FIRE AND THE HAMMER

Shirley Barker

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“. . . the Lord’s word was a fire

and a hammer in me. . . .”

—From a letter of Henry Fell
to his wife Margaret Fell,
February 19, 1657,
preserved in the
Swarthmore Hall Collection
of Quaker manuscripts.

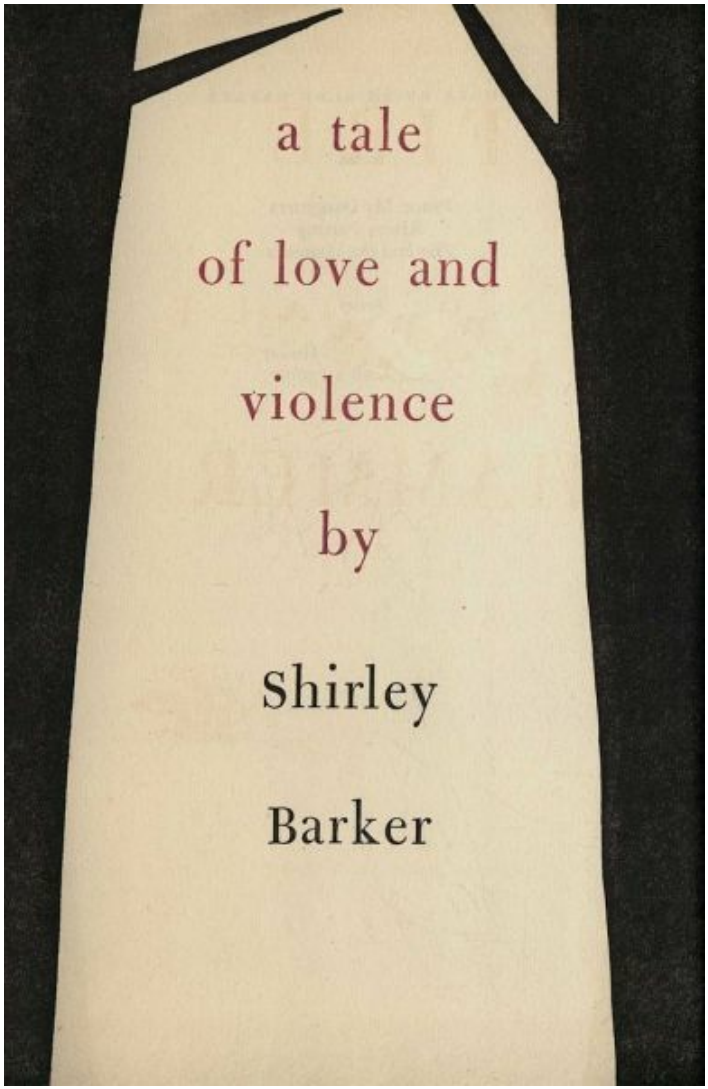
BOOKS BY SHIRLEY BARKER

Novels

Peace, My Daughters
Rivers Parting
Fire and the Hammer

Poetry

The Dark Hills Under
A Land and a People


a tale
of love and
violence
by
Shirley
Barker

FIRE AND THE HAMMER

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For
“The boys in Room 300”
otherwise
my former colleagues in the
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Gerald D. McDonald
Sylvester Vigilante
F. Ivor D. Avellino

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“The Doan Robbers? The Tory Doans? The most devil-daring fellows that ever lived! Hell itself can’t match them!” said Sir William Howe, General, Commander of His Majesty’s Forces. When he spoke so, these Quaker brigands were real and living men. No novelist could have created them. Only God would dare to use so much fire and color. They were made out of the old, wild, free America they loved and fought to save; the troubled time of the Revolution; and the deep, rich wheatfields of Bucks County in Pennsylvania. Their tale cannot be a quiet one, but when it is wildest, then it is most true. They were incredible men, but it has taken incredible men to bring about our incredible country.

THE VIOLENCE

ONE

In This November 1776

•

1

November, thought Silas Marvayne, is a time for the old to look at the young, and marvel and remember that season of love and the beauty of it all, for God has so ordered that it does not come twice to any man, since no man is strong enough to bear the wonder of it twice. Silas sat in the blue-gray dust of the stonecutter's shop, southeast of the Frog Pond, at the foot of the burying ground, and sneezed the powdered granite out of his nostrils where it settled invisibly on his ruffled shirt and black velvet waistcoat. He looked up the hill under the twisting elm boughs, lower, to the brown grass and tilted headstones. That way, he knew, would come youth and love. Not fox him, any more, settled merchant of Newburyport, Massachusetts, grizzled, and forty-nine years old, and on too good terms with life to want what was gone from him forever. But he could still look with delight at the youth and beauty he had begotten, that was destined for some other man. He sat between his two cronies, smoked his pipe, and drank his rum, and read the paper aloud—but he waited for his daughter Lass.

They were three men there in the shadowy, timbered shop, with its diamond panes facing westward, away from the town, straight at the side of the sharp hill of the dead; young men no longer, and it was autumn and the yellow leaves were falling—the end of a long, mild autumn in a troubled time. Silas Marvayne was tall and lean, with eyes the color of sea water, a sharp, thin face, and black and silver hair; Silas who had wanted to be a poet in his youth, when he was reading Ovid in the grammar school, but also a Silas who had loved women from about that time, first the shy girl sweethearts, then his wife and his baby daughters, and loving them meant that he wanted to give them the good things of the world. So he had burnt his foolscaps, and gone out with this father's ships, and come home to his father's counting house, grown to be a master hand at both, and on the whole he had found it good. He knew the look you must give a shilling to turn it into a guinea, and that was no bad thing to know, but when the fog blew down from the east country and a warm wind stirred the pussywillow buds along the spring brooks, he thought sometimes,

wistfully—But I wanted to be a poet.

This afternoon he had come up from the wharves below Market Square to sit with his old friends, Dr. Timothy Fletcher, who had looked him in the eye on a ghastly birthing night fifteen years ago and told him that his wife Ann would die before morning—which she had—and Job Corey, the stonecutter, who had given him his only son—save for those two limp boys of Ann's who never breathed at all. Job, shot in the back in the French and Indian War, had walked bent double ever since, but he had gotten and raised more boys than he could feed or the parish either. It was his fourth son, Crispin, who had shipped for Silas as a cabin boy at eleven, and gone out a master at nineteen, Crispin who would be his son-in-law. The young men were out now, with the privateers, or fighting somewhere across in New York or the Jerseys, but the older men could gather here in their teeming river town, and plan for tomorrow, and remember yesterday.

Silas laid down the paper to fill his pipe and pick up the earthen mug from the hearthstone, for Job had a little fire burning there, and he liked his rum with a taste of warmth about it, not puddle cold. Now he began to read again, as the shadows thickened in the corners of the room and the salt wind whirled yellow leaves against the window panes.

" 'Item—from Boston. The enemy have landed their main body at Eastchester—we lost twelve men, but we killed five hundred—New York Island is still in our possession. The salvation of America depends upon our next engagement. It will be the destruction of the British army or ours.' "

Job, black-browed and stone-dusty, spat into the fire and poured himself another mugful. "Salvation of America! Hell and damn! When I was called out twenty years ago, they told me that was to save America. My dad was killed at Louisburg, and his dad at Port Royal, an' what was they up there for, but to save America? Now I got four boys gone from home for the same thing. How many damn-all times we got to save America anyway?"

Dr. Timothy swallowed thirstily, then lifted his mild, brown eyes in the square-bowed spectacles, and looked at Job and spoke, a little drunken, as always. The doctor had seen too much suffering, tried to mend too many sorry predicaments, known too well what bitter destruction the flesh can bring upon the spirit, and been destroyed, in turn, by his own compassion.

"I think maybe, Job, every man has got to save it once—in his time."

"Cris sent me a letter," Job raged on, unmollified. "You want to see what he said? You want to see what to hell he said?"

Silas put down the *Essex Journal*. "You've heard from Crispin—since Lass has?"

"I couldn't say. I heard this morning." He pulled from the pocket of his tattered homespun breeches a sheet of paper, crumpled, bearing a patch of

square, black writing. Silas took it and read aloud, in the even, droning voice he used in his counting house.

> Dear Father:
>
> Send me a gun so I can trade this rifle for a pair of breeches, though we be so ill-equipped 'twill soon be the fashion here to go with a bare backside. Since Long Island we have found that the British cannot aim as we do, but fire in volleys and depend on closing with the bayonet, which calls for a musket, so 'tis that I want, or the price thereof. We was last paid when we was mustered out of Beverly in July. Great Franklin talks of arming us with bow and arrow, but I doubt I could wield the damn things. If you have no money for the musket, never mind, as I have a small and a great hunting knife by me, and I had two fists before I had either. These will do well enough for such of them as I have talked with. They claim this is to be no war but a fox hunt, and they come to America to kill peasants. This notion will undo them quicker than cannon. May this letter find you and my mother well.
>
> Your son,
> C. Corey

Dr. Timothy set down his mug and ran his hand back over his forehead, tilting his powdered wig awry.

"Bows and arrows? I'm surprised at Mr. Franklin. I remember he come here once twenty years ago. First Church steeple got struck by lightning, and he wanted to study on it. Said church didn't burn because of a wire that ran through the bell tower, an' clock, an' all, straight into the ground. I thought he was a smart man *then*. Anyway, I'm glad to know Crispin's well. As you must be, Silas. Hasn't he stood as a son to you in the trade, doesn't he have your business at his fingers' ends, isn't he marrying Lass?"

"He is if he ever gets home from war and Lass'll have him. She changes her mind every time the wind veers."

"What woman don't?" said Job crossly.

"Huh? Not yours, sure. After bearing you ten sons."

"Wager it?"

"No—oo. I haven't known much of women the last fifteen years."

"Hannah Hildreth—?"

Silas' blue eyes lit up with rage and he slammed his mug down on the rough plank table.

"By God, any man who talks about Hannah ain't worth my fist in his face. He'll get my boot—elsewhere. She's kept my house since Ann died, and reared my girls. I've asked her in marriage twenty times, but you know why

she couldn't, as well as I do. Her husband went on a voyage their wedding week and was never heard from. She's got no proof she's widow—and until she has—but you hold your tongue about Hannah Hildreth. I'd rather have her beside me in a fight than the best man in Newbury port."

He stopped, out of breath, and refilled his mug.

"I didn't speak no harm of Hannah," said Job sullenly.

"That he didn't, Si," said Dr. Timothy, swaying forward a little. "All town knows Hannah's a good woman. She's cooked and cleaned for you, and mothered Sally and Lass. If she lay in your bed as need arose—it's none of our affair."

"You're drunk, Tim," said Silas magnanimously, reaching over to fill the doctor's mug.

"I am, praise God," answered Timothy Fletcher, settling back and folding his hands across his flowered waistcoat. "What else is left for a doctor who's failed at his trade the way I have—so many times—Even my best friend's wife I couldn't save."

"You did all you could for Ann," said Silas-bleakly. "You need some more wood, Job. I'll fetch it." He stepped into the shed at the rear.

"Ann Marvayne was a pretty woman," muttered Job reflectively, "but not if you was to put her beside old Mistress Marvayne—her that was Peg Magoon."

"Peg Magoon!" cried Timothy, all his wits opening out like a flower. "That wasn't a pretty woman. That was beauty. The fountain and spirit of it. All in a Scotch-Irish redemption lass, wrapped up in a peat-stained shawl. When he was old, old, and I was a young man, I talked to the captain who brought her over sea. He'd shipped two girls that voyage, he told me; Peg Magoon from Derry and Margery Brown from Cork. Margery was the pert one. He says to her, 'An' what are you going to America for?' 'Why,' says she, 'to marry and raise governors for them.' "

"I heard that story," said Job, smiling quietly, "heard it from my mother that was a girl with Peg—and look how it's all come out that way. Here's Margery's son a general—General John Sullivan of New Hampshire. God knows what he'll govern later."

"But," went on Doctor Timothy, his eyes fixed straight ahead, staring at the fire, "Peg didn't say nothing at all. She didn't need to. Captain looked her over good, an' then he had her locked in the hold till they got into Boston Harbor. She had so much of what a man wants that he couldn't keep her safe any other way."

Job swallowed and felt the liquor rise in him. "I never talked with no captain about her, but I heard something else of Peg Magoon and not from my mother either. I heard one man say for all her beauty he wouldn't have her—

not if she was offered to him on a tray with handles."

"I hadn't ever heard that, Job. Why didn't he want her?"

"Because he said she'd be no good to him; no good ever to a man she didn't love, and he could see in her eyes that she'd never met her man. He said most women'll take what the Lord sends them for a husband, and make the best of it, and be happy—but Peg wouldn't. He said she could marry a man an' live with him forty years an' bear his children an' in her heart still be a maid. Could that ever be, Tim?" He appealed to the doctor.

Timothy nodded his head sadly. "Could be, yes. Not often, but with a one like Peg. I hope it won't happen, again—in our time."

Job muttered, and Silas, who had rejoined them in time to hear the last words, bit his lower lip. Both of them spoke together. Both of them said the same thing.

"She's marrying Crispin."

"A fine lad, a fine lad," rumbled the doctor. "Just because two women look the same—it don't mean they must be alike. But I never saw two before —'twixt whom there was *no difference at all*."

Silas had known his mother as a great beauty, turning softly into a delicate old lady, but there had been no closeness and love between them. She had borne him, and seen to it that he was fed and cleaned and looked after, but she had paid scant attention to him and even less to his father. John Marvayne spent all his time in the counting house. Peg walked in the garden, sat idly by the upper windows, watching the sea, singing low Gaelic songs to herself, talking sometimes with Lass, when Lass was growing. She died when Lass was eight, and she herself a two years' widow. Her son had scrupulously followed her last request; the square granite marker he had paid Job to set over her grave on the burying hill bore two words only, "Peg Magoon." Now in the mellowness of rum, and twilight, and late autumn, he remembered that her last living gesture had been to flout the Marvaynes, to deny that she had ever borne their name. She had always been a stranger to him, always wanted to be.

Silence settled between the three friends. The talk had gone a way none of them liked, and Job tried quickly, clumsily, to set it back.

"What else be in the paper?" he asked, bending over his work bench, chiseling away at a death's head on a small slate gravestone.

"Well—nothing we don't know. No more of the war. Only home things."

"I like them better."

"Timothy Dexter, at the Sign of the Glove across from Somerby's landing, has deer, sheep, and moose hides to sell, and a quantity of good blubber; also olives by the jar, lemons by the box, ironware, sherry, and good Lisbon salt by the hogshead."

"Timothy Dexter's crazy. That's all that ails him," said the doctor, smiling

gently into his mug. The others nodded agreement, and Silas went on.

"Stephen Hooper's got raisins and oil, I see. So's Enoch Titcomb. Enoch's also offering potash and Philadelphia flour. Joe Choate's got in some more West India rum. Knott Martin by Amesbury Ferry has black silk handkerchiefs. Bishop Norton has bar soap, crown soap, Poland starch, and French hair-powder. They're selling a prize cargo at Dan Marquand's wharf next Wednesday. Here's notice of four dollars' reward for a runaway slave named Seneca—about forty—who made off with a red coat, a blue coat, and two pairs of buff breeches."

"He won't be caught. Too many here feels the way you do, Si, an' you've spoke your mind loud and often."

"Oh, I've bought and sold most things in my time," said Silas, bending over to knock his pipe bowl empty on the hearthstone, "but I've never bought black flesh. I was aboard a slaver once, first year I went to sea, and I never had stomach for the business after." He continued to read. "Jonathan Jackson has sugar, coffee, cotton wool, rum, madeira, claret, cocoa and Cadiz salt, ship's bread and indigo."

"Jonathan Jackson's house ain't so fine as yours, Si," interrupted Job. "I asked the carpenters, an' they say it ain't."

East on the high street, overlooking town and harbor, the richer merchants were beginning to build great, square, three-story houses, and Silas' own was roofed over now, waiting for the carvers to finish the balustrades and panel pieces. He had bought painted French wallpaper, and busts of Plato and Socrates, like old Judge Lowell used to have, but his heart was not in the building. It was not for him. Lass and Crispin would be the ones to love and grow old in it, and overflow it with children.

"Jonathan Jackson," he said, "has got a wife to put in his house."

It was inevitable then that they should drink a round to Ann Marvayne, inevitable that they should remind him he still had Sally and Lass.

"How *is* Sally?" asked the doctor, brightening up, with the air of a man who mentions happier things.

"Well enough. Her time's at Christmas."

Only a year ago it had been, that he had taken his older daughter, Sally, when he went to Philadelphia to do business with his friend and brother merchant, Robert Morris. And after their first few days there, Sally had been busier than he; busy falling in love with Sam Bye, then the head clerk for the firm of Willing and Morris, now back on his farm in Bucks County, trying to raise money for the Congress. Love and marriage had come to Sally Marvayne, all between two full moons, and she had not returned to Newburyport. Now she would bear a child before the year turned, and she had written and sent for her sister, Lass. He carried the letter uneasily in his pocket.

He had done nothing about it, but he knew that he must. Next week, he himself would be gone, gone to sea for the first time in years, to run in powder from St. Eustatius in the Dutch West Indies. There was another notice in the paper, one he had not read to his friends, but had done much thinking upon. Dame Eleanor Druitt had opened a day and boarding school near the Assembly House, on October twenty-eighth. She would teach English, French, needlework, sewing and embroidery, drawing, darning, and mending rich laces. Lass, at sixteen, knew none of these things. He began to doubt if she would ever know them. She knew how to ride, and row, and bring a sailboat in through the salt creeks that wound across the marshes, and shoot squirrels out of the walnut trees along the Merrimack. Sally had diligently followed the tasks Hannah set her and grown expert at them. Lass had simply ignored them and run off to the counting house, so he had taken her with him, trading in Boston, fishing at the Isles of Shoals, gunning for deer across the Piscataqua in York County. The matters Eleanor Druitt taught would be good things for the mistress of his new mansion to know. But Sally wanted her sister.

He stared soberly at the dying fire. Dr. Timothy nodded. Job lighted a fat candle in the iron sconce swung above the work bench, where he still pottered over the death's head. The sun had gone down in red behind the graveyard hill.

Suddenly Timothy stirred and shook himself awake. "That gun Crispin wanted? You got the money, Job?"

"I got it," interrupted Silas hastily. "I'll be in Philadelphia—ten days—two weeks from now. I'll buy him a gun. I'll see he gets it."

"Do you know just where he is?"

"They'll know in Philadelphia."

"He's with Glover, sure, and that's bound to be near water.

"General Glover!" chortled Job proudly. "As I taught to make shoes when he was a young man."

"You did?" cried the doctor in surprise. "I never heard that.

"Where you been? It's stale news now. I was always a Newburyport man, but my wife Alice come from Marblehead, an' when we was first married, we lived there, an' I made shoes—the work I was born to in my father's cobbleshop—an' young Johnny Glover learned the trade of me."

"But you didn't stay by it—either of you."

"No. He left to sell fish, an' rose to be a merchant, an I learned stone work of Alice's father to please the old man, as he hadn't a son to leave his tools to, an' I had three brothers wanting mine. But when Johnny was raising men to go fight the British, I told Cris if he meant to get in this war, he better go with somebody like that we knew an' trusted. An' I was right. Glover's Marine Regiment of Marblehead—the Fourteenth Massachusetts! They done some proud work."

"Saved Washington's whole army—that's all. Sneaked 'em out of the trap on Long Island, away to New York in the middle of a foggy night, before Howe knew there was an oar in the water. The men from the western mountains are good shots—maybe. But they can't handle a boat like the men from around here—Salem—Gloucester—Newbury—Marblehead."

Silas smiled. "I remember Cris wrote Lass that all he'd done in this war so far was run a damn ferry boat.

"You wasn't too eager for Crispin to go at first, was you, Silas? You must feel different—now you're taking sides yourself."

"Yes," said Silas thoughtfully, "about this I've shifted minds like a woman. But I think now I know where I stand."

"What's changed you?"

"What changes the tide? It runs one way, and then it turns and runs the other, and then it turns again—and all that floats must go with it."

He leaned forward, elbows on spread knees, chin in his cupped hands. "I tell you. Up to twelve years ago, England minded her own business and we minded ours. I sent ships to sea and I made money. Rum, molasses, flour, salt, fish, whale oil, naval stores—powder and shot in war time. Those were good times, and all I want is those good times back. Oh, I know—cargoes worth ninety thousand dollars in Nantes now are worth a hundred and forty thousand in Boston—but I'd rather have a free sea. Well—England changed—maybe some men know why, but I don't know no more about it than I do about the tide running. Comes the Stamp Tax, and the Tea Tax, and Non-importation. They closed Boston port, even. They sold us out to the East India Company. They come up with a thousand laws like a nest of snakes to strangle our trade and drain off our money. We won't have that, and we'll show them we won't. Newburyport's a poor sea town—less than a thousand free men—but it can say no to King George of England, if it wants to, and he's got to bide by it. We've burnt goods we didn't want and hanged dummy tax collectors—pity 'twasn't the real thing. And if they think they've killed our trade, they ought to hear the goods-for-sale I was reading tonight. There's nothing raised, grown, or made that we can't buy here in Fish Street or Market Square if we want to."

"Aye. When they try to dam our trade, it's like damming the Merrimack with pipe staves," muttered Dr. Timothy. "With pipe staves—" he muttered, resting his chin on his brocade waistcoat.

"I always traded honest," went on Silas hotly, "but I've traded both sides of British law."

"Whole coast knows your shooting crews," said Job admiringly.

Silas smiled, but his jawline lifted grimly.

"No man treads a deck of mine unless he ships his rifle with him and can shoot to kill at a hundred yards. My ships've never been troubled much, once

they sight my flag. But I've turned a fleet of peaceful brigs into battle frigates, and I don't like it. I'd rather have a free sea."

"Do you think you'll get it by siding with Congress?"

"I don't know. But I know I won't get it any other way. Never with English leave again. That's why I'm putting all my ships to the arms trade to further the war. I'm taking one out myself next week, having lost a captain of yellow fever coming back from Trinidad."

"I know," sighed the doctor. "Ephraim Bartlett's boy—born the fall of '52. I delivered him the night of the great hurricane. The candles kept going out."

"I remember that night," mused Job. "Highest tide that ever come up the Merrimack."

"Talking of such," said Silas, "the night I was born, there was an earthquake and a howling wind that broke all the orchards down. I been in turmoil ever since, but I guess this war'll be the worst yet."

"But if you was agin the British from the Stamp Act on," pried Job, "why was you of two minds about whether to fight?"

"Because I wasn't sure—I'm not too sure now—that we ought to set ourselves up to be a separate country. There's too much talk in the Congress. Too little business sense and too many fine ideas. All I want is to have things the way they were, and I'm not sure either side'll give us that again. 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness' has a fine sound, true, but it would mean more if they wrote it, 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Free Trade.' You can't pursue happiness. It comes to you, or it don't."

"Statesmen and merchants measure by different rule," Timothy said quietly. "Seems I read somewhere that you'll see all manner of men put up in bronze: poets, scholars, kings, preachers—even a justice or two; but never a merchant—unless he pays for it himself."

Silas smiled appreciatively. "Well—let the bronze go. I didn't fight till I was driven to it. But when England sets out to treat us like we're Bengal blacks and she's the East India Company—there's no other way. They want arms for Washington, and I'll see they get them. But they're advertising a free country, and come the peace and we win, I expect them to deliver it."

And with his ultimatum came suddenly the sound he had been waiting for: girls' voices, and a burst of thin, sweet laughter from the crest of the sunset hill. He stood up and went to the window.

Down the steep slope they came, a rout of laughing girls, jumping across the old stones laid flat like tables, circling the upright slabs as tall as they were; green, and pink, and russet skirts held back, their bright hair streaming under the skeleton trees. They had planned to go after shagbark hickory nuts behind the ridge that followed the river up toward Amesbury, Lass had told him, but they carried no baskets now, so they must have cracked and eaten as fast as

they gathered. Lass, swifter and lighter than the others, was in the lead, holding her skirts higher, racing past the granite slab that read, “Peg Magoon.” He watched her come, and his heart turned over. He loved Sally, a trim, sensible girl, pretty, and well-ordered, and never any trouble to him; loved her like a daughter; but Lass was more than that. She was his daughter, too, but she was the wife he had lost and the son he had never had. Lass was his life. He had named her “Thalassa,” because he had been a poet in his youth and knew that “Thalassa” meant “sea”; because he had lived of the sea all his life, and knew all good things came to him from there.

When Lass reached the door of the stonecutter’s shop, she turned her head and waved at her companions. She was going too fast to stop, so she flung herself against the oak door, and hung, laughing, a moment, on the iron bands across it before she lifted the latch with impatient fingers and stepped inside. Once over the threshold, with the firelit room and the three men before her, she stood there, smiling at them, too breathless to speak, one hand clutching her left breast with a gesture of distress she never meant them to believe in.

Silas had measured his girls each year against the buttery door, and drawn a line to mark their height, and dated it in pencil. Lass’s line had stopped at five feet. He weighed her sometimes on the grain scales at the wharf, and once he had read the balance at a hundred and five pounds, but that was the day she had a stone in her pocket. Delicate-boned, thin-hipped and full-bosomed, she never decked herself with the jewels and laces Silas would gladly have paid for. He had taken this once for a becoming modesty, but that was before he had heard her tell Sally, “I don’t want them looking at my dress. I’d rather they looked at me.” Today she wore a slate-blue gown untrimmed, with a tight waist, a full skirt, and long sleeves ruffled with the same blue. She had left home at noontime with her hair piled high in curls and puffs, but it had all shaken down now and hung on her shoulders and the combs were gone. Her hair was red, not red-gold or burnished chestnut, but tawny, flamboyant red. Her eyes were blue, black-browed, long-lashed, her features small and straight. You could scan Lass Marvayne from top to toe and write down on paper everything you saw, but the person reading what you wrote would have no idea of her. You could say, as the old captain had said of her grandmother —“she had so much of what a man wants”—but that still was not enough to say. Lovely, burningly alive, with the confident, happy look of one who has never been hurt, or troubled, or frightened, or denied in all her life. That was Lass Marvayne.

They were not young men, there in the stonecutter’s shop, and they had known her from babyhood, but they all stood up when Lass burst through the doorway, and each of them felt that her smile was a light caress meant especially for him.

"Don't try to talk till you get your breath back," said her father gruffly. Job dragged a three-legged stool out of the corner and placed it for her. Dr. Timothy brushed the pipe ashes from his waistcoat.

Lass spoke quickly, still gasping a little. "We have to go, Dad. We have to go this minute. The *Sally B.*'s in. Our privateer. I saw her as we came down the ridge."

"I doubt it. She's not due for ten days yet, and you couldn't tell our flag in the twilight."

"Think I'd need the flag to tell one of our ships? She's got a prize, too—at least, there was a strange schooner following her close on."

"No?" Silas stood up. "If you're right, I guess we better get down there. Job, you want to let her have Crispin's letter—"

"Why, I'd be proud."

He handed it to Lass who smiled glowingly at him and slipped it into the front of her dress.

"And, Tim—It's on your way. Will you tell Hannah we won't be home to supper for a while?"

Dr. Timothy tried to shrug his shoulders. "Well—I wouldn't dare it sober—but as is—I'll tell her."

"Oh, her tongue rattles on, but just don't listen. I never do." He did not mind Hannah's sharpness, did not mind that she was dark and square where Ann had been slight and golden. He did mind that while Ann had always wanted him to have what he wanted, Hannah wanted him to have what was good for him. "She don't mean no harm," he said. "Good-bye, boys."

He opened the door for Lass and followed her into the chill dusk where the light of a crescent moon flashed from the copper weathervane on First Church steeple. Together, silent, happy in each other's company, they skirted the sunken Frog Pond and turned into Fish Street, scuffing like children in the fallen, yellow leaves under the giant elms. Once Silas looked down at the top of Lass's ruddy head, and thought of the night he always believed he had gotten her—that October night when the whole town celebrated the taking of Quebec; when they split and broiled a whole ox on a huge gridiron set up at the west end of Mr. Lowell's meeting house, and everybody sang and drank to true British valor and the year '59. He and Ann had walked home after in the dark, arm in arm, and gone to their bed with so much love. He was glad that it wasn't of Lass that she had died, but of a stillborn son in the next year.

They turned down Fish Street toward the waterside, the shipyards, the warehouses, the ropewalks, past the old golden-brown houses of weathered pine trimmed with red, past the newer ones of brick. At the corner of Threadneedle Alley, by the Wolfe Tavern, they had to wait while Stavers' coach, just in from Portsmouth, crossed in front of them on its way to the

stables at the back. All the windows were lighted now, and the river flowed black below them, under a pale yellow sky.

"Don't you want to know what Crispin's letter said?" he asked, shivering in the chilly seawind, the seawind of autumn.

"Crispin? I don't know. I suppose so. I can wait."

Silas frowned. "He's a good lad," he told her, "and handsome."

"I'm sure of it." She smiled up at him, put her hand on his arm. "Let's go the short way," she said, "past the distilleries."

"Well—if you want to breathe in rum. Myself, I'd rather drink it." But he turned as she bade him. I better get Crispin home, he thought. No. I'll send her to Sally. No time for the niceties of Eleanor Druitt now. Crispin can get leave and come to her there. I want her married to a good man I know will take care of her, and Crispin's that. She'll settle her mind to him, once they're married. Left alone, maybe she'd look further and do worse. I haven't raised her right. I've let her stay a child too long. I've made her safe from everything—except herself.

A sense of failure settled leadenly upon him, and he looked about the familiar landscape for reassurance, thought back to all the years that had gone over the town in his time, and he a part of it all: the days when the wild geese flocked so thick you could kill them by sixties with a club; when tall moose ran on the Old Town hills with branching antlers seven feet high. He remembered the great rains of 1740 with the houses of Haverhill floating past; the year the army of caterpillars cut a swath across the country, leaving no green thing. Young men had gone off to school at Cambridge, or to war at Louisburg when he was a young man, but he had not gone with them. And maybe he was wrong. He thought of the Titcomb battery trundling out its forty-two-pounders, and how Father Moody from York who'd signed as chaplain carried along a hatchet to cut the idols out of the Catholic churches there. He had stood by and watched it all, but now his whole life was changing; now, instead of sending other men out, he was going out himself. He felt an air of doom and sadness about him in this November that he had not felt in any fall before. When this year went out, much of the world he had known was like to go with it. He was committed to the new country and the coming time, and he didn't know whether he was glad or sorry; sailing out on the late autumn sea, in the autumn of his life, to prepare the way for an uncertain spring.

"Oh, Dad—it is—just as I told you! And it *was* a prize! Our wharf's all crawling with trussed-up British. Come on! Run!"

It's come to this! he thought. Same blood as ours—but we've got them in irons—because it was either we or they. Oh, Christ, what'll come of it all!

With Lass half dragging him, he let the past go, and ran, hard after her,

toward the future.

2

November, thought Hester Doan, is the time of fulfillment, the time when all things turn to the earth again; when the bright leaves have all come down and begun to moulder in the brown grass, when men move abroad in the fields and among the dry cornstalks to cut back the vines and stems of living plants that they may sleep secure in the root the winter through, that there may again be spring. November can be mild or sharp, blue or somber; it can wear the face of any season; but whatever masks it assumes or promises it holds forth, its own essence is of decay and death. The eternal sadness of it struck Hester suddenly, as she looked out across the fields of Plumstead in Bucks County of Pennsylvania, and watched her five sons plowing the land, but she put it from her, and remembered God had been good, and gave Him the thanks thereof.

A wind sang sharply through the oak grove behind the fields, and lifted the red dust of the Easton Road that wound past Joseph Doan's stone and timber farmhouse on the way from Cross Keys Tavern up to Plumstead village and beyond. In the warmth of the raftered kitchen, Joseph's violin was singing, too; the song of a boiling kettle full of side meat and herbs in proper portion, the song that had in it all the sounds of autumn dark coming down on the farmland —cattle lowing by the milk pails, dry stalks a-rustle, and hogs crunching down corn in the frosty moonlight. Hester smiled gently. She knew other men on the farms around who could fiddle, too; dance tunes and hymn tunes, the hearty airs of the German farmers up past Deep Run and Swamp Meeting House, but only Joseph could fiddle cricket music and cackling geese, and bees going in and out of the wild honeysuckle. When she had come to this house first time, a bride, she had felt wonder and gratitude that of all the pretty girls in Pennsylvania, she was the girl to marry Joseph Doan. Thirty years and nine childbirths afterward, she still felt so; still felt, God forgive her, a girl's silly pride that bearing had not thickened her slight waist, nor trouble silvered her soft, black hair.

She looked away from the house and fields, down the valley to the south— a long, mellow groove between the curving ridges that ran east to the Delaware. At its bottom coiled the north branch of Neshaminy, brown and still between the willow hedges, and across, on Clover Hill, she could see the thick trees clustered north of Plumstead Meeting House and the smaller stone cottage close by it, where her second son, Joseph, named for his father, used to teach counting and Dilworth's speller. He had once told her that he read to his scholars every week or so out of George Fox's Journal, so the boys growing up under him could see how a man and a Friend should grow. Hester sighed. She did not think that young Joe read much from George Fox in these days.

She could hear him now, jeering across the field at his elder brother.

"Hey, Mose! Straighten her up, there! Thee's weaving like a damn adder!"

Hester winced at the oath. Not among Friends, such speech. And worse, there had been a note in his voice, a tilt to his head more profane than the words he uttered. The other farm wives roundabout had sons who were mild and easy-mannered, whose ways were like the gently sloping valleys they lived in. Why must her sons be wild and strange, like the rough, craggy ravines by Delaware, and all the great, wild woods behind? Sworn to spill hearts' blood with the rifle before they'd turn the other cheek.

The wind cut sharper now through the chilly autumn dusk, turned up the leaves that still clung to the giant sycamores crowding round the mortar-and-pebble springhouse where Hester stood.

But they are ours, she thought proudly, knowing her pride was wicked, but feeling the need of it to lean on, and they will follow the Light—I know they will, for they were taught so. Only—they do not see it as we do. But they are young.

She looked steadfastly up the field with the russet wood behind it and the purpling sunset behind that. Moses, her eldest, was coming straight for her, his head flung back and the black hair tossed away from his dark, ruddy face, his great shoulders held stiff, and his great hands gripping the plow handles behind the heaving ox. Only Moses liked to plow the old way. Her other boys liked better to guide the deft-hoofed horses who could tread a field in half the time. Of all her boys it was Moses who liked best the old ways in everything; who listened longest to Grandsir Israel's blasphemous tales of the days when he and his brother had been the gay blades of Newtown and Four Lanes' End, read out of Middletown Meeting fifty years ago. Perhaps it was from old Israel that the wild blood had come, or perhaps from older Doans than he, strange, black, warrior men in England, she'd heard—the very name meant darkness—before the light of God woke in them and brought them to the Meeting. Fighters back to the days of King John, whoever he might be. Hester's own folk had settled Makefield way in the days of William Penn, and as far as she knew, they had always been Friends in standing, no worse than their neighbors, and she doubted if much better. There was something in her boys, a power that frightened her, a strangeness and a violence that was certainly not in any blood she gave them, that must have come somehow through their gentle Quaker father, carpenter, maker of fine moldboard plows, who loved to play the violin. They were hasty and passionate, hot and cold, proud and sensitive, grievously upset over little things, like the shadow of a leaf blown across the grass. She had borne them, surely, and she loved them, but she had had little part in their making. She had been only the cradle where they lay awhile.

Young Joe stood now at the edge of the field, on the ragged sods cast up by

the plow's turning, as he shouted to Moses to straighten the furrow that looked straight to her already. If Joe was thinner, brighter, more sharply mocking than Moses, it was by a hair's breadth measure. Not every man could tell the two apart. Or Joe from Aaron, or Aaron again from Levi. But Joe always had the best-combed hair, and his tailored suits from Philadelphia bulged with the books he carried in his pockets. At the top of the ridge, on the last field toward Plumstead, Aaron and Levi were toiling now, boys like Moses in form and coloring, but no more like him, really, than a dark window is like a lighted one. Moses would lead them always, and Joe would be thrust and spur to quicken that leadership. Levi and Aaron would follow into evil and good, the one, alas, as quick as the other. But beyond these four, beyond Betsy and Polly and the younger children, beyond them was Mahlon, her fifth son, and Mahlon she would not answer for, for she had known him least of all, even in the days of his depending childhood.

"My boys," she said, musing aloud to God who walked always by her like a familiar household presence, and to the mottled sycamores and the first thin starlight, "my boys may curse and plunder and do otherwise than Friends, but they are strong men when they walk abroad." My boys, she thought, are like the panther and the mountain lion. But Mahlon—he is like the wild deer we never tame or know.

Beyond the plowland, now, back in the tangled oakwood that swept northwest of Plumstead toward Grandsir Israel's, a rifle cracked. That would be Mahlon's. That would mean squirrel or rabbit stew tomorrow noon. The other boys would turn to the plow handles or the cattle stalls sometimes, but not Mahlon. The gun grew in his hand and the deerskin hunting shirt on his back. Dear God, thought Hester, they are home now, and the wickedness is over, and they may never be quite like the good, kind men in the Meeting—never quite like Joseph—but oh—if Thee would look out on them as they stand now—and keep them always from any worse than that!

She pushed back the low-swung boughs, filled her wooden bucket under the straw-thatched roof, and thought to go in where the violin spoke out now in the language of corn growing in the soft summer night when all men who are men want to make love, but something stopped her. The click of a slipper heel on the paving Joseph had set with so much labor round the kitchen door so she would not mire her shoes when the rainwater gathered there, the swish of a skirt through the stiff grasses and dead rose haws. She turned around and faced her sister, Rachel. Rachel was married to Joseph's younger brother, and lived on the old family place the other side of Plumstead, with Grandsir Israel, that merry, wicked one, who held up all the family by the breeches band, and laughed and over-drank and swore, and spoke out masterly well in Meeting, and didn't see why such ways couldn't belong to a Friend and a man.

“Hester,” said Rachel, quick and short, the way sisters can speak to each other with no edging on, though her face showed she was going to speak trouble, “Hester, they’ve begun it again. Here. Close by home.”

Hester looked straight back at Rachel, as dark and as slim as she, with more lines in her face though she was the younger; that because her sickly husband hadn’t been able to carry his share of the burden, the way Joseph had.

“They—they have? Is thee sure?”

“We was afeard they would.”

“I know. Thee better tell me.”

“It was last night. In Bedminster.”

Last night, thought Hester. She had put the children to bed. The boys had ridden out. She had mended Levi’s hunting shirt and gathered a cambric flounce for Polly’s First Day petticoat, while Joseph whittled on a wooden porringer. They had snuffed the candles early and slept sound till daybreak. Last night? Last night her boys could have been—anywhere. She felt terror shaking in her like an ague as she stared into the eyes of Rachel Doan who had been Rachel Vickers. Together they had washed naked in the Makefield brooks and wept and giggled under one counterpane half the night over the Doan boys, when Joseph and the younger Israel were the Doan boys in courting days. Rachel had shared much with her and shared this trouble now.

“What happened—in Bedminster?”

“William Darrah. Thee knows him.”

“Why—why—a good man and a Friend. Did they—did they harm William Darrah?”

Both women looked up the hill to the plowings. The rifle cracked again in the blackening oakwood from which the sunlight had quite gone. The young men called crude jests across the furrows. A worm fence twisted along the upper edge of the cleared land, and over it now leaped a black bear of a man. Abraham Doan, Rachel’s son. Gaunt and lowering, he strode toward his cousins.

“Oh!” cried Hester, low and sharp. “My boys—my boys and *Abraham*!”

“Thee needn’t be so pure about ‘*thy boys*,’ ” mocked Rachel, her black eyes snapping. “Abe’s what he is, true, but I don’t know that I’ve heard thy Mose was much better. ’Twas he helped the British at Long Island. Abe was home.”

“He wasn’t either. He was over in Jersey stealing horses. But William Darrah! I know his wife. She showed me how to soften chestnuts for a goosebelly pudding when I was first married and couldn’t boil water without I burned it. She—”

Her sister interrupted. “Thy boys rode out after supper, didn’t they, Hester?”

"Yes—"

She saw in her mind the five, great black horses, each a carefully groomed pet—Moses' Wild Devil and Mahlon's Firebrand—wheeling out of the stone-faced barn; saw their riders stoop to pass under the sycamore branches; heard the beat of hoofs die away in the muffling white mist that poured up from Neshaminy.

"So did Abe. They don't hold with tax gatherers, thee knows."

"And William was one—new-appointed. I'd forgotten that. Why did he let them make him a tax gatherer and set himself up to rob his neighbors? What did our boys do?"

"Hush! We won't allow our boys did anything—for naught can be proven. But it happened so. Last night thieves rode up to his house, tall men moving in the thick shadow, and first they shot out the lamps so there was no light to see them by, save the cook fire, and no one could name them. They came on shouting, 'We will take nothing except what belongs to the Congress!' "

"Oh, that Congress! It's a trouble to our hearts and a pox on Pennsylvania!"

"Thee's really a Tory then? Thee and Joseph? Thee's both got the name of it, way to Buckingham. But I've denied—"

"No. Not Tory. Not the other thing. We're Friends, and we've got God's plenty all around us and His peace in our hearts. We don't see what's to fight for. We won't do it, nor pay to have it done."

"Well, in Bedminster—I won't spare thee, Hester—they tied him down, tied his wrists together. They asked him where he'd hid the tax money, money the farmers round had brought in for Washington's army."

"There's blood on money like that! Before our boys ever touched it—if they did touch it—there was blood on it."

"He wouldn't tell them. He prayed them to leave him alone and think of their poor country torn all ways with war, but they cursed and said the country wouldn't be so, if it wasn't for men like him."

"I've heard Joseph speak the same of tax collectors."

"I told thee they bound his wrists. When he wouldn't tell, they took live coals off the hearth and heaped them in his cupped hands like apples in a bowl. Thee can still smell burnt flesh if thee rides past there, so Israel heard this noon in Plumstead Tavern. Anyway, he finally told, poor man, and they took the money—God knows Bedminster's a lean town and couldn't spare it—and rode off in the night singing and shouting, leaving him bloody and half afire. Our boys, Hester!"

"Be thee sure?"

"Isn't thee?"

Neither spoke for a few moments. Rachel looked down at the fallen leaves

on the pavement, and Hester looked at the white moon riding wanly up over Plumstead Meeting House.

"What shall we do, Hester? We who love them."

"I—I don't know. Except hold by our own. How is Abraham? He never comes in to visit with me and Joseph now. Shouts for the boys, and waits for them in the yard, and mutters."

"I—he—he won't ever be himself again, I'm afraid. Thee never saw Deborah?"

"No, but I heard Abe talk about her before—before it happened. She must have been fair."

"Oh, she was fair enough. Hair all marigold color and soft as a cobweb. But it wasn't all her fairness. There's plenty girls are fair right here in Plumstead. He didn't have to go to Philadelphia for *that*. A woman has to have more than looks for a man, thee knows, and what he found in Deborah I'm afraid he won't ever find again."

"Won't time help him? And other girls?"

"Thee's heard how he treats other girls—now."

Hester shuddered. "Yes, I've heard. I even keep my eye to Polly when he's about. His own cousin."

"Thee'd better. Then we won't both be sorry. He thinks that because *she* was used so and died of it, it's his right and duty to treat all others as bad, or worse."

"Whom does he blame?"

"He seems to blame the whole world. But he's bitterest against those who call themselves 'Patriots' and 'Liberty Boys,' who've set up this group to goose-gabble and named it Congress.' "

"And given men their blessing to steal from other men and call it tax-collecting."

"Aye. They're all mired in the same pit. My Abe's against it, and thy boys are, too. I'm afraid for them, Hester. I dreamed last night they were all dead men, laying a-row in the sod beyond Plumstead Meeting House. But before that happens—I'm afraid—there'll be others die."

"Dreams are the whisperings of Satan in the night season. Thee'd better get some ancient Friend to pray with thee and Abraham."

"Had I? The same that prays with thy Mose, no doubt. I've heard 'tis he leads our boys when they go thieving."

"Did thee now? Whom does he thieve from?"

"Why—why—the Patriots and Congress."

"A set of idlers with nothing to do but gabble and rob honest men, as thee thyself just said. I'll hear no talk against him till he's done worse than that. Tell me, Rachel, where does thee and thy household stand in this, and what

does Grandsir say? Would he change the King for the Congress and favor men killing each other for this new kingdom they're setting up?"

Rachel drew away, confused, unhappy, having delivered her ill news and being eager to get back over the rough fields while there was still light enough to see by, feeling the milk heavy in her bosom, and remembering Leah, her two months child.

"Grandsir says leave things as they are. He's seen them this way near eighty years, and he's got no cause to want them different. We—a few Friends—are making a purse for William Darrah—"

"For him to spend on his own condition or give to the Congress?"

"So he can go to Philadelphia and have Dr. Rush heal his burns."

"Then Joseph and I will give. The same sum as others."

"I thought thee would. Someone from Meeting will ride by for it in a day or two. Good night—Sister—"

For a moment their years of wisdom and assurance fell away from them and two frightened and troubled young girls peered into each other's eyes in the starlight under the dying leaves.

"Good night."

Rachel went up the road toward Plumstead, picking her way in the twilight, and Hester watched her, feeling defenseless, empty as a drawn gourd. The evil wasn't over then, the nightmare that had begun just after the turn of the year in frozen January.

First had come Sam Bye, a young man in a fine, plum-colored coat, plump and rosy, heir to a rich farm and stone buildings at the foot of Buckingham Mountain, knocking on the door, saying he was a tax collector and wanted money for the Congress. Joseph had asked him mildly to come in for some perry or cider and tell them what was the Congress, but Moses stood behind Joseph with his rifle down, and said to hell with the Congress. Sam Bye had made black scratches with sharp charcoal on a sheet of foolscap and gone away. Then the surveyors from Newtown had come, and trod the field over, and said the little strip below the duck pond that always grew such fine clover didn't belong to them any more—that it belonged to Pennsylvania because the Doans wouldn't pay their taxes; that all men hereabout who wouldn't go to war had to pay taxes to those who would, whether they liked it or not.

Hester had asked God under the sycamores, under the low beams of Plumstead Meeting House, what was this new power that could take their fields away, but He had not answered her. Likely Himself didn't know. It was something men had thought up to busy themselves about for a little while; better sport than hoeing bean rows or getting in harvest, the right concerns of a man. Hadn't the Assembly, in the days when it was made up of tried and worthy Friends, published it abroad that the setting up and putting down of

governments was God's peculiar prerogative?

But from then on life had slid all awry and she had found no way to put it back. There had been trouble. Trouble in Philadelphia between the great merchants and the leather-apron men in their little booths along the streets and common and river. Once, bold and open, in the daytime, a mob dragged Dr. Kearsley out of his own door on Front Street, tore his hand open with a bayonet, and rode him off in a cart singing "The Rogues' March" and yelling for tar and feathers. They ransacked his house after, bringing terror to his niece, the fragile Deborah Mave, Abe Doan's sweetheart, lying ill in bed there, and that terror had brought on death that might or might not have been ready to claim her anyway. Abe had not learned of it till her own folk had taken her home to Merion and buried her by the Meeting House, but since then he had been morose, full of brooding anger, withdrawing himself further and further away from the world happier men lived in. And even that world kept going wrong.

All men's thoughts seemed to run crisscross, like the whirls and eddies in Delaware, and every last mother's son of them seemed to be sure his own way of thought was worth shouting and spilling blood for. King George was suddenly to blame for everything, from a sick hog, to rain on the hay harvest, to a daughter marrying out of Meeting. Next came word that they were fighting somewhere—out beyond Bucks County; towns she had never heard of, in a place called Massachusetts.

Grandsir Israel had heard of Massachusetts, and he sucked his gums wetly behind his white beard as he told them, shrill and wise, how his father had come from there before he was born; come near three hundred miles of swamps and rivers in an ox-cart, with a wife and four baby children, all to get free of a church he didn't like, and live with Friends in Friends' country. That he'd been read out of Meeting later for meddling in astrology didn't matter—he'd seen Massachusetts as a Quaker'd see it, and he didn't like it. Grandsir said it was an ill land, and he didn't care what happened to it. Hester had not been troubled then either. Her menfolk were Friends, and Friends let wars go by them. They do not hinder or abet. They abide with their own concerns. But again Sam Bye came knocking on the door, wanting more money.

This time Joseph joined with his sons in saying they would not pay men to kill each other; that he saw no need for wars and new governments, nor for him to pay taxes to them.

Sam Bye asked him if he would rather pay taxes to King George.

Joseph replied that he saw no need to pay either; that King George only taxed tea, and stamps, and sugar, and trifles a man could do without; he could do without lead and glass, even.

Sam asked him did he not stand with trade, said that King George wanted

to hamper our shipping.

Joseph said Bucks County could live of itself if not a sail stirred from now till the end of the world; that the trees bore till the weight of their fruit broke the branches down, that the old fields still gave new corn.

"Once," said Sam, not in anger but temperate still, for Sam was a Friend, "thee could have thought that way, Brother, and been let alone in it. But things are different—now blood's been spilt. Once thee'd have had a right to stand aloof—but now—"

And Mahlon had put down the violin—he was the only one of the boys who knew how to play it—and called from the kitchen hearthside, "He's selling what he calls 'Free America,' Father! Don't buy any. I'd rather have part share in the northern lights than his ways of freedom where all men march in line, hayfoot, strawfoot!"

"Go home," Joseph had told Sam finally, "and plow thy own furrows for a living, and get thy Meeting to pray for thee. I'm agin all taxations."

So Sam had gone, and the surveyors had come again and paced out the rich black meadow along the Neshaminy, and said it did not belong to Joseph Doan any more. It belonged to she Congress. Joseph did not plow it that year, neither did anyone else, but it grew a noble crop of wire grass and thistles without, which nobody came up from Philadelphia to reap.

Next thing that happened was, she waked up one morning and the boys were gone, all five of them, down through Mahlon. Joseph knew where and shook his head but he would not tell her. All summer she did not see them, and word went from farm to farm of great battles moving ever closer. Once they heard of a battle lost, at a place called Long Island somewhere east of the Jerseys, and Moses, some said, had been there and served the British as a spy in it. Some men praised Moses when they heard the story, and some spat if his name was mentioned, but the country Friends said little, and came to pray with Hester and Joseph.

In the fall the boys came back, but now all Plumstead, down to Wrightstown even, seemed to know something ill of them that she didn't know, that she learned slowly. Sometimes in the store at Buckingham where she went to buy quilted cotton for a petticoat, sometimes in Doyle's Tavern when she was selling eggs and roasting ears, the whispers came to her.

"At Long Island. Thee's heard? A thousand men were killed—some of them good men like us, bred in Bucks County. The stench of their corpses goes up all over New York Bay so folk there scarce can breathe. And Moses Doan helped kill them."

"The Doans steal every horse they can come by, from Montgomery to Hudson side, and drive them off to sell to our enemies, the British."

"They stole the taxes in Newark. Taxes gathered to pay the army that's

fighting to free us all. My boy's in it—writes he has no gun and his feet are bare. Yours, too? I thought so. Levi Doan, that was. Aped a drunkard till he found out where Squire Shelton hid his collectings; tied him up and tickled the bottoms of his feet with feathers until he told."

"The Doans! The Tory Doans! The Bucks County Robbers! Mad Dog Doans! Hell itself can't match them! Hang them all!"

"Joseph," she asked her husband, taking her trouble to him when she could bear it no longer, the way she had done for thirty years, "tell me. What have our boys done? They are not fighting in the war. Not out spilling blood with that Washington. They have come home to live with us as Friends. What is happening in this country? I do not understand it."

He had tried to tell her, not quite knowing himself. "Hester, the times are ill; times in which a man must choose between life and death, and few of us wise enough to tell the one from the other. Our boys have chosen—wrong, perhaps. They have committed violence and outrage, as our neighbors see it. Even now they are planning more. But they do not do so for lust, or greed, or viciousness. They are moved by the inner light. They are called to save America. So they tell me, and I believe.

