

# Hamilton Girl

A short story - by Darryl Vidal

## Chapter 1 - Mara Wilson

Because of her mother's cultural leanings, Mara was not allowed to have her own computers or cell phones. She doesn't miss a day of school, and she always gets straight A's. She also hasn't been allowed to go to birthday parties (except for immediate family) or sleepovers. She doesn't play sports, although her dad knows some karate, and her stuff is always tidy and neatly organized.

Like many half-Asians, she has that indescribable natural beauty that combines the best of a strong Caucasian nose and jawline and Filipino almond-shaped eyes. But her best talent, known only to her family, cousins and some close family friends was her voice. Mara had a singing voice that was hush, but strong, as if she were speaking a melody. But she can belt them out like a professional, hitting the high notes, and adopting foreign accents as if American English were not her native language.

Mara loves Broadway musicals and her love of the current era is Lin Miranda's Hamilton. She knows all the songs, all the characters and because of it, she's quite knowledgeable about the American Revolution, the Continental Congress and dueling.

In the Spring of 2020, the year that the world changed, the COVID-19 plague hit Mara's hometown like every town in the world.

In response, each student at her school was given a chromebook device for distance learning along with a free internet hotspot. Mara had used computers often enough in class so the transition to distance learning was actually very easy for her.

She no longer had to get up early to get dressed for school, so she usually stayed in her pajamas all morning. Her mother did ask that she make her bed and shower each day before sitting for lunch.

Mara also no longer had to catch the bus, which also meant she didn't have to look at everyone else using their smartphones, and try to get a glimpse of social media over someone else's shoulder. This kind of made her an outcast although she did have her best friend Susan who didn't mind her looking over her shoulder during bus rides.

The school's computer acceptable use policy restricts students from using the computer for non-school related activities. So, despite having her own computer, Mara was still unable to set up her own social media accounts, and her mother wouldn't allow it anyway. This was mostly a good thing academically, although since some of the school portals were modeled to be like social media apps, Mara found herself with a little catching up to do.

The idea of starting an Instagram account was tempting since she now had her own device and unlimited Internet connectivity. As long as she kept up on her schoolwork, and in fact, continued to get straight A's, what would be the reason not to?

Of course, her mother would not allow it. If she were caught, her mom wouldn't trust her. She would somehow find out, either from friends or family. That would be the end of it. If she disobeyed her mother, Mara wouldn't get a computer until she could pay for it herself.

At first Mara stayed focused on school work. But distance learning was actually easier. It seemed like the teachers were having a harder time with the transition than she. In fact, some of the students didn't seem to catch on either, but with the resources provided by the school and the ability to search the internet, Mara quickly became a distance learning expert and could get ahead of her assignments.

## Chapter 2 - First Success

Mara's success with the distance learning curriculum was something of her own private success. Since she was already a straight A student, it wasn't surprising that she was easily able to complete all her school work and even go above and beyond.

Mara learned that she could use the online tools to become very effective at communicating her thoughts and doing more than just completing the assignments. She would use drawing tools for creating customized graphics, go deep when doing internet research, and learn to use audio / video editing tools to create her own videos to enhance the quality and depth of her school work.

During online classes, Mara made it a point to be the class leader. Her teachers lauded her work, used her assignments as examples, and had her demonstrate to class about how she goes the extra mile.

The extra time on her hands made the lure of social media all the more tempting. It's not like she didn't have any exposure, she had a ton. The only experience she lacked was having her own personal social media accounts.

Finally, the perfect circumstance revealed itself. One of Mara's classes assigned a group project where the students needed to do a report on the American Revolution. They could pick any relevant subject and needed to produce a collaborative report with music, videos, speeches, pictures and the like.

Of course, Mara's love of Hamilton became the key to their group's success. She was the Subject Matter Expert of the American Revolution, something she dubbed AmRev. And, one of her teammates was producing videos using TikTok, which meant she would have to open an account and use it as well. That was Mara's first foray into having her own personal social media account and she used it to its fullest. Unfortunately, when the project was over, Mara's mother asked her to delete the account and forbade her from using it for any other purposes.

