. However, without one word to her, he had altered his will. Her grandfather had not played fair. He’d gone behind her back and thwarted her.

She tasted hot bitterness on her tongue.

As if propelled, she rose. “Thank thee, Mr. Bradenton. I will begin packing. I’ll be in my room, Darah, if thee wishes to discuss anything with me.” She walked from the office. Outside, she had to stop and lean against the wall to still the emotions that rampaged through her.

Royale was waiting nearby for her. She came to Honor and walked with her toward the stairs. Halfway up the staircase, she whispered, “I was listening. We thought your grandfather would do something like this.”

Honor swung toward Royale. “Thee did?”

Tight-lipped, Royale nodded. "You should have told your grandfather what he wanted to hear and then did what you wanted after you buried him."

The brazen words shocked Honor to her marrow. Royale had not spoken so baldly in her presence since they were children. Honor could not have lied to her grandfather. Yet how could he, in turn, have so callously disinherited her? Hurt throbbed with each beat of her heart.

She walked beside Royale up the grand staircase and into her room, where she sat on the chair beside the window. She wondered if Darah would come up or lack the courage to face her.

Honor had her answer soon enough. She recognized the footsteps mounting the stairs. Darah entered her bedroom without knocking, then stood staring at Honor. "You can still change your mind."

What naive, silly words. And people called *her* foolish. Honor rose to face Darah. "Can Grandfather still change his mind? Can I regain my inheritance?"

"You can change your mind about abolition. People will forgive you. You'll find someone to marry and be happy. Why do you have to take the hard way?"

Honor felt a grinding inside her like rough metal rubbing against rough metal. "Thy words are apt." She quoted Matthew: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because . . . narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." She folded her arms and, not wishing to add more weight to her words, gazed down at the floral hand-tied rug. "I choose the

narrow way.” She softened her voice. “Is that not the way thee wishes too, Darah?”

“You are so self-righteous.” Darah’s hands clenched the ribbons of her reticule. “But what you want to do is wrong. What would our people do without us to care for them?”

Honor gripped tightly her self-control. “How can thee say that? Who raised us when our mothers died? Royale’s mother, Jamaica, did. Did she lack understanding or ability?”

“Even animals can make good mothers,” Darah retorted.

Honor’s hand itched to slap Darah, and the urge shocked her. Their slaves were deemed children by most, but Honor’s father had taught her to view them as people who differed only in the color of their skin. She couldn’t let Darah’s scorn go unchallenged. “Jamaica was as wise as she was loving to us. How can thee belittle her?”

Darah looked as if she were crushing hard words between her teeth. “You will not listen. You think you know better than anyone else.”

“I think differently. If people didn’t know in their souls that what they say about slaves needing us is a lie, what I believe wouldn’t cause them such anger.” Her father had taught her that too.

Darah shook visibly with outrage.

Honor changed tack. “What was it that Grandfather said in the will—for thee to be careful whom thee weds? Is thee indeed planning to marry Alec Martin?”

“Yes, I am.” Darah’s chin lifted. “You don’t want him.”

Regret, remorse pooled inside Honor. Her feelings for Alec had been strong, but how could a woman who freed

her slaves marry a man who kept his? There was no middle ground for them.

“Do you still love him?” Darah asked in a softer voice, uncertain, reaching for Honor’s hand but not taking it.

Now Honor looked her in the eye. “No. It has been over between the two of us for months. I came to my senses and told him the truth.” Saying those final words cost her more than she had expected. Her long-standing attachment to Alec could not be dismissed, discounted, or denied. Not yet.

“What will you do?” Darah asked.

“Weeks ago I wrote to a relative of my mother’s in Pittsburgh. As soon as I hear from her, I’ll pack and leave with what has been allowed to me.”

Darah appeared to want to say more, but what was there to say? She left the room, weeping.

From her window, Honor watched Darah enter Mr. Bradenton’s carriage and drive away down the avenue of stately oaks.

Like a bellows losing air, Honor sank onto the chair, suddenly weak. Her mind jumped from thought to thought—from Grandfather to Father to Darah to Alec. She leaned backward and let tears flow from her eyes. First she must let the heartbreak and sorrow and betrayal have their way, expend themselves.

And then, when she could think instead of feel, she must pray that her mother’s cousin in Pennsylvania would welcome her for a visit.

Honor had thought her future course was laid out. She would free her slaves, sell High Oaks, move to Pennsylvania

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with modest wealth, spend the rest of her life in good works. Independent-minded, she had doubted marriage would ever have a place in her life.

But one hundred dollars in gold and silver did not mean wealth of any kind, especially since she must help Royale establish herself too. Fear threatened her, but what choice did she have now? She'd been shunned by the living and betrayed by the dead.