"I had to make a choice too when I was a young man. Does thee remember the old Indian wars when we were called to go and save the Scotchmen on the frontier?"

"Aye. When I was a new wife and the children small."

"Some of our Meeting fought in it, and others gave money, believing it was the will of God and done to preserve our homes. But I did not. I was moved otherwise. I have never had aught to do with wars, and I never will. We Doans have fought before, but it does not become us, and too often we lose. It was so in England, my Grandsir Daniel told me, when we followed the red rose of Lancaster."

"What was that?"

"If he told me, I disremember. But God's voice has spoken in our boys more strong and terrible, appointed them vessels of greater strength than most men are charged to bear. They affirm, to a man, that the God who bid Abraham sacrifice his son in Moriah has bid them stain their own souls with crime to keep a greater crime away. I do not understand. God has not confirmed them in truth to me, nor shown me how to deal with them. But until he does—I shall hold by our own blood."

"What—what is the greater crime?"

"Mahlon says, and as Mahlon is the quietest, so his wisdom is more when he does speak, he says these armies have arisen to destroy the free America we've always known. He says the men who shout loudest about freedom are the ones who want to take freedom away."

"I—I see what he means. Nobody spoke of freedom much. We had it without knowing. We were so sure it didn't matter. And then came a burst of noise about it—men marching with torches and beating their neighbors—tax collectors like locusts in the heat—"

"Hester," Joseph had said then, taking her hand for a moment and letting it drop, reminding her thus of all the love between them, "scan thy own heart. God may reveal it there for both of us."

But as yet God had not spoken.

Suddenly she realized that she still stood holding the pail of water, and that Rachel's plodding figure had vanished beyond the bare ridge under the pale sky. Joseph's violin had gone silent in the kitchen, and through the half-open door came a streak of yellow lamplight and the sputter and smell of sausages frying.

Down the field the boys trooped home to supper.

She watched them all, Moses, Joe, Aaron, and Levi; tall men, dark and shaggy, coming on with great strides, like moving towers of bone and muscle. She watched Mahlon, half a foot shorter, stepping so lightly across the furrows he hardly seemed to disturb a blade of grass as he passed over; a slender, wiry lad, just nineteen, with sleek, black hair, and a habit of looking always down—because of a fleck in one of his brown eyes and a little scar beneath it, where a hazel bough had struck him in the face once in his boyhood as he raced through the woodland. Again she thought of the wild deer in the groves above Neshaminy.

"Dear God," she whispered into the silver branches drooping round her in the dusk, "dear God—for my boys—let them do no more harm to any living thing."

TWO

Bucks County Ale

•

The world belonged to Lass Marvayne that night as she rode up through Pennsylvania. The sorrel mare Sam had brought to carry her back to Buckingham moved gently up the long, looping road, with never the jar of a false step to disturb her thoughts, and Sam himself, riding just ahead of her, did not trouble them either. For Sam, sturdy and apple-cheeked and kind, had talked on cheerily ever since they'd left Philadelphia that morning, and now she was so used to the rhythms of his voice that she could say yes and no in the right places without listening to him. Not that Sam was dull, and she'd been eager at first to hear about Sally, but he'd gone so soon to talk of the war and the Congress, and the wickedness of King George, and the war had never seemed very close to her even when Crispin went off to it, partly because her father had not had much to say for either side, partly because she had no idea of war. Now she let Sam talk, while she watched the strange landscape unwind before them, and thought how glad she was to be herself, with new adventures ahead of her, all of them sure to be happy ones.

She had taken leave of her father in the mild, gray morning at the door of Robert Morris' mansion in Front Street, but she did not think so much of their parting kiss, desperately casual, as she did of the proud moment when she had stood beside Silas by Mr. Morris' desk in the big, busy counting house the day before.

"And this is my daughter Thalassa," she could still hear him saying. "I want to fix her credit with you. Take a good look at her face, Rob, and make sure you'll remember it."

The merchant, stalky and imposing in bottle-green coat and breeches, bowed forward to reach for her hand, his smooth, round face alight with a genial smile.

"Think there's any man who wouldn't? You bring a lovelier one every year, Silas. Have you more?"

"No. This is all."

Lass stared past him, where half a dozen bent young men seemed to be writing busily in ledgers or crinkling sheaves of paper. It was here that her sister Sally had found a husband. Just so Sally must have stood last year and

looked at the sleek heads, black, and brown, and gold, and rumpled chestnut. Just so the river must have gleamed in the background, blue through the dusty windowpanes. Sally had looked, and one pair of eyes had lifted and caught hers, and now Sally was Mistress Sam Bye, and readying a cradle for Christmas time. Lass stared hard, but no eyes lifted to meet her. Oh, well, she wasn't looking for a husband. She had Crispin, and perhaps he wasn't the handsomest man in Massachusetts, perhaps there was a handsomer—all 'twas, she just hadn't seen one. Then she heard her father say, "Then when she shows her face and writes her name, you're to give her anything she asks for."

"You mean—anything within reason."

"I mean—*anything she asks for*. She knows what I'm good for as well as I do, and she won't go beyond it."

That had been yesterday. They had slept at Mr. Morris' house that night, all pictured tapestry hangings, and spindly carved furniture, with the richest dinner served on the thinnest china Lass had ever seen, and ending with a syllabub and a chilled, syrupy pudding called "raspberry fool"—and no wonder. Mrs. Morris, kind and pretty and brown-eyed, had bustled around in flowered silk cut well down her bosom, and chatted sweetly, but somehow Lass had longed for Hannah's square, dark face and sharp tongue, for one of Hannah's every-night suppers of johnnycake and codfish balls, fried in the iron spider and served on brown earthenware. Plenty there had always been in Silas Marvayne's house, but display and fashion never. In the new house in the high street—well, he was a rich man now, and wanted other ways, or thought he did, the ways of rich men in Boston and Philadelphia. Then, late in the evening, just as a servant was bringing the candles to light them upstairs, Sam Bye had ridden in from Buckingham, and kept them up an hour longer while he talked with his father-in-law and held his calm, Quaker face from showing how startled he was at the beauty of Sally's younger sister.

She hadn't rightly stopped missing Hannah and the frosty marshes round Newburyport until they'd ridden well out of town along the level roads, through a trim little village called Frankford, over a couple of walled bridges, and into a hilly country of red sand. Then her spirits lifted, higher with every mile, till she seemed to be drifting on clouds that shone like the opal ring her grandmother Peg had left her, rather than riding through a dun-colored, sunless day on a sorrel mare. The warm, fiery heart of the opal was love, and between two sure loves, her father's and Crispin's, she felt secure, enthroned, radiant, impervious to any attack or any creeping trouble. Her father had trusted her before his friend with all that he had. There had been swift messages exchanged, and Crispin had sent word that his enlistment term ran out at the year's end. She could expect him then to come to her in Buckingham. He would keep himself free from the war for a little while, to be her husband, he

wrote, let it rain King Georges nine days running.

So she dreamed her way beside Sam, scarcely knowing what they ate when they stopped at the Red Lion Inn, or feeling the closer circle of the trees, or appraising the wide, russet and dull gold farmlands with their scattered, square stone houses. Dusk overtook them finally, with a round, white moon in the deep sky to the eastward, and a wind began to blow, shaking the bare branches everywhere, and swirling the dead leaves across the road, troubling the black surface of the frequent brooks. They rode through a crossroads village Sam told her was Four Lanes' End, and here he tugged out of his gray coat a great, silver turnip watch, and looked at it, and said they'd wait for supper till they got to Newtown. But when they got to Newtown, and passed up a street of stone houses with an open common before them, and a glint of water down the middle of the common behind a row of willow trees, Sam only turned away from the friendly, lighted windows, urged his horse a little, and said he guessed they'd wait till they got to the Anchor. Lass smiled and slapped her own reins on the sorrel neck, and agreed, "The Anchor." She knew what ailed Sam. He wanted to get home to Sally. Well, let him. She wasn't cold, and she wasn't hungry. She was too excited. She was free and light as the white moon blowing across the wild, dark sky, over the darker ridges before them. She and the moon owned all they looked on. The world belonged to Lass Marvayne that night as she rode up through Pennsylvania.

After they had crossed Newtown Creek and left the lights behind, the land flared upward in a long ridge that tilted east, and Lass could tell from the straining sorrel flanks that they were climbing.

"Is it far now, Sam?" she asked, leaning toward him, laughing inside as Sam drew back a little, because she knew why he drew back.

"No. Just to Wrightstown. About—oh, we can have supper and still be home by ten o'clock. Is thee tired, Lass? Just over the ridge here and—"

Suddenly, faintly, far away but nearing, over the spur of black land, east and under the moon, sounded the rhythmic beat of a song, borne on an undercurrent of lusty shouting. She could hear the cry of it coming down the wind, but not the words.

Sam stopped his horse and fumbled at his coat. "Lass," he said, "thee take my wallet and hide it on thee. They've never robbed women—of money—that I know of."

"Now what's this?" she asked him, amused rather than frightened.

"It's the Doans," he said, "their song. It was made against them, but they've turned it in their own praise."

"And what are the Doans? Robbers?" She pulled away her cloak and tucked his wallet in the front of her russet dress.

He made a little sound in the darkness that might have been agreement and

was certainly fear, but gave her no coherent answer.

"Well. It's not likely they'll tear my clothes apart. Do we hide—or go on?"

"We'll try to make the Anchor," he said, urging his horse forward.

Over the black ridge came the burst of song again, crude and boisterous, alive with all the life of devil-may-care young men.

"*Who is so strong, so strong,*
As Moses, Moses Doan?"

Sam drew her suddenly under the shadow of a great tulip tree at the side of the road. His eyes followed the crest of the ridge, white in the moonlight, and she looked there, too. Along the top of the low hill, bare under the clear moon, galloped six black, riderless horses, and all the night swelled with shouting.

"*Your gold you cannot save*
From Moses, Moses Doan—"

The horses sped down the ridge and out of sight to the west.

"*He is the Briton's friend,*
He is the Congress' foe—"

The sound died suddenly. The black shapes had quite passed by. But ruddy Sam Bye was still shaken.

"Well," said Lass, urging the sorrel out of the hazel bushes below the tulip tree, and fingering haws and dead leaves from her hair, "now tell me, what was that? I can see there's things goes on here doesn't go on in the commonwealth of Massachusetts."

" 'Twas the Doans," replied Sam stubbornly, as they turned into the road and headed once more for the Anchor. "An' I got uncommon cause to fear. I'm a tax collector, and they're sworn against all tax collectors."

"Six black horses?"

"There was men on them, Lass; riding so close to the mane, the Indian way, thee couldn't tell—thee, from New England—where things been settled and done a long time."

He did not talk any more, but urged his horse forward between the dark farmlands with lighted windows pricking out the darker bulk of houses, sometimes houses close to the road, their gray stones shining whitely in the moon. Finally they turned into the yard of a tall stone box-like building with a row of tiny windows close to the roof making a third story, and a ship's anchor carved in yellow pine swung over the wide front door. A tow-headed boy, in

ragged breeches and a fringed hunting shirt, came around the corner of the inn when he heard the clatter of hoofs on the pebbled strip that led from the roadway, and took the reins to lead the horses away to fodder at the rear.

"You got back all right, Sam," he said with easy friendliness. "Lucky, too. The Doans be out tonight, I hear."

"Yes," said Sam, lifting Lass down from the sorrel. "Who's within, Thomas? Anyone of Buckingham or beyond? We could use company going that way—after we've broken our journey with food."

Thomas did not answer. He had pulled a twig from the grapevine that scrolled across an arbor at the side of the tavern, and was chewing on it, covertly watching Lass. Lass smiled at him, straight and open, with no thought of coyness, not knowing her smile said there was no man in the world quite like Tom, the stable boy at the Anchor. Sam smiled wryly, shoved open the nail-studded door, and stepped aside for Lass to enter.

A great fire blazed at one end, but there was little other light, save for a thin, flickering candle set here and there in a battered sconce tipped half sideways. Patches of shaggy beam stuck out through the thin coating of gray plaster on the walls, and dust obscured the tiny windowpanes. Not a tidy, shining place, but dim, and malty, and full of the rich, brown smell of roasting game. Two great pine slab tables nearly spanned the room, with a dozen or so twig bottom chairs flanking each. Six men, in the drab wool clothes of farmers, had drawn their chairs to the fire, drawn a settle into their midst to rest their ale mugs on. They turned and stared wordless at Lass, then, more slowly, greeted Sam.

"Has thee had a favorable journey, Brother Bye?" asked one, elderly, lean-jawed, balancing a broad-brimmed Quaker hat on his knee.

"Fair enough, thank thee," said Sam, leading Lass toward them. "Friends, this is Mistress Bye's sister, come here from Massachusetts, to dwell the winter with us."

Lass curtsied and bowed her head demurely, her bright hair all hidden under the russet hood of her cloak.

"These, Lass, are all my good friends." His eye moved around the circle as he introduced them, John Penquite, the old Quaker who had bid them welcome, Landlord Croasdale, bald, ruddy, and round as a pot; then two flinty, gray-faced men, with worry in their eyes. "Arkle and Aiken! Has either of thee heard?" He turned back to Lass. "Their sons, Dick and Henry, were in Magaw's troop at Fort Washington. News has come back they may be captured, or—There was a battle—" His voice trailed off.

Arkle cleared his throat and spat into the fire. "We ain't heard," he said sharply, "aught of the boys. All we heard was, whole damn Continental Army's fleeing across Jersey like game running out when you fire the woods."

"That's right," echoed Aiken in a deep, growling voice, "but they better stand at Delaware, they had. I say, we'll all be getting our guns down and loading them within a week. It ain't Bunker Hill and New York Island no more. It's Bucks County. What do they say about it in town, Sam?"

"In town? In Philadelphia?" Sam looked grave. "Well, 'tis true, Congress sets uneasy there. 'Tis a dark time for the country. But General Washington says even if we be driven beyond the Delaware, beyond the Alleghenies even, his men will rally to him and he will fight on from there. Looks like it might happen that way. We are fleeing across Jersey—'twas no lie thee heard—an' Lord Cornwallis coming after. There's some talk the capital's threatened."

Two men remained whose names Lass did not yet know, and one of them stood up and came forward from the shadow to hand an empty mug to the landlord. He was tall and raw-boned, young, with brown hair and eyes and a beaky face. "Capital!" he scoffed. "We ain't got no capital; no great city with towers like I hear they has abroad. We can load Congress into a haycart, and haul it off, and set it up anywhere—and to my way of thinking, it's better so." He stopped; stood looking at Lass.

"This is Will Hart," said Sam, "and yonder, back in the corner's his brother Samuel. Is thee going home to Plumstead tonight?"

"You mean," said Sam Hart, and even in the shadow Lass could see that he looked very like his brother, "you want our company as far as Buckingham, since the Doans be about, and you've likely got a bit of tax money on you."

Sam reddened. "Well—about that, Friend."

"Oh, we'll see you home, won't we, Will? Always sleep better in my own bed anyway. In a hurry?"

"Yes, but not till we have supper."

Landlord Croasdale had been seating Lass at the table and bustling back and forth between kitchen and taproom. Now he set out cups of heavy brown ale, a loaf of wheaten bread, and a platter heaped with the dark, sweet, oily flesh of wild pigeons, skewered between pink slices of ham and browned on the spit. Lass clapped her hands and threw off her cloak. Sam sat down beside her and they began to eat. The fire snapped and crackled; dead leaves swirled against the windowpanes in the moonlight, and the men left off their troubled talk of war. Finally, when no voice had been lifted in the room for at least five minutes, Lass swallowed the last morsel of pigeon on her plate and asked of anybody who would answer her, "Who are the Doans? And why is Sam afraid of them?"

For a moment nobody replied. Landlord Croasdale shifted uneasily in his chair. Will Hart had been polishing the long barrel of his pistol with a bit of rag. Now he spoke, mild, and unhurried, and very sure of himself.

"You shouldn't say Sam's afraid," he reproved her. "A man don't like to

have that said of him. Say he's cautious when there's Doans about."

"Well? Why is he cautious?"

" 'Cause he's got no wish to stop a bullet with his head," answered Sam Hart.

"Thee's never known them shoot a man!" cried old John Penquite vehemently. "They was always good boys—Friends—until—"

"No," said Will slowly, "they haven't *killed* yet. But that'll come. First off, all they did was make fools of folk—tickling feet with feathers and such. But 'twas no jest, what they did to William Darrah."

"How is Brother Darrah?" asked Sam. "I been from home so much—"

"Dr. Rush doubts his burns will ever heal. The flesh rots away beneath them and runs out in foulness. The Doans—"

"The Doans," continued Will Hart, as if nothing had interrupted him, "went to school with us. All Plumstead schoolhouse was spilling full of Doans and Harts ten or fifteen years ago. We leaped and wrestled and hunted with 'em, and swam Tohickon Creek, and fished the Delaware. They was Quakers and we was Presbyterian, but no matter. They was good boys, and my friends. But come the war, we saw things a different way. Sam and me come out for the Congress. Old Joseph's boys didn't want aught to do with war, but when they kept losing land 'cause they'd neither fight nor pay fines not to, and their cousin Abe lost his sweetheart the way he did—they turned wild-like—started their own war on everybody. First they stole horses and sold them—to get back their own, they said. Then they started robbing tax collectors; wouldn't take a man's private funds, they'd boast; only what belonged to the Congress. But it's growing on them—the wildness, I mean. *I* say, they'll kill, and I'd rather face up to Howe's cannon with a slingshot than be chosen tax collector of Bucks County." He looked steadily at Sam Bye.

"How about Abe Doan and the girls?" rasped old Aiken. "Be them stories true?"

Will Hart shook his head. "That he forces them against their will? Couldn't be! The girls had an eye for Abe before he could aim a rifle or smoke a pipe of tobacco. If he takes a girl, it ain't agin her will—at the time of it—no matter what excuse she makes after."

"Mose is better-looking."

"They're afraid of Moses. Indians say he's an evil spirit, since he got the live steel into their boy, Walking Thunder. Once when he was swimming the Delaware under a full moon, they say, they caught the flash of hoofs and a tail."

Lass leaned forward, elbows on the table, her chin in her hands, her red hair tumbled out of her hood and down on her russet clad shoulders.

"Quakers set up for hotspurs?" she murmured. "Well, I never heard—"

The men went on talking.

"Which one was it got Farmer Nugent down below Bristol last week?"

"That was Abe. Gil Nugent was heading home, sleepy, from market, and give a stranger a ride. He offered to drive while Gil took a nap, and when Gil woke up, he was alone in the woods, less his watch and twenty pounds. They ain't so careful to take just tax money as they was. But Gil's a good Whig, and has talked all over lower Bucks how he'd like to see the Doans hanging in a row."

"Abe's worse than a Mohawk," said Landlord Croasdale, "but still it's Moses is the heart and soul of them, and it's he they follow. Aaron and Levi's got no special harm about them. Aaron can think up more pranks that are all laugh and no particular hurt than any man in the county. But they'd both of them jump off the top of Jericho Mountain if Moses told them to."

"Mahlon—?"

"The runt of the litter! All he wants is to go back in the woods gunning, and not be bothered at all having to suit his ways to other men's. But he's as true to Moses as the rest be."

"At Long Island?" asked John Penquite, in his quavery, old man's voice. "They say Moses was there. 'Tis hard to believe. I knew his father—What did he do?"

"Whatever it was, they say he got five hundred dollars for it. That's more then Iscariot got for selling Christ."

"Aye! Mose was in with the British, right enough. Now Joe—he's the dandy. When he goes down to Philadelphia—"

Lass sat up suddenly, listening to a faint patter of sound that she took to be raindrops on the roof, but when she turned to look out the window, she saw that the moon still shone. Then she knew the sound for hoofs, coming nearer, nearer, sweeping into the tavern yard under the grape arbor. She heard scattered shouts; a curse; a laugh. Then the door burst open.

The first man to enter was huge and brawny, with strongly cut features and deepset, glowing eyes under shaggy brows. He wore his black hair Indian straight, and a red silk handkerchief at his throat. He moved lightly and covered the taproom with a thick, short-barreled pistol. After him swarmed three others, equally tall and fierce-looking, dressed like their leader in brown linsey-woolsey coats, knee breeches of sheepskin, and the broad, gray hats of Quakers, worn at a wicked tilt. The fifth intruder differed only in his costume, proud with silk stockings and silver-buckled shoes, plush breeches, and a gilt-buttoned coat with a touch of lace under the chin. And then, last of all, a little diffident, moving as lithely as an Indian through the western forests, came a slight lad in a deerskin hunting shirt, his dark head bare. He was carrying a rifle and looking down.

The leader stood still, holding the gun trained on the little group with Lass at its center, while the others massed beside him.

"Ales around, Landlord," he said finally, in a deep voice, rough but not frightening. "We Doans be dry."

Landlord Croasdale scuttled to the small bar in the corner and raked an armful of thick, brown bottles from the shelf behind it.

"Don't you put no coals in my hands, Moses Doan," he quavered. "I ain't gathered no gold for the Congress."

"Ah, Congress," sighed Moses, keeping his gun level, his eyes steady. "Congress is hogs. I've a mind to go over to Durham Ironworks some night and blow their powder up."

The bottles passed from hand to hand among the Doans till all were supplied. Then Moses spoke again. "We don't mean harm here tonight, so thee needn't fear, Landlord. We're not all that people say we are. We be poor Quaker lads who's brought thee their small custom." He flung a gold coin on the table, where it struck, and rang, and circled off to fall on the floor, whence no one retrieved it. "We want thee to join us in a toast to King George, our rightful King. Mahlon—" The slight lad moved forward. "Thee look to the Whigs. I like to shut my eyes when I drink a toast."

As his gun went down, Mahlon's came up and leveled. The other Doans lifted their bottles.

"Stand up!" said Mahlon, in a voice sharp-edged as the crack of a rifle.

Sam and the landlord, the Harts and the old men, scrambled to their feet. After a second, Lass stood up too. Lord, she was thinking, aren't they handsome! I couldn't see they'd have to force anybody.

"To George—his England!" said Moses soberly. "With a short swallow."

"Drink it!" snapped Mahlon.

And seven good Bucks County Whigs drank briefly, bitterly to George the Third.

"And to the Doans—Free America! Drink while thy breath lasts thee."

Everyone drank long and deep.

As Moses lowered his bottle and looked around, he seemed to see Sam for the first time. Twirling his pistol, still under the protection of Mahlon's gun barrel, he stepped forward.

"Sam Bye! Well met, Brother! I'll bet thee's carrying Doan money on thee. Money thee stole from us for the Congress. Try him, Aaron."

A tall, brown-clad brother stepped forward, thrusting his hands into Sam's pockets, pulling his shoes off, shaking his hat—finding nothing. Sam held himself stiff and looked at the floor in sullen silence; neither helped nor hindered.

Joe Doan walked close to Moses then, the skirt of his coat a-rustle in its

taffeta lining. He whispered, and he laughed, and both men looked at Lass.

"Is thee taking home another wife, Sam Bye?" Moses asked. "Thee thinks well of thy manhood, sure. The first one was uncommon fair, but this one surpasses all I've ever seen. If some day I've time to go a-wenching—"

Sam stood taut in helpless anger.

"Girl—did thee come here with Sam Bye? Is thee hiding our money on thee?"

Lass smiled at Moses. "How can I tell your money from any other? Does it have your name on it? Mine carries the King's picture and nothing more. Can you prove claim to that?"

Moses roared with pleased laughter. "A proper hellcat! Put it on the table and I'll pick it up. That'll be my proof."

Lass hesitated a moment. I—I don't have to, she thought. He won't search me. He won't shoot me. I just won't do it.

She smiled again, then shut her lips tightly like a stubborn child and shook her head.

Moses' laughter turned into blank surprise, then back into mirth.

"Then we'll shake it out of thy petticoats ourselves. Boys, who's to search the lass? It'll be rare sport for the right man. Shall we draw for it?"

Joe bent forward again, smiling out of his gay, dark eyes, smoothing his powdered hair.

"Suppose we let Mahlon do it, Mose. He needs experience." He laughed tauntingly.

Mahlon turned a dull red, his rifle barrel wavered for a moment, and Sam started forward. It steadied, and Sam stopped.

"Not I," muttered Mahlon. "Let Abe—"

Once more Moses aimed his pistol before him. "Levi'll hold thy gun, Mahlon," he cried, an edge of sternness in his voice. "Do as I tell thee!"

"Pick her up by the heels and shake her, Cousin," bellowed Abraham, tilting his head back and lifting an ale bottle.

Levi, grinning, snatched Mahlon's rifle away and shoved him rudely forward till he finally stood face to face with Lass, close enough to touch her if he reached out.

She had never been frightened in her life, and she was not frightened now, but as she looked at Mahlon Doan, she felt a change come across her, as if her blood had turned in her veins and started to flow another course. She knew the way a river feels at the one moment of tide-turn, when it waits immovable, poised between end and beginning. She knew the way a tree feels when the warm flood of lightning pours into it from the sky, and it receives at once its glory and its death. And like river and tree, she did not understand her feeling. She only knew that she was terribly shaken as if by some invisible storm

blown out upon her from another world. She could only dig her fingers into the rough pine table, and stand there, and look at him.

She saw a slender lad with straight, dark hair and shy, brown eyes, avoiding her own, his face thin and finely featured, his naturally sweet mouth drawn to a harsh line. His head was flung back, and every muscle about him warily taut, like a wild deer, testing the air, ready to streak off through the trees at the first whisper of danger. She did not see all of time and the generations that had gone into the making of Mahlon Doan, but she could sense the wild, free spirit in him that had come down from his old kin who ranged the Delamere Forest and rescued the Black Prince at Crécy, a spirit that all of Plymouth deaconry and Plumstead Meeting House had never quite killed and rooted out. It spoke to a free spirit in her—a spirit that had crossed the sea under Peg Magoon's peat-stained shawl from the dripping oakwood glens of Derry. Other men she had looked at all her life, and known, with a look, what they were, but this man she would never know, not even if she were to live as close to him as his deerskin hunting shirt, all the days of their lives. And as he was the one mystery she could never solve, just so, she recognized him, too, as the most familiar thing she had ever seen in all her life. When she stood and looked at Mahlon Doan, she was looking, too, at Lass Marvayne.

Desperately she fought for composure; to hide her confusion till she could be alone with it, and take it out privately, and try to understand it. And as she struggled with herself, she could hear his brothers calling raucously to Mahlon.

"What ails thee, lad?"

"Be thee a Doan?"

"Put thy hand in her bosom!"

"Ha! He's afeard of what Ruth Gwydion will say!"

Again they shouted with laughter. Joe stepped forward and prodded him between the shoulders with his rifle. Then Lass looked again at Mahlon, and saw how he hated the whole thing, the ridicule, the compulsion to do a deed he despised, the forces trapping him and driving him to do it. She had intended to scratch and bite and pull hair, to save Sam's money if she could, but all she wanted now was to free Mahlon from the plight he was in. She groped with her fingers for the wallet, lying warm in the lace of her underbodice, pulled it out and held it toward him.

"Here. Take it," she said, her voice shaking.

He flushed, muttered, and looked down at his own fingers as they closed over the sleek leather. His brothers were cursing in good-natured dismay that their fun had ended so quickly. Mutely, he handed the money to Moses, seized his rifle from Levi, and slipped through the doorway into the night.

Joe and Abe were aiming their guns now, while Moses took off his hat and bowed sweepingly. "Good night, Friends. Thee can rest easy, Sam Bye. We

have expiated thy sin of thievery and lusting after thy neighbor's goods." He was retreating through the doorway, his brothers all around him. "And remember," he spoke very soberly, a deep light glowing under his shaggy brows, "Moses Doan can have as clear a word from the Lord as ever the prophets and apostles had."

Then with a rush they were gone, the door torn at one leather hinge and hanging open, moonlight streaming through—then hoofbeats dying in the night.

Lass sank into a chair and put her head down on the table for a moment, then she straightened up and shook back the riot of her hair. Everybody was running this way and that, muttering about what they'd have done if they'd only had their guns by them; the landlord slopping their cups full, babbling that it would be free and they needed it. "They ain't never dared before to come out so plain," he exclaimed hotly. "Folks can't go on looking the other way much longer."

Sam came close and put his hand on her arm. "We was lucky, Lass, that none of us took hurt—that we lost only the money. I am glad thee had the wits to give it to him. But thee looks so queer. Is thee sick—or only frightened? 'Tis no wonder if thee be so—"

"No—no, I'm not frightened, or sick, and yet—something—"

She took a deep swallow of the foaming brown stuff in the pewter cup before her, then lifted her blue eyes and looked straight at him.

"It's strong ale they brew in Bucks County," she said.

THREE

No Need for Violence

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"Thee'll be a sight to see when thee's with child. Lass. Thee's so tiny," said Sally Bye, standing in front of the mirror that hung over the mahogany dresser in her bedroom and preening at her own reflection, conscious that in her ninth month, she herself looked very well; full and heavy, but not graceless or misshapen. Sally was a tall girl with a placid face and fair hair shining in the glow of the candles she had lighted against the morning dark. A wan, reluctant sunrise faintly yellowed the sky over Buckingham Mountain, but grotesque patches of shadow still clung to the frosty meadows outside, to the depths of chamber and hallway.

"Likely I will," said Lass, her blue eyes laughing as she tied on her hood and drew her cloak round her, for she and Sam were off that day on a shopping trip to Trenton, "but I shan't worry about it this week."

"Hmm! Well, maybe in a month or two you will. You *are* marrying Crispin at New Year's, aren't you? Father mote that you were. My! I hope I'll be up by then."

A faint shudder of distaste swept through Lass suddenly, as if she'd eaten spoiled meat at breakfast. Oh! She didn't want to marry Crispin, she thought. She had wanted to marry him once back in Newburyport before—But now—Aloud she said, "Sally, how do you always think to say 'thee' and 'thy' in the right places when you're with Sam?" Mahlon was a Quaker, and he would say "thee" and "thy" in the right places. He had grown up saying them. Mahlon would have a mother who would expect any girl he brought home to say "thee" and "thy."

Sally's brows drew together. As she grew conscious of her speech it became hopelessly mixed. "I'd forgotten, Lass—not seeing you for a year—how your mind does go from one thing to another like a bee in a cloverbed. I was talking about thy wedding, and now thee's off on the plain talk. What does thee want to know about it for? Thee won't talk it with Crispin. He went to First Church, same as we did."

"I still want to know how you do it."

Sally had taken Sam's faith when she took Sam, and the faith had, a little more cautiously, taken her. Now she answered thoughtfully. "Well—I try to

pretend ‘you’ and ‘your’ are wicked words and I must never use them. But it’s more in *feeling* ‘thee’—”

“Sally,” shouted Sam from the foot of the stairs, “isn’t Lass ever coming? Ruth’s here, and the horses are ready.”

“In a minute, Sam. I want to go over the shopping list with her.” Sally pulled a folded paper from the pocket of her flowing pink apron. “It’s so good to have a woman to help with these things again. Sam tries, but he has no judgment—even Father was better. Now I want sweet oil and oil of peppermint, and flannel and molasses, and wooden button moulds, and two packs of fine-eyed needles—and see if you can get some catnip and rosemary. The herb garden’s run wild—Sam’s mother’s been dead three years, you know—and I did what I could with it in one season, which wasn’t much. But next year—”

“Who is Ruth?” asked Lass, playing with her bonnet strings.

“Oh, Ruth Gwydion. The school teacher. A strange, quiet thing. Her father brought her over the sea from Wales when she was a little girl. And then he died. There was something wrong about him, I think. But everyone loves Ruth, she’s so kindly—and good with the children. She brought me some bittersweet the day before you came, and happened to say she wanted to go to town, and I told her Sam meant to go this Saturday and she could ride with him as well as not.”

Ruth! Ruth Gwydion! The name one of the Doan boys had flung at Mahlon that night at the Anchor a week ago! If he put his hand in another girl’s bosom, Ruth Gwydion was someone who would mind. “Sally,” she asked soberly, folding the shopping list into smaller and smaller squares, “does she—is she the sweetheart of one of the Doans?”

Sally put her hands on her hips and stared at Lass.

“Now wherever did you pick up that story, and you scarce here seven days yet? Hannah’s sure given you her nose for news. It’s something they whisper about her, but I myself don’t believe it—none of the Friends do. I’ve never seen a sign—yes, Sam, we’re coming.”

As Lass walked out of Sam Bye’s front door and across the narrow stone porch, she wanted suddenly to run back to where Sally stood waving at them, to hide forever in the tall, high-dormered house set in the oak grove. She did not want to go down into the yard where Sam stood holding his horse and her own, where another horse waited, and on its back a girl she did not know. But she went. And then, when she looked at Ruth Gwydion as Sam presented them, her fears vanished and she choked back a laugh of relief. For Ruth Gwydion was hardly pretty. She had a dark, serious face, dark eyes with green flecks in them, too heavy brows, the hair growing too low on her forehead, a generous figure, a full, sweet mouth. She was no match in looks for Lass

Marvayne.

Sam helped Lass up on the sorrel that had been Sally's when Sally could ride, and they started off, taking the trail, all fallen leaves and dead fern, that ran west around the end of Buckingham Mountain into the Durham Road. South they went, and then east at Pinetown, heading for the Delaware over half-frozen brooks, past fields yellow with dry cornstalks, and green with winter wheat.

"I think we'll go down this side and cross at Beatty's Ferry," explained Sam. "I doubt we'll get home tonight, but I'll see to decent lodgings for us. Will thee mind, Ruth?"

"No. No, I'll not mind, Brother Bye, but will not thy Sally? Will she not be afraid—without thee—and her time so near?"

Did she imagine it, thought Lass, or was Ruth chiding her for not staying with her sister? Why, Sally had wanted her to go! She pouted. Sam went on reassuringly. "Oh, she has two maids in the kitchen—one old and seasoned—and there are men in the fields to send for aid if she needs it. Sometimes I think that she likes to be by herself a little, now and then."

He had never thought that of Sally before Lass came. He wondered if she had sent for the girl remembering only the laughter and bright life of her, forgetting how perverse Lass could be—in little ways only, and of course, not meaning to. He sighed. Sally was never perverse. He sensed that Ruth would not be. Along the riverside they rode, under a pearl-gray, sunless sky, passing scattered farms with here and there a tavern sign swinging above a wide front door, having little to say to one another.

It was nearly midday when Sam led them down to the water edge and out on a flat wooden scow moored level with the bank. Two men stood on the sodden plank floor already, one leaning against a willow basket full of brown eggs wrapped in straw, the other with two suckling pigs in narrow slat boxes. As they shoved out on the broad, shallow stream, Sam pointed ahead of them. "Look, Lass! That's Trenton."

You could have set all Trenton down on the Training Green at Newburyport, she thought, and still had enough room left over to hold muster day. Two parallel streets ran up a gentle slope, lined with houses of frame, brick, and stone, and a great many people seemed to be astir there, women in bright skirts and farmers in russet, with a pepper-and-salting of Quaker gray; all come for the Saturday Market, or business at the post office and county court, or to meet the stage from New York or the sloops from Philadelphia. Gigs and wagons crowded the gutters, and two greasy shafts of smoke poured up from tall chimneys above ugly blackened buildings massed at either side of town, the iron works and the steel works, Sam told her; lighter smoke rose up from the paper mill, and no smoke at all from the grain mills to the south. He

pointed downstream to the famous rose gardens at Bloomsbury Court, all gone to haws and dead leaves with autumn, and to the brown stain of Stacy Potts' tanyard, half up the hill, and across from the sturdy brick bulk of the English Church. But there were no tall steeples, and an apple orchard crept in between the iron works and the Quaker Meeting House on the east side. Two creeks wound downward to the Delaware, their mouths sluggish and stony, and all before the town lay a carpet of reeds and yellow marsh grass, protected from the force of the full current by a crescent island of sand and alders. Then the scow grated against the Jersey shore, and they were leading their horses out through the frozen weeds, up Calhoun Lane and into Trenton, past the gray stone barracks with white porches stark in the thin yellow sunshine.

"We'll stop here first," Sam said, carefully looping the three sets of reins to a bit of fence beside a sprawled, frame house that was almost a mansion, with twin porches on its front and a pump close by. "And if Abe Hunt doesn't have what thee wants, we'll try Alex Calhoun's on our way out of town, though Abe has the larger stock. I've no business in Trenton, but with Thomas Middleton —on the Maidenhead Road."

He watched Ruth sharply. There were those who said one of the Doan boys was her lover, those who affirmed it was not well to talk in her presence of anything it would be harm for the Doans to know. He remembered that time last spring—before anyone had really taken the boys seriously—"boys" they were still called, from Moses whom he knew to be twenty-six, to Mahlon who could be scarce nineteen—when they had hurt no one really, only gone whooping around the countryside at night, cheering King George and stealing a few horses. They had ransacked the school house, he knew, and the small stone cottage beside it, which the Meeting had allotted to the teacher. The story ran that six Doans had gone in that night, and only five been seen to ride away. Nobody was quite sure which one had stayed with Ruth, if any of them had. And she kept her eyes down, and spoke always so modestly, and was often so rarely moved in Meeting. His wife liked and trusted her. But for himself—He watched her quietly; tried to find some clue in her changing eyes; failed utterly.

Then Lass startled and exasperated him by crying out brightly, "Oh, yes! Sally said the Middletons had some tax money they'd raised in the Jerseys; that you were going to get it and take it to Philadelphia."

Ruth Gwydion's lashes lay long on her cheek.

"Lass," said Sam sharply, "hold thy tongue."

"Why?"

"At home—I'll tell thee." He turned to Ruth, heavily cheerful. "Can thee get what thee wants at Abe's?"

She smiled. "Yes, I think so. He has ordered two books for me from

Philadelphia. I want some spice and sugar, and silk facings for a hood."

Sam guided them to the right of the twin porches and turned to leave. "When thee's done trading, I'll be over by the Court House." He motioned to a stone building with two flights of tall, iron-railed steps leading up the front to the second story, the barred windows of the jail beneath. "There'll be lawyers in, from all over Hunterdon County, and I'd like to hear from the east, if I could—what news of the army."

He walked away, and Lass turned, her hand on the iron latch that would open Abe Hunt's store, and looked back into the peaceful, ordered bustle of King Street. Coaches, wagons, gigs, farmers' barrows—wheels turning everywhere, she saw—for Trenton was a travelers' town, halfway between two great cities, near halfway between New England and the South. Below its slope, little flecks of white sail wafted the river boats up to the gray-brown-green-changing rapids that marked the falls of the Delaware—not like the great, salt-crusted sails of the sea-going ships that would be riding in the blue water about Newburyport that morning. She should be homesick, she thought. She tried to be homesick. But she had never been able to lie to herself. If she were in Newburyport where she had been born and lived all her life, she would be homesick now for Bucks County where she had never been before last week, where the Doan boys rode black horses down a wild ridge under the moon.

From the Market House beyond the square stone post office, a cow lowed plaintively and fowl hissed and cackled.

"Shall we go in?" asked Ruth, smiling, putting her hand over Lass's hand on the latch.

Once inside, the girls separated, each taking her own way among the goods spread out on shelves and counters, toward the pot-bellied iron stove against the rear wall. Lass half lost herself in bolts of blue and orange-rosy wool, trying to pick out a piece for a present for Sally's baby, and, looking up, she missed Ruth altogether, but it was only for a little while, and then she discovered the teacher, her shopping finished, sitting quietly on a heap of full grain sacks in a corner, reading one of her new books.

They went out finally to find Sam and stow their purchases in the saddlebags he had brought, and he took them to the Fox Chase tavern, a frame house just past the head of town, where Mistress Bond, a trim woman in a ruffled cap and blue linen bodice, who favored Sam as a well-known traveler in these parts, served them with hominy soup and bacon and dried cabbage, wine custard and spiced ale. Ruth ate well and daintily, and Lass licked her lips over the humble richness of the food, but Sam seemed quiet, ignored half his hostess' friendly sallies, and cleaned his plate as if it were hard work for him. Sunset had dwindled into a swirl of blackish gray clouds and a sharp wind

blew on Jersey out of Pennsylvania as they finally left Trenton behind them and rode between worm fences and bare apple orchards. And in a mile or so, came the snow. It was a wet, white snow that turned into water when it touched any substance, either flesh, or field, or stone, and the wind drove it in eddies everywhere, a chill wind that pierced through wool and fur and leather. When they dismounted at last, and huddled, rapping at the front door of Thomas Middleton's spacious brick farm house halfway to Maidenhead, the full night had come on, though it was barely five o'clock, and they could not have been any colder or wetter if they had just been fished out of the Delaware.

Thomas and his wife were a frail old couple, looking strangely alike, bent, with bloodless faces and thin silvery hair that made Lass think of haloes round the heads of holy people in the books in Mr. Lowell's library that he used to let her look at when she was a little girl. A plump, black-eyed serving maid ran merrily about, fetching wood, water, and mulled ale, corn cakes and ham, setting out more lights, mending the fire. The Middleton house had a look of comfort; very old pine furniture, a wide hearth, turkey-red cushions, and a dresser full of pewter and heavy silver. Here, too, Sam was a familiar presence, it seemed, welcomed and loved, and he and the girls were soon drying themselves on a broad cushioned settle before the blaze, yielding without argument to Mistress Middleton's plea that they would stay the night.

Lass had been trying to answer her hostess' motherly questions about Sally, when she heard Sam say to Mr. Middleton, "Perhaps thee and thy wife had best leave. Better to lose thy house and goods than something dearer to thee. To thy son in Philadelphia, perhaps—"

"Thee thinks he's coming this way?"

"Washington? Yes. I heard it in Trenton this noon. He must mean to retreat across the river, for he's sent the word for us to gather up every boat and raft that we can find. Dan Bray and Jerry Slack are seeing to it. He won't harm thee. He honors Friends if he cannot understand them. But after him will come Cornwallis, maybe Howe, maybe the hired Germans. And they spare no one. Truth is, Brother Middleton, our whole army's in flight! And men deserting every day! I don't know what's to save our country."

"This will help," said Thomas Middleton quietly, shuffling his old feet in their felt slippers to a corner cupboard, thrusting an iron key into a massive lock. He drew forth a leather bag, and carrying it close to him, crossed the room and held it out to Sam.

"For the Congress," he continued soberly. "Two hundred pounds I have gathered among Friends in the Jerseys who deem it unfitting to fight, but will share their substance—and one hundred of my own."

Snow hissed against the pane outside, the wind threshed in a tangle of cedar boughs about the house, the candles flickered, and the fire roared in the

stone sheathing of the chimney. Everyone grew silent, fearful, not knowing why. Then the night turned all alive with shouting, and heavy blows sounded on the oak-paneled door. Sam paused, irresolute, the money sack dangling limply in his fingers. It was the old Quaker who moved first, half shoving, half dragging the younger man to the cupboard, thrusting him in, turning the lock, throwing the key in the fire. Then he drew up his bent shoulders to pitiful straightness, gave one warning look at the women who had fled to the furtherest corner by the stairway, and went to fling open his front door.

"I am a man of peace," Lass heard him say, but he was buffeted rudely to one side.

"Thee is an enemy of the Lord," spoke Moses Doan as solemnly as a preacher in his pulpit. "The Lord meant America to be a free country, without congresses or tax collectors."

In swaggered the Doans, quieter, less boisterous than they had been in the tavern, but going straight to their work. She saw Moses, in the lead, as always, and Joe, strutting a little, in a fur-collared cloak. She saw Levi and Aaron, grinning, as they started to rummage in the dresser drawer and the chest between the windows. She saw Abraham, suddenly turned handsomer than all the others, and striding toward the huddled women. But she did not see Mahlon, and Mahlon, she had heard, was the one often assigned to watch outside, while the others went at the work that took a tougher conscience. Not stopping to pull her wet cloak from the drying rack, unnoticed by old Thomas and the terrified women, she slipped behind Moses who had just seized Mr. Middleton by the throat, and ran out into the storm.

He was only a little way off, standing by the edge of the road in a thicket of wind-lashed willow trees, calming the six black horses, peering sharply this way and that through the night.

She flicked the snow from her lashes, brushed back the damp flame of her hair. She stepped boldly up to him.

"May I watch with thee, Mahlon Doan?"

He turned like a spring uncoiling.

"Watch for what? For Sam Bye?"

Lass misunderstood him completely. "Sam's nothing to me. He's my brother-in-law!" Her words tumbled out with a rush. He looked at her coldly.

"I've naught to do with either thee or Sam Bye," he said.

She drew back a little and looked at him through the falling snow and the night that drew around them. He was bareheaded, and she watched the white flakes fall into the darkness of his hair and turn to drops of silver, watched the closed, unhappy darkness of his eyes, the grimness of his thin young face.

"No? Not ever?"

She gave him the smile that she had been giving men for sixteen years, and

never before had one failed to respond to it, or failed to smile back. But now Mahlon Doan did not smile. Instead he growled.

"What is thee out here for?"

"What does thee think?"

He gasped, floundered for words for a moment, then he said, "Thee better get back inside."

Just then came a sharp scream from a dormer window in the roof. Mahlon uttered a curse deep in his throat. "It's Abe again. I wish he wouldn't do *that*!"

"What?"

"I think—he's—hurting some girl. Perhaps thee's better out here. Were there girls in there?"

Lass looked him straight in the eye, feeling as if she had cut herself and was rubbing salt and lemon in the cut to clean it, knowing it had to be done. She had to know what he would say, how his look would change.

"Yes," she said, "Ruth Gwydion," and waited.

He shrugged his thin shoulders impatiently. "I know she's there. He won't hurt Ruth. Anyone else?"

"Mistress Middleton."

"She's old."

"And the bound girl—"

"That's it, then." He looked moodily down the road toward the lights of Trenton pricking through the snow.

"Why won't he hurt Ruth?"

"Why should he?" he asked, not meeting her eyes. "She's a Friend like we are. She never harmed us. There are enough Whig women—"

A great hubbub was going on all over the lower floor of Thomas Middleton's house, but no lights, and no more crying came from the dormer. She waited, not knowing what to do or say. Mahlon scuffed nervously in the snow.

"I wish he wouldn't," he said again, talking to himself rather than to Lass, dismissing her presence. She put her hand on the sleeve of his rough leather coat.

"Mahlon," she said, with a look too sweet and direct to be sly, "doesn't thee think it strange the bound girl hasn't cried out again?"

"Why—why—? Does thee think he's *killed her*?"

Lass laughed merrily in the face of his terror. "No, I do not think he's killed her. I think she liked his looks so much that she stopped screaming so she wouldn't frighten him away."

He stood looking at her, utterly discomforted, following her words slowly. Before he could quite arrive at their full meaning, shouts broke out on the Trenton Road, cries of, "By God, this time we'll kill the damn Tories!"

“Abe! Mose! Leave off now!” yelled Mahlon, whistling to the horses who followed him as he ran close to the house. Out spilled the Doans, just as a group of horsemen came spurring up the road. Someone fired a pistol. In the light that streamed through the windowpanes, Lass saw Moses clutch at his Quaker hat, hold it up to show the ragged bullet hole in the brim.

“Fire again!” he called, waving the hat, his swift horse leaping away in the night.

The newcomers halted their horses, trampling the snow to spume and mud, while they argued whether to go after the robbers or see how all fared with Thomas Middleton. They decided to go in. Lass followed after, pretending she had never been out. She watched them untie Ruth and the Middletons, ladle out hot water from an iron kettle on the crane to bathe the welts and bruises about the old Quaker’s head, let Sam Bye out of the cupboard, still clutching the money bag. Everything was indignation, confusion, epithets against the Doans, cheers that at least no blood was spilled and the taxes safe. It was only Lass who stared at Ruth Gwydion with covert questions. Where did you go, Ruth, and whom did you speak with when I missed you in Abe Hunt’s store? How did the Doans know there was tax money here? How did Mahlon know where you would be? It was only Lass who watched out of the corner of her eye when the bound girl crept downstairs, a look of wonder on her face, and stood staring out into the night. But it was all three of the girls who turned suddenly to each other, with a sisterhood between them, too terrible, too beautiful to name.

FOUR

A Man Alone

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A landscape ages the way a face ages, thought Israel Doan, as he peered out into the tangle of shadows and frosty moonlight across his fields and hickory groves, with here and there a late lamp burning in a Plumstead window, and beyond that, all the dim valley winding down. Both he and the landscape were a-many years older than they were the first time he had looked out across these acres, and known them, exultingly, for his; those good times, when anywhere north of Wrightstown a man could buy a hundred acres of rich soil and timber in exchange for an old gray mare. He and his brother, young rakes read out of Middletown Meeting, not bad, but brave and gay then, had come riding up here on the trail that was forest all the way from the long, narrow, timbered farms of Newtown, each with his new and untaken bride on the horse behind him. And now that brother was dead, away south in the Carolinas, where he'd gone after he lost his wife in a hard winter years back, the year they'd picked up frozen birds and squirrels off the top of the snow crust, and three deer had lived in the barn with the stock all through January. Long ago it had been, but he still missed the dead whom he had known and loved. Even if their children were said to flourish in some outlandish place below Virginia, it wasn't the same. He felt lonely for someone who had shared his young days with him. And his own wife, Esther, was old, and gray, and mumbling—something to be cherished for what she had been, but little comfort to a man these days.

He remembered the golden time of his young manhood in Bucks County, back to 1720 and running down to the year that witless Englishman, Braddock, got beat so bad on the frontier, and all the Indian wars came on, and the Friends started losing their power in the Assembly. Strangers coming in caused it. Not the fault of the Germans, so much, an honest folk, if they did let their women work in the fields and farm by the signs of the stars and moon—after all, his own father could cast up astrology too. It was the fault of the Scotch-Irish—a dark, carnal people. Look at how them militia men up round Deep Run Presbyterian Church kept after his boys! Bob Gibson, the Harts, McCalla, Kennedy—all knaves who'd taken up their guns for King Congress. Oh, the Devil was at the roots of this war! The country was getting above itself. Give him the days when a homespun coat was good enough for a man, even if they

did have to carry their guns to Meeting then, and shut the henroost against the wolves come dark. The days when nobody went to a market, when they grew and made all they needed on their own land, under their own roof. He smiled a little at the dark acres under the moon, the frost gathering on the small, square windowpanes, then turned away and went to sit in his twig-bottomed chair by the huge black hearth where the fire that Rachel, his daughter-in-law, had built up so hot at supper time, had burned down into live brands crusted over with ash. He kicked one of Rachel's iron pots off its squat legs, swung the crane out of the way, and stretched his feet close to the warmth. He wouldn't go to bed —not till his grandsons came in. Abe had said Joseph's boys aimed to come home with him to sleep tonight, instead of stopping at their father's. He wouldn't want to miss talking with them, pleasing himself with the sight of them. He supposed they'd been down to Buckingham or Coryell's Ferry; dancing with the girls, maybe. My, but he could leap to the tune of "Packington's Pound" when he was a young man! Not now! The young, he knew, would go forth into vanity, and the old go into the earth. He'd had his share of vanity, he supposed, but not all he wanted—never all of that! Being brought up a Friend, he knew he'd come of a wondrous holy people, but sin creaked in his bones to their very marrow. Neither sin nor holiness ever set quite easy on a man. What he'd like would be to go riding out with the boys again, if it wasn't for his crooked shanks and lame back. They ought to be getting in now, whatever devilment they'd been up to. He leaned against the whittled slats of the chairback and looked up at the half dozen rosy-brown hams hanging on the smoky rafters over his head.

He had begat sons and daughters liberally, according to the Bible example, helped each to his own holdings round the countryside, and of them all, only his own namesake still lived at home, fifty himself, and sickly, but possessed of a wife and strong sons—especially Abraham! He slapped his knee when he thought of Abraham, picked up a firebrand with the tongs, and lighted his pipe. Abe had leaped over a Conestoga wagon once at a vendue in Buckingham, and once in Dublin on a training day. Abe had been known to make tax collectors dance barefooted on heaps of broken glass, or maybe a red-hot stove cover. Friends in the Meeting said he and the boys' fathers ought to reprove them for walking disorderly. Their fathers had done it—not him! For himself, he'd stand against wars, tithes and oaths any day. They were all as one—all bad.