That was the kicker. There was no way her mother was going to be able to keep a lid on Mara's yearning to be online. Mara felt drawn to these public sharing applications, as if she were an incomplete person.

To keep her mother in the dark, Mara chose an innocuous name that no one could connect to her - Peggy Schuyler, one of the characters from the Hamilton production.

## Chapter 3 - Going Above and Beyond

Mara was able to use the Peggy Schuyler account secretly without her mother knowing. Unless her mother actually stood over her shoulder, Mara could keep the windows hidden behind school work screens. It was so easy, she started to open accounts on other apps. First it was Facebook, then Instagram, then YouTube and the dreaded TikTok.

Posing as Peggy Schuyler, it made perfect sense to post Hamilton related videos on the popular platforms. And since her mother didn't use these apps, she could pretty much post anything as long as it didn't have her name embedded in the content. There was zero connection between Mara Wilson and Peggy Schulyer.

In fact, since most of the Hamilton cast were of color, Mara could become a very convincing Peggy Schulyer without anyone questioning the fact that the real Peggy Schuyler was White.

It was the perfect storm that would lead to Mara's meteoric rise in the two platforms. This perfect storm consisted of the following hot trends all coming together: 1 - Hamilton's popularity on social media, 2 - Tiktok and YouTube competing for viewers and contributors, 3 - Mara's pent up desire to enter the fray as social media star, 4 - her beautiful voice and exotic good looks. Mara's Hamilton videos were the right mixture of timing and talent for a true internet viral explosion.

Mara started by posting some of the videos she had created for the school project, then she started making new videos and posting other creative works, mostly not school related. Her videos were short little vignettes featuring the young mixed-race woman with the amazing vocal abilities, doing song excerpts, monologues, and dances, all with the American Revolutionary theme. She took choreography from the original play and adapted them to her own hip-hop and R&B variations.

Within a month Mara had tens of thousands of views and over a thousand subscribers to the Peggy Schuyler account. It would seem inevitable that someone would recognize her as plain old Mara Wilson, but she did her best to keep her online identity totally separate from her school and personal identity. Using makeup, homemade costumes and all the special effects available, the video snippets made Mara look like a twenty-year-old Peggy Schuyler.

Since the distance learning aspect of school was so easy for her, she began to live a double-life. During school hours she was the model student, outspoken class participant, leader, and academic superstar. This made her mother and father very proud.

Some of the students in her classes began to envy her academic success and started to resent her and her overachievement.

After school work was completed each day, Mara would escape to her room to become Peggy Schuyler, internet sensation. She was making YouTube and Tiktok videos on a daily basis and her followers became as obsessed to enjoy her latest additions, as she was to create them.

One day Mara's best friend Susan came over saying they "needed to talk." They sequestered themselves in the back room and Susan began pulling up the Peggy Schuyler videos. The number of views were huge. Each video had thousands of likes and hundreds of comments. The secret life of Mara Wilson as Peggy Schuyler was bound to be unveiled sooner or later.

Susan asked, "Is this why you're never around? It's like I don't even know you anymore...you don't have any time for your friends....and what will all this attention get you if your mother doesn't even allow you to have social media accounts?"

To help the situation with her best friend Susan, Mara evolved a plan to use her various account personas to create a website of all her Hamilton internet videos, speeches, dances as well as her best school projects that students could draw from, and through some very simple manipulations, make them their own. Mara had invented an American Revolution database - she dubbed it AmRevOnline.

Susan and a couple other of Mara's close friends started accessing the database of video content on AmRevOnline and using them for their own class projects. She knew that this might be considered cheating but from her viewpoint, she was just "helping" her friends access files that were available to anyone who put in the effort to look. And she - Mara Wilson - could not be connected to any of these accounts. Mara was simply a facilitator and helper.

## Chapter 4 - Hamilton Girl

As her popularity exploded, many people started messaging her both for good and bad reasons, mostly good, but some of the bad were really bad. She was being noticed by some undesirable types. People would leave criticisms about her hair and makeup, or the way that she danced. Maybe her renditions were historically inaccurate, but the way Mara looked at it, all publicity is good publicity. Besides, she wasn't doing anything illegal or harmful.

