

We deleted scenes from *A Founding Mother* for many reasons. In the case of this scene, where Abigail learns about the seemingly dire fate of her grandson, we ultimately came to feel that the scene wasn't enough about Abigail and her journey, and was instead just more of something she was reacting to. And while what her son-in-law and grandson had been up to in terms of wanting to liberate Venezuela very much interested (and astounded?) us, in the end, it couldn't survive.

Deleted Scene: The Poisoned Chalice

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The day before Nabby's carriage was expected in our drive, we received the worst news yet. The Spaniards had not sat idly by while Miranda set out to stir up a Venezuelan revolution. They'd gone after his ships—and captured the sailors—amongst them our grandson.

Willy was now to be charged with piracy.

The penalty for which was death.

Frantic with worry, I went to John's library where he had retreated to think. Now I intruded upon him, pleading, "Surely there is something you can do to intervene. You were the President of the United States and he is your grandson."

Smoking a cigar, and still red-faced at the news of this latest calamity, John stared out the open window. "I don't see how my name could be of any help to him. Nor should it be. If my grandson thought himself grown enough to throw in with this sorry lot of adventurerers, why should he escape the hangman's noose? Because he is my grandson? Oh no, I dis—"

"Don't."

John turned to me and the icy look I gave him silenced the word on his tongue. We both knew what he'd been about to say. He was going to *disavow* our grandson, just as he had disavowed Charles.

Well, I would not allow it.

"Willy is but eighteen years old," I said, voice trembling with fury. "He followed the guidance of his father. A father who was himself a war hero. Our grandson was raised on

nothing but tales of his father's idols, Lafayette and the Baron Von Steuben. For pity's sake, John, his name is William Steubens Smith. What other destiny did he think life had in store for him but to follow in the footsteps of the heroes after whom he'd been named? And if it matters to you, he is also the grandson of *President John Adams* and believed himself to be walking in *your* footsteps, too."

"Oh, not mine!" John raged right back at me. "I was no reprobate at his age or any other. I risked all defending the freedom of my *own* country."

I stared at him coolly. No matter how hard the veins at his temples throbbed or how far out he puffed his chest, I would not let him cow me.

This was not an argument he would win.

"What *you* did, John, was go to France and persuade young men just like our Willy to join our cause. Some of those heroic young French soldiers died on our soil fighting in our cause. Because of *you*. Will you now call yourself a hypocrite?"

The lawyer in John prompted him to raise a finger to object. But I had boxed him in with his own sanctimony. Now he fell silent, having nothing to say. And since he always had something to say, he was forced to flee my presence and go to bed early.

Later that night, when everyone else was asleep, I found Nabby by the fire. "They will negotiate for Willy's life."

She had not slept in days, trembling for the life of her son, the freedom of her husband and grieving for the dishonor of both.

Unfortunately, I had very little comfort to give except for cold political realities. "In capturing your boy, the Spanish have a prize. They possess the grandson of John Adams. I believe they have a stronger motive to use him than to hang him."

Nabby blew out a distressed breath.

It was several long moments before she said, "President Jefferson has thrown my husband into prison without a qualm. Yet, you believe he will lift so much as a finger to save my boy?"

"Yes, I do believe it."

I did, actually.

Even if there was no longer a speck of affection in Jefferson's heart for our family, there was still the matter of our national standing. Even Jefferson would be able to imagine the likely uproar in international relations if he allowed the grandson of an American President to be executed by a foreign power.

Nabby remained unconvinced. "When I was a little girl I used to have nightmares that the British would capture and hang Papa. I thought I had banished such violent and fearful nightmares, but here I am now and the nightmare is real. Except it is my own son facing the hangman's noose and not my Papa. I cannot wake up from this nightmare, nor can I sleep."

"I'm so sorry," I told her, drawing her close and kissing the top of her head. "I'm sorry for the childhood nightmares and the ones you face now. I would take them from you if I could. I know what it is to fear for a son."

"And to lose one," she admitted, mournfully. Then her hands balled into fists. "You used to warn me not to let my son fall into disappation like Charles. But at this moment, I would rather my boy was a drunken wastrel than a crusader in the cause of liberty."

I did not think she meant it.

But then her voice now seethed with bitter conviction. "Thomas Jefferson will not save my son, because he and Secretary Madison planned this. They have gleefully imprisoned my husband and left my son to the hangman's noose because it's what they planned all along to bring about our family's ruin."

I had bitter feelings too that might lead me to the same conclusion, but I tried to be reasonable. Gently, I said, "My darling, your husband made a terrible mistake in assuming his mission had the sanction of the president—he has only has the word of Mr. Miranda to confirm it. And that man's character is murky."

Nabby all but rolled her eyes at me. "*Mother*, there was nothing secret about this enterprise. It was done in the open, in the newspapers. A mere whisper of disapproval from President Jefferson would've brought everything to an abrupt halt. But they waited until the ships set sail to arrest my husband and leave my boy floating out there as prey for the Spaniards."

“Your father says—”

“Papa doesn’t know everything,” she said, uncharacteristically running over my words. “In truth, I don’t think Papa *wants* to know, because it would expose how much of his life, and yours, and mine have been sacrificed on the altar of doing the right and noble and patriotic thing whilst everyone around us laughed. Mr. Madison could clear all this up by testifying that he met with Francisco Miranda. But Jefferson won’t allow him to testify. There can be no innocent explanation for that *except* to scapegoat my husband.”

Suddenly—savagely—Nabby jerked up from her chair. “Oh, I vow to you, Mama that if we make it through any of this, I am finished with public service. I will beg my husband to leave society behind for a plow, and teach our children they’re better off eating locusts or sawdust than trying to honor any patriotic ideals.”

*You don’t mean that*, I wanted to caution.

But I decided not contradict her. Better to let her spit the toxin out in privacy and in the dark. For I could remember many a dark night that I, too, once sipped from that poisoned chalice.