He began to hum,

"*Who rides so well, so well,*
As Moses, Moses Doan?"

Moses! There was a man for thee! 'Twould be better to be gripped in a vise,

men said, than to wrestle with him. With his Lancaster rifle he could hit a wooden nailhead at a hundred yards. And Moses had had a Word!

Israel thought then of himself as he was, a little, wizened man, his gray hair hanging in elf locks, his eyes black and snapping, his face like a withered russet apple. A prosperous farmer, looking for help to no one but God, who asked only of his sons and grandsons that they see to it that nothing stand taller around them except their trees. A Quaker—truly! But to be a Quaker didn't mean that thee couldn't be a man!

Now he heard the sounds he had been waiting for: the thudding of hoofs over frozen ground, the voices of young men, deep, rough, laughing, full of vigor. He heard the groan of the iron hinge on the heavy barn door as they flung it open to put their horses away. He did not rise to look out; he stretched back in contentment and pulled at his pipe. Well enough to admit to himself that he had been growing more and more worried the last half hour, but they were at home now, safe—till another time.

Perhaps it had been folly in him to worry anyway. Some folk wondered why they hadn't been shot down or put in jail long ago. Most folk knew. Knew that the Doans were doing what more than half Bucks County wanted to do, to strike at anybody who tried to change the old, free ways they'd inherited from their great-grandfathers, whether it was a king or a congress. Plenty of Friends at the Meeting who'd chide about his boys took a secret pride in them; didn't like the war a bit better than Mose and his brothers did. And if a tax gatherer met with misfortune now and then, it was not really their affair. Many of the more violent Whigs who might have been hot after them with bullets were over in the Jerseys now with Washington's army. Yes, his boys didn't have hides made lead-proof by magic, like the Indians said they did, but they could shoot and ride and play a japes if need be, and the underlying temper of their neighbors caused most men to look the other way, even to smile a little—so far. If only they hadn't come out so bold as to rob Sam Bye at the Anchor a few weeks back!

And then suddenly the kitchen was full of them, tall, dark-eyed, ruddy, in gray woolen clothes and blue home-knit stockings. Moses wore a red silk handkerchief tied around his neck, and Aaron had a partridge feather stuck in his close, round cap. Mahlon's weather-white deerskins looked as if they had grown on him. Boots clattered on the pine floorboards as they rushed to hang up their guns on a row of hooks on the wall beside the fireplace, flung their powderhorns on the oak dresser among Esther's cherished bits of pewterware. Abe reached into the corner cupboard for a bottle of grog.

Old Israel held up one hand and steadied his pipe with the other.

"Hush thy noise! Thee'll wake up the whole house and have Rachel down here scolding!"

"Perhaps she'll send Mary down," murmured young Joe Doan slyly. "Mary may be abed, but she ain't asleep. I told her I'd come by."

"Thee leave Mary alone now!" chided his grandfather. "The child ain't above twelve."

"She's as grown as she'll ever be—and as pretty. As ripe, too."

Israel ignored him. The boys had sprawled on chairs and benches while Abe handed the drink round. Now they were all served, and Mose stood up, lifting his mug. The others followed him. They stood a moment. Then Mahlon spoke, quite out of turn, surprising everybody.

"Will thee join our toast, Grandsir?" he asked.

Israel had always been against the drinking of healths. He had watched his grandsons do it often, but he had never been asked to join them before. Now it was not Mose, the leader, who asked him, not the powerful and savage Abraham he had reared in his own house. It was the shy, slight, often-unnoticed Mahlon. But Mahlon was, someways, the wildest one. Knew the woods better than the creatures that lived there knew them. Wasn't a better woodsman than Mahlon east of the Alleghenies. Israel reached for the bottle, saw no mug handy without prowling the cupboard for one. Let the bottle do! He stood up. He saw Moses' full upper lip quirk slightly upward in approval.

"To George—his England!" boomed Moses. They drank briefly.

"And to the Doans—Free America!" They drained their mugs and the old man held the bottle tilted as long as he dared. Then they sat down and began pulling off their boots.

"Where'd thee go tonight?" asked Israel. "Was the Plumstead militia out pestering thee?"

"No," answered Joe, always the readiest talker, which came of teaching school and reading books. "We've been down along the river and back past Bogart's tavern where General Greene's lodged. Give him a few cheers for the King as we went by. Whole county's creeping full of Washington's rebels. They got a cornstalk general in every house from Coryell's down, and Newtown's crowded with ox teams bringing in victuals and powder for 'em. I hear there's talk they mean to march on Trenton. Anyways, they seem to be studying war." He grinned; peered up the crooked stairway in the shadows at the back of the kitchen; caught a flash of white there.

"We set three of their boys to studying something else tonight," boasted Moses, leaning back, putting his stockinged feet on the table. "Shove that candlestick away, Levi, or I'll set my damn toes afire."

"Then thee'd know how some tax collectors feel," said Levi, moving the candlestick.

"Go on. Tell whole tale," urged their grandfather, bending forward, so eager to hear of the adventure that he did not see Joe slip away to blend with

the shadow on the stairs. If the other boys saw, they gave no sign.

"Down by Dark Hollow," went on Mose, "we seen three rangers up ahead, so we scattered an' hid. Aaron gets off his horse an' goes limping up to 'em like somebody's broke his back, all time holding onto his head and muttering, 'Oh the Doans, the Doans!'; saying we'd beat him. Rangers swore they'd make us pay, an' he said he'd show them where we were. He led them down to the river an' we all jumped them. Cove there'd frozen over, but we broke the ice fast enough, and clucked them till they cheered for King George. Made 'em cheer till folk could have heard 'em in Jersey, an' then sent 'em back to camp with Delaware freezing on 'em. They won't go looking for Doans again."

"Aaron played it so high I near killed myself laughing," chuckled Levi. "He ought to be on the stage down to Philadelphia. I ain't seen men so discomforted and surprised-like since that time thee beat up Jim Fitz, Mose."

"Jim got over that though," answered Moses, pleased. "Asked at the time if I had any brothers home like me, an' when I said, yes, four, he said his business wouldn't be taking him back to Bucks very soon. But we're friends now."

"He steals horses for the British over in Montgomery, don't he?" asked the grandfather, poking up the fire a little, for the chill of after-midnight seeped through the small, stone farmhouse.

"Yes. He fought for the Continentals for a while, but he didn't like marching in line, and putting up-thy-gun or down-thy-gun when the sergeant says so. While sergeant's thinking what to do, the game gets away. He deserted then and become a cowboy—like us: the name people's given to horse thieves.

"Saw him up in Dublin last week. Pleased with himself. He'd just flogged a damn Whig for going through his house looking for him and breaking his mother's spinning wheel. He wants us to go along with him in a plan he's got. We're to drive all the horses we can come by over to his place in Montgomery, an' he'll drive 'em south to be sold, where their owners can't find 'em and claim 'em back. We may drive some south ourselves. Grandsir, didn't thee tell me once we had kin in the Carolinas? I wonder could they put us in touch with the horse markets there?"

"We've got kin there, yes," answered the old man slowly. "My brother Joseph. Your father's named for him. He died there, but his son married—seems like I heard it was three times. John Woolman saw him when he traveled through there, and told me about it once when I met him at the gunsmith's in Bristol. There'd be boys thy age—plenty of them. But I don't know that they'd welcome cowboys."

"I've heard it's wilder country than here," said Mahlon. "Fewer houses and cleared lands. Better hunting. Man's got a better chance to be free. Did thy brother go there for that?"

"Well, no, I don't rightly think so," mused the old man, memories coming back, flowing over his dry old lips, tasting sweet to them. "Brother never seemed to have heart for much after his wife died. Sold his farm and scattered his children about with kin. Got the idea first he'd like to go back to the Coast of Cod where Father come from, an' he did, but he didn't like it there. Some place by the sea water called Eastham, I think he said. Said it looked just like Plumstead—a ridge, and land sloped away both sides the same. 'Twas from him, not from Father, that I heard all about who we Doans be an' where we come from. He heard it from the kin who stayed up there."

"Who be we?"

"We be Chief Foresters of Delamere Forest in the County of Cheshire. Somewhere near Wales west of England, an old Doan cousin told Joe. Seems we had that title an' its rights since the days of King John, an' I don't know when he reigned, but I'm sure it was a sight before any of the Georges. Brother was right proud when he heard it, and took pains to remember it all. Little and little it comes back to me what he said."

He paused. The boys waited silently, everyone too interested to notice the absence of Joe or the light scuffling back in the shadow.

"My great-grandfather got restless in Cheshire. He loved his forest an' it was being cut down. King was using it to build ships. He wanted the wild, free ways of the woods, so he left there and come over the sea. It was a rock and bramble county, he said, after the trees went, an' he had to become a carpenter. Most of us been carpenters ever since. He lost the old rights, too—chief forester rights to every swarm of wild bees and the right shoulder of every deer anybody shot. Could behead a thief, too, if he caught him in the act. Now that I tell it over, it comes to me that maybe that's where thee got the ways thee's got. Maybe it's not the Light shining in Mose that's led thee off the track; maybe it's in the blood an' what the blood's been used to. Great-grandsir always said, I recollect Brother told me, that Cheshire men more readily resort to arms and are harder to govern than other people. Maybe thee be not at fault; only bred true."

Mahlon's face wore the rapt look of one who has seen a vision. "Chief Forester," he murmured. "I'd have liked that."

"Well," asked Levi impatiently, "we still don't know why Uncle went to Carolina."

"I never knew myself. He never told me. He couldn't live here without his wife—or thought he couldn't. He didn't care for Eastham or Sandwich or any of the towns he saw there. 'Bout the time he come back, there was a party heading south. Squire Boone from over to Durham Ironworks was one, I mind. He took up land in the Yadkin country, and I understand his boy Dan's doing right well on the frontier. Anyway, Joe went south with them, an' took one of

his boys with him. They joined Cane Creek Meeting where Woolman went and saw them. They never came back, and I only heard twice. Heard 'twas the deepest woods they'd ever seen, an' the best game; that it wouldn't be grown up to farms and towns like we be in a thousand years."

"Some day," said Mahlon very low, mostly to himself, "I'm going down there."

"If we don't go along with Jim Fitz," spoke Aaron, bringing the talk back to matters of closer concern, "maybe we should join one of the Tory regiments that's forming round. I hear in Philadelphia the British are offering a bounty for such. They say any man who fights for them gets fifty free acres after the war, where he can enjoy his bottle and his lass."

Moses spat into the fire. "I ain't joining nothing," he muttered. "I'll fight *if I must*, but for myself and not in wars. I'm a free man of Pennsylvania."

"Thee can't be, any more," said Joe, emerging from the shadow, his usually sleek hair tousled. "There aren't any such. Pennsylvania can't settle its own affairs now. We can't so much as slaughter a hog but what we got to run and ask New Hampshire, or send to Georgia, or get leave from Jersey, or find out how the world sets with the Virginia men. That's because now we're a United States. When they signed the Declaration of Independence, when they set themselves up to be a nation and mix with the nations overseas—that was the end of American freedom, right there."

"We been pushed too far," muttered Moses. "If they want their war, let 'em have it, so long as they leave us alone. But they won't. Either we got to fight for 'em, or pay 'em two pounds ten. By God, I'll get my two pounds back, with usury—an' they're lucky if it ain't blood. America was meant to be free! I had a Word that said so."

"Some tried it honest in Newtown by the vote," said Abraham gruffly, the first time he had spoken since the toast was drunk. "In free election they voted to hold by the old ways we've always lived under. An' Philadelphia set the militia on 'em. An' remember Joe Smith from Pine Town that Father taught to make plows? They made him run the gantlet. Said they'd keep the damn Quaker warm enough!"

"That," mocked Joe, "is called Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, my brothers."

"I don't see there's any use going on as we are," said Mahlon resentfully, "trying to steal our own back, and getting a bad name for it, and beating up every taxing bastard we can catch. There's too many of 'em. They're set too strong. We'd be better off out west, beyond the Scotchmen, beyond the tree-line even—down the Great Valley or off to Kentucky country. If Uncle said there was great woods in the south—A man could be free there! We better go away from here."

Moses laughed with a sudden gaiety not common in him.

"We know what's making thee so sour-faced, little brother." He turned to old Israel. "Grandsir, Mahlon has got woman-trouble. To my sure knowledge he's keeping a half-wife down to Buckingham, and now there's the most persuading red-headed piece I ever saw, looking at him with want in her eye."

"I noticed it, too! Down at the Anchor one night a few weeks back!" cried Abraham. "With Sam Bye, she was. But Sam's no good to her once she's seen a Doan. Come to think of it now, she handed him all Sam's money an' looked pleased to do it. Give her what she wants, Mahlon. All she wants is a plain man's yea."

"Aye," taunted Joe. "Grandsir, I'll wager Mahlon can out-wench us all."

Mahlon stood up. "If I do, it won't be on the back stairs with my own cousin," he announced. "I'm going up to bed."

Swiftly, their boots hung round their necks by knotted laces, the brothers climbed up a ladder nailed to the rear wall, leading to an unfinished loft where they could sleep without disturbing the rest of the family.

Alone, as he had been an hour earlier, Israel Doan went to the window to take one last look at the fields he had cleared, the fields he loved. In spite of the houseful of breathing life around him, life created out of his life and passion, he was now, toward the end, a man alone. In the way that every man is alone! Alone with the things he knows that no one else ever can; what life was to him and the way he found it; how he felt the first time he kissed a girl, or heard the wail of a new son, or watched his father die. In a way, these things were the same for every man, but in a way, they were never twice the same, and to no two men on earth did they ever come alike. When he died, these things that only he knew would die with him. There was no way to pass them on. Come next summer he would be seventy-eight years old, and it could not be so long now until, though there might be great goings-on in Bucks County, he would have no part in them. And then he heard the deep flow of the boys' voices as they talked among themselves under the blankets in the loft. His sadness left him and he turned to quench the fire, on his face a peaceful smile of fulfillment and satisfaction. He had done good and evil in his life, but above all, he had passed life on, and that was the chief thing a man was supposed to do. "Say I am dead," he murmured, thrusting the small iron rake among the ruddy embers, "but say I have left six grandsons behind me, each one stronger than I; that they be that much better off than we were."

FIVE

Trenton Night

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Lass never forgot Trenton night. Her grandmother Peg Magoon had told her that it would be that way when *he* came, the one man she could truly love with all her heart until the day she died; that life would be suddenly full of excitements and adventures, but not to let them grieve or trouble her too much, for in the end it would all be well. The only reason for grief and trouble would be if he never came at all, or if he came and found you married wrong. "But suppose he comes, and doesn't love *me*?" Lass had said once, and Peg, looking her up and down, had answered, "I'll risk that." But she sometimes doubted, during the black, starry nights of that December, as she lay awake behind Sam Bye's dormers and heard the old timbers cracking in the frost, whether her grandmother could quite have imagined Mahlon Doan. Certainly she had not foreseen a time like this to meet him in, when men were riding all over the countryside at night shooting off deer rifles at each other, when the whole Continental Army had gone to den in the hills around, like foxes driven to earth.

Lass and Sam had no more than got back from Thomas Middleton's when the word caught up with them that Washington's men had straggled into Trenton, fleeing for their lives, with Cornwallis in pursuit, and his hired Hessian soldiers pillaging the country as they came through it, taking everything they wanted, silver candlesticks, a flitch of bacon, or a woman's honor; the terrible Hessians, said by the credulous to have double rows of teeth in each jaw. Then Washington was over the Delaware, sweeping it clear of every raft, and boat, and floating thing, tying them up on the western bank so the British couldn't cross after him till the ice froze solid, which please God, it wouldn't do, and Bucks County found itself overrun with six thousand ragged, hungry, half-sick men, having nothing to their names but firearms and courage, and not quite enough of either. Every dwelling, every barn, even the fowl roosts, anything with a roof gave them shelter, and some men had only tent canvas between them and the winter stars, and some not even that. And in every farmhouse and tavern kitchen the bake ovens glowed red-hot twenty-four hours a day trying to feed them all.

Everybody in Bucks County knew as much about the troop movements as

General Washington himself. This worried Sam Bye, but it was one of his lesser worries. He sat with his head in his hands all one night and said the war was lost. After the first of the year there would no longer be an army. Most terms of enlistment ran out with the year's end, and the men, unpaid, many of them barefoot, were for quitting the colors and going home. They had been beaten steadily backward ever since summer, and they were losing faith—in Washington, in the Congress, in their own daring enterprise to declare themselves free men and prove it. You could read Tom Paine to the troops till your breath left you, and they probably agreed with him all right, but more than the thanks of man and woman, they wanted warm coats and bellies full of salt hog.

Sam said the Congress had fled to Baltimore; that Trenton in Hessian hands was a cannon loaded with grapeshot, pointed square at Philadelphia. General Washington, he said, had written home that the game was pretty well up. General Cornwallis, he said, had engaged passage for England, to go and receive the King's praise for subduing America. We had pledged our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, and were now like to lose all three.

"It's our doom," bleated Sam morosely, "for having gone to war at all. I was taught in my youth in Friends' Meeting that wars are from lust, and those who fight them shall lose them.

"But the British fought too, and thee says they didn't lose," answered Sally, unruffled, pouring a little rum sparingly into Sam's glass. "Come to bed. Thee'll feel better in the morning."

And he did feel better, but that was because Landlord Croasdale of the Anchor rode up early, his horse leaving sharp, black hoof prints on the frosty grass, and haled him out of bed. Croasdale had spent the night over on Jericho Mountain, and visited the stone mansions where the generals had their headquarters, and he brought back good news.

"We're going to fight for it," said Sam when he came in, his face glowing with cold and excitement. "One more time! A victory now, and the troops will sign again, and we can go on, and the country'll believe in us once more. Taking Trenton'll save Philadelphia. And we're going to take it! Soon."

Sally and Lass had murmured polite encouragement, Lass thinking of Mahlon and where would he be when the men started shooting at each other, thinking that Crispin might be shooting from the other direction; Sally of her own personal war, due to fall upon her any day now. But Sam was up and away, leaving his fried mush and small beer, his boots half-fastened, saying he'd got to wring three days' battle ration for the troops out of the farms around him someway, and he didn't know how, since he'd got less than two pounds eight about him, and that was money he owed John Penquite for a heifer. That was the last they saw of Sam for three days.

He came home Christmas Eve, haggard for want of sleep, his linen rumpled and his bootsoles worn thin, but a happy look about him. “It’s all in plan,” he told them, between great gulps of hot stew and cornbread. “I can’t say when, but it’ll be soon. We’ll strike from three points at once—Ewing straight at Trenton, Cadwallader up from Bordentown, Washington himself coming down the river. The Hessians make a high Christmas, and they’ll likely be abed drunk. Abe Hunt’s having Commander Rail for cards and supper, and Abe’ll see he has enough to drink. It’s our last hope for free America.”

“I thought Abe Hunt was a Tory,” said Sally, feeling heavy and listless, not caring much at the moment for either Sam or America, or anything except to be rid of the burden that oppressed her.

“He’s a Tory—when it suits our purpose,” answered Sam, explaining no further. And then he went so sound asleep in his chair that Sally and Lass had to douse him with cold water before they could get him awake enough to blunder upstairs to bed. Early next day he rode off again.

There was no merrymaking in Sam Bye’s house that Christmas. Sally, in pain most of the time, wandered from room to room, finding dust on her new mahogany, dust on the mellow old pine chairs and tables that had belonged to the Byes since nobody knew when, scolding the maids for it. Lass could think only of Mahlon and wonder what part he would take in the battle. About noon the rain began, a sharp, freezing half-snow rain and all the world outside the windowpanes dissolved in a wash of black and white and gray. By four o’clock Lass was biting her fingernails and Sally almost ready to admit that her time was upon her. Instead she said wanly. “I think I’ll go lie down and sleep for a while. There won’t be any news come for hours. Maybe not before morning.”

Both sisters looked out at the weeping willow trees Sam’s father had planted along the brook, misted with sleet now, lashing in the wet east wind.

“Do you think—you’re—going to have it?”

“How do I know? I never had one before. I only know I’m tired and I want to lie down.”

“Can I do anything? Can I go and try to find Sam?”

“In this storm? Amongst six thousand men loose in Bucks County besides the ones that live there? No! I don’t believe it’s yet. Too much dinner—or the excitement.”

So Sally dragged herself upstairs, where all the patterned chintzes and shining mirrors Sam had bought for his bride in Philadelphia did little to comfort her, and Lass sat still, jumped up, ran to every window in turn, ran into the kitchen and got herself a glass of wine and a piece of plum cake, then never tasted either. All she could think was Mahlon! Mahlon! Mahlon! After Sally had been upstairs about an hour, Lass followed her, swung open the

chamber door and peered in.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. Go away."

"Shall I get Sam? Or the maids?"

"No."

So Lass went downstairs, knowing she couldn't stay there, couldn't stay anywhere, thinking, Well. I did what I ought to—as far as I could. I talked to Sally. I think she's sick, but she doesn't want me around. She ought to have Sam. No matter what she says, I'm going to ride out and try to find him. But in her heart she knew that was not her real reason.

She did not take her own cloak, but a heavier one of Sally's, smoke-gray and lined with rabbit fur, too big and long, but warm against the wind heaving the boughs outside, against the biting snow. Wrapped in its folds she slipped into the kitchen where the maids, one of Sam's field hands, and Tom from the Anchor had all the candles going, with half a cold roast goose set out, and a bottle of blackberry wine Sally had given them to keep Christmas with. Tom went with her to the big, warm barn and saddled Bess, the little mare she usually rode, promised her that he would set off any minute for Doyle's tavern to fetch Dr. Meredith if Sally needed him. Then she rode out into the storm.

She rode north at first, up the long lane that led from Sam's house to the Old York Road, and then east for the river, past Holicong Spring with the ghost of a dead Indian at the bottom of it, so Sally had told her, past the school house and Ruth Gwydion's cottage. Behind the panes sat Ruth, serene and unmoving as a cameo, her face bent over some sewing, the glow of a warm firelit room all around her. Could she be—waiting? Bess trotted bravely along the wet, sandy ridge, and Lass kept her face drawn back in the depths of her hood, making no attempt to guide with the reins. Once in a while she could hear shouting blown on the wind from the fields far on her right. Now and then when she peered out from her halo of soft fur, she could see signal flares on the black massed mountains to the south. The country's up, she thought. Mahlon won't be home! He won't be with Ruth! He'll be there with the other men! She tried to picture his home—a house like Thomas Middleton's perhaps, perhaps poorer, with no turkey-red cushions and silver. And the people in it—who besides the tall, wild brothers? A mother? A sister? Before she could quite decide, she felt Bess dig her rear hoofs sharply into the mire. They were going down hill. She looked out again. Lighted windows clustered on either side of the road, and just below her lay Coryell's Ferry, and beyond it the Delaware, a great curve of moving blackness like a serpent crawling down the valley, flecked with white, swirling ice floes that kept crashing together in bursts of horrible sound.

She reined back the sorrel and stood looking at the river. If Sam Bye thinks

anybody's going to cross that tonight, he's crazy, she thought. There won't be any battle.

But she started south along the bank, for Sam had told them at breakfast that it was down that way the troops would gather. He'd gone early to help bring the boats from Malta Island where they were hidden and moor them just above the Ferry Inn below Bowman's Hill. All she had to do was follow the river till she came to it, but what should she do when she got there? There would be hundreds of men, and how was she to find two men among so many, the man she wanted, and the man she was supposed to be looking for? She rode along the water's edge in the driving sleet, confident that her wits would save her when the time came.

And then Lass suddenly noticed that all the low hills sloping down to the river were alive with men, men moving downward by the same route she had chosen. Out of the trees they came; out of the lighted farms, slamming the doors behind them; out of barns, and tents, and crossroads taverns, over roads, and bypaths, and down the creeks; springing up like grass blades in a sunny field after a spring rain. She was no longer a lone rider, but toiling along in the midst of an army. Only a few were mounted, and they wore officers' uniforms, the colors sodden and run together. For the rest, it was a ragamuffin troop in leather breeches, linsey-woolsey, hunting shirts, and rags, anything that would cover them, every man trying to keep the wet away from his gun and his powder horn. Now and then the light from a farmhouse window glinted on a bayonet, now and then somebody cursed, low and with feeling, or bent to see to a broken shoe. Dim shapes plodding through the misty sleet and high wind, all turned out to save America, but somehow each man alone, independent of his neighbor, and paying no attention to the vague, cloaked figure on a sorrel mare who might have been a camp follower, or a midwife going to a labor, or even another soldier who'd been lucky enough to get himself a horse and a cloak.

Their march ended on a muddy terrace at a grove of silver beech trees, gnarled, looking as old as time, and crowding down to the black water, all aflow with jagged ice blocks. Under the beeches in the freezing rain huddled the rest of the army—men, and men, and men—in ranks to the river's edge as far as she could see. Now and then a powerful voice down in their midst boomed forth with an order; now and then she heard a curse or a harsh jest from the soldiers nearest her. But for the most part they waited, silent, tense, ready. Here and there a pine torch sizzled and went out, or an officer moved among the men carrying a shrouded lantern.

She guided the sorrel deftly along the rear of the clustered troops, glancing back now and then at the cone-shaped hill where the beacon on top of it spoke to a beacon set high on the Jersey shore. If anyone should challenge her, she

would say that she was looking for Sam Bye to tell him his wife was in labor, but no one seemed to see her at all.

There were twenty-four hundred men, drawn down out of the hills, under the beeches and willows, facing across to the lights of John McKonkey's Ferry on the Jersey shore, feeling for the three days' ration, the forty rounds of powder and shot each man had about him, and in all that twenty-four hundred it must be hopeless to find one man—but she could try. If the Doans were there, they would be prowling in the woods and thickets out of sight, so she rode slowly along the edge of the rhododendrons and white birch, alert and trembling, seeing nobody though she passed the whole army. Past the Ferry Inn, where the troops thinned out to a straggling guard, then to empty sedge and swamp land, she caught a movement in a tangle of vines that swung between two crooked hornbeams. She looked closer till her eye could trace the outlines of the three men who stood there, apart and watching, and one of them had the angular lift of shoulder, the slight figure, and the deerskin hunting shirt of Mahlon Doan. Two of his brothers were with him, she saw; powerful Moses and Joe the dandy, and now they drew away from the vines and disappeared in a willow covert that circled a swirling black cove. She climbed down from the sorrel and crept after them, wanting only to watch him if she could, only to know he was not in the way of danger.

Pressing close upon them through the twiggy thicket, she could see the older brothers pulling and straining, dragging out a boat that had lain hidden in the frozen weeds; a large rowboat with a steering oar at the back. Mahlon held a lantern.

"Here's one boat Washington didn't steal from them that owned it," gloated Moses Doan. "He didn't know about this one."

"No," said Joe brightly, his eyes glinting above his beaver collar, "Washington didn't know. But he knows a lot. I wonder if he knows about Sam Bye's redhead watching us from the bush over there?" As he spoke, he pointed. Lass had heard it said round Bucks County that Joe Doan could see in the dark.

In an instant Moses had crashed through the willows, wordless, dragging her out, with the grip of his heavy fingers biting through her cloak, bruising her flesh. She stood silent before them.

"Well, girl," inquired Joe finally, "what was thee looking for?"

She could not tell them, of course, but it was not in Lass Marvayne to keep still.

"Blackberries," she said demurely.

"There's some fine ones ripe down in Trenton," replied Joe, even-voiced, "and we'll take thee to them."

He turned to his brothers. "We can't leave her here, boys. She'd carry back

the tale—that we'd gone down river. They'd think it through—that we'd likely warn Rall—and maybe not venture; keep shy of the trap we mean to set for them." He turned mockingly toward Mahlon. "Thee can entertain her, Brother—as thee did in the willows by Thomas Middleton's."

"How'd thee know?" muttered Mahlon, watching the river. " 'Twasn't my doing. She—"

"Countersign!" snapped a voice from the trees behind them.

"Now what to hell!" blasted Moses under his breath.

A sentry in tattered blue and a three-cornered hat confronted them, his bayonet leveled.

Joe, suave and composed, nudged Mahlon. "Brother, ask thy rebel for the countersign."

The sentry started forward. The light from Mahlon's lantern struck on cold steel before them, on the flooding river behind. The Doan boys had only their hunting knives.

"She don't have to tell me," growled Moses. "I know it. Its 'Victory or Death.' I got it off one of Sullivan's men who was hungry. For a slice of venison and a pair of old boots I got it."

She remembered then, Sam in the frosty porch at daybreak, holding Sally in his arms and kissing her so, and saying something that she had thought at the time it was never in Sam Bye to say, "It's to be Victory or Death, Sally, Victory or Death."

Mahlon called the words at the sentry. The man turned, presented arms, touched his three-cornered cap and moved slowly off toward the inn.

The Doans hustled Lass into the boat and shoved off, heading down river, well inshore, and away from the drifting ice. Once, as they swept under a menacing tangle of half-fallen trees, and when she thought the older boys who were handling the oars were too busy to notice, she put her hand on Mahlon's sleeve as she had done that night at Thomas Middleton's, hoping he would be better pleased with her by now, smiling up at him with all the winsomeness she had.

But he pushed her fiercely away.

"I wouldn't mind thee being a rebel," he told her, "but thee's not even true in that. Thee should be at home on thy own side helping thy own, when there's fighting."

Lass Marvayne had not cried since she was three years old and wading in the tide pools on Plum Island, and cut her foot to the bone on a jagged clam shell, but now the hot, stinging wetness flowed out of her eyes and down her cheeks, already wet with melting sleet.

"But I haven't any side," she choked. "I only wanted to know thee was safe."

“What be I to thee?” he asked, looking down more kindly on her bent, bright head, the hood thrown back and tiny pellets of hail beating down and clinging to the meshes of her hair. “I be nothing. Our ways be different and must stay so.”

“But—but thee’s so wonderful, Mahlon!” she cried out in longing.

Moses was rowing with broad, deep strokes and Joe kept busy with the steering oar, wavering a little, not too sure of himself. She tried to watch them, tried to look anywhere but at him. They can’t handle a boat, she thought, like the men from up home. She’d always thought she could do three things, handle a boat, shoot a squirrel, and please a man, but now, maybe, it was only two. She pulled her hood up and drew her face back into its depths.

Then, to her surprise, he spoke, gently, with a mist of softness in his eyes.

“May I ask who it is—thinks—I’m wonderful?”

“I. A rebel who’s not even true in that.”

“With a name?”

“Lass Marvayne.”

“I didn’t think thee was a Bye.”

“Bye? No! My sister’s married to Sam—as I told thee before. That’s as much Bye as we be. We’re from Newburyport in Massachusetts.”

“And down here for—?”

“I’m here to stay with Sally, and she’s here because she’s married to Sam. But if I’d known there was—”

“If thee’d known I was here—thee—wouldn’t have come?”

“I’d have come as soon as I could walk.”

His thin lips worked, trying not to smile.

“At least—thee’s honest—a way—Lass Marvayne.”

“*Honest?* Why! Who ever said I wasn’t?”

“Then what’s thee doing out here away from thy kin when the fighting starts? What’s thee following after me for?”

The insides of her throat drew together and swelled up in one great aching lump.

“Is—isn’t—there no pleasing thee?” she choked.

As he sat beside her in the prow, she could see the sharp, almost delicate line of his profile from forehead to chin. What was there about him that made him different from other men, to be preferred above all others? Miserably, she admitted that she did not know.

“I been well pleased already,” he murmured, “nearer home.”

He did not speak it very loud, and the wind carried it away, and Lass began to doubt if he had ever said it, chose to believe he had not.

But now Moses and Joe seemed in deep trouble, the ice cakes coming at them as they pulled out from the western bank and tried to cross the river, the

steering oar grown clumsy and erratic. She could hear their heavy breath as they toiled. Suddenly catastrophe bore down in the shape of a great ice block that threatened to crash broadside upon them. Lass dove for the oar and deftly wrenched it this way and that. Not a matter of strength it was, just a matter of knowing well how boats behaved in the water. It twisted clear, writhed away, leveled into a smooth stretch of current.

"Thee dumb oxen!" shrilled Lass between her teeth. "Where'd thee want to go?"

"Straight over," answered Moses, almost meekly. "To the Jersey side."

So Lass steered them across the Delaware, and Mahlon rowed and saved his breath for it, and Moses and Joe began talking together as if they were alone. Once across, and in a quiet reach of the stream just above Trenton, Lass heard Joe raise his voice and listened to him.

"I know he says so. I've read him. And I can answer him every time. He says a continent shouldn't be governed by an island, and I say, why not? Isn't all man's great body governed by his little head? He says England's too far off! But he'd not deny the Government of God, and he's a further ways off than King and Parliament. I say the hell with Tom Paine."

Moses' shoulders drooped pathetically in spite of their mighty strength. "I don't know no Tom Paine. I don't mean to harm any man, I never meant to. All's I want is a free America—and what's my own. It'll come about, too—in our time."

A blur of light shone on the shifting curtain of rain and mist that hung below them on the left. That would be the town. The Doans leaped overside in the shallow water, and Moses dragged the boat high up on a strip of sloping gravel. It was Joe who stretched his hand to Lass.

"Thee's fallen in two sad errors this night," he told her, shaking his head in pretended sorrow, "and I'd say thy chances are about gone now, for all thy good looks."

She stared at him. "What—what does thee mean?"

"Thee's even learned the plain talk, I see. But it'll take more than that. Thee's deserted thy people tonight, and displayed thy skill at a man's trade and thy ignorance of a woman's. Mahlon, my brother, likes a woman to be loyal to her own. He likes her to be soft, and yielding, and warm at home for him to come to."

He pointed to Lass's hands, hanging limply now at her sides, the palms flecked with scales and blood where the oar had chafed them, and Lass remembered Ruth calm and sewing. "Thee'd be a good companion in battle, Brother, but not so rare in love and sweetness—the things we want of a woman."

She lifted her blue eyes at him provocatively, determined that he should

not see the near-mortal wound he had given her.

"Is thee sure?" she asked lightly.

He moved toward her. "By God, no. I'd like to find out."

"Thee never will," she taunted, scrambling away from him up the bank, half-falling over her cloak.

A few minutes later the four of them plodded into Trenton. Night and bad weather had driven everyone from the streets, but the barracks, taverns, churches, nearly every house, seemed to be running over with lights and guttural singing. The Hessian soldiers were keeping Christmas well. In front of the post office they had raised an uprooted cedar tree and tied bits of red cloth to its branches; tried to light it with candles, but the fat tallow dips of the Jersey countryside weighed down its twigs in an ungainly way. The tree stood abandoned now, and tilted sideways, forlorn, glossed with sleet. Lass recognized the twin porches of Abe Hunt's house, and meekly followed the Doans as they approached it and Moses pounded on the door. Looking through the window while they waited, she could see a group of thickset men in red and blue and green-faced coats crowded at a gaming table. Others circled round a deep pewter punch bowl where Abe presided, or waited turn at a table piled with dainties—olives, almonds and roast apples, a whole stuffed pig, and oysters in wine. All the men, seated or standing, were swaying together and bawling drunkenly,

"*Freut euch ihr lieben Christen,*
Freut euch von Herzen sehr;
Euch ist geboren Christus
Recht gute neue Mär. . . ."

A white-headed Negro in a yellow felt coat with silver buttons opened the door and looked enquiringly at them.

"We want Rall," demanded Moses gruffly. "We got news for him."

"No, sah!" said the old man, shaking his head vehemently. "He's ain't to be disturbed. He's keeping Christmas."

"He'll keep Christmas a way he don't like if he ain't careful. Thee go and tell him we got news he can't afford not to listen to."

The old serving man tried to shut the door but Moses thrust his foot against it.

"Go and fetch him."

"Not till you lets me shut de door, sah!"

Moses withdrew his foot, and it closed, with dignity, but very tightly. After a long wait it opened again. A skinny black hand thrust out a dripping pen and a half sheet of paper.

"Colonel Rall got no time for your likes. He says you write what you got to say, and he read."

Moses, his foot against the panels again, handed the paper to Mahlon. "Here," he said. "Colonel Rall knows thy name, for thee was talking to him here last week when thee come to report how Sullivan's men joined Washington. Write it and sign. He'll believe thee."

Lass watched Mahlon smooth out the paper, press it against the door frame, and trace the letters laboriously.

"Washington is coming on you down the river. He will be here afore long. Mahlon Doan."

The Negro took it from him and held it out disdainfully, shook it to dry the ink, and closed the door. They heard the turn of the key.

"*Euch ist geboren Christus . . .*"

sang the drunken Hessians within. The Doans stood in the unflagging sleet and looked at each other.

"I'd ha' felt better," said Mahlon finally, "if we'd got to talk with him."

"I guess thee can trust him if Howe and Cornwallis can," answered Moses. "When he reads thy note, he'll get his men out in double quick. He's got the name of being a brave good soldier. He'll have a trap set to cut them to pieces, time they get here. Maybe then we can go back to old ways and a free country."

He looked at Lass whom he had forgotten all about. "Leave her here," he rumbled. "Her tongue can't harm us now. And her friends, the rebels, will be here afore long. Come, boys, there'll be horses in Abe's stable we can steal to get us back up country."

Silent as red Indians, they slipped away from her, round the corner of the house, with no other leavetaking.

Alone in the deserted streets, Lass stood looking after the Doans for a minute or two. She felt tired, defeated, bitterly cold, not knowing where to take shelter from the storm. All the inns were loud, sounding full of carousing soldiery. Most of the decent families in Trenton had fled, leaving their homes to the invaders. She wandered drearily up and down, past the English Church, the school, the market. The night grew later and colder, and the singing wilder. As she passed Stacy Potts' house in King Street, she saw beyond it a low little slit of a place with a lighted window and a woman moving behind it, a huge wooden bottle swinging over the door. She remembered Sam had bought some French brandy there on their way back from Middletons'. It was a spirits shop kept by a small, wren-like woman, Polly Brown. Polly, still in Trenton, still awake, could perhaps give her a bed.

As Lass stepped into the small, warm room lined with shelves that held thick brown bottles, she noticed first that Polly had slumped on her counter, either ill or tired to death. She lifted half-glazed eyes at the intruder.

"What'll it be, and how much of it, and I won't take Continental money!" she babbled wearily.

"I—I don't want to buy. I need a place to sleep, and I don't know where to find one."

"How? Oh—a bed? Take mine. It's at the back. Doubt it'll ever hold me again. Three nights I been kept here at counter, trade's that brisk. If the Hessians stays here till spring, I'll be a rich woman. Seems they must wash their faces in it." She pointed to a door at the rear of the shop and Lass stepped through it. The bed was only a pallet with straw ticking, an the quilted coverlet not very clean, but she did not care. She flung herself upon it, in the very act of going to sleep.

She dreamed she and her father were hunting wild duck in the salt marshes round Parker River, below Newburyport. A covey of mallards winged up from a juniper patch above the water line, and Silas pointed his fowling piece at them, but when he pulled the trigger the noise it made was the heavy, relentless boom of cannon.

She opened her eyes. Gray, sodden daylight poured into the back room of the spirits shop. She was wide awake, but the cannon roared on. She noticed Polly, huddled and quaking in a corner. "The Continentals is here," she quavered. "All hell's abursting in the streets."

Rifles cracked down by the river. A wounded horse screamed. A charge of grapeshot rattled against the clapboards. Lass covered her head and waited. She waited and waited, and the chaos outside did not clear away, but increased; more rifle shots, more shouting, cannonade from another direction. But Mahlon would not be there, she thought. He had stolen a horse last night. He had ridden away. But had he? And when she thought that, she had to crawl from the dirty bed and run to the door in spite of Polly's protest. She opened it cautiously. It did not want to open. Then she saw why. A fallen soldier lay across it, a boy with straw-colored hair and a silken down above his mouth, the rosy color ebbing from his cheeks and lips. He lay half on the stone sill, half in the mud and trampled slush that stained his fine white uniform, gay with touches of red and blue. His sword, still in its scabbard, had fallen under him at an awkward angle. He gasped weakly. Not till she went down on her knees beside him did Lass see what had brought him to this—the two small, bloody, welling holes in the front of his white waistcoat where the grapeshot had gone in. One look told her that it would be no use to fetch water or brandy. There was nothing now to do for the Queen's dragoon, except to see that he did not die alone; that there was another human being there holding him, if he should

want that comfort. He choked raspingly, and she lifted up his head so that he could breathe a few times more. A bullet shattered the windowpane beside her, but she did not know it. He opened his eyes, blue and young as a school-boy's, and they held no pain, only puzzled surprise.

"We were going to geld all the males," he whispered, "and horsewhip them across the country. It was to be more sport than a fox hunt—"

His head rolled back and a gray shadow went over his face, like clouds going over on a sunny day. He kicked feebly. Lass lifted her eyes because she could not stand it to watch him any more, and found herself looking up at another young man, stocky and square-shouldered, his blond head shining in the rain, and under the warm hazel eyes she knew so well, the fading freckles of childhood. Another bullet struck the already shattered pane beside her, but they did not notice it. They were staring too hard at each other.

SIX

Trenton Morning

•

"I'll think about her now," Lieutenant Crispin Corey told himself, sucking his raw fingertips that had left their hide back on the frosty iron of a rowlock off John McKonkeys beach. "Just until we start marching again. Then I won't think of her till it's over. Just the job we've got to do, I'll think about. But for a minute—now—"

Dripping oak boughs over his head stood out sharper every minute, as the wet, gray daylight came on. An icy wind blasted down the river, sweeping the ridge where Sullivan's troops waited so Greene's troops coming down the longer Pennington Road could catch up. They'd separated at the Bear Tavern to swing, fighting, into Trenton by different roads. When they came together again—if they ever did—the battle would be over. Looking back, for most of the division placed behind him, Crispin saw the front ranks of St. Clair's brigade and the guns of Moulder's battery. Ahead of him, General Sullivan leaned over the side of his big gray horse, speaking to Colonel Johnny Glover. The general had his gold-laced hat jammed down on his ears, and wet, brown ringlets beaten close to his swarthy forehead. Colonel Johnny wasn't a tall man, and he had his head cocked up to listen. Crispin remembered he was going to think about Lass.

It was usually easy to think about her—hard not to. Lass in the prow of a boat, heading into the wind and laughing, her red hair streaming back; Lass in the moonlight under the lilacs in her father's dooryard, standing on tiptoe to be kissed; Lass running along the beach at low tide, light as a sandpiper; romping through the Virginia Reel at a cornhusking; Lass always moving, restless, never still. But his thoughts would not stay with her now. They studied war in spite of him. He thought about the night just ended—poling those damn great ore barges the Pennsylvania men were so proud of, canoe-shaped, funeral-black, big enough to hold a regiment; about Colonel Henry Knox, barrel-chested, calling the orders in a foghorn voice you could hear both sides of the Delaware. He bet Henry weighed three hundred pounds—what was it General Washington had said when they were crossing that made the men laugh so? "Shift your tail, Henry, and trim the boat!" Used to keep the London Bookstore, southward of Boston town house in the Cornhill—before the war,

that was. He'd bought a book of poetry there once to take home to Si. Not everybody'd know Si'd like a book of poetry. He looked down at his battered rifle, thought about the new gun Si was sending him. He thought about the moment when they'd finally got everybody over the river and lined up in brigades, while the general sat on an overturned beehive and kept a quiet eye on everything. It was then he'd passed the word down the ranks for every man to set his watch by his—at twenty-five minutes after three. Nothing could make the army into one the way that had—to know that for one night all and the least of them would march to a general's time. And after that, the march itself, past sleeping farmhouses and snowy fields, all dead, standing corn—not shocked up the way it would be at home; past groves of black oak and hickory. He remembered he had been going to think about Lass.

"Cris." Colonel John Glover and Captain William Blackler stood at his elbow. "We're about to their first picket—round fifty yagers, the scouts think. General Sullivan wants us to send forty men who've got bayonets to drive them back on the town. Captain Flahaven of the Jersey Line'll lead them. He knows the ground. Right behind him, I want you and ten good shots—with rifles—you pick 'em out. Go down Front Street to the bottom of King and Queen, and scatter. You know Trenton. You've reconnoitered it. Each man find himself a safe place with a good range to snipe from—an' *stay* in it, an' *snipe*! The rest of us'll go on past you, over the ridge to the rise beyond the grain mill, so they can't get out that way. Stephen and De Fermoy'll take the roads northeast, and the creek'll hold everything between us—so we'll box 'em. Get it?"

"Yes, sir."

The officers moved off, and Crispin looked around him for his ten good shots. His company, tired to death from ferrying an army in the unwieldy Durham boats all night, sprawled against the worm fence strung along the field at the crossroads where the River Road met the road to Howell's Ferry. Ragged uniforms and torn hunting shirts, broken shoes leaking blood on the snow—just the way everybody said the Continental Army looked, by God, the warm Tories in New York and Philadelphia making fun of them—tattered and sagging weary, three of them asleep; half of his best down with fever and dysentery back in Bucks County. Ten good shots, and quick! Well, he knew one way to do it. He strode up to the fence and prodded the sleeping men awake with his rifle barrel to attract attention. Then he called out, in the low, carrying voice he used on the quarterdeck, "I want ten men! Ten men who've sailed for Si Marvayne!"

He waited. Tom Prescott was picking up his knapsack, coming forward. He should have remembered Tom. If it was the coast east from Portsmouth, it was Tom you wanted. No other man knew it so well. There'd be ten, all right,

who'd been with those famous shooting crews. Wasn't a man in the regiment, he thought, born outside Essex County. Jacob Morse—Eben Putnam—John Tapley! Here they come, he thought, the blood flowing warm in his veins because he had called on his own kind, the men who came from the place he came from, and they had risen and answered him.—Nathan Wise Thomas Procter—that's ten!

"Hold it!" He lowered his voice and told his volunteers what he wanted of them.

"Forward march," came the whispered order, passing down the line.

Captain Blackler touched his shoulder. "I'll take the company, Crispin. You and your detail move ahead now fast. There's nobody leading you but Flahaven's men. And that's Colonel Dickinson's—where the pickets are." He pointed, and Crispin saw a clapboard house with three dormers in the roof and three thick trees before it, their branches growing upward, pointing, reedlike, at the sky. At the same moment he heard rifle fire beyond the woods where Greene—and General Washington with him—would be coming down the Pennington Road. In answer to it, a dozen bulky figures in green coats faced with red rushed out of the Dickinson house toward the sound. But now Flahaven's men began firing on the shelter the yagers had just left, and out of it tumbled the rest of the picket, fleeing pell-mell for Trenton, scattering their arms and knapsacks in the snow, with excited bellows.

"*Der Feind! Der Feind! Heraus! Heraus!*"

"Here we go, boys!" yelled Crispin, grasping his rifle and taking after them, just as Colonel Dickinson's cannon opened up from across the river, hot after the foreign varmints who wouldn't be stabling their horses in his wife's front parlor any more.

In front of the gray old barracks, ramshackle, half-fallen down, unused since the French and Indian War, the yagers attempted to make a stand, firing one volley. But they had no bayonets. Flahaven's men had, and Flahaven's men were charging. The yagers fled, past the houses and shops in startled Front Street, past King Street, jamming the narrow, humpbacked, stone bridge where Queen Street crossed the Assunpink. Crispin, coming close after Flahaven, knew each time one of his men chose the shelter of a house or clump of trees, and slipped into it. Alone, at the end, he came to a red board fence running between the last house and the shallow creek, bordered with reeds and willows. He leaped the fence, crouched down, and yanked one of the boards awry so he had a space to fire through. Then he stopped for breath.

For a minute he could see nothing to shoot at, and then the soldiers began reeling out of the churches, the courthouse, the taverns where they had been billeted, sleepy, half-drunk with holiday, thick, foreign voices lifted in cries of dismay and fright. Still he held his fire. They didn't seem fair game. Then he

heard guns going at the head of town. That meant Stephen had got through the picket by Calhoun's store, likely opened a way for Greene's whole division. A troop of Hessians scurried down the hill between the houses and gardens on King Street, spilling over into Queen. Now a red-coated regiment tried to form under the poplar trees in the graveyard back of the English Church, and a blue-coated one in King Street, just in front of Stacy Potts' house. An upstairs window flung wide open and a head in a white night cap thrust out, calling excited questions in German. That was Rall's headquarters. He'd probably been sleeping off Abe Hunt's liquor, but he'd got to get his head through the doorway somehow, get to his men. For all he'd been carried drunk across Jersey through the fall campaign, he had the name of being brave, and a good soldier. Hessians ran all over town now, here and there screaming officers trying to rally the men who paid no attention to them. Crispin leisurely put his gun to his shoulder and went to work with it, pausing now and then to try to make out what was going on.

Six brass three-pounders blocked the middle of King Street, and the blue-coated Rall men were fastening horses to them, trying to drag them into firing position, but Mercer's guns began blasting from the bark pits in the tanyard, and five of the horses went down. Knox's artillery roared from the head of town now, testing the range. Crispin ducked as a cannon ball sailed over his head, fell behind him, and rolled into the creek. Damn it, he thought. I didn't come here to get killed by Henry Knox. He should of stuck to bookselling.

Then the black uniforms of the Von Knyphausen regiment tried to form in Queen Street right in front of him, and he did nothing for a few moments but load and fire. He'd heard that when the hired German troops passed out through Prussia, they'd had to pay head tax a man, same rate as for cattle. He could swear of his own knowledge the tax wouldn't amount to so much going home. He put his raw fingers in his mouth for a moment to warm them. By God, it was cold, and the snow still coming down!

When he picked up his gun and looked out through the fence again, Rall's artillery had dropped their sponges and rammers and fled through the kitchen gardens toward the swampy edges of the Assunpink. Here and there, in the snowy streets and dooryards, lay blotches of color, the uniforms of men who would not get up again. And all the time there was a steady movement of the Hessians eastward, through the sycamores round the gray stone meeting house of the Friends, through the river orchards, over the Queen Street bridge, where Glover's advance waited to make them prisoners of war.

Steady cannon fire raked King and Queen Streets. General Washington would be up there at the head of town, in his rain-spattered blue and buff, on his tall, sorrel-chestnut horse, and Crispin lowered his gun for a moment to take a look that way, but too many trees and houses and flying Hessians came

between. Now the last of the Rall battalion broke and fled from the guns in King Street, and as their fine blue coats scattered eastward across the graveyard and into the low brook meadow beyond, Crispin saw the drab tow and butternut hunting shirts of the Americans swarm in to capture the abandoned cannon.

Right in front of him now, a black-bearded Knyp screamed as a bullet hit him, and ran, yelping like a hound come on a hedgehog, over the bridge, straight for Glover's men beyond the stone grain mill. Another followed him. Then a third. Then all the Knyps were running. Crispin primed his gun, sighted it on a Hessian lieutenant, and pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. Only a faint blue flash and a wet sputter. "Oh, for Christ's sake," he muttered, flinging back the hammer, shaking more powder out of the pearly and olive cow horn hung under his jacket where he'd hoped it would keep dry. He aimed at another Knyp. Again the fizzle of wet powder. That meant for him the battle was over—or did it? He had his hunting knife, and he could charge in for hand to hand fighting, but the Germans wouldn't fight that way. Take them man to man, with no officers to tell them what to do, they'd cut and run every time. But Queen Street lay before him, littered with dead and wounded, and one of those boys likely had some dry powder on him. Clubbing his gun, just in case he needed it that way, he crawled to the end of the fence and peered gingerly round it. Closer now, he saw that a great number of the Hessians had withdrawn to the meadows, where their desperate, gay-coated officers were trying to re-form them. At the bottom of town, St. Clair's men struggled with the last standing company of the Von Knyphausens, Colonel Stark in there killing like a private, a man with a face like a vise, shouting as he killed. By God, thought Crispin, if I ever pick a fight with any man, it won't be with John Stark. He can have my yes-sir any day.