Then, the storm started releasing the rain. One of her classmates reported that she saw her school project on tiktok. This was reported to their teacher and then reported to the principal. Mara was called into the Principal's office and warned about the computer acceptable use policy. Any future posting of school work on social media could lead to a suspension and if the school was implicated, she could be expelled.

This warning didn't phase Mara as she was learning new techniques to hide her true identity and growing more confident in her skill and her ability to keep her school work disconnected from her social media. By creating new account names, like Angelica Schuyler, and Elisabeth Schyler, Mara basically recreated herself under a different Internet identity and continued in her elicit activities. And her followers were just as smart. They would search for the other characters names of the play and be able

to continue to follow her, even on to the move. Her popularity continued to grow unchecked - Mara had become the "Hamilton Girl."

## Chapter 5 - Backlash

Mara's Hamilton vignettes on YouTube and Tiktok begin to gain attention from creative directors and people from industry. Different people from all over were fawning over her videos and wanted to exploit her raw talent and creativity.

She was contacted and solicited to come to New York and Los Angeles but she was forced to hide the fact that she was a 12 year old girl, and that she was keeping her Internet identity secret from her family, friends and school. This frustrated her to no end. She actually considered confessing to her mother so she could entertain the numerous requests, but she was too scared of the backlash from school and especially at home. Were it not for the cheating aspect, she would probably come out of the confession okay.

Mara rationalized to herself that it wasn't cheating if people were using the content she created for their projects, she was just sharing, like a textbook. But she just couldn't convince herself that her mother and the principal would see things the same way.

Her social media audience grew by the thousands to the point that she really didn't know any of her online "friends" and contacts anymore. Mara was starting to feel like a person in a prison inside her home, unable to be a good friend to her school friends and unable to be herself on the Internet.

Just before the holidays Mara's mom started to notice that her daughter was spending more and more time isolated in her room doing "school work" and started to monitor what she was doing both by looking over her shoulder and going online. But she was not nearly as tech savvy as Mara and had no understanding that Mara was the mastermind of a cheating ring at school and still didn't understand the breadth and depth of the AmRevOnline website.

The backlash started quietly. First, some of her friends started wondering why Mara was sheltering herself, not going out and rarely speaking to her friends. Some wondered if there was trouble at home, or maybe she was drinking or abusing something.

Then, students in her classes start to criticize and mock some of her school work and call Mara the teacher's pet. Anything Mara did was criticized if it wasn't perfect, and never did her grades drop below an A. When one of her projects had obvious historical mistakes, they called on her to be penalized and her work downgraded.

After the holidays, things seemed to settle down a bit, Mara had created and uploaded a new video to YouTube under her Angelica Schuyler account, another student anonymously sent it to the school principal and Mara was accused of plagiarism and helping other students cheat on their homework. This was truly ironic because Mara was the creator of the speech and video content. Her own zeal to hide her

identity made it nearly impossible to prove that she was the originator of the video, and the creator of a vast database of American Revolution oriented video content.

The teacher simply thought Mara took the work off the internet and claimed it as her own. The quality was so good and the performance and production so sophisticated, the teacher wouldn't believe her.

Equally frustrating to the Principal was the fact that there was no solid evidence Mara wasn't the creator of all this content. So ultimately, they didn't raise the issue with Mara's mother, the warning stayed between Mara and the Principal, accompanied with a grim look of suspicion.

Not everyone was fooled into thinking the academic goldmine in AmRevOnline was a legitimate source for historical data and content. Students that didn't have access to Mara's database became more and more aware of who was in the sharing network, and who wasn't - it was like a cheating club. Fortunately, the text and video components she created were impossible to connect to Mara. She could never be accused of helping other students cheat through the sharing of her videos and speeches.

Without a better way to confront Mara at school, some students started creating fake accounts in order to attack and bully Mara online via her alias accounts.

The comments began as criticism but soon descended to true hatred. Anonymous and fake user accounts on both sides of the comments made for confusing yet maddening discourse. But only Mara and a few of her closest friends knew who was at the center of it all.

Other students begin to ask Mara for help in their school work and through mostly legitimate means Mara became the saviour of several students by giving them access to the AmRevOnline.

## Chapter 6 - Going Underground

As Spring approached and the school year was winding down, Mara decided to try to stay out of the limelight and attract less attention at school. She started participating less in classes and never caused dissension. She tried to compliment other students' work and reflect a more positive attitude.

But in the background, she continued to create more videos, content and expand AmRevOnline. Mara had created logins to the site for only her closest friends, but these leaked out and soon more students, as well as students from other schools began to access the website.

To get back at her, several irate classmates made a plan with an upcoming school project, all Mara's team members pretended to cooperate online but when the final project was submitted, they omitted all the content Mara had put into the project. They made it look like Mara had made no contribution to the finished product and none of the students would back her up. She got a D on the project - she was devastated.

## Chapter 7 - Disaster Strikes

As the end of the school year approached, things began to get crazy online. There seemed to be a lot of harassment and negative comments coming in on her accounts, and more people were getting into the AmRevOnline website and using the content for their own projects. Things were getting out of control.

Then Mara slipped up. While reading some nasty comments about her videos on Tiktok, Mara responded fiercely defending her work. She detailed how much planning, preparation, cost and post production time and effort went into each video. She described how she confirmed facts to more than just Hamilton as its source. She spilled her guts about the agony as she was living a double-life, unable to make the three factors of her being live symbiotically: school, social media & family.

After slamming her finger down on the send key she quickly noticed that she was not logged in as Angelica Schuyler, but as Mara Wilson. She tried to delete the message but it wouldn't erase, edit or undo. She had set the account up at the very beginning, before the cheating scam started, but only used it for lurking.

She thought to herself, "the Internet is forever."

Her secret was out, the Hamilton videos, which were the fundamental core of AmRevOnline's video content that Mara had compiled, was now tied directly to her. This would not stand, not at home, and not at school - the only "real" parts of her life.

Mara panicked and decided to direct the attention on others. She went on the attack and identified several students that used content from AmRevOnline. She wrote emails to the teacher and principals naming each student and accusing them of hacking the passcodes and stealing the content without a license. She raised the threat bar with the school by threatening a copyright infringement lawsuit from AmRevOnline.

By sending these threatening letters from the Schuyler accounts, the school thought they were coming from the corporate owner of AmRevOnline - and they were, Mara Wilson.

Because of the charges and accusations leveled by AmRevOnline, the girl Mara named got suspended from school for hacking, copyright and misuse of school computer equipment. And Mara didn't even get spoken to. The administration couldn't figure out how Mara was connected to the other students' cheating. Even the classmate didn't know who outed her. She had a strong suspicion, but no proof.

To keep up the pressure, Mara - as Schuyler - outed several other classmates for hacking and stealing from the website. Once called into the office, they quickly broke down and confessed that they were using the website. But Mara forgot one detail.

Under pressure, the girl sobbed, "but it was Mara that gave us the passcodes, she runs the whole website. It's not a real company."

The cheating ring was exposed.

## Chapter 8 - Everything is Not As It Seems

In the end, Mara and the students involved were suspended and penalized. But once the principal and teachers began looking at the abundance of resources and content Mara had developed during the year, they were astounded and convinced that good use could be made of the website and content.

For the students implicated, it was recognized that videos, speeches and content Mara had authored, compiled and created, was a goldmine of American Revolutionary history, and since the students still had to compile and learn the material in the process, it was more an exercise of compilation and organization than of real plagiarism or cheating.

The hacked passcodes weren't hacked at all, they were freely distributed by Mara. None of the students believed they were receiving hacked passcodes.

Although Mara was suspended and her grades were negatively impacted, her work on the AmRevOnline website was an historically significant body of work and utilized the best new technology had to offer. She was lauded in the end and her AmRevOnline was adopted as a part of the school's American Revolution curriculum. Mara was asked to help manage keeping it up-to-date.

What started as a fun distraction, morphed into a cheating website, but ultimately became an online database of the American Revolution - according to Lin Miranda, and Mara Wilson.