Then he saw his own men, the Glover boys, streaming past him, with a clear way between them and the heights south of the bridge where their advance already waited. He got up, slipped away from the sheltering fence, crossed Front Street, threading his way between the advancing troops, and came into King Street, silent except for the erupting cannon above it, strewn with dead. He bent over one or two of them, but they lay in pools of mud and melting sleet, their equipment no drier than his. A Hessian band struck up fitful music behind the graveyard, and between the houses he saw the scarlet Von Lossbergs and the dark blue troops of the commander, attempting stubbornly to form, but faltering under the steady assault of Captain Forrest's battery and snipers' bullets, spattering forth intermittent and deadly, from every house to the west of town. And in all the sleet and lashing wind and powder smoke, it took a sharp-eyed man to tell friend from foe.

Under cover of this deadly mist, Crispin stalked up King Street, keeping

close to the house walls. He passed a party of Hessian officers, frantically trying to gather up their men to make a decent stand, or at least retreat in order. An ensign hobbled off on a shattered leg. A lieutenant of the Von Lossbergs fell and lay kicking, his red coat torn off, his broken spine gray-white and purple-clotted in the bleak Jersey rain. Crispin shuddered. Maybe his own body would be the next one spilled and broken. He looked down at his hands, strong-boned, raw, black gunpower clinging to the little golden hairs along the backs of them. They had been his good friends a long time. He wondered for how much longer.

The American batteries were moving in closer—opening up on every street corner. The danger from his own guns now kept Crispin pinned to the crazy wall of a staymaker's shop, unable to go about his quest for dry powder. Over in Queen Street he heard a distraught shouting, "*Alles was mein Grenadiere sind, Vorwärts!*"

Crispin smiled grimly. Don't need German to know what he's saying, he thought. He's saying, "Come on, you bastards, and fight!" Then he heard a great cry go up, followed by an almost pitiful silence. Something's happened, he thought. I wish I was over there. I wish my gun would shoot.

To the northeast now, the guns of Stephen and Fermoy opened strong. Must be the Hessians were trying to get out by the Maidenhead Road. And now he realized that except for an occasional bullet the fighting had moved away from him. King Street filled with Mercer's men, crowding in from the tan pits, pouring through to the gardens on Queen.

"We've got 'em at the brook!" panted an excited rifleman, his right cheek bloody and his eyebrows singed away, pausing to reload in front of the staymaker's. "They're surrendering, pulling their flags down, throwing their guns away. Did you hear we got Rall?" He snapped his gun shut and ran on.

Good, thought Crispin, it's just cleaning up now. But still, I better get over there. Ahead of him he saw a fallen dragoon lying at the door of a little spirits shop with a girl in a pewter-gray dress bending over him. He looks done, he thought. He'll have some powder he won't need any more.

He started toward the dragoon's body. The girl looked up. He stared into the frightened blue eyes of his sweetheart, Lass Marvayne.

Even as he looked at her, a stray bullet drilled through the mossy clapboard behind her head as if it were cutting through moulded cheese. For a moment he felt his blood ebb out and leave him, to a point where he could not feel; then it came pounding back, all hot anger.

"By God, Lass, what are you doing here? I got a war to fight. I can't bother with you."

"Well, who asked you to bother with me?" She slid the dead boy's head gently from her lap and stood up, her skirt all wet, stained with Trenton street

clay and clotting blood.

"Here!" He flung open the door of the spirits shop and drew her inside. The sound of firing came more faintly now, no longer from the head of town or the deserted streets, but from the outlying brigades that stretched, a line of steel and gunfire, across the escape routes leading back to the safety of Cornwallis' camp. And still the sleet pattered against Polly Brown's windowpane.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, some of the anger gone from his voice, as some of the fear for her safety left him. "I thought you were away off in Bucks County, safe as God. You're supposed to be."

"I—I know. But I'm not always where I'm supposed to be."

He had always thought Lass's willfulness was one of her charms, like her shining red hair, and her fair skin, and the light way she moved. Now he was not so sure. Now it seemed a weapon turned against him, rather than the proper part of a feast he was to enjoy in good season. Something had changed about Lass—he couldn't understand what. Right now he wasn't going to try. He'd got to get back to his company.

"Well—I'll ask you again later. Now I've got to go with the men. Will you wait here for me?"

"How long?"

"If the battle's over—and it sounds that way—I'll try to find Colonel Johnny or Bill Blackler and get leave to go and take you home. In an hour or so, maybe. It's not quieted down enough for you to go into the street yet."

Lass looked at him, his blond hair plastered wet on his ruddy forehead, his thick blue uniform drenched and powder stained, but his eyes still deep and warm when they looked at her, his hand closed over hers, so steady. Oh! He's a good man! she thought. He's like my father. He's—he's—if I hadn't seen Mahlon.

"I'll wait," she said aloud. "Till you come."

She followed him outside and stood with him a moment in the bleak, gray morning rain, pelting on the battered town, on the bloody snow round the upended brass cannon in front of the English Church. Then someone hailed them. Four Hessians toiled down a lane of currant bushes, carrying a church bench with a huddled, twisting, dark blue heap on it. Beside them paced an American captain in Virginia buff and blue. Lass looked hard at Crispin's sleeve, tracing the irregular blending of warp and woof.

"Give us a hand here," called the captain. She lifted her eyes, fearing what she would see, yet knowing she must look. One of the men bearing the bench with the fallen officer, wounded himself, had collapsed on the fringe of yellowed grass at the edge of Stacy Potts' dooryard.

Crispin strode forward and raised the bench where the Hessian had eased it down. She ran up beside him in time to hear him say, "Don't look, Lass. It's

Commander Rall. He's shot to death."

But she did look, where the blue, medaled coat was stained black, where the side was shot away, where the chest kept heaving with breath and pain—why, why, why? When a man was shot, why couldn't he die? *Why couldn't he?* Twisting her fingers together, she turned away and did not watch Crispin and the others walk off with their burden to the front door of the Potts' house.

Once there, they had to lower the bench and wait, while the colonel tumbled about in a paroxysm, while the captain poured whiskey between the bloody froth of his lips, wetting his unshaven chin. As they stood about, silent, helpless, a folded white square fell from the dying man's pocket, and Crispin picked it up and flipped it open, nervously, not so much curious as wanting his hands to be busy. He read, and read again, and then he turned to the captain.

"Why—why, this—listen here, sir—it's—do you think he never read it? That he had it on him all the time?"

"What?"

"It's a warning. It gives our whole attack plan away. 'Washington is coming on you down the river. He will be here afore long. Mahl—' The rest of the name's gone. The bullet tore it. Who'd he be? We ought to go after him."

The Virginia man's eyes flashed; a sharpness cut the blur of his mellow, southern voice. "I don't know. That's not enough to tell by. Some God-damned Tory." He turned to one of the Hessian bearers. "Ask him if he read this note."

Three times the Hessian spoke to the commander. The opaque eyes behind the thick lids opened, the sharp nose stood out even more sharply in death. Pouches sagged on the mottled cheeks. The colonel had drunk out many nights, but he had never faced such a terrible after-morning as his last one. Now the heavy head rolled from side to side, speaking, wordless, with its gesture. The lips moved, uttered thick, gasping syllables.

"He says he never read it. He was at cards and wine. Why should he bother with a Yankee poltroon? He says"—more slowly—"if he had read it, he would not be here now."

Meanwhile Lass waited on the wet stone steps of Polly's shop. Crispin did not come back at once, but other men hurried to and fro, surgeons, officers in all kinds of uniforms, none of them noticing her, and she felt too sick to care. She had never seen a man wounded to death before today, and when she and Silas went hunting, they shot to kill clean, not to leave a live thing twisting in agony.

But first the dragoon, and now the Hessian leader.

When Crispin came back to her, he said only that his captain had given him two days' leave and the loan of a horse, provided he would carry a message posthaste to Newtown where Washington meant to take the prisoners and

foregather for a few days to make the next battle plan. They walked straight from Rall's headquarters to the ferry, and once across they were lucky enough to find a farm wagon going their way. Lass lay in the back of it and slept under a wet horse blanket on a heap of wet pine logs, and Crispin slept on the seat beside the farmer.

When they got to Newtown and Crispin had delivered the word to make ready for near a thousand Hessian prisoners, they went into the Old Frame House and sat down to drink ale, and dry off, and wait for their supper. Lass remembered Sally then, and began to feel guilty and uncomfortable. She remembered the sorrel horse she had left in the willows beside the Delaware. The dark old tavern swarmed full of townspeople and soldiers straggling back, tired, and wet, and cold, smiling with the good news they bore. Toasts were drunk every minute, and fires roared in both the corner fireplaces. A plump man in Quaker clothes, not Sam, but very like him, shared their table, and his tongue ran on while his food sat before him untasted.

"Ah! 'Twas a wonderful victory, and it's changed all! 'Twas enough to make me forget I'm agin all wars. The men are re-enlisting so fast the sergeants can't take their names down. We've saved our army. Howe can't take Philadelphia now, for all his thousand great troops. We'll hear no more cries against General George Washington. The whole country'll rally to us now! I'm just from Trenton—"

"So am I," said Crispin. "I fought there." He looked disdainfully at the other's decent gray. Crispin had his own ideas about men who stayed at home when there was a fight going on—creeping Quakers or aught else.

"I came in with a supply team—just at the end. They were all surrendering down by the creek, amongst the band and the baggage and the women, holding their hats up on their bayonets—'twas a glorious sight. How did thee get back here?"

"By wagon. Round Four Lanes' End and up the Durham Road."

"Thee must have left town long before I did then, which was just past noon. I came straight from the river over Windybush. Washington won't get here before night, the men are making so merry with the Hessian liquor stores, he had to order forty hogsheads of rum stove in. I hear there's near a thousand drunk, and 'twill be a worse chore getting them back than it was getting them over through all the ice last night."

"Well, I shan't be taking them this time," said Crispin. "I have two days —" He looked at Lass.

She did not look at him. Instead she said, "I think we better go home, Crispin, as soon as we can. I—I was supposed to find Sam. Sally took sick—"

"Was that," asked Crispin, starting to eat the pork porridge and boiled turnip a harassed tavern maid slid in front of him, "how you happened to be in

Trenton?"

"Yes. I got lost looking for him."

"But how did you cross the river?"

"In a boat," she said, shutting her mouth firmly; and, knowing he would get no further answer, he did not question her.

They got home just as a streak of red sunset over Montgomery promised the end of sleet and rain, and Mag, Sally's old servant, met them in the doorway, holding up a lamp against the swift, sudden dark streaming in long shadows down the snow.

"I'm glad thee's home safe," she greeted them. "There's been a commotion over in Trenton, I hear."

"Yes," murmured Lass, looking down at the bloodstains on the front of her dress. "I guess there has. Has Sally—?"

"She has a son. Dr. Meredith says he never saw so easy a birth. She'll be serving supper at table before the week's out."

She turned then to show Crispin into the parlor, for Lass had bounded upstairs and flung herself into her sister's bedroom. She stopped on the rag rug in the middle of the wide pine floorboards, ready to cry, "Oh, Sally!" but found she couldn't say anything at all.

Sally lay propped on down pillows, a candle burning at each side of her and a pink ribbon in her hair. She had lost hardly any of her rosy color. Sam sat in a chair drawn close to the bed, looking prouder than he had any right to.

"I'm glad thee's back, Lass, from wherever thee went," she greeted her sister, "though I didn't have much time to worry about thee. Sam, thee'd best go downstairs and have thy supper and then come to bed. But don't overlay him. I don't want him smothered. He's put me to too much trouble."

Later that evening, when the house was dark and quiet, Crispin's moment came, and he took Lass into his arms. He held the softly curving body, and his lips wandered at will over the face and neck and hair, but there was a Lass he would never hold again, and both of them knew it.

SEVEN

Fire and the Hammer

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Wars and world events moved out of Bucks County for a season and left the wide fields bare to the dull winter sky. Under the frozen snow crust now, between the pools of mire on thawing days, sprang up the winter wheat whose burnished fronds would fall to the sickle next June in such rich heaps as to pay for the Revolution and feed the men who must fight in it. All day the cattle, turned out alike from thick, stone barns and poor sheds, wandered through the woods cropping hazel, broom, and rye straw, or tree buds, thrust forth improvident, in a warm spell; meandered home at night to crunch down turnips and stacked hay. The men swung their flails on the threshing floor, or went into the snowy groves to cut firewood and fencings and push the tree line back a few yards, extend their fields that much more. The women spun and wove, churned and baked, and cared for the children and the men. Lass had never known a winter like this, for though bitterer winds swept Newburyport, and the drifts piled higher toward the eaves, in Newburyport there had always been plenty of young folk coming together, tea drinkings in the afternoon and singing school at night, dancing and talk and laughter, even a sly bit of bundling now and then, with a lad you trusted aplenty. Here there was no one but Sally and Sam, the baby and the maids—once in a while, Tom from the Anchor, come courting the bound girl, Jane. And Sam not home very much, but ranging the countryside to conjure up supplies for the Continental Army, from the charcoal furnaces of Durham Ironworks, shut down now till spring, to Philadelphia and all the richness of Chester County below. He never suggested that she ride out with him as her father would have done, and Sally, busy and bustling, did not go out herself nor seem to imagine that anyone else could want to do so. So she spent her time in the kitchen, learning to frizzle beef liver for First Day breakfast, to turn the flax wheel and dye linen from crushed saffron and scarlet berries. She skimmed the flat earthen pans of milk, and gathered eggs and wrapped them in straw to send to the market in Philadelphia. She ran down cellar to the bins full of wattly, yellow crooked-neck squashes and greenish white ones, knotty golden potatoes, and large, pungent Spanish ones, purple-russet turnips and dried Indian corn; to the brine tub full of salt meat. Sometimes she rocked the old pine cradle Sam had slept

in when he was a baby. She had never thought that she would want to bother about knowing these things. Now it seemed that she might.

They went to Friends' Meeting once a week, of course; into Buckingham, past the sprawling tavern with the sloped roof, where Sam said Mary Bogart would give you clean beds, an indifferent dinner, and bad claret; past the peaked stone houses grouped about it and through the meadows surrounding the evil waters of Holicong Spring; then under the chestnut trees on the ridge, to the big, square stone meeting house, with the schoolhouse and Ruth Gwydion's cottage close beside it. Once when they passed the Friends' burying ground, Sam pointed out the spot where his old ancestor, Nathaniel Bye, lay buried in his armor. Sometimes on sunny days, Lass rode out alone across the open country, all broad fields and sturdy houses, with brooks everywhere draining out of the woods and on almost every brook a grain or a saw mill. She rode an old dappled plow horse now, for the sorrel had never come home, but Sam, happy in the new son named with his name, had not scolded her about it. Sometimes she went out with Sam's fowling piece and came in with a brace of squirrels or rabbits, or a woodcock. Great flocks of wild pigeons, rich slate-blue, olive green, and brown, marked with white, settled often in the beech woods at the foot of Buckingham Mountain, but it seemed that here you did not shoot a pigeon, you trapped it in the fields, and Lass never had the patience for that.

It was the loneliest winter she had ever spent, the first winter she had ever done anything except amuse herself. But it was the most exciting one. For any moment of the day or night, Mahlon Doan might ride by, and Lass waited, breathless, for that; felt that she could wait breathless forever, and be deliciously happy waiting. It was inevitable that he would come. But he was not the first. After Trenton, Crispin had hurried back to his company. There had been more fighting in the Jerseys, another victory, and then the army had withdrawn into the hills round Morristown for the winter.

One crystal-sharp afternoon in late February when a rose and purple sunset cast long shadows over the fields west to the Durham Road, Lass heard voices in the yard, and looking out saw two of Sam's hired hands with axes on their shoulders, talking to a man on horseback, the blue trousers of a uniform showing beneath his bearskin jacket.

Well—it had to be, she thought; had to be sometime that Crispin would come and ask about their marriage, and she would have to tell him there wasn't going to be any marriage between him and her. She turned in the window. Sally was curled up in a corner of the fine brocaded sofa bought new in Philadelphia, her feet tucked under her, suckling the baby. In the kitchen she could see old Mag lighting the lamps, for the twilight was coming on now, swift as a horse a-gallop.

"Oh, Sally! It's Crispin! I can't—!"

"Of course you can," said Sally placidly. "Better soon, too. Father wants it. Crispin wants it. You want it—or you wouldn't have promised him. It's nothing to be frightened of. Hannah told us that, years ago. And she was right."

"I'm not frightened!" cried Lass indignantly.

Crispin walked in then, not bothering to knock, stamping the snow off his boots on the rag rug.

"Oh, Lass—Sally! What you got for supper? I have to be back in camp by midnight, and that'll mean riding like the devil—"

Sally unwound herself and stood up, cradling the baby close so he could not see her bare bosom through her unlaced bodice.

"Then I better go set the table. We're glad you came, Crispin. The kitchen's full of food against Sam coming home for First Day. There's cold turkey and venison, and Lass shot two rabbits yesterday. I could stew them up with some herbs in about twenty minutes. Whatever you'd rather have—"

He looked only at Lass. "I don't know, Sally. Get what's easiest for you. Likely I won't know one dish from another."

Sally hastened from the room and he lifted Lass off her feet, strode to the sofa and sat down on it, holding her. She clasped her hands behind her back and stiffened her shoulders.

"Lass, Sweet. Are you angry at me for coming like this without telling you? I didn't know they were going to let me off this afternoon. But now—it's all come out our way. Colonel Johnny's been made a general."

Lass stirred uneasily in his warm clasp. "I'm glad. My father said he was a good man."

"And we're going to be ordered to Peekskill—to guard the Hudson. For if once the British hold that, they've got us cut in two—New England and New York away from these parts and the south. Most of us think that's what they'll try to do. But that's not till April—and in between—I'm to go home recruiting. And I want to take my wife."

No sound troubled Sam Bye's parlor but the ticking of the grandfather clock at the foot of the stairs in the hallway. She let Crispin find her mouth; let him see it held no response for him.

"Lass! What's wrong? What's the matter with you?"

"Don't you know?"

He was silent.

"Can't you tell?" she asked again, shaken, almost hysterical. "The one thing it could be?"

Another long, slow, dragging silence that made her feel she must scream, run screaming out under the bare trees, to hide somewhere in the twilight and

the snow.

Then Crispin stood up and set her carefully down on the brocade cushions beside him. She glanced once at his face, into the proud, impassive hazel eyes that looked at her without seeing her.

"Well," he asked casually, "who is he?"

"I—I can't tell you."

"Why not? If you're marrying him, it'll be common knowledge."

"I don't know—" she faltered. "I—he—I don't think he wants to marry me. He doesn't now. Maybe he never will. Its so wonderful—just to love him."

Crispin's anger dissolved slowly in a smile. Then, to her amazement, he took out his pipe, stepped to the hearth, and lighted it with a twig of pine.

"You—I didn't understand, Lass. I thought you were grown up. You're not. I can wait till you are. But I'll never let you go. Remember that. Come—we'll help Sally."

He drew her into the kitchen where all was bustle, and as soon as the rabbits were stewed he swallowed them down, tossed off a glass of Sam's best Spanish wine and left, without touching her or trying to be alone with her one moment more. He did not even kiss her in the doorway, or take her hand.

"I'll be back in the spring, Lass," was all he said, to Sally's utter bewilderment and eventual rage.

"What does he mean by that?" she cried, once he had ridden off east in the dark. "Is he trying to jilt you, Lass? Does he have another girl?"

"I don't think so. I hope he finds one." And Lass turned and ran upstairs. Next morning Sally did not ask her what had happened, but held her peace and waited—for Crispin to come back in the spring. But he never came, being held too close to Peekskill.

And in the spring, quite surprisingly, came Mahlon Doan.

It happened on a warm night early in May, a night when the moon was big and round and hardly any farther off from earth than the tops of the weeping willow trees along the brook. It had been a day of sun and soft wind, and Lass had gone climbing among the trees and rocks on Buckingham Mountain, pulling the last arbutus of the season, already beginning to go brown. On the low, rounded summit she had stopped to look out over the countryside, and seen nothing but a froth of blossom everywhere—pear, cherry, apple, the deep purple-pink of the peach trees, the dappled carpet of small plants close to the earth. There had been spring at home—apple, and lilac later, not too much more—but that all stone-walled and spaced out with gray-brown fields between. Here, the white tide of bloom flowed everywhere. She had never seen anything like the quaint, curving leaves of the May apple; never anything like the rich, white sweetness of the dogwood, the thick petals shining as ivory, soft as cream. And she had walked on the mountain and through the fields all day,

wondering at it all, loving it all; not because of its own beauty—that way, her own sparse fields were more beautiful to her, looked more the way a field should look—but because it was Mahlon's country. And in the dusk, with Sam away, and Sally upstairs crooning to the baby, she had gone out to walk along the brook.

She had crossed the brook and started down the green grass alley beyond it, all filled with blue violets and alder shoots, and bounded with a row of young hawthorn. Sam favored hedges over fences, and meant to grow this one for six years and then read a paper about it to some learned society of men in Philadelphia. Just as she was ready to fling herself down in the deep, sweet river grasses to watch the dark water slipping by, she heard a stir in the lane, and looked to see who might be coming. A tall, sleek horse, a rider dressed in the dim, gleaming white of buckskin, moved toward her out of the night. He would have crossed the low stone bridge into the yard, so she called to him between the willow fronds stirring in the soft air.

"Mahlon! Mahlon Doan!"

He reined the black horse to a stop. She walked toward him and stood looking up. He climbed down and confronted her.

"I thought 'twas time I brought thy mare home. We picked her up and wintered her." Sure enough, on a lead behind, followed the little sorrel.

She strove desperately to hold herself together, to behave like Sam Bye's sister-in-law. She could no longer hope to behave like Lass Marvayne.

"Thee's been kind. We must owe thee for her feed."

He smiled. "I guess, one way or another, the Congress has paid."

"Will—will thee sit down and rest before going home? Here? Or come into the house for a glass of wine?"

"Into Sam Bye's house?" He shook his head.

"But why? Why is thee at odds with Sam?"

"Hasn't anybody told thee?"

"They have. They've told me so much I don't believe any of them."

Mahlon laughed wryly. The black horse stamped and neighed.

"He's—he's a fine horse," said Lass timidly.

"He is that. He come down from Tamerlane, a horse of William Penn's, an' he come down from Godolphin Barb, most famous sire ever was in England. I stole him from Judge Henry Wynkoop over at Vredens Hoff in Northampton. I named him Firebrand."

"Oh—Henry Wynkoop! He's a friend of Sam's. Is he for the Congress, too?"

"He is."

"My father's for the Congress. He's running powder for them."

"Thee can't help that. We can't tell our fathers what to do."

Mahlon flung the reins aside and let Firebrand wander, threw himself down on the grass, crushing the violets and May apples, thrusting his boots almost into the little, boggy, creeping brook. Lass, with a sigh of content and wonder, sank down beside him, a careful distance off, not caring what her father did, nor the Congress either.

"My father and mother are not with us at all. My mother says that in us the Light runs out of measure, and she fears it will bring us death instead of life. My father says he always feared God in his generation, and why can't we do the same? The Meeting looks on us as hickory Quakers—which is no good Quakers at all. And yet, thee notice—we've never been held in jail or called to court, no matter what we do. All Bucks County's afraid of us—and yet, they're proud of us, too. We're holding by what we believe. And there's not many Friends can do that nowadays. 'Course, there's still some good men. Some's picked up and gone out of this place—like Gilbert Hicks of Four Lanes' Ends, or Galloway of Trevose. There's more good men in exile than in all the Pennsylvania line."

"Sam Bye—"

"Sam Bye! He's a hickory Quaker too—but another way. He favors the war greatly—likely he'll take down his gun afore long. He runs when Robert Morris whistles. When we're counting men, we won't talk o' Sam Bye. Me an' Mose an' Abe are just as much the servants of the living God as George Washington and Robert Morris. Does thee want to argue we're not?"

"No. No—I don't want to argue."

"Well. What is it thee's heard of us? I'd like to know."

"I've heard—that—that thee robs folks—because thee doesn't like the new government—"

"And why should we like it? What's men got to unite for? Pennsylvania—Bucks County—Plumstead—Mahlon Doan! Mahlon Doan's the root of all this. The others be fine terms in air. Mahlon Doan knows his farm and his business—if it's been a good year, how corn crops are, whether rabbits be plenty in the woods. Think of a state, think of a nation, what ever be it all? They all come back to the man—to Mahlon Doan. And Mahlon Doan wants to be free. He don't want to be bound in terms that makes his country a high country he'll have to die slave for. Didn't we come over the sea to get away from all that? He can live of his own, and he don't want no help or hindrance! I—I'm sorry. I preached to thee who's a girl and can't help what thy men do. What else did thee hear of us?"

"I've heard thy brother Mose is thy leader; that thee follows Mose—"

"I'd follow him to Jerusalem if the way was all live fire! And where he tells me to shoot, I'll shoot."

Lass shrank back in the fragrant dark. She could not see his face, but the

young voice throbbed roughly only a few inches from her, his eyes caught the moonlight and glowed with it.

"Why? Whatever for?"

"Because he's my brother and I believe on him. Because he's had a convincement. We Doans be all convinced the same—but Mose has had a word from the Lord."

The brook flowed on and the white petals fell, and the round yellow moon shone.

"There was a thing men said in the days of our coming over," went on Mahlon, leaning toward her, tense, but not tense because of her. "When the Friends first came out of England, in the time of Penn, in the time when He led our vessels as one leads a horse by the head—Thee'd not know it, Lass Marvayne, not being one of us."

"What was it?" she breathed, fighting, fighting as hard as she could, with all the weapons of vivid blue eyes, sweet, shapely flesh, and soft red hair.

Her weapons failed and fell short.

"In those days men said, as one man wrote to his wife, 'The Lord's word was as fire and a hammer in me'—we Doans feel that. In us is the fire and the hammer, that which drives us to do God's will—and if we must break with the ways of Friends to do it, why that's the burden he's put on us—that's why he chose a strong man like my brother Mose."

" 'Fire and the hammer,' " repeated Lass slowly, "something that makes thee do a thing not knowing why—that's—that's God's will working in thee?"

"Yes—yes, I think thee's right—putting it that way."

He leaped up from the bank of sweetgrass and violets.

"I'm going now. I brought thy horse back. I—I'd not show a brambly nature toward thee—if I did so—it was to make thee see—our ways be different."

"Must they be? Must they—always—Mahlon?

"I believe so."

"Then—then—" she faltered, feeling the whole earth crumble away beneath her.

"I'll dance at thy wedding, Lass Marvayne, when thee marries a better man, if thee wants me to. Good night."

She felt his presence going away from her, heard the hoofs of the great black horse who had come down from Godolphin Barb go beating through the lane, and put her head in her hands to think awhile, but found she could not think at all.

It was in that spring, Sally still waspish and inclined to upbraid her for the way she had treated Crispin, that Lass turned to Ruth Gwydion for friend. After the winter broke, it was easy to ride out, to whip the old spavined plow

horse down the lane—for she never explained the sorrel's coming back and never used it—to ride past Buckingham to the schoolteacher's cottage, for a cup of tea, or to go picking daisies and field strawberries, or just to chatter. Ruth did not seem to be interested when she tried to talk of the Doans, save to say that once, when she taught in Merion, she had known Deborah Mave, a girl Abe Doan planned to marry, a girl who died. But Ruth was friendly, always ready to admire Lass and talk about her concerns, having little to say of herself. Not until a hot night at the end of July, with lightning a-flash every minute or two in the thick, brassy clouds driving over the Meeting House, did Lass feel she really knew Ruth.

Likely Sally wouldn't have let her go out, late and the air full of thunder, if she hadn't been so excited herself about Sam coming home. He'd been a month in town—away through hay harvest and wheat harvest, the men pulling the flax and spreading it to dry—but on this night, just as the red sun dimmed away in the sultry dusk, he rode into the yard. After he'd kissed Sally over and over, and handled the baby, and sat down to supper, Lass saw her chance to slip away from them and go to Ruth, not wanting Ruth particularly, but feeling restless and eager, as if she must go somewhere, having no other place to go. As she tiptoed out through the kitchen, Sam's voice followed her, throbbing with more excitement than that of his homecoming.

"Howe's moved his army out past New York Island—gone by sea to attack us somewhere—we don't know where. Washington's marching his men south. They're camped by the river tonight. They'll be coming down the York Road right after sunrise—right through Buckingham. We can see them from here—"

She stepped from the kitchen into the barnyard, and heard no more of Sam and the war.

A high, hot wind shook the chestnut boughs round Ruth Gwydion's house when Lass reached it, and the thick, coppery sky flared up every minute or two, but the rain held off and the thunder stayed back in the hills toward Plumstead—back in the hills where Mahlon Doan lived—and did not come any nearer. Ruth had six candles going in a pewter candelabrum on the low, pine table where she sat finishing her supper, cutting open a ripe, orange melon just as Lass came through the open door. She jumped up.

"Oh, Lass! I'm that glad to see thee! There's going to be a storm and I'm afraid of lightning. I—"

Lass laughed. "It won't hurt you, Ruth. That melon smells good. Give me a little piece."

She sat down on a three-legged stool across from the teacher.

"I'll cut thee half. 'Tis too much for a lone woman."

And after they had eaten, they sat and talked, their elbows on the table, the unwashed dishes pushed to one side; talked of many things, and finally of

grandmothers. Ruth had asked where Lass got her red hair, Sally being so blonde, and Lass had told her about Peg Magoon, her beauty and her perverseness. And then it was that a dreaming look came into Ruth's flecked eyes and she said softly, "I had a grandmother, too."

"Was she beautiful?"

"Oh, no! She was a poor shepherd woman on a mountain in Wales. We lived on Plinlimmon side—all russet waste and black crags, with little springs bubbling out of the turf everywhere, between the start of two great rivers, the Severn and the Wye. She brought me up. And I loved her."

The tenseness in Ruth's voice almost kept Lass from asking questions; but not quite.

"Is she alive now, Ruth?"

"I—I do not know. My father took me away when I was a little girl. He lived much apart from us there, in the towns and cities, I think, and did not come home to the mountains very often. I think he had done something he should not have done. I do not know what it was. It was long ago, and I was very small."

"Did he come to America with you?"

"Yes. Once he came to our little house in the night. It had a slate floor and one room, and the fire smoked, I remember. It always smelled of burning thornwood and mutton. He seemed to be hiding. And then my grandmother—she was tall, with black eyes, nothing like me, but I cannot see her face plain after all the years—my grandmother said, 'There will come a knock on the door.' My grandmother had the second sight."

"I know what that is. My grandmother told me. They have it in her old country, too. But she did not have it. Do you have it, Ruth?"

"No. I do not see—as she did. But sometimes I know."

"You mean—what will happen?"

"Not quite that. It's more—that—sometimes I know things I have no way of knowing. I do not like it when it happens. It frightens me."

The two girls sat staring into each other's eyes over the candle flames, and outside the storm seemed about to break, and never broke at all.

"Sometimes—I have it about thee, Lass. I know thee wants something terribly. And I think—thee will get it. But not this year, nor next."

"Oh! Oh!" cried Lass faintly. "Do you know what it is?"

"No. That I do not know at all." Ruth smiled and flung out her hands, palms up, on the table.

They were still for a few moments. Then Lass recovered herself and called Ruth back to her story.

"What did she mean—there would come a knock on the door?"

"I have always thought that she meant some men would come for my

father—men of the law, perhaps, or his enemies. He answered her that he'd better go then, but that since he might never come back, he would take me, and she never said one word. I rode on the saddle before him all that night and many days after, till we came to a town by the sea where the ships anchored. One of them brought us here."

Ruth laughed gently. "My, but I felt shamed and strange, when first I walked up from the docks in Philadelphia, along Front Street, and saw all the fine people in claret-colored velvet, and cobwebby lace, and satin shoes, and silk hose, and quilted bonnets, and beaver hats with feathers. I had on the old dress of Wales—a hat like a round tower, and a blue wool kirtle over a crimson petticoat, and stout, broad shoes. I'd lost one shoe buckle, I remember, and that troubled me. I hadn't thought of it for years—till we spoke of grandmothers."

"What did your father do here? Was he a merchant like Robert Morris? My father is, you know."

"Oh, no. Sally says she thinks thy father's growing rich. And my father was poor. And he died of a fever in such a little while. I think it must have been something very wicked he did, back in Cardigan, for he would never tell his name."

"You don't know—what your father's name was?"

"No. Nor what mine is—except for 'Ruth.' When he lay dying there were kind Quakers who came to help us at the poor tavern where we stayed, and they asked him what I should be called by, what they should cut above him. I remember how he laughed at them, for all his fever, and he said, 'Oh, call us after old Gwydion. He's the father of every Welshman.' "

"Gwydion?"

"An old enchanter—in the Welsh stories that happened before history. He made a woman out of flowers, and when she displeased him, he turned her into an owl."

Lass stared at Ruth, undecided whether to envy her or not. Her own childhood seemed suddenly dull as pease porridge, empty of all adventure. But she had come away from it—come to Bucks County and found the greatest wonder of all, the wonder of loving Mahlon Doan. Suddenly her heart grew so full of this wonder that she wanted to be alone with it.

"And afterwards—a kind woman named Rebecca Jones, who kept a school, took me in and taught me her trade and to be a Friend," Ruth was saying, but Lass scarcely heard her. She stood up.

"The rain's not come yet, and the wind's dying. Sally will miss me. I'm sorry for all your troubles, Ruth."

Ruth smiled and walked beside her to the door, standing there while Lass climbed to the old horse's bony back. "It does not matter. It was long ago, and

I am as happy as most—now."

They waved to each other and Lass rode off, down the Buckingham Road. She was not thinking of Ruth and the strange, old world she had come out of. She was thinking of that night in the spring when Mahlon had said to her, "Fire and the hammer! The force that drives you to do the will of God." She was thinking that it was the will of God she should so love Mahlon Doan. And Ruth had said she should have him, not knowing at all what she said. Oh, he would see! Their ways would not always be different!

If she had turned, she would have seen a slim figure in a buckskin shirt move out of the trees behind the Meeting House, hasten to Ruth in the lighted doorway, and take her in his arms. If she could have listened, she would have heard him say, "I rode over. I know thee's afraid when there's lightning. I saw her sitting here—so I waited."

She would have heard Ruth murmur against his shoulder, "Did thee come only to save me from the lightning?"

"Oh, Ruth! I thought she'd never go!"

She would have seen them step inside and shut the door, and the windowpanes go dark. But she did not turn. Fire and the hammer drove her another way.

EIGHT

Death of Lass Marvayne

•

. . . but, anyway, I'll never have to die again, thought Lass Marvayne, beyond all tears and bitterness, lying on her bed and staring out at the pale starlight over Buckingham Mountain, the dim fields stretching away to the lighted houses scattered along the Durham Road. When I'm an old woman—some day my breath'll stop, and they'll come to bury me. They'll think it was then and there I died—but it wasn't. It was long ago. It was now. It was on the stairs in Ruth Gwydion's house—a fall morning, when I was seventeen. She gave a cry of pain and tossed about on the pillow, remembering how it had happened to her.

Last night at this same time she had been so happy, she and Sally together in the parlor, reading their letter from Silas and unwrapping the rich presents he had sent them. He'd been away almost a year; sailed twice to France, and to St. Eustatius more times than he could count. "It is but a barren rock three miles wide," he wrote, "with no produce or garrison, but it is free Dutch and on America's doorstep, and thus, I think, the richest seaport in the world—for now. We run the powder as we can, in beer tubs and rice barrels, and boxes that Hotaling et Cie., the French merchants, have labeled to hold women's stays. All the trade from Europe pours here to meet and change with that which comes out of America. . . . I like it well, I find, to feel a deck under my feet again. The blockade is a jest. Now and then we meet a British frigate but outrun them. A big ship cannot defeat a little one. England knew that in the days of the Armada, but that was a long time ago, and rich countries forget. I think I am trying to say, do not worry about me. I have been twice at home, and Hannah sends her love. I see Sam Bye sometimes when I make port in Philadelphia—as he will have told you—and hear from him that Sally has a son, which pleases me. I have put one of my ships in his name and he shall have all the profits from it—as the arms trade is now, one hundred and twenty percent. Next year I hope to do the same for a son of Lass. Why is her wedding delayed? I send you trifles. . . ."

The "trifles" gave Sally's parlor the look of a rich shop in Front Street: fine, white Staffordshire pottery, a roll of Chinese wallpaper with red mandarins walking under golden willow trees; bolts of crimson damask,

flowered lawn, and burnished taffety; gloves, silk hose, Brussels lace, and scrolled silverware; a garnet brooch for Sally; a Scotch cloak of heather-colored wool for Lass.

Sally picked up a pair of dancing slippers and held them out before her, shaking her head.

"I can't think how Father could be so forgetful! He knows our measures. But these! I can't get into them, and thee couldn't keep them on."

"I know." Lass took the slippers and turned them over, studied them in the lamplight, shells of velvet with high, jeweled heels and a scarlet rose on each toe. "They're no good to us. Let's give them to Ruth. I think they'll fit her."

"But where will she wear them? She never goes to parties in Philadelphia, as we'll be doing this winter—as we couldn't last year, with the baby so new and all."

"I think she would like to wear them in her house. I've noticed she wears very gay clothes there—not her Quaker gray gowns at all."

Sally looked up and narrowed her eyes. "Does thee think she has—someone courting her?"

"I've never seen anyone there. She's never spoken of anyone."

They put their gifts away soon after and went to bed. Next morning Lass woke early. With her, to wake was to run to the window and thrust her head out to see what the day would be like, and this day promised fair, after a long week of rough wind and rain. At home now, in late September, the fall would be settled in, but here the leaves, though limp and dusty, were still green, and summer flowers still abloom in Sally's garden, the long beds running, pink and white and lemon-color, down to the willow hedge by the brook, the paths bordered with larkspur and bleeding heart. The sun just coming over the mountain turned the mild, misty air all golden, the shadowy fields all blue-green like rippling sea. She heard the hired men calling to each other in the wheat stubble, heard Mag and Jane rattling the milk pails in the kitchen below, looked off across the white, fragrant meadows of flowering buckwheat—and loved it all.

"I know!" she cried suddenly. "I'll go over to Ruth's now. She'll be awake, getting ready for school, and I'll give her the slippers and come straight back. A ride'll make me hungry for breakfast."

She washed her face hastily in the pink china bowl on the dresser, scrambled into her russet dress and ran downstairs and across the yard, clutching the slippers in her hand. The old horse plodded a little heavily going up the lane, the grass blades and thorn bushes still wet from last night's shower glinted crystal where the rising sun touched them. Lass felt its warm glow on her hair and shoulders; delighted to be riding forth like this, alive and young in the fresh morning; hummed an old sailor tune she had picked up on the

wharves in Newburyport. Brandywine battle to the south had been fought and lost, she knew, and General Howe's troops, at last accounts, were streaming toward Philadelphia, where a frightened Congress packed its bags in the boarding houses and talked of where 'twould be best to flee to—Baltimore again, or west to York and Lancaster. Over on Hudson River, Crispin and his company stood guard to block Burgoyne's men coming from the north. You couldn't help knowing these things when you lived in Sam Bye's house, and he ranged back and forth, in and out, at all hours, harassed and upset as an ant when you'd raked its hill over. She knew them, but she did not think about them. Why should she trouble herself about the war and its goings on, so long as it kept out of Bucks County? No invading army threatened Plumstead, or Mahlon's safety. Only to have the shooting over and all the men home safe—other than that, King and Congress were all one to her!

She rode under the dripping wide leaves of the chestnuts in the yard of Ruth's stone cottage. No smoke rose from its chimney, no stir of life glided across its windowpanes. She isn't up! She'll never get to school in time! thought Lass, jumping off her horse and skipping across the wet grass, lifting the iron latch of the square oak door. It yielded to her touch, and she was about to cry, "Oh, Ruth! Lazybones! See what I've brought you!" but she never did, never knew what stopped her, unless it was the sight of the two empty wine glasses on the table, the fringed hunting shirt tossed down on a chair. Instead, she stepped in quietly, and tiptoed across to the crazy log stairway running up to the single chamber overhead. On the third step from the top she paused and lifted her eyes to the tall fourposter where Ruth lay sleeping sweetly, oblivious of friends and time, in the golden morning light that streamed through the dormer.

Ruth did not lie alone. Beside her dark head, on the one pillow, lay another dark head; under her bare shoulder stretched a man's arm, sunburnt, careless, outflung. Curved above her, relaxed, unconscious, worn with love as she, lay Mahlon Doan.

For one terrible minute Lass stood there and studied them: Ruth smiling, happy, perhaps dreaming, living over lovely moments in her sleep—moments that might have belonged to Lass Marvayne; Mahlon drawn close about her, shielding her and leaning on her all at once, as a man does with his love. There they lay, asleep in bed together.

After she had looked quite long enough to be sure of what she saw, Lass bowed her head and crept downstairs, making no sound. Once she stopped and crouched there for a time, hearing the two mingled breaths above her, unable to go on, to get away, as she so desperately longed to do. "*Oh, it was then and there I died! On the stairs in Ruth Gwydion's house—of an autumn morning!*" Then she picked herself up and staggered into the yard.

A young ash tree grew just by the road here, gnarled, gently rounded, its berries ripening red. Gwydion, the old enchanter, so Ruth had told her, was the ash god who had beaten the alder god at a battle of the trees in a time men couldn't remember, and Ruth had loved this ash tree, watered its roots in drouth, watered all Wales when she did it. Gwydion had made a woman out of flowers—a woman who would be all love and softness to a man—like Ruth. Lass clung to the tree, half fainting, seeing nothing, knowing only that the sun shone warm on her head and little gusts of wind went fluttering by. Finally, after a long time, she heard the neighing of a horse and the sound of wagon wheels. She dragged herself into the road.

"I—I'm sick. I have to get to Sam Bye's!" she called to whoever might be there to listen.

The wheels stopped grinding. She smelled sweat in woolen clothes, a breath heavy with sauerkraut and beer, felt hearty arms hoisting her up on the hard wooden seat, then the forward heave of the wagon beneath her. A man's voice, guttural and kindly, kept trying to question her, but she could not understand him. One of the German farmers from over west, she thought, but he'd know where Sam lived—everybody knew Sam Bye in Bucks County. She kept murmuring over and over, "Sam Bye."

It seemed as if they had jounced along for days in the hot, blue forenoon, when the wheels stopped again and she heard confused voices and bustle all around her, then Sally speaking so plain.

"Lass! Whatever ails thee? Where's thee been? Thy horse came home—we worried—"

"Oh, Sally! I'm sick. I want to lie down."

She felt arms go around her again, first Sally's, in starched, crackly linen, smelling of lavender; then the thick grip of the German farmer carrying her; finally her body eased down on the ruffled counterpane of her own bed in her sister's house.

"Now tell me what happened to thee," Sally asked, bending over her. Lass sensed they were alone.

"I—I found them—" she cried brokenly. "I found Mahlon—abed with Ruth!"

She could not see Sally, could not see anything except a streaming black-gray mist that would be tears in a minute or two. But she could hear the placid voice going on, trying to set everything to right. You could trust Sally for that, always trying to tidy up—an unruly love affair or the kitchen cupboard.

"Well—I know—Ruth's thy friend, and it's a shock to find she's common. But I see no call to be so upset by it. Folk do go to bed together, though 'tisn't usually seen or talked over. Who is Mahlon?"

"Mahlon! Mahlon Doan!" It used to be so sweet to say the name. Now it

filled her throat with iron fit to burst her apart. “It’s not Ruth! I don’t care if she goes to bed with—with the whole Continental Army!”

“Ah! Including Crispin, I suppose?” asked Sally, her voice tight and sharp.

“Including Crispin.” Lass felt suddenly too tired to suffer any more, but some deep part of her didn’t understand that, went right on suffering.

“Then—then—” She could see inside Sally’s head as Sally talked, where Sally was rearranging, taking down old ideas an putting up new ones. “Then if it isn’t Ruth thee minded about, it must be he! Mahlon Doan! The outlaw!’

“Oh, Sally, what shall I do? I love him so! And he’s—with Ruth!”

Sally waited a long time before she answered, and then she did not talk like Sally at all, but more the way their father, Silas, would have talked if he had been there.

“Lass, dear. I didn’t know. Let’s think this out and see where we are. Thee’s been seeing him—out on the roads somewhere?”

“Four times I saw him. Once with his brothers in a tavern, and once in Thomas Middleton’s dooryard. I rode with him in a boat on Trenton night—and I talked with him by our brook a night last spring—and, oh—once, the first time, I saw him riding black against the sky.”

“He’s made love to thee?”

“No, never. He says I’m a rebel and I go against my own.”

Sally bit her lip. “But—but if that’s the way it is then, why does thee think thee loves him?”

“How could anybody see him and not?”

“But thee doesn’t love a man for what he looks like, but for what he is—for what he is to thee—the talk, and the laughter, and the kisses—for what thee two are together.”

“Well—can’t you tell by looking at him what he is, what he could be to you?”

“Can thee? Tell me then, what is he? What’s different in him—more wonderful than any other man?”

Lass twisted on the bed, fighting off the inevitable tears. “I can’t,” she murmured, “I *know*, but I can’t tell you. There aren’t words for it.”

Sally, herself again, gave a little cluck of triumph, but Lass went on. “Suppose you tell me what’s different about Sam Bye, different from other men.”

Sally pondered. “Why—why—he’s *Sam*. I don’t know that I can tell thee more than that—what the difference is. But it’s there.”

“And you’ve been married to him near two years, and you don’t know! Then how do you think I can tell—with so little—”

Sally got up suddenly. “Lass! Tell me! Thee’s sure Mahlon Doan’s thy man for life and thee won’t ever want another and if thee doesn’t get him—”

"I'll do without."

"And be an old maid the children throw sticks at?"

"There's worse in the world. There's being touched by a man you don't love."

When Sally answered, her voice had stiffened like a lace collar when you dipped it in the starch bowl.

"So—thee loves him. And he's abed with Ruth—now. Sam told me that it's common amongst men to lie abed with more than one before they marry, though he never did—he says. Ruth's swarthy and shaped like a meal sack. Thee's a pretty girl. Get up and wash thy face and go out and take him away from her, if thee wants him."

"You mean," asked Lass bitterly, "maybe I should take the rifle and ride up to Plumstead to his mother's house and say, 'I'm here to take thee to a preacher, Mahlon Doan, and thee'd best come along and make no commotion!' "

She rolled over and began to cry, and cried until she began to laugh.

Sally ran downstairs to Mag. "Mag—please—Lass is sick. Will thee make her some of that Indian tea thee made me when I first conceived and ailed so—the tea that brings sleep?"

Mag lifted gentle gray eyes and looked up from the pickling tub, stirred her wrists in the brine.

"Sleep is God's gift, Mistress Bye. I gave it to thee because I feared thee would lose thy little baby. But I'd not take it easy on myself, the giving of it. Miss Lass has the vapors, likely."

Sally grasped the back of an oak chair till her knuckles showed white. The seasoning of heat and passion was not so strong in her as in Lass, but it was there. She did not raise her voice, but her look would have scorched stubble.

"While thee takes Sam Bye's wages, Mag, thee'll do as his wife tells thee. Will thee make the tea?"

The two women stared at each other over the pickling tub. Then Mag turned her head, still at a proud angle, and went to the small wooden boxes of dried herb leaves on the shelf near the chimney piece.

"Yes, I will, Mistress Bye," she said evenly, "not because I'm thy servant. Because I feel thy conviction is stronger than mine."

Half an hour later Sally ran anxiously upstairs with the pale yellow brew in an earthen cup. Lass, still racked with sobs and laughter, lay there, hardly knowing what she said or did.

"Here, dear, drink this. Thee'll sleep, and tomorrow we'll talk—how to get him for thee—"

"But he doesn't want me. He wants a woman made out of flowers. I'm a good companion in battle, because I can take a boat through the ice and shoot a

squirrel in the eye at a hundred yards—but I'm not so rare at love and sweetness—the things men want of a woman. His brother Joe told me that."

"So thee knows Joe, too, the schoolmaster. Here I thought thee was so quiet and kept to thyself because thee'd quarreled with Crispin. And instead, thee's been running with the Doans!" She held the cup for Lass to drink.

"Will—will you really help me, Sally? Even if he's an outlaw?"

"Of course I will—if thee loves him; if thee knows he's thy man."

Almost as she drank it, Lass could feel the hot tea seep through her like a numbing tide, hear Sally's voice growing dimmer, fading out.

When she waked, the daylight had gone and the stars shone over Buckingham Mountain, the lighted windows along the Durham Road. Drowsy still, she turned away from the lights, and burrowed into the goose-down pillow. Tomorrow, she thought, I'll wake up—and live, and breathe, and walk, and be somebody, I suppose. But I won't ever be Lass Marvayne—not the way I was. She stirred restlessly, came wider awake. And I dropped the slippers, she thought to herself. There on the stairs I dropped them—where Ruth will see—and know I saw her. How can I ever talk with her again? Mahlon will know!

She rolled over on her face and began to cry stormily. Downstairs in the kitchen, Sally heard her and turned in consternation to Mag. "Oh—poor Lass! What can we do now? She's never known trouble before, and she takes it hard. She thinks she's dying—"

Mag smiled wanly. "There's nothing we can do, Mistress Bye, save leave her to it. She's finding out the way of the world now—as all of us must. But she isn't dying—she's being born. And that's worse, God ha' mercy!"

NINE

Of Cocks and Eagles

•

The fall moved south across America: the scarlet leaves of New England turned brown with frost and lost themselves in drifting snow; the russet and amber stalks whitened in the fields of Pennsylvania, and a thick blue mist hung over the garnet-colored hillsides of the Great Valley further down. Cold stiffened the inland rivers and drove lovers of gaiety and comfort into the rich seaport towns that faced on the world and shared the luxuries of it. Howe's redcoats held Philadelphia and Washington's Continentals poised above them at Valley Forge, and both sides nursed their wounds and gathered their strength, and waited for winter to be over—and the war went no further along. But more than the changing season moved across America, that fall of 1777; a word that went from man to man, from east country fisherman to the pine barrens farmer of North Carolina and the rice and indigo planter below; the word came, and the answer went back. It was not "America," not "Independence," not "Freedom," and not "Unity," but it was an inarticulate speech that had all these meanings in it.

Mahlon heard it that third day after Christmas, as he put his head out of the kitchen doorway into the bitter sunshine, caught sight of the Plumstead company galloping by, and drew back inside his father's house again, to wait till they had ridden on. Captain McCalla, Rob Gibson, Will Kennedy and the Hart boys—all men he'd known and been friends with—but now he had to hide from them because he thought a different way than they did. Or did he? Did he really think at all? Or did he only do as Moses said? Was there more than one way for a man to be free? He looked wistfully after the militia men; studied every twig and tendril of the mottled sycamores standing bare against the intense blue of the sky, the protecting sweep of evergreens between the barnyard and the Easton Road. Then he turned up the collar of his coonskin jacket and shouted for his mother to come and find his mittens for him.

Hester came out of the tiny bedroom at the back, her eyebrows drawn almost together with worry, but not one of her sleek hairs out of place, her linen apron starched, unstained white.

"Look in thy pocket, Mahlon. They're there? I thought so."

The iron kettle steamed on the crane over the blazing logs. Sunlight poured

through the windowpanes, and a faint, clean smell of dry herbs, brine, and new milk, and honeycomb hung thinly in the air. Upstairs he could hear his sister Polly singing in a high, sweet voice as she shook up the pillows and smoothed the counterpanes.

"Be sure thee tells Dr. Meredith Mose didn't get hurt in anything against the Congress, anything to do with the war. It was for sport really—" cautioned his mother.

"I'll tell him that," said Mahlon, thinking what kind of sport the raid at Smith's mill might have turned into if Mose hadn't been hit at the very beginning. "Don't worry. Mother. He'll come."

Joe strolled in, handsome, swarthy, and languid, in a salmon-colored velvet jacket, taking tobacco in a long pipe. He stretched and yawned.

"Ho, Mother! I'm sleepy! How's Mose? What's for breakfast?"

Hester, taut with worry over her eldest son, relieved her feelings by scolding at the younger.

"Sleepy in mid-morning! And no wonder! Up every night bundling with thy cousin Mary!"

"Ah!" said Joe, knocking his pipe ashes over the crane. "A sweet piece, Mary. Where'd thee hear about it? From Aunt Rachel?"

"Yes, 'twas Rachel told me. She's going to complain to Grandsir if thee doesn't stop it. Mary's only a child."

"Mary's as old as she'll ever be. Who knows how old Mary is?"

"Why—why, surely, her mother."

"Her mother least of all. When she's grown, I think I'll marry Mary. Till then—what's wrong with bundling?"

Hester bristled. "There wasn't nothing wrong with it! It used to be innocent enough in my time. Thee wants to know when the wrong began? Right after the French and Indian War, it was. The boys coming back—they'd been used to running wild with the red Indians and the Scotch girls on the border. And nine months after—my, such a crop of shame! Since then I've never held with bundling. Joseph, I wants thee to stop it."

Joe stroked the nap of his velvet cuff and relit his pipe.

"Thee's got other sons, Mother. Why chide me alone? Mahlon's here handy. Mahlon, doesn't thee ever bundle?"

Mahlon flushed. Hester stood looking, distraught, from one son to the other.

"I got to be off. I'm fetching the doctor for Moses." The militia would be out of the way now. He put his hand on the door latch.

"Of course, of course! A noble errand, Brother! But Ruth Gwydion now—and Sam Bye's redhead? They've both a claim on thee. Mother, ask him what goes on o' nights in Buckingham. No need to pick only on me."

Mahlon walked out and slammed the door. He saddled Firebrand and rode hard over the frozen yellow grass, his breath blowing backward like smoke in the opal-colored morning. He passed west of Doyle's tavern, galloped south across the open fields and patches of woodland toward New Britain church. If he had felt trouble stirring in him at the sight of the Plumstead company, it was nothing to the trouble put in his heart by his brother's jesting.

"Ruth Gwydion," he muttered, "and Sam Bye's redhead! What I think is, a man would be well enough off without either one of them."

He had not chosen Ruth any more than he had chosen Lass. It had happened one March night nearly two years ago, when they had first started out riding and thieving—to get some of their own back. Galloping past Buckingham Meeting House in the sharp, spring moonlight, early spring, before the buds had come on the chestnut trees, somebody—Moses or Joe, probably, he couldn't remember—had suggested they visit the weathered stone cottage across the road and call on the teacher. Ruth had drawn back into a corner and watched them quietly while they tumbled chairs and tables about and drank up the one jug of wine she kept in the corner cupboard. And then someone—that would be Abe, likely—had insisted that it was time Mahlon prove he was a man and could take a girl like the rest of them. He had been foolish enough to protest; worse, to resist. They had been five burly men against one slender one. He had ended up by being ignominiously tossed into bed with his unwilling hostess, while his brothers galloped off, shouting words of lewd encouragement upon the night.

Of course he could have got out of bed as soon as they were gone—but after all, she had not been so very unwilling, she had been very sweet, and Abe was right about his being a man who could take a girl like the rest of them. He had gone back time and time again to Ruth, not only because of the pleasure he took with her. Somehow he felt himself committed, but feeling committed lessened the pleasure, and that confused him, made him unhappy. Ruth had never urged that they marry, never denied him or sought to bargain or bind him in any way, but her mere existence took something away from his freedom. Sometimes he felt he hated Ruth—hated her and loved her, much the same as a man can hate his own mother if she makes herself too important to him.

And then—Lass Marvayne. She was pretty. Probably the prettiest girl ever in Pennsylvania, and she'd taken an uncommon liking to him. He knew what his brothers would have done in such a case, and he'd had it in his mind to make a half-hearted try once, about a month ago; ridden down to Sam Bye's on a restless evening, all windblown moon and shadows, not knowing if she would come out or if he really wanted her to. But the house was dark and the windows shuttered over. When he felt sure there was no one at home, he went up and hammered with his pistol butt on the oak door, and of course, nobody

came. The Byes had gone somewhere. He didn't know where. He didn't go to Ruth that night. He went home to Plumstead to sleep in the loft with the other boys.

He passed New Britain church and the Welsh Baptist burying ground, and rode down the brook valley to the rich low-land, all runs and bogholes, where Dr. Hugh Meredith's rambling, white-faced house stood in a cluster of twisted oak trees. Dr. Hugh himself came to let him in, tall, stout, blue-eyed and brown-haired, walking with a limp because he'd never got over the white swelling he had in his leg when he was a young boy.

"Well, Mahlon Doan! A brisk morning for you to be so far away from your fire, lad. Shall I turn out my pockets for tax money, or is it pills and a poultice you need—or you've gotten some girl in labor?" The doctor's eyes twinkled.

Mahlon reddened. "It's Mose. He got shot in the shoulder."

The doctor spoke sharply. "How long since? Is it bleeding now?"

"Christmas Eve, it was. It's not bleeding. It's crusted over black. Mother says it's clean, but it's uncommon stiff and sore."

"The lead worked out yet?"

"Grandsir Israel got it—with Mother's kitchen tongs. 'Twasn't deep. The Smiths can't shoot."

The doctor relaxed.

"If it's closed and the lead's out, it'll keep till I get there. Come in and sit down. I been wanting to talk to one of you Doan boys a long time—and lately—I've wanted, to talk to you."

Mahlon followed him into a small room lined with books bound in red and brown and charcoal leather. The chairs had worn, comfortable-looking cushions. From somewhere at the back came the rattle of milk pails and the cooing of young children.

"Sit down, boy." The doctor pointed at one chair and threw himself into another. He reached for a straw-covered jug and poised it over a pair of squat glasses on the pine table. "You take Jamaica rum?"

Mahlon nodded and reached for the glass as Dr. Hugh filled it, shifting uneasily in his chair.

"Thee's sure—we shouldn't be getting to Mose?"

The doctor sank back and savored his drink. "I'd say—at the moment—Moses is safer than you be. But first, tell me what happened to him. Somebody around here, was it?

"No. We was in Philadelphia selling some horses we—some horses we had, when Levi got the idea we ought to go stir up the Smith boys. On the Schuylkill they live, and they beat us wrestling once years ago, and Levi suddenly thought on it. Going by Howe's headquarters, Howe himself was just coming out, and he remembered Mose as a spy on Long Island and stopped to

talk to him. Laughed when he heard what we aimed to do and said he'd give us twenty-five of his Hessians to take along and a fife and drum to go before—but we didn't want no Hessians. We got to Smith's mill about dark, and it was snowing, but somebody'd been ahead of us and warned them—we think we must have been seen drinking at Five Mile House—anyways, they was ready, hid behind a thorn hedge with their guns trained, and they got Mose. We brought him home on a hay cart."

The doctor waited for a few moments after Mahlon had finished. Then he shook his head.

"It's time you Doans took account of yourselves. It's a time to decide. You can't be wild boys much longer."

"We're not wild boys—maybe raiding the Smiths we was—but not most times. Moses has had a Word what we're to do."

"I've heard that. I've heard how the six of you stood up in Buckingham Meeting when you was called before it, and said only the one thing to excuse your goings-on—that you'd had a Word from the Lord."

"That was good enough for the Meeting, wasn't it?"

"They said they'd defer the matter because as yet they'd had no convincement how to deal with you; that they'd pray to be guided. So they pray and you run wild. Convincement! Truth of the matter is, they've got convincement they're Tories too—the quiet kind. They're really proud of you in their hearts, only they don't understand you and they can't appear to countenance. But I don't know what's wrong with admitting you're a Tory. A man can think as he likes. If I was one, I'd cry it from the ridgepole. I came out and said I was an Associator and for Congress the first day we was called on."

"Associators be in favor. Tories ain't."

"You're right, Mahlon. I was talking like a fool; telling you to do the very thing I mean to warn you against. There's no consistency in man's nature. Tell me more about the Word Mose had. Did he see a vision—or what?"

"He says he was coming down the ridge above Tohickon Run on a winter morning—where the rhododendrons fall off and thee can see the Delaware all unwound between the hillsides—like curves of silver fire, he said it looked to him. And the Lord spoke and said that river was to be free and he was to help make it so."

"Did the Lord say anything about stealing horses?"

"He said we must break with the ways of Friends."

"So you believe when you beat up old men and steal the public money, you're fighting a holy war?"

Mahlon did not look at the doctor. For a few moments he did not answer.

"Moses does—" he said finally.

"But you don't—?"

"I—I am not always sure."

Dr. Hugh cupped his hands round his glass. "Mahlon Doan, I wish I knew whether you were worth arguing with, whether there's something in you I can talk to. I can look at you, and I know you're what most people would call a man. You're quick as a deer, and you can shoot straight, and leap, and throw heavier lads at wrestling. You'd never betray a friend or a brother, and you're likely a great joy to any girl you choose to favor. But—is there any more to you than that? I'll gamble there is, but I don't know. Look in any pair of eyes, I can, and tell what's behind them—horse, dog, man—it shows, it's all given away there. But looking in your eyes is like looking into Holicong Spring—all blackness and no bottom. Is there more to you than what I been naming?"

"What more does thee want?"

"I want one of you Doans who can see for the rest—see the world as it is and not the way Mose would have it—see the hell you're coming to if you aren't stopped. I don't mean preacher's hell, that'll wait for you till you're decent buried. I mean here now. Whether you know it or not, there's a new country coming up—a new world, run by a new set of men. Why don't you Doans go along with it? Give a little at the start, to get more later on. You're men the country'll need. It'll pay you. Can't you trust to it, to what it'll be—like most of the folk around here?"

"Is thee talking about the country that took our clover field away because we were agin oaths, and supporting armies? What call they got to be crying about taxation without representation? When 'twas voted to tax all that wouldn't fight, who represented us Doans? I'm for free America. I believe King George in London is less trouble to Bucks County than Congress in Philadelphia—or York, or Lancaster, or wherever it's run away to now."

"Is that Mahlon talking to me, or is it Mose and Joe?"

Mahlon twisted unhappily in his chair. "Joe—mostly. He's been to school. He puts things in words better."

"Well, I don't say there isn't some truth in such talk. But it's not so much what's right, I want to speak on. All I say is, King and his friends and his blasted great army is going to get driven right out of this country, and there won't be any power but Congress, and you better stand well before it."

"Too late."

"No. You've got a bad name, but you can mend it. The change won't come this week nor next. You've got time to set yourselves right, all of you. And I wish you would. I like you boys. The country'll need you. You're the kind it wants—free men who'll never consent to be aught else."

"Doctor—I don't mean no disrespect, and I'm hoping thee'll come and treat Moses when thee's finished thy morning rum. But if thee's thinking—to turn Tories into Whigs—thee's but thy cousin come again—Crazy Tom."

"Yes, Tom was crazy, I suppose," mused the doctor, sipping at his glass. "Who else but a crazy man would try to build a castle and keep beside the Neshaminy, and take a Minisink chief in his war paint for good King Arthur of Britain? Wizards came down through the tulip trees and talked with him while he carried stones, he said. Poor Tom—he over-studied in London. But they let him work at his tower and he was happy—he harmed no one."

Mahlon noticed uncomfortably that tears stood in the kindly blue eyes looking at him. Then the mouth below them hardened. Dr. Hugh drew himself up. "Well, boy, if it's crazy cousins you want to talk on, we Merediths can't match your Abraham."

Mahlon studied the toes of his rawhide boots. "Yes—I guess thee has it right. Abe's been unsettled since he lost Deborah. Before that—he used to think he wanted to join the militia. He drew a picture of himself in a uniform, like General Washington's. But now we have trouble with him more and more. He'd harm folk when he needn't—and the rest of us don't want that."

The doctor sighed. "Crime takes hold of a man once he's started it. Likely you'll all end mad as Abraham. Think over what I been saying. Mose'll have a dose of the same talk while I dress his shoulder. But now—I got another thing to say to you, Mahlon—a thing that's harder to say."

"Then—then thee best get it out and over."

"All right. Remember, I'm not an elder in your Meeting. I'm not so many years older than you are. I got a young and pretty wife in the kitchen. You can tell me to mind my own business if you want to. But I see trouble coming your way, and I'd like to stave it off. Do you mean to marry Ruth Gwydion?"

"Why—why whoever told thee I might?"

"This isn't easy to tell you, Mahlon, but it's something I think you ought to know about, so I'll give it to you just the way I had it. In October, two months past, I went down to Buckingham to Sam Bye's, to treat his wife's sister. She near died."

"Lass—died? But she didn't!"

"She come so near as makes little difference. She had a fever such as folk get about here when the seasons change. Whether it comes with the floods, or the fall wind, or the ground turned over and stalks rotting—or something out of the sky, or something swimming in the blood—I've never been able to determine. They don't know at the medical school in Philadelphia where I went. But she had the worst case of it I ever saw, and it near caused her death."

"But she got well. She went away. I've been to Sam's.

"Yes. She got well in spite of you. Mistress Bye's a fine woman—brave and merry. If only all women would take to childbed the way she does. We been good friends ever since that night I tended her while all you boys was at Trenton. Anyway, when Lass was so bad, she came and told me—thought it

might help me to treat her if I knew how troubled about you the girl was, and what happened just before she fell sick."

Mahlon tried to open his mouth. His jaws felt as if they were made of wood and his throat hurt him. He was frightened of what Dr. Hugh was going to say next though he had no idea what it was.

"Miss Lass—fancied me. She's young and doesn't know. I never harmed her none. What does thee mean—'what happened'?"

"Only that poor Lass, being so much in love with you she doesn't know whether she's afoot or on horseback, runs into Ruth's house one morning, not seeing any reason why she shouldn't—and finds you two asleep there."

"Lass—saw us—asleep?"

"Well—'twas possible, wasn't it?"

"Yes—I—I been there."

"Now it's none of my business, Mahlon Doan, to try to make a man's mind up for him between two girls. His politics I'll lecture him on while my breath lasts, but the other thing I won't lay my tongue to. Only I'll say this—once again, it's a time to decide."

"But what's there to decide, Dr. Hugh? I can't leave Ruth, after the way we've been."

"Because you love her too much?"

"No. I don't mean that. I mean because I broke in her house and took her against her will. And now—to leave her for another girl—would be wrong."

"Your brothers don't feel that way about girls."

"No, but they was taught that way, same as I was. They've come to see things different. I haven't—yet."

"How long ago did it happen?"

"Two years come March."

"And you've been sweethearting ever since?"

"Yes."

"You've been quiet about it or I'd have heard gossip. Why haven't you married her before this?"

"I don't want to marry—yet. I'd rather be free to go hunting when I want to, and fish, and ride the woodland—than have a house with children and all."

"You've told me half what I want to know without my asking. You don't love Ruth."

"I do. She's sweet to me. She never scolds or bargains or gives me orders."

"Do you love Lass?"

"No. For all her pretty face, she's as good a man as I am. I hear she can ride bareback, and shoot like General Dan Morgan, and she knows more about a boat than Admiral my Lord Howe. I wouldn't want that of a woman. I'd rather have Ruth. I'm sorry she got her feelings hurt. I'm sorry she got sick.

But if she's in love with me, she'll just have to get over it."

Dr. Hugh sat and smiled. He drained his glass. He replenished the fire. He waited.

Mahlon gulped the last of his rum and choked on it. Then he asked, trying to seem casual, "Is Sam Bye still away?"

"Yes," answered the doctor, "he'll be gone all winter."

"He take his family?"

"Yes. Closed the house and left a man to live in the barn and tend the stock."

"Where's he gone?"

Mahlon ran his finger inside the coarse wool of his shirt collar. Dr. Hugh studied him through half-closed lids.

"Philadelphia."

"Philadelphia?"

"That's what I said."

"But—but Philadelphia's all crawling alive with Howe's army. Most of the people who live there's closed their homes and gone into the back country like the Congress. Sam's an Associator, like thee. What's he going to Philadelphia for? And taking women? He's worse crazy than Tom or Abe."

"I don't think the Byes will run into any trouble there, or I'd have counseled Sam against it. You know he's worked for Robert Morris off and on since he was fifteen, and Morris himself is away from town with his family and wanted Sam to go in there and mind his business interests for him. His partner, Thomas Willing, stands well with the British, and he'll see Sam's bothered none. They're living in the Morris house on Front Street. Mistress Bye insisted she wasn't going to stay in the country all winter without Sam; she wouldn't go back to her father's in New England, either. She's a loving wife. I had a note from her last week, asking my advice about the best doctor there. Seems young Sam's troubled o' nights with croup. She says salt's scarce, and firewood, and some foodstuffs, but they haven't suffered none, 'cause Sam's man sends them everything from the farm here. Says the British officers care about nothing but dancing and suppers and the theater, and they're squiring the Philadelphia girls everywhere—Whig miss and Tory alike. Miss Lass has danced through her third pair of slippers."

"She—she has?"

Just then the outside door flew open and Grandsir Israel bounced into the room. He stamped his feet, rubbed his hands, and scuttled to the fire.

"It's cold enough to frost a man's gizzard," he complained, his black eyes snapping. "What's thee two great slugs doing, sitting there taking grog and my grandson Moses bleeding to death!"

"Mose started bleeding again, has he?" asked Dr. Hugh, getting up.

“Mary,” he called, “lay out my greatcoat!”

“That he has—not bad—but some. And Hester fussed at me till I put after Mahlon—seems it takes two to fetch thee.”

Grandsir Israel Doan held his knotty hands toward the fire, while Dr. Hugh examined the contents of a worn leather bag, added a swirl of cotton and two thin knives from a desk drawer.

“My grandsons be fighting cocks, Doctor,” boasted the old man, looking ridiculously like a bantam cock himself.

“That’s the name they got in Bucks County, Friend,” replied the doctor, putting ironical stress on the last word.

“ ‘Friend’ is it? Thee means I should be shamed of their ways instead of proud. Think I’d want pale fellers knitting and taking tea? I’m a Friend ’cause it’s the freest faith, and puts fewest fences between a man and his God, but I allow, I ain’t always a good one. I was read out of Meeting once, and so was my father before me—him for casting astrology and me for marrying Esther—so if my grandsons be served the same, it’ll scarce astonish the countryside.”

Hugh and Mahlon fastened their jackets. Old Israel put his mittens back on.

“You’ll think about what I said, Mahlon,” the doctor asked very low.

“Yes—yes—I’ll think about everything. But thee knows it surprises me, what thee said last. I wouldn’t think Sam Bye would let a girl in his household go about carrying on with the British. I’d think he’d put a stop to it.”

The doctor bit his lip but he could not keep his blue eyes from showing just a glint of laughter. “That’s good advice, lad. When I answer Mistress Sally’s note, I’ll pass it on to her. Shall I say it came from Mahlon Doan?”

“No. I’ve got no messages nor advice for her nor none of her family. I’m going to Mose. I wish thee’d get along.”

He strode out of the house, the other two preparing to follow him. Hugh Meredith put his hand on the old man’s shoulder.

“I like your fighting cocks, Israel. But I worry for them. There’s hawks and eagles about.”

The grandfather stood looking through the window, watched Mahlon, still embarrassed and angry, fling himself on Firebrand; after a moment he turned and answered tartly.

“Then save thy worry for the hawks and eagles,” he said.

TEN

Map of Babylon

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They were dressing for the dance, Lass Marvayne and Vinny Whitlaw. Vinny, staring into the mahogany sconce looking glass with a crack across it, saw a round, merry face, amber-colored eyes, and a skin like dogwood blossoms. It was the face she had expected to see. She had been seeing it ever since she was a little girl and confidently believed she would go on seeing it until she got to be an old lady. The dresses underneath would change and the coiffure above, but not the face nor the essential she. Tonight she wore pink, all sewn with little false pearls an caught up with many flounces. Back of herself in the mirror, she could see Lass sitting on the edge of the featherbed and swinging her feet, like a child dressed for a birthday party and trying to keep presentable until it was time to go. Lass had a blue velvet gown embroidered with daisies, a plain, tight bodice, and a flowing skirt. Her hair hung down her neck in round, red curls caught up with a gold clasp.

She watched Vinny preen and shifted herself uneasily. The feather bed sagged and she felt the edge of the wooden frame cutting her thighs through the thick velvet. Mrs. Morris had sent all the good bedding and really fine furniture away from the house when the British first threatened the city. The remaining chairs stood on broken crow feet and their cushions were worn. The carpets had been rolled up and taken away to Manheim, the great farm near Lancaster, and bright squares on the walls showed where the pictures had hung. Several tears gaped in the yellowed net window curtains. How different this room had looked, Lass thought, the first night she had slept in it, that night in the fall more than a year ago, when her father brought her here on their way from Newburyport to Bucks County. But so many things were different now.

Sally kept house cheerfully amidst the dilapidation and Lass never bothered about it. She wasn't at home much, anyway. She was out with the British officers, dancing, or riding, or skating—not a hard winter, but the Delaware froze over in January and sleek, safe ponds gleamed in the Northern Liberties and the apple orchard across from the Conestoga Wagon. She had been learning the glide from Massey, the biscuit-maker, the best skater in town, all the girls said, now that General Cadwallader was away, and artist Charlie Peale had hung up his scrolly gutter skates and gone off to war too.

Lass liked the Philadelphia girls, Becky and Fila Franks, Peggy Chew, Eve White, Nancy Redman, and the Shippen sisters—a little stately perhaps, taking their beauty too seriously. She drank tea with them and exchanged dress patterns, and shared the same set of beaus.

Sam disapproved intensely of the quick, gay social life the army of occupation had created in the town to make the winter less tedious; the weekly balls at the City Tavern, boisterous dinners and punch parties at the Bunch of Grapes, the charades and stage playing, but Sally persuaded him to let Lass fill her days and nights with it. She argued that his own position in the city, as a declared Whig and purveyor for Washington's army, was none too tasty to General Howe and Joseph Galloway, the traitor from Trevose in their own county, who ruled the port, and constables, and most civil affairs. A Tory gesture like this would be a wise act politically that his true friends would understand and forgive—certainly Mr. Morris, who was something of a trimmer himself, setting up for a patriot but not willing to sign the Declaration.

Sam had growled that she didn't know what she was talking about, but in the end he had not tried to keep Lass from doing what the rest of the town did, probably doubted if he could, anyway. Men's control over women, he had found, was so much a matter of pursestrings, and Lass had her own purse with her own money in it. And to her—when it came to a matter of dancing partners, the color of a man's coat made no difference, nor the flag he fought under. Older or younger, maybe she could take sides in wars, and wave banners, and urge young men to kill each other—but not now, when the young men gathered round her, attentive and eager.

Sally played her own politics, too, for she hoped that a gay winter with escorts in bewildering plenty would make her sister forget Mahlon. And if Lass chose a husband from among those bright-coated, ruddy boys with dashing manners and plenty of hard money in their pockets—maybe a great estate in England—she wouldn't mind at all. She'd help calm Silas down and get him to accept a British son-in-law. Lass hadn't mentioned Mahlon since the fever left her. Perhaps she'd forgotten about him, a little, here with all the wonderful times she seemed to be having. Beauty was a coin that passed anywhere, Sally told herself, a little smugly, and if a Bucks County horse thief didn't know pound sterling when he saw it, still, her sister wouldn't have to go begging, exactly.

Yes, she thought, on the whole her affairs were going well, so she didn't mind the difficulties in housekeeping—having to do without salt, and hauling their firewood down from Buckingham, and paying sixty dollars a pound for tea and one hundred dollars a yard for silk. Sometimes she worried about her father off at sea, or about young Sam's croup, but that was only when she went looking for something to worry over.

In the chilly bedroom the girls had finished dressing.

"Vinny," said Lass, her lips drawn tight, but a little smile around her eyes, "if you eat everything that'll be on your plate tonight, you'll never get that dress around your waist again. Worse—maybe a hook'll pop off before the evening's over, and how do you think Charlie O'Hara—Colonel Charlie O'Hara of the Coldstream Guards—is going to like that?"

"He'd like it well enough if all my hooks popped off," said Vinny, dimpling.

Vinny was Lass's favorite among her new friends, an orphan come up last year from Chester County to live with her uncle, a rich Quaker who owned a house and walled garden round in Spruce Street. Tonight the girls had planned to stay together, for talking over a party in bed afterward was as much fun as going to it, and, this was to be an evening worth talking about—first to the Indian Queen, where Billy Winward, Lass's most frequent escort, had ordered an upstairs room and supper for twenty couples. Afterwards, they'd go on to the ball at the City Tavern. Sam wouldn't like it, but Sam had gone to the school house down by Christ Church to a meeting of the Philosophical Society to look at a box of sea shells somebody'd picked up on top of the Allegheny Mountains, proving, so he said, that there'd once been a deep, drowning sea spread all over Pennsylvania. Besides, when he was at home, he was usually busy in the back parlor with his account books, trying to figure how to give so much gold and silver for so much grain at Willing and Morris' store, and wouldn't notice if the whole Pennsylvania Flying Camp came in.

"Cuddled under the stairs, maybe he would," said Lass, for a moment practical as Sally, "but not dancing a set with all the boys from the Friendly Brothers and the Yorkshire Club looking on. He'd think you were a sight unbefitting an officer of the King, and he'd walk away."

Vinny sighed. "Likely thee's right. This dress is tight for me." She writhed sidewise, trying to settle it smoothly round her curving hips. "Does thee think it's safe for me to eat any supper at all? Tell me again what they mean to have."

"Well—you could drink up the hot cockle broth. But when they bring on the West Indian turtle stewed in madeira—"

"Lass, thee's breaking my heart."

The latch clicked at the bottom of the stairs and hinges squealed as the door came open with the firm pull of Sally's fingers. Over the deep murmur of men's voices they heard her discreet call.

"Girls! Company's waiting!"

"Here," cried Lass, sliding down from the featherbed and seizing up a heap of silky brown fur that had been lying beside her, "you wear Sally's beaver cloak—it's going to be cold out. I'll take the gray one lined with squirrel. It

suits my dress better."

Demurring very little, Vinny drew the rich softness around her, and Lass wound herself, cocoon-like in shining gray and blew out the candles, all save one which she picked up to light them on the stairs. Beyond the darkened window lay the cold, black night, the February stars half dimmed with silvery mist, and the ill-lit, ill-paved, square-run streets of Philadelphia. A whisper, a laugh, heel taps on the treads, and Mrs. Robert Morris' front chamber stood serene and empty as she and her husband had left it when they fled with the Congress.

Outside the night deepened, the old, haunted night that shared the world with chaos before God ever thought of morning. Lass shivered a little as she stepped into it, in spite of her gay companions and the muscular arm in its scarlet wool sleeve now cupping under her elbow, now stealing a little too heavily to her waist, in spite of Ensign Winward's deep, pleasant voice flowing over her head as sunny and untroubled as one of those meandering brooks in the level English shires he liked to talk about.

They walked up Dock Street, along the foul-smelling creek, its edges littered with offal from the slaughter houses and sweepings from the livery stable behind Carpenters' Hall. A cart rattled across the drawbridge below them, and drunken voices spilled through the broken windows of the crazy, moss-covered stone houses sunken in Budd Row. Philadelphia was still a strange town to Lass, a town that she could not get used to as she was used to Newburyport, Salem, and Boston, and she felt a sense of wonder when she walked abroad in it, especially at night, not so much wonder at what it was, but that she should be there in a place so unbelonging. She knew its worn-down bluffs crowding to the river, with slips, and quays, and little brooks pouring through it everywhere; its five thousand odd brick dwellings, three floors high, with marble steps in front, and leaded, latticed windows; its warehouses and counting houses, and its shops piled full of rich goods from abroad, and homely, necessary goods brought in by wagon from Montgomery, and Bucks, and Chester. She knew where its public pumps were, its steepled churches; which streets were paved, and how far between the little square-paned glass boxes that lighted them at night. But she would always be a stranger here, no matter how much she knew about the town or how long she lived in it, just as she would always be a stranger to the temperate ways of Friends; always be hurling herself futilely at them, like a spark thrown into wet tinder—or was it the spark that failed, that could not communicate its own burning? She remembered Mahlon lying asleep with Ruth in the tumbled bed, in the cool dawn, at the end of summer. Even Mahlon would kindle to the proper spark, to the girl who attracted him: lie with that girl as Sam lay with Sally, and her father with Hannah—as Crispin thought to lie with her. But he never will! she

cried wordlessly in her throat. Not he, nor any other. Only—

"What did you say, Lass?" asked Billy Winward, interrupting the placid flow of his own voice, thinking she had started to speak to him. They were passing the slate-roofed house now, with the double row of pines around it, old, so old William Penn had lived in it before there was any town here at all, Sam had told her; later, a boarding house for the Congress, dark and fireless now they'd run off west, and were writing home to their wives ashamed letters admitting themselves to be brittle ware; dispersed, no one could argue, but fighting still.

"I—oh—nothing—nothing!" she cried, looking up at him, her eyes bright and empty. "Tell me again about that dress your sister wore when she went to the Court. I want to see if the Misses Sparks down Chestnut can't make me one like it—"

They turned into High Street, past the Friends' Meeting House and the market sheds, shuttered now, a faint scent of salt meat and frozen parsnips clinging about them. The further you got from the Delaware, the darker it was, for the moving water seemed to give back all the lights about it, the stars, and the half moon drifting above the mist, and the lamps and candles glowing in the town. Christ Church steeple caught the light, too, and shimmered whitely, far up the air.

The ensign lifted his head a moment and listened to a shouting down by the battery. Perhaps someone ought to go and see, but not he, surely. What with all the troops quartered in Southwark and the Highlanders in the Northern Liberties, the town ought to be as safe as Piccadilly. Piccadilly! Likely the war'd be over and he'd be walking there now, if Howe'd gone up Hudson and met Burgoyne last fall, as he was supposed to do—Howe up at Stenton cuddling Mrs. Loring, beyond the trouble of shouts from the waterfront and battery. What the hell was the matter with Howe anyway? Something more than a woman. Didn't he want to beat the Americans?

"Billy, I was asking you about Charlotte's dress and you didn't tell me, and now we're here at the Indian Queen. And we've lost Vinny and Charlie. Where, do you think?"

"Slipped into one of those walled gardens for a kiss under the plum trees, maybe. They'll be along."

Lights streamed out from the tavern window, and Francis Lee, the host, proud of his decorous house that was fit for a gentleman to bring a lady to, ushered them inside where their guests already waited, flirting in the corners, gathered at the broad table sipping fish-house punch.

North, a little, and east, behind a high bluff facing the river, the shadows lay thickly under the sparse city trees along Vine and Callowhill Streets and the cross ways between them. On Newmarket Street, the little, three-story brick houses crouched in a narrow row, scrubbed marble steps, white doors and window trim gleaming at the front. A raw wind blew down from the Schuylkill valley, from the fine estates with their yellow stucco mansions, shaking the dry leaves and scattering the street refuse. Huddled against one of the neat, brass-knockered doorways, lay an inert bulk, moaning hollowly now and then, like a great, wounded animal. Behind the windowpanes of that particular house, the lamplight showed a comfortable pair drawn to a crackling hearthfire. Isaiah Hallowell and his wife sat reading the Bible together as they did so often of an evening, now that he had sold his chandler's shop in Swanson Street and settled down to enjoy an old age sweetened with thrifty prosperity. She did the reading, in the mellow voice that she'd always been sinfully proud of, that had made her want to speak out too often in Meeting when she was young—times when she hadn't received the word to speak at all. Long ago that was, and now her throat tired easily, and when that happened, Niece Harriet would oblige at the clavichord with Sabbath tunes or old ballads full of red rose braes and dying lovers. The Hallowells had not sent their goods away, nor fled in abandon across the country. They had stayed quietly in their home as Thomas Willing had advised all honest Philadelphians to do, and they had not suffered from it. Delicate carved chairs and tables, the chintz curtains with tiny, old-fashioned flowers woven into them, made the room a pleasant sanctuary in the heart of the grim, ribald city garrisoned with eighteen thousand enemy troops, that had come overnight to take the place of Penn's green country town.

"Hush thy music, Harriet!" cried Mrs. Hallowell in the midst of the final bars of "Hearts of Oak," holding up her hand. "I thought I heard something!"

"The wind," answered Harriet plaintively through her nose, the thin, fine nose that turned red and dripped in wet weather. Harriet had goggle eyes and a stoop, and declared vehemently that she wouldn't be seen about with British officers.

"Don't concern thyself, Rachel. It sounds to me like the ass braying in Neighbor Wain's stable," said Isaiah, his bald head leaning against the carved walnut shell of the chairback, his hands crossed on his lean chest, and his face aglow with firelight. "I shall leave thee shortly to go to the Meeting for Sufferings—to see if we can aid those Friends who were exiled to Virginia. I'll look about me on the way—"

"No," protested Rachel, "it was a man. In pain, I think—close to our house. I'm going to see."

She stepped smartly into the hall and pulled the door open a little, then

wider. “Isaiah! It is a man! Get thyself out here. The poor creature looks half dead.”

It took three of them finally to haul the bulky figure over the threshold and ensconce it on a settee by the fire—a tall, shaggy man, bent near double by disease or injury. His coat hung in tatters caked with red earth, and frayed muslin rags bound his feet, for his boots had been stolen last night while he slept in an alley, so he told them when he was able to talk a little, after Isaiah had comforted him liberally with rum. His name was Henry Bron, from the iron country, and he had worked all his life at Cornwall Furnace till somehow he fell in the way of one of the great hammers used to batter the ore, and had suffered a cracked spine. After that he could not work, and begged from town to town by the open road. He had walked from Bristol that day because the people there had grown tired of feeding him and urged him on. Usually when he came to Philadelphia he slept in the stables kept by friendly ostlers—always he got a welcome and a free supper at Peg Mullin’s beefsteak house in Water Street—but tonight a whole new crew seemed to have taken the town. New hosts in the old taverns, new drinkers at the bars; new men, new men everywhere, most of them wearing red coats; either that or Scotchmen from the frontier or Tories from Virginia; crude, rough, cursing men, with no kind remembrance of old Henry Bron. Supper? Well, a crust or a bowl of stew. A bed? Why that he could never accept. An old quilt by the kitchen chimney, perhaps.

But whenever the Hallowells saw human suffering, they felt it to be their own. He ended up well-fed and washed—as much as he could be encouraged to it—with soft ticking under him and warm covers over, in a green poplar bedstead, the walls of the third story bedroom at the back of the house sheltering him all round. He lay there smiling in the darkness, listening as the family undressed, watching the line of light under the door vanish sharply with the last lamp blown out. He lay there till he heard Isaiah’s snores and his wife’s gentler breathing. Harriet had retired down a passageway too far off for him to make sure of her, so he had to take a chance that she slept. No midnight would ever find him in Harriet’s room, he thought grimly, for any cause whatsoever. Finally he got up, shook off the bed clothes, stood straight and tall, and struck a flint. The tinder flared, and the face that looked out at him from the scrolled, gilt mirror was the savage, smiling face of Abraham Doan.

In spite of his massive figure he could move like the panthers on Haycock Mountain, and it was with all their stealth that he crossed the room, slipped through the doorway, and into the upper hall, but it was more lightly still, more like a shaft of drifting smoke that he descended the stairs. Once at the front door he lifted the oak bar placed across it to secure the house against trouble from without. Standing well back from the threshold, he whistled once, a low,

quavering note, and waited, his foot, still bound with torn muslin, holding the door ajar. After a moment he saw what seemed to be a patch of dark fog move out of an alley running down from Second Street and waft itself toward him. Music blew faintly up on the river wind. At the City Tavern the British were dancing late. A smile lighted Abe's craggy features. Dancing was a waste of time. He knew a better thing with the girls.

He looked down toward Front Street where Deborah had lived, and bit his lip, thinking how they had walked there by the waterside, down to the Swedes' church, and sat among the old slate headstones, crooked and greenish; and it had seemed that they two were one with time, and the night, and the shining river, and that none of them would ever end. He had wanted to take her to the minister's house, where Doctor Collins was said to marry folk out of hand, and not make them wait to pass Meeting after the slow way of Friends. But Deborah had said no. It must not be till she was at home again with her own folk by Merion Meeting House where she had worshipped ever since she was a little girl. And he had humored her and waited, and now she was dead, and nothing seemed quite real to him any more. He could not take any woman with tenderness, but he would take them savagely again and again, looking always for Deborah, not finding her. He put out his hand awkwardly before him and touched the coarse wool of his brother's jacket. Mahlon had slipped down the street to join him and now tiptoed over Isaiah Hallowell's threshold. They had been in town for a week, staying at the Conestoga Wagon—not a gentleman's haunt—and selling stolen horses in back of the London Coffee House. The British needed horses badly because so many of their mounts had died on the hot voyage down New York Bay last summer—the hottest summer ever seen in America. The Doan boys had readily disposed of all their stock in trade—you could get forty pounds for horse flesh now where'd you be lucky once to get ten—but Abe insisted on this last adventure before they started home. Now he closed the door.

"Did thee bring my boots?" he whispered.

Silently Mahlon took them out of a corn sack he carried and handed them over. With a grunt of satisfaction Abe bent down to pull them on and fasten the rawhide thongs. Then he straightened up.

"I believe 'twas just as I heard in the grog shop—the old Friend's alive with wealth. The mahogany desk in the parlor, I'd say, from the way he tested the lock tonight. But I noticed he dropped the key into an empty candlestick on the mantel."

"I don't like it, Abe. He ain't fighting nor stealing from us. He's a Friend like we are."

"Ain't Friends' money good?"

"That wasn't the way Mose talked when he told us he had the Word. Not

the way we started out, round Plumstead."

"We come a long way since then."

"A wrong way, maybe. And of all of us, thee's gone that way furthest."

"I had more to make me."

Mahlon did not answer him; stood, stubborn and unhelping in the hall, while Abe, with a growl of disgust, eased open a low, white-paneled door to the right, stepped through, and shut it behind him. Waiting uncertainly in the sleeping house that seemed full of sound and threat, the younger brother knew by the glow along the sill that his companion had dared the risk of a lamp or candle. In a few moments Abe cautiously rejoined him, his gangling arms clasped round the corn sack Mahlon had brought the boots in. Now it bulged and overflowed.

"Four hundred pounds the old beggar had!" hissed Abe. "Half of it hard, and all English money. Well, he ain't got it now. We got it."

"I don't want none of it," said Mahlon restlessly. "Let's get out of here."

"I got two dozen silver spoons and candlesticks, and the tray they set on. But I don't mean to go till I get the old man's watch. He took it upstairs with him. Here."

He put the sack down at Mahlon's feet, and heaved himself silently up the stairs.

Again Mahlon waited. Twice he thought he would go, and started for the door, but each time loyalty drew him back into the deed he hated. Whoever heard of a Doan walking off and leaving another Doan when there was trouble likely to break! That, or cast an eye on another Doan's woman, they wouldn't do. Then Abe came back, chuckling, holding his clenched hand to Mahlon's ear. From inside the fist sounded a patient, industrious ticking.

"Got it. After a while. Snaked it right out from under his pillow. Near woke him the first time and had to lie low at the bed foot till he dozed off again. Come on! Let's make for the Wagon!"

Balancing the sack between them, they slunk out of Isaiah Hallowell's dwelling, away from his outraged charity. Down Second Street, past Christ Church forlorn in the moonlight, its white shaft gaping empty of the bells that used to ring for market day, now carried off to Trenton for safety, its once neat fence torn apart and dragged off to keep the Hessian campfires going. Howe had given his men harsh orders against plundering in the city, but it had gone on just the same.

"Want to stop by Hell Town and find us a couple of women?" asked Abe gruffly.

"No."

"As well. The moon's setting. Look, Mahlon, I ain't going to take this silver and all back to the tavern. It'll be full of teamsters from the western

roads this time of night, and they'll hang together and set by and laugh while four men jumps one. I ain't a coward, but I ain't a fool, neither. Let's take it out and bury it by the potter's field—this side, I mean, where the slaves picnic."

"If thee says so. It's thy silver."

Nothing stirred in the midnight town except themselves, and the far-off music, and the sleepy sentries pacing round an encampment of British artillery just below them. They crossed the Quaker burying ground and skirted a frozen duck pond draining down into Fourth Street. From here to the west the houses thinned out and scattering fields wedged themselves between the roofs and chimneys. The Doan boys finally entered a grove of black walnut trees across from the State House, and keeping well within its shadow, they passed westward, following the course of High Street. The State House Yard loomed full of cannon belonging to the Forty-Second Highlanders, its white-trimmed tower as empty of bells as Christ Church steeple—the bells that had rung for Independence—and now, thought Mahlon bitterly, both bells and independence, as he saw it, were gone. Glancing between the mottled tree trunks about him, he could see past the brick wall across the roadway, the little wooden platform that learned city scholars had put up years ago so they could mount some kind of a spy glass on it and watch for a star named Venus they said was due to pass overhead. He knew about it because he'd been in Philadelphia then on a market day, with his father and old Israel. Whether anybody'd ever seen the star or not, he never heard. He'd been asleep in the wagon rattling back to Plumstead before it got dark enough that night to look for stars.

South they turned now, into the open country that lay between the town and the woods along the Schuylkill. Just ahead of them stretched a post and rail fence, and behind it a hummocked field, warted and swollen with the graves of the city's poor. At the foot of a blackberry thicket the ground gleamed white with broken bits of oyster shell and slivers of chicken bone left over from some Negro merrymaking. Here Abe knelt, tearing away the dead grass with his huge, bony hands, hacking with an old, blunted knife at the frozen turf.

"Can't break into the soil far enough, Mahlon, with this here. Fetch me some dry vines and have up a sheaf of those berry stalks."

Mahlon did so, swearing as the hooked thorns tore through his mittens. Abe covered the sack with a heap of dead stems and then kicked it far back into the thicket. Then he straightened up; he let his hand fall on Mahlon's shoulder.

"Thee be a Doan after all, maybe, Brother."

"Thee thinks all Doans be the same?"

"If they be not, 'tis a pity. Want to go back to the Wagon and get drunk, or go down and watch the British dance? We won't be in town for a good while, maybe. Mose has got plans."

"Has he? He ain't told me of any. We drunk enough while we been here. Let's go watch the British."

Mahlon did not notice the flash of amusement far back in Abraham's deep eyes.

"I'd as lief. Nobody'll challenge us, and if they do, I got Howe's pass. He gave it to Mose."

Shoulder to shoulder they strode down Walnut Street between the rows of brick houses and winter-stripped trees and gardens, the chilly white moon still high enough up the west to light them through a Philadelphia that never quite was and never would be.

Abe cursed under his breath. "Towns be queer at night," he muttered, "country, too, sometimes. 'Member I heard once that down in the old streets by the water thee can meet after dark with a coach and four, driv' by a demon, with a ghost inside—'specially if thee's been drinking."

More sensitive to the eeriness of the night, Mahlon hardly heard him. Somewhere under all these roofs and cobbled ways lay the old, green fields the city was built on, the old, wild country of a hundred years ago, before the cupolas went up and the paving stones went down. There, in the sharp city night, in the midwinter, it almost seemed to the country lad that he could smell the sweet meadow grasses and cleanly cedar trees that had been rooted out of Philadelphia, blade and branch, when his great-grandfather was a young man. He shivered a little inside his warm coat. Abe went on talking.

"Just was minded of another thing about this town. Joe read it out of a book and it always sets him laughing."

"What?"

"Why, when old Penn drew up his first map of the place—the streets run all straight and in squares, for Joe says he hated anything askew—when he set down to do it, the thing he had in front of him to go by was a plan of Babylon! The wicked city! Think he meant to play a japes on folk coming after—talking about 'brotherly love' and building his town for sin all the time?"

"No, I don't think Penn would have done that," said Mahlon slowly. "I think—" He stopped in his tracks, slipped a little in the icy gutter, and stood still.

They were opposite the City Tavern now, its windows beginning to darken one by one, its musicians sending forth wearily, happily, the full, deep clamor:

"*God save—Great George—our King!*"

Red-coated officers and fur-wrapped girls poured laughing through the doorway of the fifty-foot banquet room, calling good nights, stepping off down this street or that, always two by two. Lass Marvayne walked with a tall ensign in a black-faced cape with gold lace. He wore his sword easily at the side of his ivory-colored breeches and he swaggered a little. He had his arm around her waist under her squirrel cloak, and now and then he lifted her quite off her feet. Her red curls hung in confusion, maybe from dancing, maybe from the ensign's caresses. She was laughing, looking up. She did not see the two lurking figures in country clothes who watched her from across the street. She and her escort disappeared into the river mist hanging above Budd Row.

"Let's take after and pitch him into Dock Creek!" growled Abraham. "He won't be so sweet to cuddle when he wallows his way out of that."

"No. Leave 'em alone. I seen enough. Enough of Babylon and the whores in it. I'm going back to the Wagon."

As they walked through the scattered apple trees that edged the little pond across from the tavern, Mahlon spoke again.

"Abe," he said thinly, "what was thee thinking to do with them silver spoons we stole?"

"I hadn't thought."

"I'll take them maybe. Give them to Ruth."

Back in Mrs. Morris' front bedroom, Vinny had pulled her clothes off and flung them half on the floor and half on a tufted chair by the dressing table, and lay in her embroidered muslin nightgown under the patched counterpane, her hands clasped beneath her head, her eyes dreamy.

"Oh, Lass! It was a lovely evening. But I wish I hadn't been with Charlie O'Hara. He's awful old. He's thirty-seven, and his hair's getting thin. When is that boy thee knows up at Valley Forge coming down? Sally says he's awfully handsome. And thee doesn't want him."

"No," said Lass, "I don't want him." She stood at the window, looking at the sky that had begun to turn gray over the Jerseys, hearing the herdsman blow his horn to gather the cows in Dock Street. Her mind was not on Vinny or the dance. She was thinking about the wild, black country spreading above them—not round Valley Forge, but east of there. Its flooded, frozen rivers and fierce, lashing branches when the storms came on; its open fields and ridges with no place for a man to hide, its roads that wound through thickets when a man could be easily ambushed. Mahlon might be galloping over those roads tonight, and there might be other men a-gallop, too, sheriffs and militia bands hating outlaws, hating Tories, steady to aim a gun and quick to pull a trigger.

Then she shrugged her shoulders. Nothing about that to make her lie awake. Mahlon had told her their ways were different and must stay so. His way to say he didn't want her.

Vinny spoke again from the pillow. "Thee knows, Lass, there wasn't a man there tonight thee couldn't have had if thee'd crooked thy finger. It isn't that thee's so much fairer than the rest of us. It's a way thee has of looking as if thee expected the men to come to thee—and they do. Even John André looked—and when he took thee to dance 'Clinton's Retreat,' thee should have seen the Shippen girls! They was like to pull thy hair!"

Lass moved away from the window and paused before the mirror, the last candle in her hand, ready to blow it out. She studied herself a moment, delicate features, clear, white skin, the vivid colors of eyes and hair—everything small and perfect as a miniature.

"I'm as God made me," she whispered defiantly, too low for Vinny to hear, "and I think He did all right." Then the mirror dissolved in a drenching rainbow wash of tears. "But I wish that He had made me good enough for Mahlon Doan."

ELEVEN

"Mose Doan Has Killed"

•

"Of course you can sing it, Vinny," said John André impatiently, drawing his brows together, his fine mouth almost pouting. "It goes to the tune of 'London town's a fine town,' and that must be known—even here in barbarous America. And the words—" He held out a paper booklet with its pages set in two columns of fine, brownish type.

"*Our Polly is a sad slut,*
Nor heeds what we have taught her."

They stood close together on the crazy stage of the Southwark Theater, facing the pit, the crude wooden posts supporting the roof and boxes, globeless oil lamps flaring here and there because of the spring dusk turning from blue to purple beyond the dusty windowpanes.

"*I wonder any man alive*
Would ever rear a daughter."

With a gay laugh and a swift tap of her lace and ivory fan, Vinny sent the play book spinning to the boards.

"No, John," she cried, "I won't play Lass's mother. I won't be Mrs. Peachem. Not ever—when she's twenty-one days older than I be. I want to play Lucy."

Lass stood in the wing beside Banastre Tarleton, short and stocky, with black, piercing eyes, a tough soldier and a good officer, and just twenty-three years old. Next week they were going to sing *The Beggar's Opera*, here in front of all the town who cared to come to it, and Lass, secure in the leading part of Miss Polly Peachem, could be mildly amused at Vinny's efforts to secure the second lead, to refuse to appear as the disreputable matron.

"*Before I was in love,*
Then every month was May."

She hummed to herself, and then broke off to think wryly how true that was

with her, how much this old poet knew. But this was not the pronouncement that made her lie awake in the night. “A man is always afraid of a woman who loves him too much.” That was the thought that worried her. If she had loved Mahlon less, would he have come tagging after her the way the British officers did? Did Ruth love him more or less than she, or couldn’t you measure one girl’s love by another’s? And would you ever be wise—so long as you were young enough for wisdom to do you any good?

“But, Vinny,” Captain André was arguing, “you know Peg Shippen wants to be Lucy.”

“But, Johnny,” Vinny mocked his firm tone but with no firmness, only mellow laughter in the amber depths of her eyes. “Thee knows her father won’t let her.”

The captain crooked his mouth up, flung his hands out and open with a gesture of despair, and turned to Banastre Tarleton. “Where’s Ham Beaumont?” he demanded, Ham being their star actor, the man to sing Peachem. “He’ll persuade the wench to be his wife, I’ll warrant. Only mind you, Vinny, it’s but a stage play, and don’t you go taking him in earnest.”

Tarleton leaned on his folded arms across the back of a cobwebbed chair with a broken leg.

“Ham’s not around. He’s gone up the Wissahickon after catfish.”

“Well—where’s Ollie Delaney?”

This time Lass answered. “He’s out at Gray’s Garden by Schuylkill Ferry, drinking fish-house punch with Fila Franks. Then she’s taking him home to Woodford for dinner.”

John André lifted his handsomely booted foot and kicked the play book lightly into the pit.

“Enough!” he cried, drawing himself up like Mark Antony ready to cry out, “Friends, Romans, countrymen.” “Banastre, comrade-at-arms, let us squire these ladies through the town to where the oystermen wait below London Coffee House—there to regale them.”

“Take off your buskins, John, and I’ll think about it,” agreed young Tarleton, even as he complied and led Lass down the right-hand aisle toward the doors giving on South Street. Outside the theater lay all the squalor of Southwark, a wooden town of poor people, and frog ponds, and brick kilns, but softened now with the mistiness of an April evening, sunset faded between the yellow willows and catalpa trees, and moonrise whitening the sky beyond the black, slipping currents of Delaware. Hand linked in hand, the two couples started up Fourth Street.

Lass looked around her almost happily, almost at home now in this town, at the terraced gardens behind their low walls, at the landscaped evergreens cut in squares, arches, and pyramids, with here and there an outcrop of grapevine

or red cedar that no man had planted, that had grown by themselves from the good ground. But she missed—here in a seaport town a hundred miles from the sea—the clean salt smell of the Newbury marshes, and wrinkled her nose and bit her lip now and then, for the town stank from end to end with the reek of filth from the British camps, the result of men and animals compassed together all winter long in a little space, with no order of cleanliness enforced upon them. And now and then she put her hands over her ears because of the noises from the Walnut Street jail—the unhappy stir of the poor, starved prisoners, many of them Continental soldiers who had fought with Crispin and other boys she knew from her schooldays; the shouts of William Cunningham, the Irish pimp turned jailor, who had killed Nathan Hale and tortured Ethan Allen.

"Kennel, ye sons of bitches! Kennel!"

When she took her hands down, the men were talking to each other of the French Alliance, for it seemed that France had decided to join with America to fight England, and that would put such a change on things as no man quite dared prophesy. John André said he'd rather go to France and be killed in a gentleman's war. Banastre Tarleton said no, he'd stay here, but he'd like some more southern fighting. A Virginia rifleman, now, was a fair match; not like these New England—oh, forgive him, ladies—that couldn't place above two shots in twenty. Both agreed they'd soon be leaving Philadelphia—in a month or two, maybe—now that Howe had finally contrived his orders home. Likely they'd hand the town back to Congress—hardly worth keeping, anyway.

And that could be, thought Lass, her mind running on all the havoc the army of occupation had wrought upon the place in the six months she had been there.

They had filled it with stench and caked the trim front parlors with the muck of stabled horses. They had burnt fences everywhere, and pulled down the row of old wooden houses in Swanson Street that had been there since the first days. They had hacked half the governor's woods away to stumps west toward the Schuylkill, and flooded the buckwheat fields in the Northern Liberties, leaving only the roads through Germantown and Frankford open so the Tory farmers could bring their produce in. The port and its ship-building were at a standstill, and the wooden sheds against the State House, where the Indians used to stay when they came in for treaty talks, overflowed with so much store of powder and shot that a careless spark from a pipe bowl or spouting chimney could easily destroy the whole town. But perhaps the worst of this condition, as most folk saw it, was the everlasting presence of the British themselves, clustered, stamping, and swearing, and drinking everywhere; making merry in the spring exactly as they had done all winter. Fox hunting at Gloucester Ferry. Bull baiting in the Northern Liberties. The

raking at concerts, balls, and assemblies. The dining clubs that still met—the Friendly Brothers at the Indian Queen, the Loyal Association at Clark's Tavern against the State House, the Yorkshire Club wherever. Cricket matches, auctions, and vendues. Lass told herself that she loved it all; knew that she was lying in her teeth when she did so.

"How'd thee know, Lass," asked Vinny, putting a white, rounded hand up to her red mouth to cover a yawn, trying to divert the men from the talk that bored her, "what Fila and Ollie were doing?"

They turned down High Street, past the Indian Queen. Ahead of them the cupolaed town house thrust its awkward turret against the ever-increasing silver in the eastern sky. Candles burned in the low front rooms along the street, but darkness had not quite muffled the life of daytime, for here and there came the shrill, young cry of a chimney cleaner pleading for business:

"Sweep oh! Sweep oh!"

and more carefree lads still played at pitch-penny in the cobbled gutters, loath to go inside away from the cool, spring air.

"I met Fila and Becky in a shop on Race Street this afternoon. They were getting the cloth for their Mischianza dresses. She told me she and Oliver were going to work all evening painting scenery."

"The Mischianza!" Vinny's eyes glowed. "Charlie O'Hara told me that's the Italian word for 'medley'—for 'everything and all things together.' The farewell party to General Howe. People are saying 'twill be the greatest spectacle ever seen in America."

"It will," whispered Lass, "and I mean to be there."

"But, Lass—how? Thee knows the parts are given out, and the invitations. Thee knows Sam forbade it—as my uncle did."

"But we're going. Both of us." Lass caught Vinny's plump arm and leaned closer. "We're going with Billy Winward and Johnny Sloper."

"But—but they're taking the Shippen girls. Since John had the quarrel with Peggy—"

"That's what the Shippen girls think. I'll see to the Shippen girls."

The two couples picked their way between the bulging sides of the blue Conestoga wagons grouped close to the market stalls, gaping full of threshed wheat, baled hay, willow cages of live fowl, and root vegetables that had lain unrotting in Bucks County farm bins the winter through. A few flower-cart men still wandered abroad in the dusk, offering lavender, jonquils, tulips, violets, and hyacinth; the red-coated captains chose from these wares for the daughters of barbarous America a clear yellow spray for Vinny, and a deep purple cluster for Lass.

At the bottom of High Street, almost to the river, they stopped outside the London Coffee House, light and the babble of men's voices rising to its wide corner gables, echoing through the porch made of thatch stretched on poles that ran from the house wall to the gutter. In the open, cobbled square before it, the oystermen had set their barrows trundled up from the barges that anchored off Spruce Street wharf. Tarleton and the girls went to sit on the darkest of the porch benches, the furthest from the tavern door, while André bought and brought back the gray-white creatures a-swim in their shells, topped with hot, spicy sauce, but tasting of sea salt underneath. Chattering and laughing, they ate, while the moon rose over the ten tall houses in Brick House Row.

André stood up first.

"We'll not squire you home, ladies, as you're but three blocks from there, and the less Quaker Sam sees of us, the happier he'll be. 'Twould grieve me sore to displeasure a rebel. I'm going round to Black Horse Alley to see if the Sign of the Bible is still open and old Bradford can sell me a book with a fair picture of laurel boughs in it. I want to copy some on the Mischianza scenery. Coming, Banastre?"

"Away from here—but not with you. I'm for the cock pit in Moore's Alley. Tom Wildman who handles the cocks says there's a hundred guineas on the main tonight. One of those blue cocks from Kent County down the Delaware —"

"Ah—I saw them fight. After Long Island. If all Americans could fight like they do, I'd give over my sword and surrender out of hand."

"I wouldn't. I wouldn't dare stop for that. I'd throw away my sword and run."

"Ah, well, but they can't."

"Not all, perhaps. But I begin to think there's more than enough who can."

Nobody had anything to say in answer.

André turned, grinding the scattered oyster shells underfoot.

"Good night, Lass—Lavinia," he said shortly.

Tarleton muttered the same. Taking their separate ways, they left the two girls standing on the tavern porch.

But as John André of the winsome ways and soft, springing brown hair had said, it was only a short distance to the Morris house, home now to Sam and Sally Bye. It was but early moonrise, with daylight not quite gone, and nobody molested Lass and Vinny on their brief walk down Front Street and over the reeking channel of Dock Creek. They arrived in Sally's front parlor, flushed, a little windblown by the spring airs, a little too conscious of their bright flowers bought with British money. They were so very young. The two women who sat on the brocade chairs in the candlelight, sipping claret lemonade, were older, aged in their men's love, or what passed for that. Lass had expected to find

Sally waiting for her. She had not expected to find Ruth Gwydion.

"Oh—" Sally started up as they entered. "Vinny—Lass! We've a guest, though not for the night, she says."

Sally watched Lass keenly for an ebbing pallor which she did not see. During her sister's illness, Ruth had called faithfully at the kitchen door every day, with fall flowers, with herbs she had heard recommended, with her love and good wishes, and Sally had made excuses for not asking her in, had said Lass was too ill for visitors. The two girls had not met since that morning when Lass had gone to Ruth's house and seen what was there to see. Inwardly Sally trembled. Outwardly, she wore the honey smile and unruffled brow of the well-schooled hostess.

"Ruth, this is our friend, Lavinia Whitlaw. Vinny, thee'll like Ruth. She came from Wales, as thy mother did. She teaches in Bucks County, but her school is closed now because it's been a rainy spring and the roads are too muddy for the little children to stir from home."

"I came," said Ruth shyly, her flecked eyes cast down at the neat curves of her homespun skirt, "to stay with my old school mistress, Rebecca Jones, in Drinkers' Alley. I came to seek her advice. There is much force put upon us now—we who teach the young—to take an oath to the new country. I am not sure I believe in the new country. But I am sure I cannot swear an oath. None of the Friends can."

She lifted clear eyes to look into the eyes of Lass Marvayne.

Lass felt hot rage run like steel arrows through her blood. So she looks at me, she thought, innocent as a baby taking sugar pap. Doesn't she know I know what she is? Who left those slippers on her stair that morning? Who saw her abed with Mahlon Doan? The rage flared out.

"Oh, Ruth," she said coolly, sinking down on a crooked walnut chair, bright skirts settling around her, "did you ever find the dancing shoes I left for you the day I took sick? When I came to your house I saw you were asleep, so I set them on the stairs."

Vinny had seated herself too, wrinkling her gently arched brows, dimly aware of a battle gathering itself, not able to guess what it could be about. Sally got up quickly and stepped into the kitchen, taffeta skirts a-rustle, murmuring something about fresh lemonade.

"Yes. I found them. I thank thee, Lass," said Ruth simply.

"Thee was resting well that morning," challenged Lass, her small body tense as a fighting cock's.

Ruth laughed. "Yes," she said, "I always do. I know the way of sleep."

"I've heard it's easy to come by—the way you came by it."

The darkness of far-off Plynlimmon side settled on the Welsh girl's face, but she made no answer.

“Lass,” called Sally from the kitchen, “come help me carry these.” Her voice had the edge an army sergeant uses to quicken his men. Reluctantly Lass lowered her colors, turned from Ruth and the wondering Vinny, and stepped into the kitchen. The door swung to behind her. She curled her toes inside her light slippers, feeling the roughness of the flagstone floor beneath. She looked up at Sally, who stood cool and poised beside the great, dark hearth, a single candle in one hand and a plate of black walnut cakes in the other. On the trestle table at the right waited a silver tray with a brimming pitcher, and somewhere, outside the casement window, the frogs sang, spring-loud, defying the brief stretches of paved city between the swamps and brooks.

“Sally,” said Lass. “I wish you’d mind your business.”

“I would,” Sally replied calmly, “if thee had the wits to mind thine. Listen. Placed as thee is, thee’d better have Ruth for friend than enemy.”

“Why?”

“Because Ruth’s the favored one—not only with Mahlon—with his folk and friends. She’s a Quaker. Gets up and talks in Buckingham Meeting—as thee and I couldn’t. She teaches the children and wears a gray dress, and keeps her eyes down, and is that mild and righteous, sour milk would turn sweet cream if she stirred it. That’s the kind of daughter-in-law Hester Doan will be wanting. I’ve made some queries round, about Hester, for it’s always a man’s mother sets his choice. Hester’s a good woman, known for such all over the county. A good Friend. She hopes her boys will turn back to the Light again, and stop robbing, and thieving, and riding by night, and stand up in Plumstead Meeting the way they used to do. In her eyes they’re only misled—not bad. And she’ll want the best for them. Mahlon’s got himself the bad name of an outlaw, but still—it’s the man who chooses—every time. And when he wants a wife, he’ll want her virtuous.”

Lass’s eyes blazed. She gripped the back of a kitchen chair, her nails sinking crescent-wise into the unpainted wood.

“Well, damn your eyes, Sarah Jane Marvayne, if I ain’t as virtuous as that strumpet in there—or you either. I’ve always kept to myself and belonged to no man. And not for lack of chances. Remember when we went to school—the big boys when they offered you pence, they offered me shillings—which we never took!”

Sally bit her lip.

“You know I’ve lain with no man at all. And she—she’s been abed with him in front of witnesses. And you say I’m the one to look to my virtue!”

“Oh, Lass,” sighed Sally patiently, “mind what thee’s saying. Hannah always told Father he shouldn’t let thee run by the wharves and hear the sailor talk.”

Lass’s rage left her then. She stifled a laugh. So Sally thought “damn your

eyes" was sailor talk. Sailor talk began so. It went on from there.

"What Ruth's done is her own affair," continued Sally, moving away from the window, for the draft made the candle flicker. "But after all—what has she done—really? Nothing save love Mahlon better than she should. Does thee think his mother'll hold that against her? I know nothing against thee, but thee gives the appearance of all that's wrong. Does thee think Hester Doan would want a daughter-in-law who stood up on a city stage, her bosom bare to here"—Sally jabbed at a spot just above her navel—"and sang a whore's song, and had one sung about her? 'My Polly is a sad slut!' Indeed, she'd think thee was, for sure. Would she want a daughter-in-law who had the name of cavorting the streets eight nights out of seven with the British officers?"

"But—oh, Sally—I'm sorry I spoke so to you." Lass's blue eyes widened with distress. "I—I was only doing it to try to forget Mahlon—and I couldn't —I couldn't ever—not in the midst of everything." Her hand shook as she tried to lift the pitcher of claret lemonade.

"Needn't waste time telling me that, Lass. I know. But Mahlon won't—nor his folks. He won't ever come to thee. But as Ruth's friend thee can come to him—at her house, or in her behalf, in all the asking-nothing-for-thyself ways that he won't guess. We'll be going back to Buckingham soon, and thee's got to think what to do when thee gets there. I'd advise thee make Ruth Gwydion thy dearest friend."

"Oh, Sally, you're a snake! But I love you for it. I'd never have thought of that. And Dad thinks I'm the clever one."

"Men think as they love—and I don't care that thee has Father. For I have Sam. And the business thee's about is such as a snake's the best counsel for—so a snake I'll try to be for thee. Take up the pitcher now, and mind thy manners."

Vinny, alone with Ruth, had fixed her puzzled eyes on the calm, slightly heavy face, ivory-tinted under the thick, dark hair. Ruth stared at the kitchen door that did not open. Vinny felt that Sally and Lass must be talking secret things. It was up to her to distract their guest. Sally had said they had Welsh blood between them. Vinny knew nothing of Wales save that her mother had come from there, but it was all she had to go on, and it was her duty. She knew no other thing. She couldn't talk to this country schoolmistress with dried mud on her thick boots, about routs and beaus and dances of the town.

She smiled, a sweet smile that lighted her dark gold eyes, and played with her fan. Ruth's strong, sure fingers curled about the leather sack that held her valuables. "Caer Gwydion," spoke Vinny, dreamily, "that's the Milky Way where all the stars walk at night. That's the only Welsh I know. Is thee named for that?"

"Caer Gwydion," answered Ruth soberly, "is the way the great magician

made to walk from earth to heaven to talk with the soul of his son." Neither of the girls found anything more to say, and a slow silence rose up between them that lasted until Sally and Lass stepped from the kitchen bearing refreshment, but Vinny had caught a thin memory and could not let go of it.

"Oh—Gwydion—I remember now. He made a woman out of primrose and meadowsweet—" She stopped, bewildered, remembering herself, a child, soothed in a warm lap in the twilight. "He made her to be a wife to his son, Llew."

"Oh, now, Vinny," cried Lass, dimpling, holding out Mrs. Robert Morris' silver pitcher, "it's an old tale, and I don't believe a word."

"But she was unfaithful, the Gwydion woman," went on Vinny, "unfaithful to her husband. And he changed her—he changed her into an—into an owl!"

Three pairs of eyes stared at Ruth, Vinny's deep amber, Sally's soft hazel gray, Lass's a bitter blue. But it was Lass who laughed first, who laid the old-country ghost.

"Oh, leave off Wales and the Wizards," she cried. "My grandmother came over the sea, too. She came from Londonderry, but she would never tell me the tales of it and only a few of the songs. She said all that was behind her; that she'd brought away only two things, her plaid shawl and her pretty face. She said I had them both; that she hoped they'd bring me better luck than they brought her."

She dropped her hand on Ruth's shoulder and filled her glass with the deep pink liquid.

Upstairs Baby Sam cried out once as he turned in his sleep. Last night, if he had cried so, Sally would have run up the curving stairs to see him, but tonight she would not put herself to that trouble, feeling in her body a new conception, nothing known to Sam or Lass, scarcely to herself. How good it was to feel so, how sure and satisfying. One was not truly born until one became a married woman. Lass and Vinny—poor, silly girls, fluttering around after British soldiers or outlaws, or whatever offered, swinging on a man's arm all evening at a public dance, and then coming home to lie in bed all night alone. She, Sally, wouldn't have cared for that. Better to be like Ruth Gwydion. She looked at Ruth's calm, slightly sallow face, her generous body, her dusky hair. Ruth lay with a man, close and deep, for Lass had seen it. Assuredly seeds were sown. As surely, nothing came of it. Strange that some women bore and some did not. Sally remembered the graveyard in Newburyport—Deacon Petengall's lot, for instance—the patriarch living past ninety years, and around him his four young wives, each dead before thirty of the one child too many. And all the little graves! Sally didn't want her Sam to face eternity arraigned like that. But she was sure now; the second time. Her back ached and her nipples had been dark and sore when she dressed that

morning. Perhaps it would be better to be a silly girl. She put her thoughts away and turned to her guests. The baby had not cried again. Outside, a flower man was calling hyacinths in the dusk of the street.

"Lass," Ruth was saying, almost shyly, "I've something for thee. I didn't see myself the man who brought it. He left it with Mag at Sam's house in Buckingham, and she asked me to bring it to thee when she heard I was coming to town. He was golden-haired and handsome, she said, and talked New England-wise." She held out a letter and a small wooden box with a cord knotted round it.

"Oh? That'd be Crispin," said Lass, putting her hand out none too eagerly. She tossed the box into Vinny's lap. "Here! You untie it while I read the letter. I wonder what he wants of me now. It's been more than a year—"

Vinny made a ritual of unloosening the tough cord. After all, these knots had been tied by a hero at Valley Forge, a blond and handsome one, so everyone said. Lass ripped open the sealed paper carelessly and read aloud:

> Dear Lass:
>
> Hoping you are of a different mind toward me than when I last saw you, I send you this painting of me done by Capt. Charlie Peale of the 4th Pennsylvania. They say he used to be an artist in Philadelphia before the war. We bring him these fresh-water clam shells from the creek, and he draws our faces on them to send home to our wives and sweethearts. The hole I have bored in the top is so you can wear it around your neck on a ribbon, as the women do who are in the camp here with their husbands. I hope you will wear it and think of me.
>
> I was at home after I saw you, trying to recruit, but there be no men left in Marblehead at all, most being at sea, following the war there. In truth, there be fewer men there than there be wits in Congress. That is not to say I have turned Tory or go against our officers. Washington and Glover will be great men for all time. It is only to say that I am against fools in high places. I have fought in Rhode Island and on the Hudson since I saw you, and once Glover gave me leave to go and take a ship a voyage for your father. He is thinner than he was, and talks less. He says he is but fighting the war as any merchant would, and that if we but have free trade then we will have free men. I think we must have free men first before the rest can follow. But I do not know. I worked for him since before I had a beard to shave, and so many times I seen him right when I was wrong.
>
> We been all winter as we be now, at Valley Forge—a ruined iron

town, furnace and mills gutted by the British, even the great trees hacked off shoulder high and all the houses burnt that were not of stone. I have taken a liking to the stone houses in these parts, I find, and think to build us one after the war when we are both at home. We can set it where you wish—Marblehead, or Newburyport, or in between. We live in log huts we have reared, with little to eat, save mouldy bread and a stew of frozen potatoes with dirt and dead leaves floating in it. Many have died of weakness, hunger, cough and bleeding, or the diorrea, but as Surgeon Waldo says, give us rum enough and we could storm Tophet. And in some ways, things be better. We understand the Virginia men now, and they understand us. I think we begin to be an army. And Steuben, the German, has shown us some foreign ways of marching and arming that seem well. I was at the sandstone house where Washington sleeps to have dinner with his staff last night, when I and five others was made Captain, and I heard him say that for the first time since he went to Cambridge to lead the Army, he does not see things by thirteens any more. Meaning I think, we are one country, not a spate of colonies. This letter grows overlong. Now that the winter has broken, we expect to fight again. I do not know where. I do not know when I can come to you, but when I can, I will.

Yours,
C. Corey

While Lass was reading, Vinny had pried off the lid of the wooden box and lifted out the clam shell, its outer shale rubbed away to a dead white surface that would take the crude paint. She peered intently at Charlie Peale's miniature, not thinking of Charlie, with whom she'd danced and sat at supper a year ago, but of the face in the painting which she had never seen before—blunt features, square jaw, and smiling mouth, the eyes narrowed under a shock of tousled yellow hair. Below the head the sturdy throat reached down into the collar of a blue seaman's jacket, the shoulders thrust out to the black rim curved round the whole. Yes, Charlie Peale was an artist, sure, she thought, but Crispin Corey was a man.

"Put it on, Lass," she cried, holding it out as Lass finished reading.

"I don't know if I have a ribbon—" parried Lass. Hester Doan, she thought, would not advise her son to court a girl who wore another man's picture round her neck.

"Oh? Thee hasn't? Well, *I* have!"

Vinny's eyes flashed mischief. She whipped the black velvet lacing out of her bodice and threaded it through the hole in the painted clam shell.

Deliberately she tied it at the back of her dimpled neck and stood forth, smiling proudly, facing the other three, the small, clear likeness of the young man resting on the rosy flesh just above her bosom.

Sally looked at her a little wanly and then smiled too. Lass smiled, savoring the jest. It was Ruth who uttered a low, strangling cry and fell sideways in her chair, her body limp, her face turned yellow and waxy.

"Quick, Lass!" cried Sally, pulling herself to her feet. "There's brandy in Sam's study! Vinny! Get cold water from the kitchen!"

The girls fled about their errands while Sally ran to Ruth, half lifting her, chafing her wrists, murmuring comfort. In a moment Ruth's eyes opened, she straightened herself in the chair and smoothed her dress. The color of life came back into her face.

"What is it? Is thee sick, Ruth? Did something frighten thee?"

"No. No. Do not tell the others. It is like a sickness. Like a curse on me. It is the thing I do not have—but almost do. My grandmother had it. The second sight."

"What did thee see?"

"I saw—I saw—what did thee say her name was—Lavinia, and she stood there smiling—and around her neck on a ribbon she wore—a death's head."

"She—she didn't! I saw her, too. She wore Crispin Corey's picture. It was in jest, for he hopes to marry Lass. Thee couldn't have seen the other thing. It was the play of light and dark—the way the candle shadow fell."

"No. It was not a trick of the shadows. There will be death—between Lavinia and Crispin Corey. I shall pray to God they never meet."

"But how? And when? And which of them will die? Or will it be others?"

"I do not know, for I do not have it clear; only the troubling of it, not the true sight."

"Here, Ruth," cried Lass, slopping brandy partly on the floor, partly in a pewter cup, "this is out of a red flagon with a French label. It'll have you up dancing 'Howe's Defeat' in a minute or two. What happened to you?"

"I had—I had—" murmured Ruth vaguely, putting her hand to her eyes, "a cramp inside me, but it is gone now. I'd rather have some water."

"Here, dear," said Vinny, her voice tender with sympathy, holding out the tin dipper that hung by the pump, the quickest thing she could reach.

But Ruth seemed not to hear. She did not take the water. She drew her skirts away from Vinny.

And at that moment heavy boots pounded through the hall, the door swung open, setting the candles all aflare, and Sam Bye burst into the room, his face as scarlet as his waistcoat, words tumbling forth in a confused babble, quite different from his usual Quaker calm.

"Sit down, Sam," cried Sally, running up to take him by the arm and lead

him to the sofa. “Is someone chasing thee? Shall I bar the door? Does thee want thy gun?”

Panting, he shook his head, finally recovered enough to make himself understood.

“Mose Doan has killed!” he blurted. “I always said he would. Will Hart from Plumstead who went to school with him always said he would. Landlord Croasdale at the Anchor thought so. I always said the Doan boys was going straight down to hell. I been out watching half the town chase him.”

“Did they catch him?” asked Lass in a very small voice.

“Was he alone?” asked Ruth, with an iron edge to her words that somehow cooled and quieted Sam.

“How? What’s that? Yes, ’twas only he—none of the other boys. Catch him? No! He got away into Jersey.”

“Whom did he kill?” asked Sally consolingly, as if it didn’t matter very much. Vinny looked on with placid interest, caressing now and then the trinket that still hung about her neck.

“He killed three British,” said Sam, now in command of his breath, recovered from his hasty trip home, from trying to be the first to put the news in everybody’s mouth. “Up above Vine Street and into the marsh round Pegg’s Run. I come by just after it happened.”

“What was thee doing up there?”

“I been to a vendue in the Liberties. Heard there was a new-landed cargo of worsted breeches for sale. I’d hoped to buy them up and try to get them to the men at Valley Forge. Didn’t do so badly either—anyway, seems the trouble started over a woman named Copeley. She’d been to the mills at Frankford and was coming home with a bag of flour. Hungry children, husband with Washington’s army—oh, Mose was right to protect her, but he didn’t need to kill. He could have given the knave a thrashing and let him go.”

“How did it happen?” asked Lass. She had always feared Mose, huge, handsome, lowering dark as a crag by Delaware. She had not liked him. But she knew how Mahlon worshipped his brother.

“Seems a British sentinel stopped her and asked to see her pass from Howe—and she didn’t have one. Then he called her a rebel hag and said her children were better off starved dead than growing up to be enemies of their King—and he tried to take her flour.”

Sally and Lass looked at each other. Sally’s look said, ‘These are the British; these are the boys thee likes to go dancing with.’ Sam went on.

“Mose Doan came by just then and tried to stop it. Finally, when he couldn’t, he told the woman to run, knocked the officer down, and shot him between the eyes. He killed another sentry in the woods trying to escape.”

Again he stopped for breath and picked up the pewter cup of brandy Lass

had poured for Ruth.

"Thee said," Ruth reminded him in a tired voice, her face gone waxy again, "that there were three."

"Yes. Third was a British captain. Once Mose got Wild Devil under him, he set out to swim the Delaware, shooting back over his shoulder, and he killed the first man in the boat they'd put out to take him. Stopped on the Jersey shore and threw his sword like a spear before he took off through the oak growth. Near hit a boatman, which would have made it four. Two Scotch Artillery men who were watching say 'twas the work of a demon; that while Mose was crossing the river, they seen the flash of cloven hoofs and a tail. Could be, I told them. Mose's horse, Wild Devil, had both. They said it was not horse's tail, but shining-coiled like a serpent. Indians used to claim they noticed the same thing about Mose. Well—"

He settled himself more comfortably on the sofa and began to pull off his boots. "I always said Mose would kill. The boys are on their way down, and they'll go fast now they've gone this far. Once they've spilled blood, they won't stop there. They'll kill another and another, every time for less and less a reason. Soon they'll all be killing—Abe and Joe—even meek little Mahlon, the rabbit hunter—"

Lass flared up then. "Suppose Mose did kill a man! What did he kill? He killed a British officer! Isn't that what all our army's trying to do? The men you run around buying breeches for. I thought you blamed the Doans for being on the British side."

It was Ruth who answered her. "The Doans," she said slowly, "be on no side but their own. I think it would not have mattered to Moses that this man be English or American. He would not care where he was born or what flag he followed. Only Abe harms women, and he is mad."

Sam dropped a square-toed boot in amazement and stared at the two girls; then he straightened up and laughed.

"Ah, women! Except, of course, my Sally." He put his arm around her, for she had come to the couch beside him. "If a man's black-haired and handsome with the ways of a braggart, they'll never hear aught against him. But if I was a woman favored a Doan, I'd counsel him to mend his ways and leave off with the British and join our countrymen. It's the way to save his own skin—" He looked at Ruth as he spoke, but Sally looked at Lass. Not noticing, he went on, "Vinny, thee'll likely defend him too. What's thy good word for Moses Doan?"

"Moses?" asked Vinny, smiling a happy, secret smile. "I don't know him. I never heard of him till now. I like men to be fair."

A clamor swelled in the street just then, causing Sam to set down his brandy and stride in his stockinged feet to the bow window, the women

crowding around him. Past the darkened housefronts toiled a small group of British soldiers carrying amongst them three yellow pine planks, on each plank a stiff shape covered with a horse blanket. They passed on their way down Front Street, perhaps to the burying ground by Old Swedes' Church. Behind them jostled a muttering throng in rough wool smocks and leather aprons, and up in the town the voice of the watch spoke through his brass horn upon the chilly spring night, while Lass and Ruth clasped each other's hands tightly, only half knowing why.

"Nine o' the clock! Moon's up, tide's out, and a fair sky. Mose Doan killed three of the King's men!"

TWELVE

Tom Fool and Damn Fool

•

It was the greatest spectacle ever seen in North America since the days of the coming over, and Lass Marvayne was there with all the famous belles—at least, she was there at the beginning of it. The rich young officers had spent money out of hand to stage a pageant for their popular general that would set all England astir when he got home, set people in the street to asking why he had been recalled. What were the King and the ministers thinking of? Such a great man! When his captains would spend fifty thousand pounds on silks alone for the farewell in his honor. Or were they, too, like everyone else, getting tired of the war in America that nobody seemed to win?

Whatever the cause, General Howe would be in London by midsummer, gone at his own request to explain why he had done this and not that, but now it was only May, the warm, blue afternoon of the Mischianza, and all the sober Quakers, and artisans, and poor people and farmers in from the country thronged the narrow, brick-walled streets of Philadelphia to watch a display of the thing their great-grandfathers had come to America to get away from, the thing their sons at Valley Forge were readying up to fight against any day now. They watched. They did not cheer or hiss. Now and then they muttered. Here in their own country they were the grave, if despoiled aristocrats, lean and tattered, looking with scorn at the tinsel trappings and paper roses, the cheap arrogance of the visiting rabble.

Lass, being one of them, could see the scorn in their faces as she stepped off Knight's wharf at the foot of Green Street, to board the Ferret Galley that would carry the general officers and their ladies. She looked apprehensively for Sam. Sally had promised she would keep him at home somehow, keep him from finding out that Lass had gone to the Mischianza against his explosive order. She did not see him! She was safe—he couldn't stop her now—she was actually on board the gently swaying deck, surrounded by knights and ladies in clothes as fantastic as her own. As the galley moved out on the sunlit Delaware, bright-coated Hessians tuning their brasses on three flatboats that swung into line behind it, she ran her fingers over the white silk of her polonaise and the silver-spangled sash with black fringe that hung almost to her spangled slipper heels. A rich costume designed by John André. Lass liked

Johnny, but not all of his ideas—for instance that great, towering headdress she was having to wear because everyone else did, the gauze turban Billy said was like a Turkish girl's, with a veil dripping down one side and feathers and jeweled tassels down the other. She'd see to it the hideous thing tumbled off and got lost once the dancing began. Anyway, she was glad she was a Lady of the Burning Mountain and not a Lady of the Blended Rose who had to wear deep pink. It wouldn't have gone with her hair. Vinny, leaning on the gilded rail and talking with John Sloper of the dragoons, looked well enough in it. John hardly looked like a man at all—any more than Billy did—in his pink and white knight's costume all puffs and bows and fringes—more like the boys at home dressed up to follow the straw dummy on Pope's Day—red plumes nodding from his hat. She thought for a moment of Mahlon's deerskin hunting shirt, of Crispin's rough, blue seaman's jacket. She felt suddenly proud to be American, just as you were supposed to do if somebody waved the new flag, with stars and stripes in it, or cheered for General Washington, or announced that all men were created equal.

"Lass," said Billy Winward, satin-clad, at her elbow, bending over till the orange plumes of his cardboard helmet touched her cheek, "look back! They are all coming now. I've never seen anything so fine on the Thames or any foreign river."

The water pageant had moved well into the middle of the Delaware, rowing to the harmonies of the band music. Lass craned her neck and almost lost her gaudy turban. Billy helped her right it. Behind the music came two other floating divisions, bearing Howe and Cornwallis, escorts of flatboats, light galleys, and small craft, darting about them like schools of fish, gold, blue, and scarlet. Over toward the Jersey shore, the great frigates of Lord Howe's navy waited in a protective line, their guns hidden with wreaths and banners. Tied up all along the wharves and quays below Front Street, the troop transports overflowed with spectators; soldiers, camp followers, people of Philadelphia. River and city blended into one plain of flamboyant color shimmering under the hot May sun.

"Couldn't you almost imagine we were in Camelot?" asked young Winward romantically, waving his hand toward the plumed knights around them, the heap of silver shields piled on the deck, to be borne in the tournament later, the pink and white fluted lances stacked at the rear mast, held there loosely upright inside a circle of rope.

"Camelot? I've never been there. I don't know much about the towns this side of Boston."

Winward bit his lip. "Your country really has no history, has it?" he asked, faintly supercilious, still respecting her beauty.

Lass could sense that he was laughing at her, but she did not know why.

"We will have," she retorted, "when we beat the British."

Winward narrowed his eyes, seeing for a moment something he did not care much for, the flash of a woman's spirit. Ignorant as a dairy maid, he thought, and imperious as a duchess! Well! that was America for you. He ignored her challenge. She was too pretty to quarrel with, and at the beginning of a famous party.

"I shouldn't have said Camelot. It doesn't really go back to Arthur's days. Johnny André tells me this is the sort of clothing men wore at the court of Henry of Navarre."

"Oh? Will King George like that?"

"I don't think he'll mind."

Off High Street wharf the fleet stopped to honor Howe's flagship. *The Roebuck* fired salutes, and everybody sang "God Save the King." It took them till near six o'clock to reach Wharton's landing above the Swedish church, low and gray in its cluster of buttonwood trees, for once at the peak of the flood tide, part of the pageant, including the general, had had to abandon their green-lined galleys for the sturdier barges that had been keeping the crowds away. They were all ashore, finally, and parading between the two lines of grenadiers, over the clipped greensward that sloped up from the river to the terraces and boxwood alleys round Walnut Grove. Joseph "Duke" Wharton had built himself this fine country seat and loved it so well he must have been homesick for it when he got to heaven, most of the town agreed. His widow had fled after the battle of Germantown and gone with some Wharton kin west to Lancaster, where Thomas Wharton, President of Pennsylvania, now lay dying. Sir Henry Calder of the British Army, quartered in the tall, spacious stone mansion with gloomy hemlocks hiding the stables at the rear, and on both sides the nutwood grove that named it, had issued the invitations for this evening, cards engraved with a setting sun and the arms of the Howe brothers.

Sunset reddened the sky now behind the dark trees and the old house, its windows blazing with lights and candelabra. Beside it the junior officers had erected a pavilion for the banqueting hall; before it reared up arches of artificial roses and colored lights, the naval arch nearest the water, guarded by two sailors, the figure of a sea god atop it, leaning on a trident; the military arch, closer to the house, in the charge of two soldiers, crowned with a woman's figure, "Fame." At each side of the naval arch rose a tier of seats, and the Knights and Ladies of the tournament took their places there, Lass sinking down on a bench to the right, between Nan White and Becky Bond. She looked across the jousting ground to where Vinny sat on the far left, talking behind her pink fan with Williamina, Becky's sister. Back in the trees and along the river, like a fringe of lowering cloud, hovered the townspeople who had walked two miles across the city and through Southwark, following the

rout, their curiosity outweighing their disapproval.

The tournament began. The seven white Knights of the Blended Rose entered from the left, riding gray horses, accompanied by a herald and three trumpeters. Their leader bore a shield with a red rose and a white rose for device, their stalks intertwined, and the motto, "We droop when separated." They circled the field and then drew up in front of their Ladies, while the herald proclaimed the challenge:

"The Knights of the Blended Rose, by me their herald proclaim and assert, that the Ladies of the Blended Rose excel in Wit, Beauty, and Accomplishment, those of the whole world, and should any Knight or Knights be so hardy as to dispute or deny it, they are ready to enter the lists with them and maintain their assertions by deeds of Arms, according to the laws of Ancient Chivalry."

Now the seven Knights in black satin and orange laced with gold spurred out from the right, bearing the golden shields inscribed, "I burn forever," their plumes waving. Lass noticed that Billy had a bay leaf on his shield and the motto, "Unchanging." She smiled, knowing the story behind it; how he had asked her to be his Lady in the first place, but Sam had forbidden her to go, so he had engaged to take Mary Shippen. And then when—when Mary had to disappoint him, Lass had promised to disregard Sam and come anyway. With all these changes, Billy remained unchanged. He had always wanted her to be with him as she was now—not her, really, only her pretty face that he could be proud of.

The Black Knights paraded across the field, and drew up while their herald declared that their purpose there was to disprove the vainglorious by Arms, not words, to establish the prowess of the Ladies of the Burning Mountain. Watching them, Williamina Bond teased Vinny.

"Please—before they start tilting and we have to applaud them—tell me—how *did* it come about? How did thee and Lass get here? When thy people forbade it? And where are the Shippen girls? I *know* they were coming."

"They were—until yesterday." Vinny's laugh bubbled up like a clear, sweet spring. "I vow, I'll tell thee if that trumpeter will just be still a minute. It's too good to keep to myself. Lass did it."

"But how could she?"

"Just made up her mind in spite of Sam, and got Billy and John to say they'd take us if the Shippens withdrew."

"Oh—it wouldn't be any trouble to get the boys—but what did thee do with Peg and Mary, for they were set on being here? Murder them?"

"Oh, Williamina! What a savage thought! Though at times they've asked for it. Of course not! Hush, and I'll tell thee."

The Black Knights had accepted the challenge. Both groups were

shattering lances now under the clear yellow sky with twilight at the edges of it. The river wind of afternoon had died, and the air seemed to grow more thick and sultry every minute. Vinny babbled on.

"She said we'd go and see Peg about tea-time, and we did. My, those girls were pleased to think they were going and we weren't! Pretended to be sorry for us, and fed us plum jam and seed cake, and showed us their dresses. Then Lass recollected Sam had sent us with a message for their father—"

"Had he?"

"Of course not. Mary went and got the judge out of his study."

On the field below them, the plumed lines moved toward each other, waved pistols gallantly, and discharged them.

"When he came out, she said Sam had a letter from Robert Morris saying he'd heard about the Mischianza and was furious; that he'd never forgive the abandoned wenches who took part in it, and that he certainly hoped none of the daughters of his old friends would be guilty of such folly. Sam had the letter truly, but he didn't tell Lass to spread it abroad—she only said he did, said he thought the judge might like to know; said that Thomas Willing felt the same way too. Then, before Judge Shippen could say anything, she asked him if he'd seen the costumes, which he hadn't, of course, and she held up Peggy's.

"Well, what could he do after that? Of course he had to say they couldn't go! He'd not want to side against such important men or have his daughters thought ill of. And he *did* think the costumes were indecent. My, but those girls were in a dancing rage! We left right after that, and they wouldn't even say good-bye to us. Sat up all night then, working on our dresses. Sally came in and helped after Sam was asleep, for poor Lass can't sew a stitch that'll hold."

By now the Knights were charging with their swords. Vinny looked across in the dusk and waved her hand at Lass, but Lass, although staring straight at her, did not seem to see. That was because she had her eyes closed, seeing the smooth, patient, wise face under the straight, dark hair that she imagined would belong to Hester Doan. What would Hester Doan think of the Mischianza, and bare-bosomed girls disporting there where everyone could see? The leading Knights closed in single combat, fought briefly to a draw. Black champions and white paraded alternately in a circuit and then lined up, flanking the arches, while the whole pageant dissolved its formal ranks and streamed, cheering, between them, upward to the mansion, in the hot, thickening dark, where no stars shone.

Lass found herself in the midst of the other Ladies—Jane Craig, Becky Franks, Ann Redman, the Bonds, and Vinny. Peggy Chew, a slight, dark beauty in a wildrose dress, Captain Andre's latest favorite, shepherded them along in the midst of the crowd.

"Johnny says we're all to go inside the house and take tea or something while the men get out of their knights' clothes and into uniform," she counseled them.

The spectators from the city, in leather aprons and rude smocks, and homespun that had seen too much service, pushed gradually forward across the lawns for a last glimpse before the brilliant company retired inside to sit down to the feast of rich viands; not worshipful spectators, for too many of them remembered sons who had died of hunger at Valley Forge. British soldiers held them away with a fence of bayonets run lengthwise. Here and there one man muttered, another spat. They were not in tune with this foppish elegance. Lass overheard a ragged little boy talking to an old artillery man with a scarred face and bitter eyes.

"Major, I want to know. What is the difference between the Knights of the Blended Rose and the Knights of the Burning Mountain?"

The major cursed. "Why, none at all, son. Save one be tom fool and one be damn fool—there's no more difference."

General Howe heard and drew his eyebrows together. A British soldier heard, and shoved the intruders rudely back with the side of his bayonet. Lass tripped on with her friends and never knew any more of the sharp-tongued soldier and the little boy, but she could not forget the comment or the homely seasoning of truth in it.

They passed the second arch and up the carpeted steps into the gray old Quaker manor, now transformed with blazing lights, imitation black and white marble, and long pier glasses giving back the light again. Agile marines, their faces blackened to represent Nubian slaves, ran here and there serving tea and lemonade, sweating under their silver collars. In a spacious parlor at the rear, sweet with the scent of box drifting in through the open windows, two Hessian officers had started a Pharaoh game. Two by two now, the Knights rejoined their Ladies, and after taking refreshment, began making their way in couples up the curving stairway to the ballroom on the second floor.

Captain André and Ollie Delaney and their twenty comrades who had sponsored the fete had held back not one single pound, not one extravagant idea. All through the first dance, Lass let Billy half-guide, half-shove her in and out of the measures, while she stared around at the circling splendor. The walls were paneled in pale blue and rose pink with gold bead, hung with drooping festoons of flowers and silk ribbon; mirrors and branching waxlights borrowed from the rich Tories of Philadelphia spread a dazzling yellow light everywhere.

"Wait till you see the supper room in the pavilion," whispered Billy, as he led her down the middle of a set, "then you'll think this is nothing."

But now it was nine o'clock, a dark, hot, cloudy evening, with no stirring

air, and yet no cool promise of rain. The wide windows on the first floor were all flung open, and the wide-paneled front door. Everyone moved outside again to watch the fireworks and the illumination of the soldiers' arch honoring Howe. Lass found herself standing just to the right of a Seckel pear tree that grew near the broad front steps, Billy on one side of her, and on the other, Lord Rawdon, and beyond the peer stood the general himself with his dazzling blonde mistress, Mrs. Loring, all black velvet and crystal. The general, dark, heavy, his red coat hung with military honors, showed his bad teeth in a smile as he looked around him, pleased at the way the fete was turning out. His large hand, veined and bony, rested on Elizabeth Loring's shoulder.

The fireworks began with a bouquet of rockets plunging skyward and bursting, falling back to earth in a shower of sparks among the new-leaved walnut trees. Chinese fountains and firepots sprang up now, all over the lawn, while the men cheered and the women uttered little cries of feigned alarm. Lass felt Billy lean closer, felt his fingers at the spangled edge of her bodice. She drew away, and as she did so, she noticed an orderly speaking quietly to Howe. Lord Rawdon broke off in the middle of a compliment, and after a moment, young Winward forgot his amorousness and turned to see what was happening.

"The Doans!" exclaimed the general. "The cowboys from Plumstead! One of 'em shot, eh? Not Mose, by any chance?"

Lass felt her senses go wheeling away from her, somewhere out across the sky. All the fires on the lawn died down for her into a stifling dark. She closed her eyes, gripped the gnarled trunk of the pear tree, and listened.

"No. Not Moses, sir. One of the younger ones." The orderly spoke low but clear, in clipped, British fashion. "Our sentries took them on the road that runs just back of the walnut trees, the road from the south. They said they'd been in Chester and were going home. They had no passes. One was hurt and bleeding—he fainted when we challenged them. They're being held at the stables in the back. They said they were friends of yours."

"Why so they be," rumbled Howe. "You remember them, 'Lizabeth? I've told you of them."

"You put me in a passion to see them," dimpled Mrs. Loring, "and then you forbade it. You said they were the most devil-daring fellows that ever lived and hell itself couldn't match them. You said they were handsome!"

"So they be." He turned to the orderly. "Send a surgeon to them. And—yes, by God, let them take my coach! I had it driven down here so 'Lizabeth and I could ride back to Stenton in it—away from the rout." He leered at her, and the smile she returned him was as lewd as his. "But let them take their boy into the city with it—they can get other vehicles there—if he can't be mended so he can ride. Send a couple of sergeants with them to bring the coach back

and to tell the men at headquarters to give them whatever they need—in my name.

"But, Sir William," pleaded Lord Rawdon, the dark-haired dandy, "remember, it's not two months since Moses Doan shot three of your men. And their Joe goes about impersonating *me*! He robbed Thomas Willing and sent him a ribald note from Newtown after—all in my name!"

Howe threw back his head and guffawed lustily. "When a backwoodsman from Pennsylvania can pass himself off as a British peer, I salute him! I weep for the peerage! You're lucky, Francis, to be reckoned as handsome as a Doan. You'll just have to bear with the japes. I shan't avenge you. I wouldn't have lost at Trenton if that Hessian swine Rall had listened to Mose and his brother. Gods knows I've won few enough battles in America. If I can help those—"

Lass could not stay to hear any more. "Billy," she murmured, "I'm going to—to the ladies' parlor—to rest for a few minutes. All the fireworks going off makes my head ache."

He caught up her hand, half solicitous, half afraid that his evening might be spoiled.

"But you'll come back—for supper, and the dancing?"

"Yes, of course. Wait for me here."

She slipped away from him and ran into the mansion. Groping down a passageway that skirted the kitchens in the rear, she finally reached the back door, its upper half open, and paused a moment, looking into the stable yard under the drooping hemlock boughs. Two or three lanterns burned there, and men's voices lifted now and then, gruffly, but she could not tell what they were saying. Once she heard a moan. To run out in her white dress would call attention to her, and she could not risk that, but in a closet under a narrow staircase she found a musty-smelling cloak—a servant's, likely—and drew it about her, flinging off her turban, her hair tumbling down on her shoulders. A white-faced shadow, she tiptoed out of the house and across the moss-covered paving stones to the side of the stable. Then she peered around the corner, directly into the lantern light; then she could see.

Howe's coach she made out first, drawn up in the middle of the yard under a spindling walnut tree that grew out of the pavement, starved for the good ground. Two redcoats were working at the front of the coach, fastening horses to its dark bulk. A little knot of men stood close by the stable doors, bending over something she could not see—try as she would—for she knew it must be the wounded man. Clinging to the rough-hewn stone of the wall, she edged as close as she could without being seen.

At the rear of the group she noticed a strange-looking creature she had never seen before; a hunchback with a whiskey-reddened nose, his face half-hidden under a mop of orange-colored hair. He could not be British because of

his ragged country homespuns; not a Doan, for they were all trim and well-built. And then—she knew, suddenly, that a man was standing behind her. A second later, she knew what man it was. She turned, tremulously. There stood Mahlon Doan, holding a lantern. Mahlon, the sentry, lynx-eyed, prowling always, beyond the margin of any Doan goings-on. Mahlon—alive and whole!

She stood there, staring up at him, the withdrawn look of his thin, tanned face, the mellow light far back in the depths of his eyes—the smile he gave, without really meaning to—after all, it had been more than a year. She could look at any other man and tell what he was; crook her little finger at any other man, and he would come to her to stay. Not Mahlon Doan.

The lanterns lighted the little courtyard under the thick dark boughs. Below the house, the rockets burst and flared in the starless sky.

"Mahlon!" she whispered. "I—I thought—I feared—'twas thee got hurt—"

"No." He spoke in low, even tones, his eyes searching her face. "No. It's Levi. We was down in Chester. A man there named Lucas. Thinks he's a proper patriot. We broke in his house at night and took what he had. He shot Levi."

"Levi? Will he die?"

"Die? I doubt it. Shattered his arm bad, but Howe's surgeon says he's seen worse. Says he'll bind it up, and if we get him home to bed, he'll mend."

"Is that queer little man with the orange hair one of you?"

"What? Oh, thee means Foxy Joe. No, his name's Condit. The boys picked him up in a grog shop in Philadelphia and brought him along. He claims to know where there's Tory money hid. He claims he's married to a pretty girl over in the Jerseys. Myself, I doubt—"

The first wonder of talking with him now worn away, Lass felt again, weakly, the terror she had suffered, the fear for his safety. He had not questioned her presence there. He had thought it likely that she would be at any gay rout, Whig or Tory. He had known she would run outside at the rumor there were Doans about.

"Mahlon—when I heard—out there—" she gestured toward the babel on the lawn. "I was afeard, and I couldn't bear it—if it was thee—and I felt like to die!"

She would be afraid for him always, now. She had heard Sam Bye say that any woman who favored a Doan should counsel him to turn Whig to save his own skin, and she opened her lips to try, but she could not.

The lantern that he held showed them plainly to each other. They stood and looked, and between them passed the swift, the silent, wordless speech of lovers. Impulsively, only half knowing what he did, but knowing he had to do it, he dropped the lantern and put his hands on her shoulders. He bent toward her.

She felt her whole body rise to meet him like a wave. He set his mouth on hers in a cool, shy kiss. Oh! Oh! she thought. He wants me! He loves me! He *does* love me! Oh!

She stood tiptoe and put her arms around his neck, her mouth against his, her breast against him, and held him warm and tight. Hers were no longer the advances unsought and unwanted. He had kissed her! He had asked for it!

But not for that much. He did not respond. With a touch that was neither rough nor gentle, he loosened her fingers and pushed her firmly away. He did not say one word. He turned, picked up his lantern, and walked around the far corner of the stable.

Lass caught her breath and thought to cry, then felt she had come past tears, grown too old for them; they would not help her now. Mahlon had kissed her—but he didn't want her in his arms! And if he didn't want her, nothing mattered, nothing at all. She sank down on the turf at the side of the Wharton stable, and rested her face against its rough fieldstone, not caring that Billy Winward waited for her at the dance. Mahlon had kissed her! But he had pushed her away! He didn't love her—and yet, between them had passed that speech of one woman and one man that is for them alone, that no other pair can ever talk. He could go every night to Ruth, but his eyes would not say all the things they had said to Lass—because they were things for Lass alone. But—but he had put her away from him—her arms, her lips, her love—all of her! She lay there against the stones, dumb, stricken, trying to fit together the shattered bits of herself as one would try to mend a china cup.

The Doans had lifted Levi into the coach and were about to drive away, when a heavy, red-coated figure, head bowed, strode out of the kitchen door and accosted Mose as he was climbing into the driver's seat.

"Moses Doan! How is your brother? I saw mine die—years ago."

Sir William Howe, General, Commander of His Majesty's Forces in America.

"I know thee did," answered Moses gruffly. "Mine'll do. Doctor says all he needs is a rest abed."

"Ah, Moses, I am glad to have this chance to say farewell to you. I shall remember you as one of my good Tories in America."

Moses stood, craggy and lowering, beside the silly, painted cupids tumbling about the sides of the gilded coach that had belonged to Governor Richard Penn when Penns still ruled the colony. He fixed his blazing eyes on the bloated, wine-flushed face above the portly body.

"I be no Tory. Nor the other thing. I be a free man of Pennsylvania as'll jump for no Georges, King or Washington. But there's them as says I be a better King's man than General Howe."

"Oh? And why do they say so?" asked the surprised general.

Moses lifted his great paw of a hand and began telling the count off on his fingers.

"One, they say of the great mysteries, be this: why, to begin with, did a Whig undertake to lead a Tory campaign?"

Howe still smiled, though somewhat crestfallen. "Perhaps," he muttered, "because as a soldier he had no choice in the matter. Try as he will, a man can't fight or lead other men to fight if his heart's not in it."

"And two, is it true, as they say, that since the Battle of Bunker Hill, Howe can not bear the sight of cold steel or Americans on a height above him?"

"Ah, Bunker Hill! God send us twenty defeats rather than such a victory!"

Moses went on, relentlessly. "Why did he not burn Boston when he might have? Why did he spare Washington's men at Brooklyn, when 'twas such a foregone thing even the camp women were taking prisoners? And again at White Plains, and again at Brandywine? Why did he not follow his gains at Princeton, or burn Philadelphia, or take Valley Forge on a winter night when the whole army was sick-cat weak?"

"Perhaps it's because he can't help a sneaking liking for good fellows—and above all, Americans be that."

"They say he's not the same man who scaled the Heights of Abraham twenty years ago and saw his brother fall."

Howe's chin sunk into its white ruffle and he twitched at a gold-laced cuff. He said nothing.

"They say," went on Moses, speaking lower, but with more bitter accusation in his voice, "they say that because he failed to meet Burgoyne and split the colonies in two, he has lost the war in America!"

He waited.

Sir William Howe lifted his head then, and spoke out like a man. "Then let them say that he hopes he has. That he never wanted to win it. That once he had faced the Americans in arms, only a fool would hope to take America."

THIRTEEN

A Time to Pray

•

The last flash of red fire died away in the sky over Jersey; the paper roses fell from the wires that held them, and the candles burned down into pools of gray tallow. The Mischianza guests took their ways home by boat or coach, swearing that it was a spectacle they would always remember, would tell their children about. In another month most of them had forgotten it, for the gay young officers were holding on to their wounds at Monmouth courthouse, wishing they'd never seen this cursed country, and the Philadelphia girls who had danced with them that night had to ready new smiles for a new-old set of faces, the Continentals coming back into town. Up in Buckingham, Lass tried to fit herself into the pattern of country ways again, to help Sally with the gardens, and learn the methods of ordering maids in a kitchen, and hemstitch flannels for the new baby to be born in January. Remembering Sally's advice, she settled into an uneasy friendship with Ruth, going to her house, wanting to see Mahlon there, but fearing to. She wrote to Vinny by every post for the first few weeks, but after that their letters dwindled. She waited for her next sight of Mahlon the way a dry field waits for rain. And in Plumstead, Levi's arm healed, though never to be as quick and sure again. The hot, dry summer wore into July, and the Doan boys grew restless, each of them unhappy in his heart.

Abraham, and sometimes Joe, suggested that they ride out again about their usual ventures, now that Bucks was peaceful, and both armies streaming toward New York over the sandy plains of southern Jersey, sniping at each other on the way. But they still held by Moses, and Moses kept them severely at home, toiling in the fields, nailing new shingles on the spring house roof, not even venturing to Plumstead tavern for grog after supper, or down to Coryell's Ferry with wheat to be ground at the Parry flour mill. There were things afoot he wanted no part in.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day of the month that Abraham rode down from Grandsir Israel's and sought out Mose where he sweated in the field beyond the duck pond, cutting winter wheat. From the circle of brown water rimmed with alder shoots, Hester's ducks and geese lifted their yellow bills in a great babel. Moses put down his sickle and stood up. Mahlon he could see, cutting further down the field, likewise Aaron and Levi. Joe would

probably be off with a book somewhere.

"What does thee want, Abe?"

"I want to know why thee wouldn't let us go to Wyoming. Things be happening there about now."

"Yes. I know they be." Mose looked soberly at his cousin, and wiped his brow with the short, loose sleeve of his homespun shirt. "We know what's planned up there. Chief He-Who-Goes-in-the-Smoke told us. Indians and Tories be going through the Valley and leave none living to tell they was there. But what's that to us?"

"I—" Abe licked his thick, out-thrust lower lip. "I want to be there."

"Why?"

"There's a fight going on. There's killing, ain't there?"

For the first time in all his life, Moses knew fear.

"Abe," he said, "they're naught to us, for or against, those Connecticut people who've settled there. Maybe they ain't Friends and has no claim on Pennsylvania, but they've harmed us none. They've never stole from us. They ain't standing in the way of a free America. We Doans ain't never killed 'cause we wanted to. Only when we thought it ought to be done. I thought lately we done too much of it maybe. So tonight when other men'll likely be killing, I planned for us a different thing."

"I want to be there at Wyoming," said Abe, restlessly, a mad light flickering in his usually somber eyes.

"Why does thee want to kill, Abe?" asked Joe quietly. He had seen the two men in the field, seeming to argue; that had brought him down from the house. For he was quicker in an argument than Mose, if Mose was quicker in a fight. Mose might need him. He hadn't liked the way their cousin had been behaving lately. He wished he knew where Abe had been that hot afternoon they found the plowboy up in Rob Gibson's buckwheat patch with his throat cut.

"I—I don't know," said Abe, shaking his head in a dazed fashion. "I don't know. There's nothing else I want."

"Things are not that bad, Abe," answered Joe, trying to speak comfort. "What's happened to us? Because we won't fight for the Congress, they keep taking our land away. They fined Father fifty pounds in Newtown Court—Henry Wynkoop saw to that—on account of Mahlon stealing Firebrand. Mose had a convincement we should stand against them, try to get back some of our own. We did that; stole a few horses and made fools of a few tax collectors. Now we're known as knaves, the 'Bucks County Cowboys,' 'The Mad Dog Doans.' But we're still free to come and go. Our people haven't been turned off their farms yet. We've got more money in our pockets than we've ever had."

"Does thee like the way it got there?" asked Mahlon, joining the group.

Joe went on. “Get a-hold of thyself, Abe. Don’t let this war unsettle thy wits. It’ll pass.”

“That’ll be the trouble,” Mahlon answered him. “What’ll we do if Congress wins, and there’s no more Tories to stand for us, like General Howe has always stood for Mose? Friends’ll have no power either. Dr. Meredith was telling me last winter, the time Mose got shot, that he thinks the British are going to lose, and we’d best turn Whig.”

“Does thee want to turn Whig, Mahlon?” asked Joe slyly. “March hayfoot, strawfoot, when somebody calls across from Jersey and tells thee to? Or turn thy pockets inside out to buy rifles for New York men? Or does thee only want to run when somebody whistles to thee—from Massachusetts?”

Mahlon was about to answer hotly when Moses, recovered a little from his concern over Abe, drew himself up and made a sharp, cleaving motion with his sickle, as if to cut the argument.

“I been thinking a long time on these things,” he rumbled, deep in his throat. “All o’ what Dr. Meredith told Mahlon, I know. Howe said near the same thing to me when we put Levi in his coach that night at ‘Duke’ Wharton’s place. But there’s truth, too, in what Joe was saying. We’re not as free as we was once, but we’ve kept out of Washington’s army, and the Pennsylvania Line, we’ve kept out of Newtown jail—though I don’t know for how much longer. Thee all know what day it is? July third, it be—the eve before. Two years ago tomorrow was the day they signed it and—”

“It’ll be remembered in Philadelphia,” interrupted Joe, irony in his voice. “There’ll be a fine celebration there like there was last year. When the Friends wouldn’t put lights in their windows to mark the return of the day, their windows was broken and they was led through the streets with halters round their necks and their coffins moving before ’em! That’s what the Whigs tell us is a free country!”

“Two years now things been that way,” went on Mose as if his brother had not spoken. “We Doans met it the way we thought was right; did what we had to do. But it was a long time back that I heard the Word and felt the Light in me. I’d like it to happen again; to know if we’ve done what was meant.”

“Does thee think,” asked Mahlon wistfully, “if thee went on First Day—and sat in Plumstead Meeting House with all the Friends around thee—maybe the Word would come?”

“I’d thought o’ that, Mahlon, but that’s not the way. Tonight, I’m going out on the road above Tohickon—where it happened to me before. Going out there—in the night—and wait. But I was thinking—why should I be the only one to hear? I want the rest of thee, each to go to the place he thinks is meetest for him, and wait, and pray, and listen. And maybe one of us will be told.”

Mahlon half expected Joe to laugh, but he did not. “I think thee’s right,

Mose," he answered seriously. "Myself—I'll go down beyond the Meeting House where the old graves are, facing Pine Run. Best men I ever knew, who set out for heaven, took leave of earth about there. If ever a Word come for me, that's where 'twould come."

It was the work of a few moments only to call Aaron and Levi and tell them what was intended, and the six Doans were soon trooping up the sunset field, and saddling their horses, while Hester and Polly in the kitchen filled knapsacks with bread and dried venison and black cherry tart, since fasting was not part of the plan. And after a brief conference among the sycamores between the house and the barn, each of them told where he was going and rode off that way, in the sultry twilight under the summer moon, the air smelling of honeysuckle, sounding with the music of their father's violin.

Joe rode up Clover Hill, as he had planned to do, and settled himself on the thickly grassed turf with crickets chirping above it and the Plumstead dead sleeping underneath. The moon crossed the sky, and the night winds went over, and he prayed sometimes, and sometimes he waited in silence. But the Word never came. In the yellow-gray light that thins the air before morning, that is cold in all seasons, he rose up, and mounted his horse, and went home.

Aaron rode toward Solebury, to an apple orchard on high land above the river. He had worked there pruning trees in the old days before the war, and he knew them as well as he knew the boys he'd gone to school with—each tree. He tied his horse in a clump of hazels and walked up through the spreading juniper and blackberry vines till he came to the rail fence with the heavy boughs drooping over it, and the sweet, rich scent of apples hanging in the air almost thick enough to be seen. He climbed the fence and paced silently between the gnarled and branching trunks. Now and then he paused and listened, but no Word came to him—only the small thud of ripe apples falling into the grass. By and by he returned to the fence and sat down with his back against it. Aaron had worked hard, cutting wheat all day. In five minutes he was asleep. He wakened in broad daylight, stiff and ashamed, his clothes moist with dew and sticking to him. He got up and rode home to Plumstead.

Abraham and Levi had left the Doan farm together. Mose himself had suggested it, not feeling sure enough of what Abe would do, turned loose alone on the peaceful countryside by night. They had agreed to keep their watch by the haunted spring at Holicong, and they rode in that direction, but only till they were out of sight below the hill. Levi drew rein then, and explained to his cousin that he had other plans and Moses wasn't going to spoil them. If four of the Doans sat out on the ground all night waiting for God to come and talk to them, there'd be enough of them to listen to him if he had anything to say. He, Levi, knew a lusty German farm wife up by Richland Swamp whose husband was away with the army. She was waiting for him now, and he meant to get

himself up there right off. She had a pretty neighbor, whose husband was also from home. So Levi and Abraham caroused all night on the farms by Richland, and came home in mid-morning to complain that God might be dead for all they'd heard of him, and tumbled themselves into the hay in the barn without bothering to go to bed.

When Mahlon rode away from his father's house that night, he let Firebrand idle along, turned almost aimlessly eastward across the fields, the shortest way to the Durham Road, that would lead him down to Buckingham Mountain, the place he had chosen to go. Mose had hesitated a moment before agreeing to his choice, questioned him. "Thee'd have to ride through the village there. It's a quick way to Buckingham school house—to Sam Bye's. Sure thee'll go to the mountain, Mahlon—all alone?"

"Yes," Mahlon had promised soberly, "I'll go to the mountain."

And he meant to. But he had little faith that any voice would speak to him out of heaven after the things he had done.

Go as slow as he would, he crossed the York Road finally, at Bogart's Tavern, all alight, men drinking inside. To turn sharp east would bring him to Ruth's; to her lavish cupboard and her warm bed, and the soft arms that had not been round him for a good time now, Moses keeping them home the way he had. But he did not turn. He rode south and crossed a meandering stream smelling rank of cow lilies. Along the stream, a little way down, he could see the lights in Sam Bye's house. Without thinking, but because he had to, he veered sharply off the road, spurred at a dangerous pace through the water meadows, and pulled up just at the box hedge that ran west of the house below the kitchen garden.

As he looked through the open windows into the low-ceiled room straight in front of him, the first thing he noticed was the girl Joe had called his "half-wife," Ruth Gwydion. She had her back to him, but he knew only too well the full puffs of dusky hair at her neck, the patient slope of her shoulders. She sat at a clavichord, making the gentle sounds of music. Beside her, facing the window, stood Lass, singing sweetly, in a high, clear voice:

"*Before I was in love—*
Then every month was May."

The two girls seemed to be alone in the summer candlelight, pleasing themselves with song, no thought of him, or the Byes, or anyone. He sat quiet in the saddle and looked at them for a long moment. Then he turned and rode off swiftly over the sharp yellow stubble where Sam had just cut first crop of hay. He rode toward Buckingham Mountain, as he had promised Mose he would do.

Oaks and hornbeams grew thick at the base of it, and hickory, with thinning pine and cedar above—a low, rounded mountain, scarce higher than a great man's grave. When he rode out on the crooked field of coarse grass and weeds and brambles at the top, he saw only the stars at first, so many stars, but so close and bright that it seemed Firebrand would brush against them if he did not keep the reins drawn close. He dismounted and stood there, on an outcrop of limestone, and looked off across the valleys. North he looked, toward Buckingham and Plumstead, and only a few feeble lights woke here and there. To the west, all was blackness; no glow from the crossroads by Doyle's tavern. South lay the lights of Newtown, and east, a lamp or two along the road to Coryell's Ferry and the dark rise of Jersey hills beyond the Delaware. He didn't think he'd ever been so alone since the day he was born! As he stood there and watched, the blue-black contours of the countryside he knew so well began to sharpen themselves before his eyes, the chessboard pattern of wide fields stood out clear. Then he did not feel lost and bewildered any longer. He was ready to do the thing he had to do—the thing he had come there for. He gave Firebrand a slap with the reins, thus telling the horse to wander, that he would not be needed any more now. The animal moved off toward a crop of lusher grass below the crest, knowing it by the old way of smell. Mahlon stood there on top of the mountain—just as old Moses had stood on Sinai—his black hair blowing in the wind, his thin, muscular hands clasped together, not piously like a saint's or a corpse's, but twisted askew. He stood there, and he waited. If the Word was to come to Mahlon Doan, Mahlon Doan was listening.

But what came to him was nothing sacred and holy, nothing to do with rights and governments, the which men talked about nowadays the way they used to talk about making saltpetre. What came to him was the troubling scene he had looked at through the windows of Sam Bye's back parlor. He had looked his fill at two girls, and he knew that each girl was his. And did he want them both—or neither? Or to make a choice? He knew himself afflicted with the old trouble of the flesh, and it was not so much that he did not know where to find the solution of it, as to know what solution he wanted.

Ruth! He had been a welcome guest in her bed for more than two years now. Ruth had been close and familiar. Ruth was his warm coat, and his mother's house, and his shadow on the wall. No matter what need he had, Ruth would do all she could to fulfill it. Now what more could a man ask for, he thought, and with that thought he admitted a suspicion about Ruth, something he could not prove, something he had no right even to think in his heart. Suppose it had been Aaron, or Levi, or Joseph, or any Bucks County man who had forced her house that night and gone to sleep there? Would she not have given that man the loyalty she gave him? Did she love Mahlon Doan, or did she love, being a woman, a man?

Lass would be a different thing: willful and stubborn, used to having her own money, having her own way, having all the men smile and run about, the way he never would. There were plenty of faults in Lass Marvayne—something thee'd have to work on, like it was a field thee wanted to clear of dead stumps. But there was something else about Lass, too; like the thin, clear, cold water in a mountain brook—sharp, and biting, and pure; something that no man finds more than once, that most men never find. Lass Marvayne was his; not like his horse or his hunting shirt, but like something closer. If she gave anything to any other man, it wouldn't be the honey; it would be the salt and vinegar, wrung from her under duress. Ruth was soft, and warm, and female, not common, not a whore, loyal in reason, but ready to take a new love when she deemed the old one gone. Lass wouldn't have any of that! Dancing with the British officers, she hadn't really fooled him; she'd made him savagely angry, and he didn't yet know why. But he'd known what made her do it. Dr. Hugh Meredith had told him how she'd caught him with Ruth. Suppose he was to say he was going from Bucks County—going for good and all? Ruth would court with another man, and pass Meeting, and get married—somebody decent and prosperous, who'd give her children, and a stone farmhouse to keep, and when the harvest money came in, a silk dress from Philadelphia. Lass wouldn't. Let all the best men, Whig and Tory, form a procession like the Mischianza, and each one walk in turn up to Sam Bye's house and ask for her. They wouldn't get her. She belonged to Mahlon Doan.

He was proud of that, but did he want it? Ruth lay soft in his arms, relaxed, unstrung, all yield and answer. Lass would not be so. When he put out his hand to Lass, she put out her hand too, and the fire leaped up—a fire that was more than the passion of animals, that was deep and strong and frightening to him, because it gave and asked so much. She was not a tool to please only his desires. She had desires of her own to please. Could he accept and forgive the tiny corner of her that had not changed into Eve when Adam's rib changed, that was still a man?

He was supposed to listen for the Word!

The moon moved west, and the stars shimmered and shook themselves about, according to an old pattern he had no notion of. Below him now, Bucks County lay asleep, secure in darkness, beautiful as all things are beautiful that a man has known from his childhood, found fair, and cherished, and spilt his blood to keep the way they are. But down there—under separate roofs—under one roof, maybe, lay Lass and Ruth. And he was bound to both of them for all time now—or was he only bound to the one—and which one? He sank to the ground, racked and worn with the conflict of desire, and leaned his back against a scrubby cedar tree.

The Word! The Word! Moses had sent him to bring it back, and all he

could think of was two girls; how one was ruddy and fair, while one was dark; of their profaner differences.

Admit himself a man now, ready to go to a woman's bed. He could go to Ruth's, knowing what he would find—the mild compliance of a woman doing what she knows is expected of women, nothing held immune, for all time, from every other man. If he went to Lass in her bed, the fire there would be a greater one than he had ever known. But it would burn all for him. He put his head in his hands. The horse ambled up and nosed his forehead. He pressed to the wet muzzle, drew back and leaned against the dwarf tree. The stars went out for him, and he fell asleep.

Of all the Doan boys to ride away from their father's house that night, Moses was the one who rode with the sureness on him, the convincement that all must be well, since he was the one who had had the Word before. Troubled for Abraham, fearing his unsettled wits, he pondered this question as he rode between the dark farms that lay east of Plumstead toward the sharp bluffs above Delaware. Abe could be turning mad, he thought. It had happened to better men for less cause. Folk still remembered Dr. Hugh's cousin, Crazy Tom, who tried to build himself a castle of river rocks—'cause he'd studied too hard in England. That wasn't no reason, compared with a sweetheart made to die. He'd talk to Hugh Meredith, secret-like. Thee could admit a Doan had stolen horses and done things the Meeting wouldn't approve. Thee couldn't admit a Doan was mad. He'd have to think of some way to cover up for Abe—for now. Maybe his wits would right in time. He worried, too, about Mahlon. The other boys had all grown up when the time came for it, and could speak out their minds and take the lead as their turn came; not the younger brother. He could hold up his end of a fight. He was a hard man to catch and a harder man to hold. He was loyal. He had Ruth Gwydion. But then, any good man and constant could have her. She wasn't nothing hard. But he had that other girl's favor; she that Joe had named out of a book—"the New England Firebrand." There wasn't any woman in Bucks County better to look at. But Mahlon kept his mouth shut and did what he was told, seemed content to live forever in his father's house, and spend his days going gunning—didn't really want a woman and his own farm, and sons growing up. He, Moses did. Knew the woman he wanted, too—Rachel, granddaughter of old John Tomlinson, south of Newtown Common. Mahlon—he always wanted to stay a lad!

"And isn't that better," asked a voice within Moses Doan, if not the voice he had come out to listen for, "isn't it better to stay a lad? Ask any man who ever grew up."

Resolutely he turned his mind from his brothers and rode along the hard dirt road that ran from Plumstead down to Tohickon Creek, and its mouth on the Delaware.

It was just at the brow of the ridge that the Word had come to him; just where the road started to drop away from the high farmland and plunge, a two-rutted track, down through the light-leaved beech trees and heavy hemlock to the rocky creek bed far below. He reined his horse to a stop but did not dismount, sat silently in the saddle and looked at the starlit sky and the faint cluster of lights that were towns on the Jersey shore. He heard the water murmuring against the stones at the bottom of the run, thought how it would be swaying the cardinal flowers there; the faint stir of wind in the laurels and rhododendron boughs crowding to the road. A tree toad called, and then a whippoorwill. Somewhere on the farms behind him, a cow lowed plaintively, lost, taken in heat. Dimly, far back toward the Easton Road, men's voices called to each other in the night. Must be the Plumstead militia riding out, he thought. Well, they'd not catch the Doans doing anything wrong this time.

He looked out over the countryside that the Lord had told him was to be free. And he waited for the Lord to speak again. Maybe it would come as a voice speaking all at once out of air and earth the way it had come before. The air was God's and the earth was Pennsylvania's, and Moses Doan loved both of them and had a right to them, the right of a free man. Maybe it would come to him Quaker-wise, an inner stirring of the great, sweet springs, a sudden beam of light piercing the dark, troubled crypt of his soul.

He could not believe that it would not come at all!

He would not believe till the stars faded, and below the beech trees the river flowed black across a landscape turning green and gold and brown again with the colors of emerging day. Then he rode home slowly, heavily, bitterness and confusion in his heart.

The first of the boys to arrive there, he found no one awake, save his father, Joseph, who knelt by the kitchen hearth, blowing on the fire he had kindled so Hester could start boiling the breakfast mush as soon as she came downstairs. He stood up when Moses entered. One look at his son's face saved him from asking the question. He waited, silent, his kind, brown eyes full of pity and dismay. Moses flung himself down on an oak bench and stared back at his father.

"It didn't come to me," he said finally. "I didn't hear naught at all. I prayed for the Light, too—but it wouldn't shine in me."

"It don't always, Mose—when we pray for it. Thee was taught that. Thee was taught that a man must wait."

"And while we wait, Devil's taking the country! Men killing and robbing and taxing each other and setting up new ways worse than the old! I killed three British soldiers, myself. Shot 'em between the eyes! Think 'twas 'cause I wanted to? It wasn't. I did it 'cause 'twas either me or they. If Congress had signed for the peace the way Howe wanted they should two years ago, them

British soldiers would be home in England now, plowing their land and getting children. I ain't done nothing but what I had to do to protect myself and my free rights. But before there was Congress, there was nothing to be protected from. And don't thee throw up to me King George's taxes. They didn't hurt us none, 'cause we didn't pay 'em—an' if women can't do without tea, it's a pity! We just went without the things he taxed, and didn't have to tighten our belts none neither. Now all I want is a word I'm doing right. A man can't do God's will if he don't know what it is!"

Moses jumped up and began to pace the kitchen floor.

"Maybe one of the other boys can tell thee, Mose. Thee'd best wait till they get in. Maybe I'm wrong to question thee now about this, when thee's so sore troubled, but it's a matter that can't wait. Has thee heard about a raid in the Wyoming Valley?"

"Yes," answered Moses, still sullen and confused in his disappointment. "I heard. Butler's Tory Rangers and Indians be going to sweep the place clean. Connecticut men hadn't got no call to settle there; valley was granted to the Minisinks when they was cleared off the Walking Purchase here. Chief He-Who-Goes-in-the-Smoke asked me to come along and make six more rifles for 'em an' I said, 'No.' Said I wouldn't kill no man who hadn't wronged me, an' mine. Why'd thee ask?"

"I was up to Plumstead Tavern after thee'd gone last night, setting there taking ale with Cousin Eleazer and some of the neighbors round when Rob Gibson come in—what'd thee say?"

Moses had cursed so low his father could not hear the oath. He did not repeat it.

"Rob had just ridden down from Durham Ironworks, and he said the word had gone through there by fast riders that the Valley was all afire, Forty Fort taken, and worse slaughter than hog butchering time. He said thee was in the thick of it, thee and thy brothers and thy cousin, Abe. He said thee had Injun tomahawks an' was scalping white men. Three days the fighting's been going on."

Moses looked blindly at his father, his jaw hanging slack.

"I told him he was in error; that thee wasn't up the country, but here, 'round home. All tavern was listening by then. He said if that was so, then he'd just step down here to the house and look at thee with his own eyes to make sure. I was discomforted then. I had to tell him thee wasn't on the place, exactly, thee'd ridden out. He laughed at me. Then he put it to the other men; had they seen either hide or hair of the Plumstead cowboys the last week? Course they hadn't. Thee knows how thee's kept the boys home. I wish thee'd been drunk in every tavern from here to Four Lanes' End. At least then folk would have known where thee was; known thee wasn't up there roasting white

men to death and spitting them on pitchforks while old Queen Esther chopped their heads off. But thee wasn't seen here—not anywhere at all. So thee's got the name of being there!"

Moses uttered a deep groan. Then he lifted his great head. "Father! Does thee think that's my Word from the Lord? That I went to him and offered myself up; and he spumed me like he spurned Cain for no good reason that I ever saw? That from now on, wherever his Light falls—I'm to walk outside?"

"Moses, I don't know. I'm past understanding. Thee chose a time to withdraw from the world and pray, and because thee did it, thee's charged with a sin men won't ever forgive so long as there's a Pennsylvania with white men in it. 'Tis like Friends suffered in the early days—but worse—for they were sure they knew God's will."

Mahlon shoved open the door then, and stepped into the kitchen, dead cedar twigs in his hair, his eyes heavy with sleep. He yawned.

"Did thee have a Word, Mahlon?" asked Joseph.

"No. Nothing. I prayed. And then I fell asleep. And that was all."

"No, thee didn't pray," said Moses savagely. "Thee was at Wyoming Valley roasting white men. Whole countryside says so."

And the whole countryside did say so, and kept on. Many who had sided with the Doans before this time spat in the dust when they saw them now, and crossed the road out of their way. When they went into the taverns, the landlords served them, but they drank alone, for other men got up and walked out, leaving their ale standing. And in the following months, the six young men paid a heavy price for Moses Doan's presumption in seeking, after the accepted way of Friends, his private word from the Lord.

FOURTEEN

North-Northwest

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But after a little while men forgot about the Wyoming Massacre just the way they forget a finger scorched by a candle when the whole house catches fire. Fighting burst out everywhere, from New England to Georgia; it spread up the great western rivers and into the Illinois country. Fighting took to the sea decks, wherever sail would carry it—the West Indies, Gibraltar, the Bay of Bengal. One by one the great nations moved against England—France, Spain, Holland, the Baltic countries—all for reasons of their own, and not because they felt called out to save America. By 1780, the first world war was well on its course of red skies and blood.

Gradually that course, in the American colonies, drew it southward, the British leaving only scattered garrisons and their stronghold on New York Island to keep the countryside from pouring after them. One by one the southern sea towns fell. "Old Corn Cob's" British regulars overran North Carolina. Banastre Tarleton, who had swung Lass and Vinny in the minuet, drove his dragoons a hundred and five miles in fifty-four hours to murder the 3rd Virginia in the Waxhaws and got himself a name for cruelty as black as his flashing eyes.

Crispin's Marblehead regiment fought sharply in Rhode Island and then moved over to guard the Hudson, a task he had little liking for, so when his term of enlistment ran out, he went to his general, Johnny Glover, whom his father had taught to make shoes, and told him he was going home.

"What you going to do there, Cris?" asked General Glover.

"Eat and sleep for a week and look the country over again—see my friends __"

"And your girl?"

"No. No. She's not up there. I'll see her later, maybe—when I've made my plans."

"Oh? Then eating and sleeping's not all?"

"I'm going to see Si Marvayne; ask if he's got another privateer for me."

"Good lad! You're more use that way than you'd be here. Sea war's grown to a powerful thing now, and we got no navy at all—nothing but our home-owned ships like Si's, each man sailing his own. And most of 'em come from

up home, in New England. We're a nation in ourselves there—a stronger one than the United States of America, but I'll have you court-martialed if you say I said so. Si's a better seaman than Black Dick Howe. Like to see Si in a British admiral's uniform, I would." He laughed and slapped his thigh. "By God, boy, I'd like to go with you! But generals' terms of enlistment don't run out."

So Crispin had gone back to Newburyport, and in three weeks had his own deck under him and his own shooting crew, and he fought the rest of the war that way. His orders were to bring his prizes up to Philadelphia to Robert Morris who would buy and apportion their cargoes to supply the army. Silas had planned this shrewdly toward making it easy for his young captain to see Lass. He himself made three visits to his daughters in Buckingham, and rested up from his voyages there, and played with his grandchildren, young Sam and baby Christine, born in January, 1779. There was no talk of Lass returning to Newburyport, where Hannah Hildreth had moved out of the kitchen into the counting house, and ran the business while Silas was at sea with the same sharp efficiency she used to bring to spring housecleaning. Lass was better off with Sally, everyone agreed, till the war ended, one way or another, and her menfolk could come home.

Crispin did go to her when he could leave his ship, and sometimes Sam and Sally brought her to Philadelphia when he sent word to them that he could be in town for only a few days. He held the line of his stubborn courtship warily, not daring to press his luck, for fear of losing all. Lass would laugh with him, and chatter, and take his presents, and favor him in the public eye. She would endure an occasional kiss. He believed that she had no other lover. But if he spoke of marriage, she shook her head stubbornly and plunged into high, fast talk of something else. Once when the women had gone to bed and the three men sat late in the kitchen drinking, mild Quaker Sam suggested that maybe Crispin ought to beat her. Silas had said he wasn't sure 'twould be a bad thing. Crispin had shaken his head moodily; said tree wasn't grown yet that would yield a big enough stick for a man to beat Lass Marvayne with. Moodily shaking their heads, the other two had agreed with him. He'd asked her once why she never wore his likeness that Captain Peale had painted, but she looked vague and said she didn't have it any more; she'd left it in Philadelphia by mistake when she came home after the Mischianza. (Truth she never told him was, she didn't know what had become of it.) Unhappy, he went off for three more months at sea, and came home, unhappy, for three days' dogged wooing before he had to leave again. And so the war went for him.

For Lass it was a slow time, a half-sleep where she watched the world in a mirror instead of looking at its reality. To feel, was to feel pain, so she did not feel at all. Her brightness dimmed over, like a gleaming surface that gathers

dust. She had always plunged headlong through life, gay and confident, driven by high audacity. Now she withdrew to a corner and sat there, empty and listless, like a very old lady. She had not seen Mahlon since that night at Walnut Grove when he had kissed her and thrust her away from him. She and Ruth were much together, as Sally had advised, but Ruth never spoke his name. The Doans, everybody said, had been at the Wyoming Massacre, and now the whole countryside hated them. Judge Wynkoop in Newtown, and Robert Gibson of Deep Run, to name two, and there were others, kept trying to find ways to jail them. It shouldn't be hard. Bucks County had strong laws against horse-thieving. But in order to get the benefit of them, you had to prove the theft of a particular horse by a particular man. That wasn't easy. The Doan boys looked so much alike! If you said it was Aaron or Levi who'd robbed your stable last Thursday night, they'd both be able to prove they were in Cross Keys Tavern drinking at the time. You should have guessed Moses or Joe. Then, too, the country was not yet safely out of the shadow of British rule, and the British had always favored their "Tory Doans." Hadn't Howe once promised them a troop of twenty-five Hessians with a fife and drum to march before? Men were still afraid of something like that happening.

And after Wyoming there weren't any Doan raids for a long time. Perhaps, thought Lass, the boys themselves were frightened by what they had done, by the dark spirit that seemed to have driven out what little they had of the Light. So she spent her days helping Sally with the house and children, or chatting-with Ruth, singing, and picking flowers, and taking walks or rides, entertaining Crispin, when he came from the sea and she could not help herself unless she picked a quarrel with him, which she would not do because she knew she would want him all her life for a friend. But only for that. Sam had distrusted her ever since she had gone to the Mischianza against his orders, disapproved of her refusal to marry Crispin. They agreed to a tacit truce because they both loved Sally, but they did not put aside their arms. Sometimes she lay awake at night and looked out through the moving oak leaves at the fixed stars, and wondered if they would ever come to her again—Mahlon, and the bright confidence of youth that makes all things possible, and the self she had always been but was not any more. Sometimes she remembered she had looked into heaven once, when Mahlon had kissed her on the mouth.

For the Doan boys it was a time of waiting, too, a restless time of going, boorish outside and shy within, from door to door where friends used to welcome them, finding all doors closed. When they needed money, they slipped silently across by night into Jersey or Montgomery; came home a few days later with their pockets full, and deeper shadows of unhappiness around their eyes. Always they watched Abe; Levi in particular never left him. Mahlon went sometimes to Ruth, realized one night as he rode away from her

house in the chill before dawn that in the hours he had spent there he had not spoken one word to her at all. He rode past Sam Bye's house, stark in the early light, smoke going up from the kitchen chimney, Mag and Jane plodding toward the barn with their wooden milk pails; but no sight of Lass, no light in an upper window. And maybe she was dead, or married, or gone home to Newburyport. And what was that to him?

Love and death visited the Doan farms in those middle years of the war. Esther, old Israel's wife, died in her sleep, and the patriarch drank too much and wept noisily for the pretty girl he had walked with under the willows sixty years ago, where the creek wound through Newtown common, sluggish and secret in the dark. Moses married Rachel Tomlinson, disorderly and out of Meeting, and went to live with her in a log house on Jericho Mountain that belonged to her grandfather, "Tory John." Joe married his cousin Mary, and how they ever passed Meeting was a wonder to all the county and a tribute to his clever, lying tongue. But they did it, and slept sometimes at her house, sometimes at his, and took no thought beyond the flesh and the glory of wearing it.

And what brought the Doans to trouble again was not themselves but the forces that cleft their time. By the spring of 1780, Congress had issued so much worthless money that the stuff was not worth stealing. To put a scrap of paper through a printing press and change it into thirty dollars was such fine sport that they kept the printers up all night making twenty million of it. And anyone who refused to sell good wheat, or hogs, or homespun, and take these bills in payment, exposed himself to the risk of tar and feathers. A hat cost four hundred dollars, and a suit of clothes sixteen hundred, and a pair of shoes cost a year of captain's pay. The only good money to be had was hard British coin with the King's picture minted on it, and one sure way to come by it was to apply to the paymasters of the British Army.

So Moses led his Plumstead cowboys down to Coryell's Ferry, east into Jersey, and the stories that drifted back of their goings-on there were such that their mother, Hester, shivered in her bed, Joseph brooded over his violin without spirit enough to pluck a note from it, and old Israel sat awake in the kitchen all night and feared for his fighting cocks—lest some of them should come home bringing trouble with them, or not come home at all. They had joined with the Hessians on Staten Island, the rumors went, and hardly left a horse round Amboy that was mettlesome enough to pull a plow. Ruth went to school with tear stains under her eyes, and Lass's nerves tightened till she could hardly swallow her meals at table, or sit still in a chair, or keep her mind on any one thing long enough to know what she thought about it.

One hot June day she had started to ride over to see Ruth, but just before she came to Holicong spring, she met the teacher riding toward her.

"Oh! Were you coming to see me? Let's go up toward Doyle's tavern and pick strawberries."

But Ruth hesitated. "No. I wasn't coming to see thee. I was going up to see Hester Doan, one of our Meeting." She said it shyly, but proudly too, and Lass felt knives turning in her heart. It was right that Mahlon's sweetheart should visit Mahlon's mother.

"Oh, well! It doesn't matter. I'll ride a piece with thee, the day's so fine; and Sally's not expecting me back."

Ruth looked as if she would like to speak against it, but could find no words to do so, and the two girls rode in silence past Bogart's tavern and up the Durham Road, between fields white and gold with daisies, past clumps of woodland. Finally they began to climb a long ridge and Ruth turned toward her and spoke without smiling.

"We are nearly there, Lass. Thee won't mind riding back alone, in broad daylight."

Lass told herself that she should take leave of her friend now, not go on and presume where she was not wanted, but to see Mahlon's home that she had pictured in her mind so often would be to take another look into heaven. She would go as far as the house and see it. Then she would turn back. She promise in her heart that she would turn back then.

Hester Doan came out of her kitchen door and stepped across the narrow strip of crude stone pave between the house and the barn, to a patch of foot-worn grass under the mulberry tree. A bench too rickety to use in the kitchen any more stood just at the tree's foot, and she sat down on it. Sunlight slanted through the blue-green leaves and shone warm on her graying hair as it had shone on her black hair the year the war began. Burning down a candle waiting for boys who did not come home was graying work that the sun took no account of. She put her hand out and stroked the scaly bark. The mulberry bole reached scarcely past her shoulder before dividing into a tangle of boughs and stems. Joseph had set it out thirty years ago, the day they first passed Meeting and declared they meant to marry, but thirty years was young for a mulberry tree. How much faster his Green Newtown apple trees grew, on the orchard slope where the duck pond drained away; planted the year their last child, Thomas, was born, and Thomas was only eight.

As she thought of her youngest son, she heard his high, thin voice calling to his father, where Joseph worked in the hop yard behind the barn, patiently coiling the stubborn vines around their poles, for gusty rain last night had wried and disheveled them. She heard his sisters, Betsy and her own namesake, join their little-girl voices to the clamor.

"Father! Hester's found a snake by the hen-run! Thee come kill it!"

Smiling at this crisis she felt sure their father could deal with, she looked

west to the clump of hazels and yellow cedar that hid the house from the high field, broke the force of cold winds in wintertime. Before her now lay her herb garden, colored with various greens, and dappled with blossom. This was her refuge from all the tumults of the flesh and the spirit. The harder she toiled here, the more she reposed in the Light, the more she felt it rise within her like a bright tide flooding up the coast of the sea creeks. The trim beds fulfilled the longing for pattern and order, now so missing from her life. Here, in the high summer afternoon, she surveyed them with feelings of peace and love.

The tall spikes of Aaron's rod that would feather gold in a month or two, and the purple and ivory call-me-to-you blooms, like the faces of children. The silver-gray maythen to soothe the baby Moses' wife would bear just after the year turned, and the Jersey tea plant with blood-red roots that gave her the dye for the handkerchiefs Moses always tied around his bull throat. Flat yellow heads of tansy to pluck for green dye and flavor, and pennyroyal to heal wounds. It was an old belief that the wild deer, hurt with arrows or rifle fire, would drag themselves to roll in a pennyroyal bed. She would make her pennyroyal bed wider next year, for men never seemed to grow tired of wounding each other. Basil and lavender she noted approvingly, and dusty green sage, and chives to chop with the turkeys' food to plumpen them in the fall; lilac sprays of catnip, and marjoram to flavor soups, and cure rheumatism, and strew about the house to sweeten it. Thyme, too, a cool patch of violet shadow from May to October; thyme to feed thy son to make him brave—if thee had a son that needed it.

"Mother!"

The call broke in upon her reverie, and she turned her head.

"Here's Ruth come to see thee! And a friend of hers!"

Her oldest daughter, Polly, only thirteen, but tall and comely, stood in the grape arbor at the south side of the house, framed in an arch of green leaves and fruit. Polly had the same brown eyes as Mahlon, but where his were shy and serious, hers sparkled with fun. Her skin, too, was like his, tanned rather than swarthy or olive like the older brothers. But her hair shone with the pale yellow of new-cut pine, combed sleekly back from her ears and forehead. Her grandmother, Esther Dillon Doan, had hair like that when she was a young girl, but no one save Grandsir Israel remembered it.

Polly stepped forward now, the two guests just behind her.

Hester Doan had been the mother of sons for twenty-eight years now, and she knew well all the terrors that must be guarded against; croup and falling into a fire or being stepped on by a horse when they were little, and scheming girls when they were older; and trouble the whole time, trouble that began the first day you lost your taste for breakfast and wasn't over till you buried them, if then—if ever. She knew how to be wary and keep her eyes open, and hold

her tongue. That Ruth had given herself to Mahlon, she knew. That Mahlon had given himself to anyone she doubted. Not being deaf, she had heard the boys' careless talk about Lass Marvayne, and she recognized the girl by her red hair and flamboyant beauty. A girl who had the temerity to love unsought and unwanted; the discernment to love Mahlon—

"Mother," Polly was saying, "Ruth brought her friend with her. Lass Marvayne, Mistress Bye's sister."

Hester looked up and smiled at both girls out of her deep dark eyes. She watched both of them. Ruth stood, well-ordered and demure, smiling correctly, but Lass's smile went straight to the heart. Every nerve in the small, taut body, every line in the primrose face, the flash of the blue eyes through their dark lashes spoke and cried aloud, Oh, Mother, Mother! No sense pretending! We both love him! But to you, he's one son among others—and for me, there's never any other at all! Lass had not won Mahlon Doan, but with a look she had won Hester.

"Sit down, won't thee?" she said, standing up and motioning them to the bench half-hidden by the drooping mulberry boughs. "Polly, there's field strawberries and a bowl of sweet cream keeping cool in the spring house. Go set them out on a tray for us—unless thee'd like tea?" She questioned the visitors.

"It's too hot for tea," said Lass, all boldness and timidity before Mahlon's mother, her glance lingering on the house and herb beds and farmland, even the very grass blades, as if she would keep their image forever in her sight.

"I'd relish tea," murmured Ruth in a voice that made you think of thin, icy leaves jangling in a winter storm.

"Polly," called Hester, "get the kettle hot. Ruth wants tea." She sat down again on the bench and Ruth sat down primly beside her. Lass settled to the grass like a puff of thistledown.

Hester waited, smiling. She knew what they had really come for, though they'd never tell her. She was ready to listen to their stories of why they came.

Lass said nothing at all. She smiled, and pulled a sorrel leaf out of the grass, and put it between her lips and chewed it as children do, all the time giving Hester that sweet knowing look that wrung her heart. Ruth sat, seeming somehow full of speech yet not speaking. Hester turned to her.

"Ruth—I'm sure thee's not come to neighbor. Thee's got a reason. Can I do aught to help thee? At school? Or hanging a skirt, maybe?"

"No. No," said Ruth, a little distracted by such blunt speech when she was not looking for it. "I—I—we all of Plumstead Meeting favor thy sons, and we hear they are in trouble in Jersey. And we wish news of them."

"So Mahlon didn't send thee word?" asked Hester, all innocence. "I'm sure if he wanted thee to know, he would have told thee."

"But—but he's well—isn't he? And safe?" cried Lass. Lass would speak for herself. She didn't have to hide behind Plumstead Meeting.

Hester would never torture a girl who loved her son the way Lass loved him.

"He was well the last I heard. But they're doing what they shouldn't. We can't rest easy." She looked at the two girls. And Ruth was all stolid courage geared to meet what might come, and Lass was all quick fire, and pain, and passion, with no seasoning of wisdom. And how was Mahlon to choose between them. If she had to choose for him, which would it be?

Polly came now, bringing a wooden tray with a bowl of field strawberries on it and a side noggin of cream to dip them in as you ate.

"Tea's a-making, Ruth," she said cheerfully, setting the tray down beside her mother on the bench, stepping back lightly to the house.

Hester leaned toward Lass. She knew Ruth was watching her with eyes like flecked stones.

"So thee knows my boys," she said, smiling encouragingly.

"No. No. I've seen them. I think they're wonderful—to stand for what they think is right, even if they have to do what is wrong—even if they're on the other side from Sam and my father."

"They're good boys. They weren't at the Wyoming Massacre, thee knows. Whole countryside says they were, but 'tisn't so."

"I heard they—went to it. I'm glad to know they weren't there."

Ruth had endured enough. After all, it was to her house that Mahlon came at night and put the bar across the door, and blew the candle out. Forgetting her usual prudence, she spoke quite shamelessly.

"Mother Doan," she asked, looking steadily at Hester, ignoring Lass, "has thee any of that blue wool barred in brown that I can use to patch Mahlon's shirt he left with me? The tear's too big for mending."

Hester watched Lass. Above the firmly smiling mouth, she could see anguish in the blue eyes.

"Don't thee fret thyself about Mahlon's shirt, Ruth. If he wants it patched, he'll bring it home," she said placidly, wondering in her heart why all her feelings should go out to this strange girl, why she should favor her over one of their own kind, known and respected in Plumstead Meeting.

They ate the strawberries, holding them by the hulls, dipping them in the thick yellow cream. Then Polly called out that tea was ready, and Ruth stepped into the kitchen to get it. Wanting to help, Lass picked up the tray with its empty bowls and followed her.

Just as they disappeared from sight, around the corner of the house strode young Joe Doan. The moment Hester saw him, she stood up, and caught one hand sharply to her breast. Twenty years had fallen away from him. He stood

before her, a hurt, frightened, disheveled little boy. A cut across his right cheek bone spilled a thin stream of dried blood the length of his face. His hair and eyebrows were singed, and one sleeve burnt out of his green velvet coat. He did not look after the girls. He wanted only his mother.

"Joel Thee's home! What's happened to thee? Where's thy brothers?"

"We been fighting in Jersey. I come on ahead. Mose has gone home to his wife. Aaron and Levi's bringing Abe—'bout half an hour behind me."

"Where's Mahlon?" The three girls had come to stand in the kitchen door behind him, but he went on, still alone with his mother, not knowing they were there.

"Mahlon couldn't stand it any more—thinking of what's been done. He's down at the Anchor, drunk as a lord on Judgment Day. Is Mary here?"

"She's at home with her mother. Tell me what happened to thee, Joe. And to Mahlon! I never knew him to get drunk before."

"It—it don't make good telling," he muttered. "I don't know why. We've never done aught like it before—mixed in other men's quarrels. I think now we got no good left in us at all."

"Thee did worse things this time?"

"Aye. Thee knows we had to take King's shilling and fight with the Hessians to get some hard money. They wanted to raid round Elizabeth Town; said it was a sad nest of rebels."

He slumped down on the grass, leaned against the mulberry tree and closed his eyes as he talked.

"We marched up at sunset to what they call Connecticut Farms. Twelve houses used to set there—and a church. We burnt 'em."

"Thee burnt a whole town?"

"No. We was watching. 'Twas the Hessians burnt it. But we led 'em there. And the thing Abe done—"

"What did he do? Why'd thee let him? Thee knows he's addled."

"He was with Foxy Joe Condit. Foxy can't shoot and we got him to mind Abe. He come from the Jerseys, and he's been leading us in by the good roads."

"But—but Foxy's no better than a beast, Joe. Thee knows thy father won't have him in the house; makes him sleep in the hay when he comes here." Hester remembered the small, mean eyes, the thick, drooling mouth, the tufted, orange hair.

"I know. He and Abe went off by themselves apiece. Seems his father-in-law, old Van Tienck, owns a tavern near there. They'd locked Foxy out of the house and wouldn't let him see his wife, she was that afraid of him. But they got in all right—he and Abe got in."

"Did—did they do harm?"

"Yes. They beat the old man and robbed him. And then Foxy stood by and watched his own wife—with Abe—"

"Joe! Mind the girls!"

Joe lifted his eyes and turned. "I'm sorry," he muttered. "I'm that befoggled I didn't know thee was here."

"I don't blame Abe," answered Ruth stonily. "I knew Deborah Mave. If people had let her be and she was still alive, Abe wouldn't be fierce and harmful."

"No—I think thee's wrong, Ruth," said Hester. "I think there's a wildness on all the Doans of this generation, but with Abe it's greater than his strength to hold it. These times are too troubled for him."

"I got more to tell," sighed Joe wearily. "He's done worse than that."

"What—more?"

"He shot a woman."

Hester shut her eyes and put her hand to her forehead. Ruth became very intent on tearing a twig apart. Lass stared straight at Joe. All three waited for him to go on.

"Most of the houses was afire, Hessians and rebels running everywhere and fighting hand-to-hand. Then Mahlon's gun—the hammer stuck, and I was with him just across from the church, trying to help him get it so's 'twould shoot. Abe and Foxy stood about ten feet away, at the edge of the town green. Sudden, I heard a gun go off close by, and a woman screaming. I saw Abe's rifle, all smoke, just coming away from his shoulder. He shot through the parsonage window and killed the minister's wife! She'd stood there looking on, all in a flock of children. I'll see those little heads all turning to her—till the day I die, I'll see them!"

"Did—did she—Is thee sure she—?"

"Yes. He got her in the side. She only lived a minute or two."

"But why did he do it?"

"He doesn't know. When I first looked at him, he was grinning. And then he began to blink his eyes, bewildered like, and put his hand up slow, and held to his forehead. We'd all got to him by then. 'Boys,' he said, 'I don't know—something's the matter—I ain't right. Get me out of here.' Aaron led him off like he was a blind horse, and he ain't come out of it yet."

Hester pulled herself weakly to her feet. "If they're bringing him in, we'd best get the girls away," she said.

"By God, we had! He's limper than wet hay now, but we can't tell how he'll be taken next. And yet—bad as he is—I think—if only the times would settle down, and we could go back to what we were—when this was a free country and folk let us alone; when thirty dollars was thirty dollars, and there was nothing to shoot at but deer and rabbits—"

Hester managed a feeble smile. Joe had rested as he talked, and now strength had begun to flow back into his veins like a rising tide. She knew the signs of it. By the time Abe got here he'd be defending him, ready to lessen the deed with clever excuses.

"Joe," she asked, "which way are the boys coming?"

"Up the Durham Road. Why?"

"Then Lass and Ruth better go round by Doyle's tavern so as not to meet them. Thee go in the house and tell Polly to run over to Grandsir's and stay there with Rachel and Mary till we come for her. We won't let Abe go home to them. We'll keep him here till we see how he's going to be."

"I'll tell her, Mother." Joe stood tall and straight, looking down. "And while she's going, she might take Betsy and Hester. Abe's better away from any she-thing."

Hester bit her lip and shuddered. He walked off toward the house and she turned back to her guests.

"We'll get our horses," said Ruth, her voice low and shaken. "They're tied by the spring house wall."

They crossed the grass and paved dooryard toward the waiting animals.

"I'm sorry, Ruth," murmured Hester, "thee didn't get thy cup of tea. Thee must come back for it another day. And bring thy friend." She smiled at Lass. "Don't worry for Mahlon. I'll send his father down to ride home with him, in case he's seeing two moons."

Ruth caught her breath in a sharp sob. "Mother—when will this end? What's to become of all of us?"

"My dear, I don't know. Pray that thee'll be able to pray, and that prayer'll help thee. That's all the good I know."

She bowed her head, listening, with no more words, to the sound of hoofs on stone as the two girls rode away—two girls she had not borne, who had both called her "Mother."

Inside the house, Polly faced her brother across the black hearth flanked with a spit and cooking irons. The little fire she had made to boil the kettle had quite died away.

"Joe—is it the truth—what Mary says Grandsir's afraid of—that Abe's mad?"

Joe smiled at her with all his old suave humor; resting a little, telling his mother what had happened had somehow changed the color of his world.

"Oh, Abe's mad, right enough, Sister. But only when the wind is north-northwest. When the wind blows southerly, he knows a hawk from a handsaw."

"Oh?" asked Polly, bewildered. She had not been to school enough to learn that there was once a troubled prince in Denmark, but for all that she sensed

her brother's meaning.

"And when will the wind blow southerly?"

Joe looked back over his shoulder as he answered her, his arm stretched toward the top shelf in the chimney cupboard.

"Not in our time," he said, reaching for the bottle of grog.

FIFTEEN

In the Midst of Death

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All his life he'd remember today, thought Crispin Corey, as he walked up Front Street in Philadelphia—today, October 21st, 1781. Yellow leaves blew out of a gray sky, plastering themselves against the wet, red brick of the house fronts, against the cobbled gutters. Below the wharves, to his left, the river moved seaward, black and slow. He passed the house where Lass had lived once when it belonged to Robert Morris before he sold it to buy a finer one, crossed Dock Creek still smelling of privies and butchers' offal and the livery stable behind Carpenters' Hall. He was to look for the ten tall houses across the drawbridge called "Brick House Row." They had told him at Spruce Street Wharf that Silas Marvayne was lodged there. They had told him Silas Marvayne was dying.

He'd been so gay this afternoon before he'd heard that news, whistling on the deck as they'd worked their way up river. Tomorrow he'd thought to be with Lass in Buckingham, the war just about won, so he and his crew could go home and settle down in houses again, sleep in bed with their wives, and plow or mend shoes for a living, and get together in the tavern after supper for a pipe of tobacco and peaceful talk of their sea brigand days. Maybe the war was over now. When he'd left Virginia last week, Washington had got Cornwallis and the best of the British Army trapped where the land ran down between the James and the York. Both sides were squaring off for a battle that was bound to end things, one way or another, but Washington had a whole rich countryside behind him, and "Old Corn Cob" had only the sea. Maybe the troubled sailors were wrong about Si being near dead. He hoped to God they were. But yellow fever—

There were the houses he'd been told to look for, sagging blinds and unscrubbed doorsteps, which wasn't common in Philadelphia, worn grass plots in front, and a strip of box hedge that needed trimming. Not the kind of place Si would ever choose, but most lodging houses wouldn't let you in if you had yellow fever, and you wouldn't go to a friend, of course, and endanger him. He'd put sailors ashore with it, and found out afterwards they died in the street. He started down the row, walking more slowly with every step, setting his jaw and forcing himself to keep moving forward. He loved Silas as he loved his

own father. He didn't want to see Silas die.

A sad, rainy wind blew up from the river, tousling his hair, driving the chill of autumn through the threadbare, dark blue coat that had been part of his uniform when he fought with the 14th Massachusetts. He hunched himself together inside it an groped to button it high under his chin. When he looked up again, he saw a girl coming toward him. His first thought was that she must be very cold, for she was wearing no coat at all. Then they drew face to face, ready to pass each other, and he noticed three things about her: first, that she was plump an pretty, brown-haired and brown-eyed, with a clear, white sun, then he noticed that she had been crying—and then—he drew his head back, and swallowed, and looked again, and kept on looking. Round her neck on a velvet ribbon, standing out boldly against the pale green stuff of her dress, hung the little picture of himself that Charlie Peale had painted that winter at Valley Forge, that Lass Marvayne had "left" in Philadelphia.

Then he heard her give a little gasp, and watched her put her hand up quickly to hide it from him. She knew him then. They stood still, staring at each other.

"You don't have to keep your hand there," he said almost roughly. "I've seen your locket. I've seen it before today. How'd you come by it, and what are you wearing it for?

"It belongs to a friend of mine," she answered placidly, sweetly, he thought. "I like to wear it because it was painted by a fine artist and it's a handsome picture."

Now what did she mean by that? That he was handsome, or just that Charlie had made him look that way? She must be a friend of Lass's. Maybe she'd know about Silas. Maybe that was why she was crying. Maybe Silas was —His thoughts kept running ahead of themselves so fast he couldn't say anything.

"Of course," she said, "I know thee from thy picture. Thee doesn't know me, but thee's probably heard my name from Lass. I'm Vinny Whitlaw."

So she was a Quaker, he thought, and somehow that made his heart heavier and the sky grayer. He'd found Quakers a sober folk, stern, and strict, and keeping to themselves.

"Yes," he said, "I've heard of Vinny Whitlaw."

"And thee must have heard about Lass's father, and thee's come to be with her—"

"I didn't know," he said. "I just got back from Virginia—made two trips there, taking soldiers down with the French fleet. They told me at the wharf that Si's got yellow fever. I'm to see him now."

"Then I'll go back with thee. I just went there and tried to see Lass, but they wouldn't let me inside at all."

"She's here then?"

"Yes. Sam brought her down last night. I know thee can make them let us in."

The house where they had taken Silas Marvayne to die was shabbier than the others, with tufts of rag stuffed in its broken windowpanes. A huge, slovenly woman with iron-gray hair and a skin like a fungus growth opened the door when Crispin knocked on it. She looked him boldly up and down. She was chewing snuff.

"I told the gal to go away," she muttered. "Now you can both go. If you could see how he looks, you'd go fast enough."

"Who's taking care of him? Has he got a doctor?"

"Doctor's been and done his worst and gone. Two men's up there with him, the two that brung him from the ship and hired the room of me."

"His daughter?"

"She's up there too. In another room. He won't let her near him. He wanted her turned out of the house. Feared she'll catch it."

"I think we'll step in," said Crispin.

She shrugged her shoulder and moved to one side without answering him.

Inside the tall narrow house a flight of stairs ran upward, almost as straight as a ladder. A broken-down sofa stood against one wall, and Crispin motioned to Vinny to sit down on it.

"I'll go up and see Silas and tell Lass you're here," he said.

She smiled at him but did not speak. She sat down on the sofa.

At the top of the stairs he paused, uncertain which of three closed doors to rap on. Finally he heard a few low-toned words spoken behind one of them and put his hand to the latch of it.

"Si!" he called softly.

The door came open quickly, and he found himself face to face with Tom Petengall who'd gone to school with him, and just in back of Tom stood John Howe, a farmer in Ipswich before the war. Both men looked exhausted, and heavy-eyed, and as unhappy as he was.

"Damn glad to see you, Cris," whispered Tom. "Come on in."

First thing he noticed was the stench—worse than the soldiers' corpses lying out in the rainy heat the time he fought at Long Island; then the crazy chairs and cracked mirror, and the unpainted bedstead covered with dirty quilts. Gray daylight sifted in through dusty windowpanes leaving the corners in shadow. Silas sat huddled on the edge of the bed, his head in his hands. He lifted it and stared, almost unseeing.

"Get away from here, Cris," he ordered feebly.

Crispin knew the minute he looked at him that he was going to die. The horribly yellowed skin with red weals on it, the sunken eyes, the gaunt, sharp

look a man's features never take on till his last hours on earth—all these told him. He clenched his hands with the thumbs curled inside, and bore down on them hard.

"How do you feel, Si?" he asked, trying to speak heartily, striding over to sit down on the bed and put his hand on the familiar shoulder.

Silas did not answer. He moaned once like a sick animal.

John Howe cleared his throat. "He's had the sickness, and it's left. He's had the fever, and now that's gone, too. He's been bled, and he said the purges was poison and he wouldn't take 'em. Now all we can do is wait."

"I'll wait with you then," said Crispin grimly.

He heard a quick tread on the stairs, and then Sam Bye's voice just outside the door.

"I got back as soon as I could, Lass. Dr. Rush says there's nothing more we can do. How is he?"

"If he's different, they haven't told me. I want to go in, Sam! Oh, Sam! Make them let me in!"

"Lass, they'll never do it. Before we got here, Silas had the ship's Bible brought; made them swear on it they'd not let thee come near him and maybe get thy death. Go downstairs and see Vinny. She's waiting to talk with thee. She says Crispin's come."

"Crispin? Where is he?"

"In there. With him."

"Oh! He'll help me! He won't keep me away from my father. He won't let you."

Silas had been listening too. Now with a terrible effort he lifted his head, then fell sideways across the bedstead. "Crispin!" He fought to get the words out. "You bring me the Bible—and swear—"

Crispin hesitated.

Silas heaved himself up, and lashed out suddenly with all the old strength and fury of the quarterdeck.

"*Did you hear what I said?*"

"Here 'tis, Cris," murmured Tom, picking up a heavy, leather-bound book with iron clasps, and bringing it forward.

Crispin looked at Silas for a moment out of somber eyes. Then he put his hand on the Bible. "I swear, Silas," he said clearly, "not to let Lass come near you till you ask for her."

"Good boy," choked Silas feebly, slumping flat on the bed. Already his eyes were glazing over. When Crispin took his hand, it felt cold and heavy like the stone hand of a statue.

"All we can do is wait," repeated John Howe.

Lass rattled the latch of the bolted door.

"Crispin! Crispin! I want to see my father! You'd want to see your father if he was—Oh, Daddy, Daddy! Make Crispin let me in!"

Silas worked his mouth and croaked in his throat, and Crispin knew he was trying to speak. He bent forward and took the older man by both shoulders, holding him steady.

"I'm listening. Can you get it out, Si?"

"That, or die trying!" rasped Silas, the old gleam of a smile waking faintly in his eyes, slipping instantly away. "Cris—my will—I made it in my cabin—when the sickness first come. It's in my sea chest—aboard the *Peg Magoon*. She's moored off Spruce Street."

"I know. I saw her when I brought the *Christine* in this afternoon. I just got back from Virginia."

"You was taking troops down, wasn't you? Always thought this war'd be the death of me, but expected to drown or die by the bullet. A man's way to die. You—you look out for Lass—if she'll let you."

"I'll look out for Lass."

Lass had stopped trying the door. Now Crispin heard her heel taps going downstairs. Silas seemed to have lost consciousness and he bent over him, but the feeble breath still continued. Tom Petengall picked up a thick brown bottle from the floor beside his chair, drank from it and handed it round. They waited. There was nothing they could do for Si Marvayne now—except watch him go out.

Downstairs Vinny talked with Lass.

"Please try to eat something," she said, holding an open basket on her lap. "Mrs. Morris just sent this over. She heard thy father was sick and she says to tell thee her husband is in Baltimore, but if there's anything she, or her servants, or the lads at the counting house can do, thee must let her know."

"They say there's nothing anyone can do," said Lass bitterly.

"Here's this little jar of soup, and she's wrapped it so well it's still hot," went on Vinny. "Do try to get some of it down, Lass, or thee'll swoon, maybe."

"I never swoon," said Lass, fearing that she might do just that. She took the earthen crock and put her lips to it. It tasted of chicken and fine herbs. It tasted good. Vinny nibbled at a crumbly spice cake, speaking with her mouth full.

"Thee must be glad Crispin has come."

Lass smiled wanly. "I think Father must be glad. Every man wants a son, and Cris has been that to him. I tried hard myself—learned to shoot, and ride, and sail with him, and followed him everywhere. I failed, of course. I think I've been as good a boy as any girl could be—but it wasn't enough."

Vinny helped herself to another cake and Lass watched her. Suddenly she noticed Crispin's picture and pointed to it.

"Why, Vinny? What have you got tied around your neck? I'd forgotten you had it, but I remember now! Do you think Crispin saw—?"

"Yes," said Vinny. "I told him I'd borrowed it of thee because it was the work of a famous artist."

"Oh. I'm glad. I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings. I want him to be my friend forever if I don't want to marry him."

"Is thee sure thee doesn't?"

"Oh, yes. Very sure."

"Then does thee mind if I tries to?"

"If—if—?" Lass stopped, bewildered. "You want to marry Crispin?"

"Does that seem so strange to thee?"

"Well—I don't know. Two hours ago you'd never seen him. How can you tell?"

"Oh, Lass—thee's a one to be asking! Remember what thee told me of how it was when thee first saw that wild boy up in the woods? His name I forget."

"Mahlon! Oh—but *Mahlon*!"

Lass stopped then, and an uneasy fear came over her, that for the moment shocked her out of her grief. Terrible things might be going on by now up in Bucks County.

Just a week ago she had been awake in the night tending baby Christine; for Sally, ailing with another child, had left the family to her sister's care if they needed anything after bedtime. The children's room was next to Sally's, and she heard Sam and her sister, awake too, talking on the other side of the wall. Sam had been away for a few days, they had not known where, but now he was telling his wife that he had been bringing tax money in to the Newtown Treasury. Thirteen hundred pounds of it! He was telling her that this money was to be used to set a price on the Doan boys, a reward for their capture—alive or dead. Lass had not slept any more after that, and the next night she had gone down to Ruth's to ask her to get word to the boys of the move against them, not daring to ride up to Plumstead herself, Sam being close at home now, with an eye to everything. Ruth must plead with them to leave the county, to go away until tempers quieted down. There had never been such an attack on them before. No doubt it was wrong to eavesdrop and carry talk, but it wasn't as if doing so could hurt either the Whigs or Sam in any way. The Doans could fight flesh and blood, but they couldn't fight thirteen hundred pounds. They would have to go, and that was what Sam wanted anyway. Bucks would be rid of them without spending a penny.

Ruth was a long time letting her in, nor had she been there more than five minutes before she saw a gun standing in the corner. Ruth did not own a gun. Mahlon must be somewhere in the house, listening maybe, waiting for her to

go away—so he could be with Ruth—alone. She had blurted out her news and fled, leaving the lovers. And then came word of her father's illness, and beset with woes on every side, she had had no time to think at all. But Ruth must have told him! Perhaps even he had overheard her. He must surely be safe by now—somewhere. She would find out where and follow when her father—had no more need of her.

"Lass!" called Crispin from the head of the stairs.

In a moment she stood beside him. He put his arm around her and she leaned on it, swayed as if she were going to fall. The door she had been beating against all day stood wide open.

"He's asked for you," said Crispin steadily. "I think he's too far gone to know, but he's done it, so I'm not breaking my word. I'll take you in."

And then they were standing in the squalid room by the stained, disordered bed, and Lass looked down in horror on the crumpled, yellow, dying thing that had been her father. His head jerked back and his eyes rolled in their sockets, and Lass thought fleetingly of the young dragoon who had died in her lap on Trenton morning.

In the dim spaces of his mind, the dying man stood in the midst of the salt swamps and scarlet autumn trees behind Newburyport. He felt a presence beside him, a presence that was youth and restless life, sprung from himself and Ann, that had always been, past that, his good companion. Now in a tree across the welling tide creek, a squirrel chattered, flicking its silver brush of tail. He put up his arm and pointed to it, silently. He saw the rifle barrel lifted just beside him and heard the crack of it, saw the squirrel fall, drilled clean through the eye so as not to mark its fur, the way a good man and a good shot would do. And then he was lying in a bleak, vile room, hopelessly sick, a place he had never seen before, the faces around him familiar, and yet strange and he could put no names to them—he yearned and ached for the young presence that had aimed the rifle, for his good companion.

The breath rattled in his throat and came hissing through his gray lips.

"I want Lass!" he muttered. "I want my son!"

So she had not failed him after all!

She felt Crispin lifting her off the floor, just as a soft gray fog came down before her eyes and shut her away. Next time she knew where she was, she lay with her head in Vinny's lap, her face wet with Vinny's tears. Crispin sat beside her holding her hand and told her that it was all over.

Later that night the three of them sat with John Howe, and Tom Petengall, and Sam, in the room where Silas lay, washed and dressed in the rough brown homespuns, his sea-going clothes, the only things they had for him. The landlady had grudged them more than one candle, and that burned weakly in the draft, since all the windows stood open to cleanse the room of the airs of

sickness. Crispin could hear the men telling Lass in low, broken tones about the last four days of her father's life. How he had sickened just off Chester, and from the first moment had recognized the marks of death on himself; how he had taken it laughing, almost to the end—even that last morning called for a mirror and said wasn't he a fine sight to go and meet Ann?

Crispin sat near the window facing Second Street, and now he heard the thick German voice of the watch, turned his head to follow the lantern bobbing past the house. He caught a word or two and stiffened, every muscle tense and alert. What was the fellow saying and why couldn't he talk United States? The other men stopped their talk to listen too.

"Basht dree o'glock und Gorn-val-lis isht da-ken! Basht dree o'glock—und a gloudy morning!" The watch passed by.

Lights woke up in windows all along the street. From down near the Market the night wind carried a burst of shouting that grew and grew. A lantern began to swing wildly back and forth in the belfry of Christ Church steeple.

"Does he say—what I think he's saying?" asked Crispin.

"Yes, thee probably has it." Sam Bye had heard from his childhood the speech of the German farmers in Bucks County and it fell on his ears with no foreign sound. "He's saying we've taken Cornwallis."

"Think it'll end the war, Sam?"

"I believe so. That's what men are saying around here."

"They was saying that in Virginia when I come away. I wish Si could have known."

"Likely he does," said John Howe soberly. "I once heard Parson say the dead knows all."

Crispin remembered Silas had talked to the boys of meeting Ann. He'd loved her right up to the end, he thought, all the twenty years he had to do without her. He wondered how Hannah would take his death; gruffly, most like, and not turn a hair, that anyone could see; and cry herself to sleep in the night time after—more nights than one. And thinking of lovers, he looked at the two girls.

Lass drooped, her beauty still there, but wan and dimmed over, and his heart yearned to her. Then he turned and looked at Vinny. Vinny had a lovely face, too; sorrowful just now, but sweet, with a full, rich sweetness, and he felt his heart yearn to her a different way. She caught his look, and her lips curved upward in a gentle smile. That was one thing Lass didn't have—gentleness. Vinny had worn his picture that Lass had flung away. He looked long and questioningly into the soft amber depths of her eyes, and she looked back, still smiling. He turned away from her to Silas, yellow no longer, austere and leaden gray in his coffin. He looked again at Vinny and found her still

watching him. Suddenly the burial service they would soon be listening to flashed across his mind—but with a difference to it. Couldn't it be made to read, he thought, "In the midst of death we are in life"? Something in Vinny's eyes made him think that it could.

SIXTEEN

Treasures in Heaven

•

An old town in the midst of a new world, Newtown, the county seat of Bucks in Pennsylvania, put out its lights early that night of October 22nd, 1781. Dead leaves blew through the rutted lanes and whirled across yellow flowerbeds and grassplots blackened with frost. Yellow leaves sifted down from the willows on Newtown Common, the forty-acre strip laid out by the Founder to be unbuilt land forever along the edges of Newtown Creek, sifted down and drifted on the surface of the black, sluggish water. The brick and stone mansions darkened first, and then the log houses of the poorer folk, where there were more children to be put to bed. Not a light shone in the county buildings on the hill in front of Colonel Francis Murray's estate, the jail, the treasury, Judge Wynkoop's small stone courthouse. Andy and Nancy McMinn had closed their tavern on Main Street and reeled to bed, neither of them being sober enough to tend bar any longer. Only a lamp or two burned behind the windows of the Old Frame House, meaning that if you still wanted a drink you could get it, but you'd have to prove that you wanted it badly, and be ready to pay in hard money. All Newtown had gone to bed by ten o'clock, as befits the folk of a small shire town in a country county, on a cold night late in the fall.

Over the creek and west of the town a way, toward Northampton Township, the road wound around a jutting outcrop of limestone, covered with vines and mosses, constantly dripping down water from a high, hidden spring. Thick, cone-shaped cedars grew around, and juniper, forming a little copse at the edge of the highway, and in their shelter waited a group of men, mounted, armed, cursing, jesting, passing a leather-jacketed bottle from hand to hand among them.

"How'd thee know there was that much money there, Mose, and what 'twas raised for?" asked a thin-faced man in a hunting shirt with a pair of horse pistols stuck in a strip of rough woolen tied around his waist.

The other men quieted down, wanting to know the answer.

Moses Doan looked them over, and an approving smile lighted the sullen crags of his face. His brothers, Aaron and Levi, stood beside him, and down by the road he glimpsed the slight figure of Mahlon leaning on his rifle, posted there lest the cowboys should be surprised by some farmer riding home late or

hastening into town after the midwife. His cousins, Jesse and Solomon Vickars; John Atkinson, the gunsmith; Hank Myers, the German doctor; the Paul boys from Warminster, and Ned Conrad; Jerry Cooper and Bob Steel, with a couple of friends from Crosswicks over in Jersey; the Tomlinsons, of course. Quite an army he'd raised, all trusted fellows, and there'd be a part for every one of them, and high stakes after. This was not an attack on a lonely farm, or a tavern full of men off-guard and mellow with liquor. This was a whole town they meant to over-run, the county seat, at that. They were going to force their way into the Treasury building and steal the money Sam Bye and the other taxing bastards had run themselves windless scrouging out of people, money raised to hunt down the Doans. It would be an easy thing—if nobody woke up—but if a child cried or a dog barked and roused people, it could turn into a battle as good as the one at Trenton a few years back.

Moses took his time, but finally he answered, keeping his voice low so Mahlon could not hear.

"Come from Sam Bye's own mouth, and he was the one that put the money there."

"Aw, Mose," jeered his father-in-law, Joe Tomlinson, "it's the truth we're asking for before we'll risk getting our hides full of lead. Sam Bye wouldn't talk over his dealings with a Plumstead cowboy."

Moses frowned. "Didn't say Sam told me. Sam didn't tell it to no one, except his own wife in the bed at night. But her sister heard. Women's mouths —" He finished with an oath. "Seems—if thee's got to have it all—Mahlon and I'd been down to get some wheat ground at Parry's mill, and coming home we stopped by the schoolteacher's, and she was cooking supper for us when this girl rides up to the door—the redheaded one that lives at Sam Bye's."

The men nodded. Old John Tomlinson gave a ribald snicker.

"Good! Good! Ye four young bloods must ha' made a night of it! Swear I'll tell your wife on you, Mose. I won't have my granddarter used so."

"Shut thy dirty mouth, John. There was none of that at all. Mahlon and I hid in the loft when we heard someone at the door, not wanting it known we was there, lest folk get talking about the teacher."

John Atkinson spat. "Folks talked about the teacher till they've stopped because their jaws got tired. Everybody knows, except her own Meeting, she's Mahlon's—"

Aaron leaped suddenly on the older man, flung him to the ground where he lay sputtering.

"Get up," ordered Mose, "and cease thy gabble, if thee'd hear what I was telling. Seems the girl never knew we was there, or maybe she did—anyway, she right out and told Ruth she'd heard Sam say he and the treasurer, John Hart, had locked away near thirteen hundred pounds, and Hart took a box of

paper money home with him. And 'twas to be used against us Doans! She never guessed we'd come and get it."

The horses stirred restlessly; the cold mud round the dripping spring clogged their iron shoes. A wind rustled in the cedar boughs, and late moonrise began to lighten the sky toward Four Lanes' End.

"What we waiting for, Mose? Didn't thee ride through town to see there was naught amiss and no guards on duty?"

"Yes," said Moses, "I done that. We'll be starting now. Everybody know what he's to do?"

Ayes sounded on all sides. They rode swiftly out on the highway, passing Mahlon, who whistled to Firebrand and in a few moments was spurring after them.

Mahlon had not thought about the robbery at all, did not want to think about it. He had tried to keep Mose from planning it, and then from carrying it through, suggested instead they lay low round Chester or out Lancaster way. Lass hadn't meant to make trouble for Sam or the Whigs. She only wanted to warn him—acted according to woman's nature. Somehow, he almost wished she hadn't. He didn't know quite what he felt about Lass, but in any case, it wasn't about her that he was thinking as he rode through the sharp autumn night to rob the Bucks County Treasury. He thought that for the first time he rode through the United States of America.

The idea had come into his head of a sudden that afternoon when Joe got home from the South; been growing there ever since. For Joe had brought news. After the burning of Elizabeth Town last year, the Doans, now hated in the Jerseys as well as at home, had turned their attention to Montgomery County, and actually worked out the plan for running off stolen horses to Carolina that Jim Fitz had used to talk about before they hanged him in Chester three years back. Friends of Jim worked with them, and they kept regular stables in the woods and caves up Geddis Run and in Towamacin, living there much themselves, and driving their four-footed booty west of Philadelphia, across Susquehanna, down to the markets in Baltimore to supply buyers from the South. That was where they'd been fighting the war the last year, and that made higher prices for horseflesh. Mahlon had been down there three times himself, and Joe had gone further—even as far as Cane Creek, and visited his cousins. He said it was a fine, wild country still, full of upstanding men who weren't afraid to take their guns and shoot it out when ways they didn't like were being forced on them—men called Regulators in the old days before the war. Mahlon had dreamed of going there ever since he'd heard Grandsir tell about the country. He still meant to—maybe when the war was over.

And now the war was over. Joe had ridden in late that afternoon just as

they were ready to start out. He'd been in Virginia, knew all about the battle at Yorktown, wanted to tell about it. So Moses and his brothers, conscious that their little army would be assembled and waiting by the Wrightstown schoolhouse, had to dismount and stand impatient on the paving stones under the sycamore tree while Joe had his say.

"I was there taking horses to the British troops," he told them. "Me and Tom Fyfe of Baltimore was running a string of seven stallions, and we'd been promised hard money for them. But when we got there, 'twas too late. Both sides was all lined up in a meadow, red and white uniforms, and the rebels in rags and hunting shirts, but proud that they'd got the best of it in spite of all. Band played, 'The World Turned Upside Down'—remember, Father used to pick that out on his violin—and the British general gave in his sword. People on both sides are saying the war's over. That was three days back."

"Three days from Virginia! Thee must have rode the wind, Joe."

"Oh, I come along fast enough. Tench Tilghman left same time to carry the news to Philadelphia, and he ain't in yet. Somebody else beat him to it, though, and folk there are all astir. Day I can't outride a Silk Stocking Trooper, that'll be the day my horse goes lame."

And it was then that Mahlon had first spoken the thought that had been growing in his mind ever since, that he could not be rid of.

"Mose—Joe! What'll the end of the war mean to us Doans, does thee think? Folk'll know there's no British troops to help us any more, to buy the horses we steal. Already they've raised money against us. Congress has won the war, and all the men who hate us'll have the say in Bucks County from now on. Whether we like it or not, we got the United States. Now, how we going to live in it?"

"I'll sit down and study on it, Mahlon," Moses had told him, frowning, "after I've got my pockets full from the Treasury—full of the money that was meant to buy lead to shoot at me."

But that was not what Mahlon wanted. He thought maybe they shouldn't rob the Treasury. Joe's news put a different color on things, but none of the others seemed to see it. Then Joe had asked what was meant, and been told about their plans and invited to go along.

"No," he said, "I've ridden as far today as I'm going to. Who's staying with Abe? Let me do that."

Levi and Abe had been set to spend the evening playing cribbage at the kitchen table, but Levi was glad enough to turn over his half-played hand to Joe and get out his horse, though Moses had promised him equal share with the others, just as Abe would get equal share. Abe didn't really need watching now. He'd not been the same since he murdered Hannah Caldwell; quiet, a little bewildered, not vicious any more—but everyone feared that was only for

a season.

Finally the Doans had ridden out and joined the others at the rendezvous. Moses had chosen the Wrightstown schoolhouse as their headquarters for tonight, partly because it would be an unlikely place for pursuers to look for them, partly because Mahlon had got hold of a key to it. Ruth had one, left over from the days when she used to teach there. They had already hidden plenty of rum and wheat loaves and a ham in the woodpile at the back, so that they could eat and drink when the robbery was over. As the night thickened, cold and cloudy, and full of dead leaves and wind, they rode westward across the field to wait by the dripping spring while Moses surveyed the town. And now all was in readiness and they were on their way. But the other Doans and their comrades rode through the world they had always known, the King's Colony of Pennsylvania. It was only Mahlon who rode through the new country.

They passed the farms west of the Common and spurred their horses through Newtown Creek so their hoofs would not sound on the low wooden bridge and wake folk up to see them riding by. At Amos Strickland's Brick Hotel they turned south into the main street, past the shops and a couple of taverns. Under the trees, some green and some stripped bare, they rode; down a row of houses built of red and black brick and stone, with white wood trim and shining brasses on their front doors; further up the hillside, below the courthouse, clustered a group of log cottages, humble, but planned for comfort, their wide eaves reaching almost to the ground. All Newtown was asleep. No —there was a light—and in the very place they would have to visit. It shone from the kitchen window of the spacious stone house half-hidden with trees that belonged to the treasurer, John Hart. Just above the house, Moses reined in Wild Devil and the others came to a standstill around him.

"The bastard's awake, Mose."

"Makes no difference. Mahlon, thee crawl round to the window. Look inside, and see who's there and what they're saying. If he's been told about us —if he's got soldiers—"

Mahlon jumped to the ground and moved into the shadow under the row of tall fir trees that hedged the Hart property to the north. In a moment he had become a shadow himself, indistinguishable from the other shadows. He advanced stealthily through the beaten-down asters and dead marigolds in the side yard, caught his foot in a sprawling grapevine and almost fell. Opposite the kitchen window stood a dogwood bush, and the light shone out on it, turning its leaves to garnet, its still remaining berries to balls of orange flame. Mahlon stood in the shelter of the bush. He watched and listened.

John Hart, a man in middle life, with lean muscles and ungrayed hair, sat before the fireplace, a steaming bowl balanced on one knee. But he was not

eating, he was talking and gesturing with a wooden spoon. A candle burned on the mantelpiece above his head, and a single log blazed on the hearth.

"Never saw Bristol so lively as it was this afternoon," he told the man and woman whose chairs were drawn up to listen to him, whom Mahlon recognized as Mary Hellings, Hart's housekeeper, and John Thomas, a neighbor from Courthouse Hill. "Every one was talking about the fight at Yorktown and saying the war's over. Half the town drunk, and t'other half deciding they might as well be. I couldn't get served in the shops or do any business there, so I come home."

The others nodded their heads, agreed his action had been wise.

"I didn't like to be away the night long, anyhow. Been no trouble at the Treasury, nobody lurking round, John? I thought 'twas safer not to post guards there. Might make the wrong folk wonder what we had inside."

"When I come by a half hour back, the place was quieter than Friends' Meeting."

"Any talk going round of where the Doans be? Some says they're in the south, and some says over in Montgomery. I hope wherever it is, it's a good piece off. If they was to ride by here tonight—if they was to know—!"

Mahlon did not listen any longer. He slipped across the garden, back to the road.

"He's only got John Thomas and the housekeeper there. He's talking about us, and he don't expect us. It's as safe as it'll ever be. But, Mose"—he put his hand lightly on the edge of his brother's saddle—"I'm asking thee again—what's to happen to us after? Not tonight, I mean—next week, next month—when it's known around. We ain't living in a free country no more."

"We ain't been for a long time," growled Moses. "Get to thy post where thee's supposed to be. Here we go."

They swept forward, beating on the front door with pistol butts, ripping it open. Mahlon came last, for he had been told to stand in the doorway once they were all inside, and see that no one but themselves passed in or out. Jesse Vickars guarded the house on one side, he knew, and Jerry Cooper on the other.

Looking before him, he saw Moses in the center of the kitchen, his shadow covering a whole wall, spreading over the ceiling. He heard him challenge the treasurer sternly, but with an air of righteousness rather than violence.

"We have come for the money thee stole from honest men as needs it, that thee stole for an evil purpose."

The Jersey boys and the Tomlinsons were rummaging through chests and drawers and cupboards, overturning sofas, ransacking the whole lower floor. Upstairs he could hear the voices of Aaron and Levi. Now a child woke up and cried, and Aaron spoke soothingly to it.

"We won't hurt thee. We only want the money—to take to thy father."

A moment later they clattered downstairs with a wooden box half open, spilling out as fine bills and notes as ever any Congress printed.

"Where is thy silver?" snapped Moses, the searchers having finished their work and gathered round him in the kitchen.

John Hart had said no word before, but now Solomon Vickars stood with a horse pistol against his chest, and kept prodding him with it.

"The s-s-s-ilver," he stammered from sheer fright, "is up in the fireproof beside the courthouse. Don't touch it. It belongs to the county. It's for the good of all."

"There is no good-for-all. It's every man alone. Where is the key?"

He hesitated, and Sol Vickars drove the gun against his ribs.

"There—" He pointed reluctantly to a heavy iron key almost a foot long and hanging on a hook beside the tall clock in the corner.

Moses strode over and tore it from the wall with such strength that the hook burst out of the plaster. Then he turned and spoke to the trembling John Hart with the stern air of a hell-fire preacher in worldly churches not of Friends.

"Thee is commanded not to lay up for thyself treasures on earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal—nor for thy county, neither."

Mary Hellings gave a little cry, and put a hand to her plump throat, startled to hear a robber quote Scripture. Moses paid no attention to her.

"Thee is supposed to lay thyself up treasures in heaven. If thee will obey the word of God, thee has no need to fear the Doans."

Twirling the huge key, he backed slowly out of the room, keeping a pistol leveled before him. One by one, the others followed. Bob Steel and the Paul boys stayed behind, for it had been decided that they should guard the Hart house for one hour, to keep John from rousing the town, and then ride as fast as they could for the schoolhouse, where the others hoped to be gathered by then.

Mahlon followed the rest of the cowboys silently back through Newtown. They tied their horses to the fence in front of Francis Murray's stone mansion and swarmed all over the grassy hillside round the county buildings, the jail, the courthouse, and the small stone fireproof hut vaulted with brick, housing the records and the treasurer's office. Jesse Vickars caught sight of someone watching them from the corner of the jail house wall and rushed toward him with an oath, brandishing his pistol, but it turned out to be a drunken man weaving home from the Old Frame House. Moses turned the iron key in its lock, and with a creaking sound the door swung open. The four Doan boys stepped inside, into the small airless chamber smelling of oak-gall ink and

snuff. A desk, a chair, and rows of boxes mostly filled with ledgers and documents flashed into sight as Levi lit a candle. Mahlon closed the door behind them. The others waited outside.

Moses approached the rickety desk and forced the drawers open, pulled them out and ranged them on the writing ledge so he could peer into everyone. His heavy fingers dipped avidly into a litter of coin. Then he turned to Mahlon with a smile.

"Thy redhead told the truth, Brother. Does thee want us to count her out an equal share? Why doesn't thee make a Doan of her? She deserves it for this night's work."

Mahlon turned red and muttered. He and Aaron began scooping the money into leather sacks they carried under their coats. When they had finished, Moses opened the door and they stepped out again into the midst of the waiting band.

"We got it, boys," whispered Levi proudly. "It looks like it's all there—as much as Mose heard."

Moses lifted his head and breathed deeply of the night air, looked at the cold, cloudy sky with the moon still trying to break through; light shimmering on the windowpanes of the clustered houses—and silence behind everyone.

"Anyone stirring out here? Anybody come by? Or lights? Or voices?"

"No. All's quieter than heaven three days after Judgment."

They crossed the strip of yellow grass into Court Street, silently remounted their horses in front of Francis Murray's house.

"Now—ride, boys," ordered Moses in a gruff whisper.

Everyone spurred forward, no longer trying to keep together, each man making for the Wrightstown schoolhouse the best way he could. Mahlon, instead of crossing the creek to the west of the Brick Hotel, rode along the main street to the head of the Common. Once there, he reined up his horse before plunging into the alder thicket that choked the water, and looked back at the sleeping town. He could almost hear his time moving past him, as he stood there under the willow trees in the moonless dark. The Congress in Philadelphia and the raggle-taggle army at Yorktown had brought a new world to pass, and whether he liked it or not, he was going to have to live in it. How? So were his brothers, and it might be harder for them. How was Moses Doan, who had had his Word from the Lord once, in the woods above Tohickon Run, to listen to the orders of paunchy counting house men in Philadelphia, or slavers from Virginia or fish-mongers from the northeast coast? How would the new country deal with Abraham? Its men would not remember that they had killed Deborah Mave. They would only remember that he had killed Hannah Caldwell. Then he thought about Lass. How was she going to answer to Sam Bye if he found out she was the one that betrayed him? He smiled

suddenly. Lass wouldn't take a scolding from Sam. As well try to scold a yellow-jacketed hornet. Sam would cover his ears and run. And then he thought, and there was no laughter in it, that with the end of the war, Lass wouldn't be staying at Sam's any more. Likely her father'd come, and take her home to Massachusetts. Well, if he didn't like that idea, he could do what Mose said. Make a Doan of her. But no—if he married any girl, it would have to be Ruth. Ruth was the pick of the two—not so lovely, not so exciting, but sweeter, more a woman. But he wasn't going to marry Ruth! Maybe it was wrong, but he wasn't going to. He wasn't going to marry any girl. Maybe he'd take his share of the Treasury loot and go down to Cane Creek with it. Time to get there before the fall hunting was done—if it ever was done in North Carolina. Maybe they didn't have winter there. Anyway, he meant to find out. If thee went far enough south and west, maybe thee could find a place where the land was still free. He rode through the creek bed and up the long ridge where the others had already gone.

Mahlon was the last man to arrive at the schoolhouse, across from Wrightstown Meeting, under the trees that marked the start of the Walking Purchase—the famous foot race years ago, when the young Penns had stolen half the country from the Minisinks. Aaron was building a fire in the round iron stove, and Levi and the Tomlinsons were slicing meat and bread with their hunting knives, while the Vickars boys got the bottles open. Moses sat all alone and apart at the teacher's desk. He had shoved the books and slates aside, and was counting out silver and paper money into little piles. There were others not here tonight who had helped in their plans in some way and so deserved a portion, like Winder, the reformed tax collector. Finally he rose.

"I'll call thy names," he said, "and each is to come and take what I think's fair share for him, according to what he's done. And if any of thee wants to argue"—he tossed his pistol and caught it—"I'll listen to him."

Nobody argued. They took their money, and at this, too, Mahlon came last. As he picked up his pile and counted it over, Moses bent to speak to him.

"I give thee three hundred dollars, Brother," he whispered, "More'n I give any of the others—or took myself. I did it because the business sets so hard on thy conscience."

Mahlon stuffed the money into his breeches' pocket. The boys were getting noisy now, with the liquor rising in them, and plenty of hard coin in their pockets. They began drinking toasts: "To King George! To Penn, the Founder! To the cowboys of Bucks County! To us—we robbed the Treasury, slick and still, and nobody in town even stopped snoring. The money was raised for us Doans, and we came and got it!" Then they started drinking to each man's name in turn. Nobody drank to the victory at Yorktown, to the new America.

"Moses," Mahlon said, half afraid to speak to his brother, yet daring to,

“when thee threw the Bible at John Hart tonight—when thee preached to him about treasures in heaven—”

Moses smiled proudly. “I’m glad I thought to do that, Mahlon. Didn’t thee relish it for a fair japes?”

“I don’t know, Mose, about a japes. I was thinking how thee’s changed—how we’ve all changed—since that night when we went out to listen for the Word.”

Moses’ face grew dark red with anger.

“So now thee’d be a clever young dog preaching my own words at me! Thee knows God has turned His back on us—on all us Doans, and the Light—the Light o’ George Fox and them that come here driv’ by fire and the hammer’ll never shine for us again. But it’s His doing and His will. It’s none of mine. Why should I lay up treasures in heaven, when I’m so little like to go there? I’ll take my treasures on earth.” He stroked his heap of gold coins with his fingers. “I’ll take my heaven, too.” He drained his glass and put it down, and flung out of the schoolhouse. He’d robbed the Treasury, like he meant to, and he was going home now—to his blue-eyed wife, in the hut on Jericho Mountain.

SEVENTEEN

If I Pay the Piper

•

"Now God forgive me for speaking so to my wife's sister," said Sam Bye piously, his plump cheeks flushed, and a ruffled, indignant air about him. "But thee'll have to leave my house, Lass, thee knows that, doesn't thee? If thee was a man, they'd have thee banished for treason—likely send thee to dig copper in Simsbury mines."

"Yes, Sam. I know. I'm sorry. I didn't think it would turn out the way it did—that they'd dare—"

"She's got no good reason for being here this long," retorted Crispin Corey, nettled by Sam's manner.

He got up from the sofa where he'd been sitting beside Sally and looked at the slate-colored sky dripping down a fine rain on the yellowed fields. It was November in Bucks County, the same time of the year she'd come here first, thought Lass, and now they were telling her she would have to go away. She did not want to go. But Sam had spent the morning in Newtown and come back bristling with resentment against her because the wagging tongues in the taproom at the Old Frame House had told him exactly how the Doans had learned 'twould be worth their while to rob the Treasury. She didn't blame Sam, and she was sorry she'd made him trouble. She hadn't meant to—only to warn Mahlon. She had danced, and now she would pay the piper.

Crispin turned back from the gray landscape and flung himself into a chair by the crackling fire. Its light flickered on his ruddy skin and fair hair, on the little lines that sea wind and weather had grooved under his eyes. Crispin was handsome, she supposed—remembered she had once thought so—but being with him was no more exciting than being with Ruth or Sally. Strange it was, how loving one man turned all other men into women.

"I'm not going to take her out in this rain," he said firmly, "but we'll leave here as soon as it stops."

"Oh, no!" cried Sally in distress, her face drawn and yellow, and her body swollen with child. "Sam didn't mean thee must go of a sudden. He only meant—"

"It's time she went home," kept on Crispin. "I've been waiting nigh a month since Si died for her to make up her mind to it. After all, she has a

house of her own now, and a business to see to."

That had been a wrong thing to say—a very wrong thing to say, but the way his upper lip quivered, just kept from smiling, told her that he knew it and meant to be wrong. He had reminded them sharply of Silas' will, rebuked them with it. ". . . that everything I have," Silas had written, "my great and small houses in Newburyport, my wharves and quays, warehouses, and six merchant ships, besides what moneys are outstanding to my account and what debts are due me, I, being of sound mind—though threatened with fever—leave to my daughter, Thalassa, without let or hindrance. I recommend that she shall duly authorize and appoint Crispin Corey, known to both of us, to handle and direct her affairs; she to receive one-half their annual proceeds for her ownership, and he one-half for his labor. I charge her that she shall supply according to her judgment, all reasonable desires of my daughter Sarah Jane Bye and my housekeeper Hannah Hildreth; but the whole of all I own to be hers to do with as she may desire."

"Thee needn't make so much haste as to inconvenience thyself, Crispin," said Sam grudgingly, with a worried look at his wife. "Nor does thee need to remind us that Sally's father used her unkindly."

"I don't think that he did," answered Crispin promptly. "Lass is a girl alone. Hardly away from Si a minute till he went back to sea. Sally's well provided for, with a house and a husband. I don't see she's been ill-used. Besides, Si knew and you know, Sally could have every penny Lass has by asking for it."

"But I shouldn't have to ask for it," cried Sally. "Any more than she should have to ask me. We should have shared alike—or nearly. It's not the money I mind. I wouldn't know what to do with it if I had it. And I know Lass was his favorite. But not to remember me at all! Or his own grandchildren! I always tried to be a good daughter to him!"

Lass stirred restlessly in the deep armchair across the hearth from Crispin. She'd been listening to this talk for a month now, and she was tired of it. In the beginning it had been her idea to divide everything as Sally wished, but she and Sam had said so much, turned so bitter against Silas. She knew Sally spoke the truth when she said she didn't care for money, knew her sister was deeply hurt and half-sick—but still—she had to defend her father.

"You tried to be a good daughter, you say, Sally. But being a good daughter doesn't come by trying. It comes because you love—or not at all. He didn't want daughters anyway. He wanted a son."

"Oh? And I suppose thee was that?"

For a moment Sally's usually sweet face turned sharp and ugly.

"Yes, she was," said Crispin steadily. "I heard him call her so just before he died."

"He—he had a fever!"

Crispin smiled. He did not condescend to answer. Instead he spoke to Lass.

"You'd better go pack your things. Doubt if we can get much further than Newtown tonight—but at least 'twill be a start towards home."

"I don't want to go home, Crispin."

He stared at her. "Well—where do you think to go? You've worn out your welcome here."

"Perhaps," said Sam austerely, "she thinks to go to her friends, the Doans."

Crispin turned on him, his square jaw lifted, his head cocked at an angle, and his hazel eyes narrowing down.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" he demanded.

A sly look crossed Sam's face and he licked his lips. Lass felt like putting her head down in her hands and crying for her father. She'd lived with Sam and Sally lovingly for five years; seen them in trouble and out; their children born, and the trumpet vine bloom scarlet over the door with summer, and the snows whirl down from Buckingham Mountain at Christmas time. Now they hated her suddenly. It was her own fault, of course, for betraying Sam. But did they really hate her so much for that, or wasn't it more because of her father's unlucky will? As if he hadn't a right to do what he liked with his own—the mark of any free man's country. As if she wouldn't have shared with Sally if they'd given her a chance—if they hadn't started scolding before the coffin lid was down! Now they could whistle for what they'd get!

"I mean—there's few people in Newtown believe she was careless with her tongue. Most folk say she did it to please Mahlon Doan because she's in love with him."

"How would most folks know?" asked Lass, going tense and white.

"They'd know because the Doans been boasting about it in every tavern from here to Durham Ironworks. They say Sam Bye can't talk to his wife in the bed at night without thee'll tell them what he says. Thee's made me the laughing-stock of the county, Lass!"

"But who boasted? Not Mahlon! Which of the Doans? I'm sorry, Sam!"

"What does it matter? I don't know. I didn't hear 'twas he. I heard 'twas Abe and Moses. They was toasting and praising thee."

"This is something I never heard before, Lass," said Crispin tightly, a stony look about his whole body, a stiffness in every movement. "Is it true, by any chance?" He was still trying to sound casual.

"You did hear about it before! I told you about it when you came here the winter after Trenton fight. Only his name I didn't tell you. You laughed and wouldn't believe it—then."

"All this time! And what has he been to you?"

"Nothing—the way you mean."

"You're patient!" His anger was burning through now, like the morning sun of a hot day when it burns through the fog on the beaches.

"That surprises you, doesn't it?"

"By God, it does! Patience is about the last thing I'd noticed in you."

Sam and Sally withdrew to the edges of this hotter quarrel. Sally gripped her hands together in her lap. She'd failed Lass so! She'd promised to help her —to try to understand about Mahlon. But she felt so tired always, and her days were so full of children. She shouldn't have been so hurt about her father's will. She'd tell Lass when Crispin quieted down; try to make Sam believe Lass hadn't meant harm. In her place, she'd have done the same thing. She didn't care who got the money or whom Lass married. She only wanted them all to live in peace again.

Lass did not answer. She only stared at him, her eyes burning blue in her white face.

"So what do you think to do? You're not going home and marry me like I've always counted on, like your father wanted?"

"No. I'm not going to marry you. I don't know what I'll do."

Sam made one last effort. "Lass," he said, "I be thy sister's husband. Thee's a young girl alone, with no nearer male kin. So I've a right. As thy natural protector, I advise—"

"Protector! When you've just ordered me out of your house! I don't have to do what you say, Sam Bye, or what Crispin, or any man says! If I make a fool of myself, I'll take the consequences. If I pay the piper, I can call the dance—can't I?"

"Oh, you'll call the dance all right," said Crispin bitterly. "You always have and you always will! God knows why I'd have to want a woman like you! But I do—and I'll never stop!"

"Oh, yes, you will! If you want a different kind of woman, go down to Philadelphia and see Vinny Whitlaw!"

"I already seen Vinny Whitlaw. She's a good friend of mine. She wears my picture that you wouldn't wear."

"She's welcome to it! Crispin, you've been my friend, and my father loved you, but I won't marry you, and I won't go away from Bucks County—not while Mahlon's here!"

"What do you think to do?" he asked caustically. "Set yourself up in a tavern and hope he'll visit you often?"

Upstairs little Christine began to cry, then to wail dolefully.

"Now see!" cried Sally, almost in tears herself. "Thee's waked the baby! And I just got her to sleep!"

"That won't bother Lass none," muttered Crispin. "She's got no heart for anyone's feelings but her own."

Lass jumped to her feet. “Talk about me all you’ve a mind to! I just shan’t listen to any more of it! I’ll just go where I’m better liked! I should think that could be most anywhere!”

She ran blindly into the front hall and tugged open the heavy door. Twilight had settled in unnoticed by the angry folk in the Bye parlor, and Mag came from the kitchen now with a lighted candle in each hand. She stopped sharply when she saw Lass. A thin drift of rain blew in from the gathering night. Lass shivered. She snatched the only garment hanging within reach and drew it about her—Crispin’s old seaman’s jacket with the insignia of the Marblehead Regiment. She slipped, almost fell on the wet slates under the grape arbor in the dooryard, recovered herself, and ran stumbling down the long lane that led to the York road.

Back in the Bye house, Crispin looked tired and worn in the candlelight, as Sam and Sally, sitting close to each other now, turned to him aghast, questioning.

“Does thee dare go after her, Crispin? Can thee follow her? We can’t let her go—all alone in the rain.”

Crispin lit his pipe with trembling fingers.

“I’m not going to chase after her tonight. ’Tisn’t cold, and she won’t freeze between here and Bogart’s tavern—or the school teacher’s. She’s got sense enough to go one place or the other. Give her a chance to sleep on it. And don’t worry, Sally.” He smiled at the pallid young wife. “Lass is quick with her temper—quick to get over it.”

“Yes, I know, Crispin—as well as thee does. But does thee think we used her as we should?”

“None of us had our wits about us much. Tomorrow the sun’ll come out, and things’ll look different. I’ll ride out early and have her home again for breakfast—if you’ll promise to have Mag fry up some of those sausages I like so much.”

He stared out into the rain, wishing he could believe the thing he had just said.

Out on the York road, three men rode warily through the dark, their pistols cocked, their heads lifted, alert, and ready for trouble. Two of the heads had a hundred-pound price on them. The Joseph Doans, father and son, were returning stealthily from Philadelphia, and Moses had joined them by appointment about a mile below, riding in from the west.

“Is thee sure Abe’s safe where thee left him?” asked the worried father, lifting his eyes from the ruts and puddles, and searching his son’s face.

"Aye, Father. When we missed him and found he wasn't in south Jersey hiding out with Aaron and Levi, I thought he might have gone to Merion, and sure enough, when I rode there, there he was—sitting on a stone across from the Meeting House, just staring at the queer pointed roofs and the ash trees round it."

"Was he—bad?"

"Bad, but quiet. I left him with the Maves, Deborah's kin. They remembered him, and understood. I'll be back there tomorrow and take him with me."

"Thee's going to Lancaster?"

"Yes. I heard there's good money passing round there for helping British prisoners out of the jail and leading them back roads to New York. I figure while all Bucks County's out gunning for us, we'd better stay away. How about it. Joe? Want to come?"

The younger Joseph looked haggard. His salmon velvets were rain-soaked, tattered from a bramble thicket he'd been forced to hide in while a troop of militia galloped by.

"I'd like it well enough, Mose. But I can't leave here till Mary's child is born—round Christmas time. I'll have to hide out close by till then, and see her when I can. They'll take care of her at Grandsir Israel's."

"I know. I left Rachel with her folks, too. Thee'd better stay in the cave down Tohickon. 'Tis safest there."

"I was thinking the same. Did thee know Father has to leave too?"

"No! How is that?" Moses felt his face turn hot for all the chill and wet. That his father should be harried out of house—his mother left alone with little children!

Old Joseph himself answered. "That twenty-five pounds thee loaned me to pay debts after the robbery. They found out about it and claim I had a share! I never knew thee'd done it till the thing was a week old and I heard the tale in Plumstead Tavern!"

"Did they set a price on thee?"

"No, but I'm watched and questioned, and I can't get my hands on any hard money. I'm going over to Northampton County. I hear they're paying good wages for carpenters there, and I can still shore up timbers and drive a nail straighter than most, if I be above fifty."

" 'Deed thee can! Thee's a good carpenter. What's that—by the road?"

They had reached Buckingham crossroads now, candles burning in the warm rooms of the houses and tavern, but nothing astir at the roadside except for a slim figure wrapped in an old coat, its head down, leaning against a chestnut tree. Lights shone out from the taproom on a drift of tangled red hair.

Moses smiled grimly and reined Wild Devil to a stop.

“Lass!” he called, gruff and low.

The red head lifted. She stared up at the three Doans, then scrambled out of the chestnut’s shelter and came toward them. She smiled shyly, but didn’t speak. Young Joseph swore inaudibly and Moses cleared his throat.

“Has the thing happened to thee that I think has?”

“I—yes, I believe so.”

“Sam Bye’s caught thee and put thee out?”

“Yes.”

“And thee has no place to go?”

She hesitated, knowing well that she could pay her reckoning at the tavern across the road by sending the stable boy back to Sam’s for her purse. But then Crispin would know where she was and he might come after her. She couldn’t stand any more of Crispin tonight—or ever, she thought.

“No place,” she answered.

“Thee was always friends with Ruth—thee wouldn’t want—?”

“No. That she wouldn’t want,” interrupted young Joe. “Use thy wits, Brother.”

He rode close to Lass and bent down to help her mount in front of him.

“We Doans be the cause of thy trouble, so thee’d best let us take thee home with us for tonight. Thee’s got kin up the sea-coast, hasn’t thee? Mother’ll keep thee till they can come.”

“No. I’ve no one. My father died last month—in Philadelphia—and he was all.”

They were riding forward now, along the Durham Road, uphill, toward Plumstead. Joe did not talk to her any more. The other men made no comment on his sudden invitation. Lass leaned against the stained velvet coat, tired, so tired with all the ugliness of the quarrel, the lost feeling as she groped the roadways, alone in the rain. And now, miraculously, she was riding to Mahlon in his own house, on the front of his brother’s saddle.

Wet woods closed blackly in on both sides of the road, retreating some times to give space to sodden fields and lighted farmhouses. After a mile or two, the men seemed to forget her completely as they talked of their own troubles.

“And what about Mahlon?” asked Moses suddenly, and she tried not to stiffen against Joe, let him know that it mattered to her; realized that he must know already.

“Mahlon’s going south. To Cane Creek, like he always wanted to. Said he’d leave about dark tonight. Likely he’s gone by now.”

“I hope not,” murmured his father. “I bought him a new hunting knife in Dock Street. He’ll need it—where he’s going.”

“I heard some talk he was taking Ruth,” said Joe.

"That wasn't his talk. He couldn't go to her house, it's being watched so close on the chance he will, but he made Polly ride over and tell her he wasn't coming back, and she was to consider herself free."

Lass felt her whole world light up with sunrise in the midst of the wet dark.

"Think we'll ever see him again?"

"Can't tell. Likely—if all of us stays alive."

To Lass the rest of the ride was agony. She wanted desperately to urge the horse forward. So near to heaven—so near—and to reach there—and find him gone!

But he was not gone! After interminable hours of riding, when they finally crossed the wet stones under the sycamore tree and stepped into the Doan kitchen, there he sat, back in the shadows by the chimneyplace, talking to his mother and bright-haired Polly. Lass had not seen him since the night of the Mischianza three years ago, but she remembered every line of his face, the unrevealing depths of his brown eyes, every gesture of his thin, nervous hands. He hadn't changed any. He was still the Mahlon whom she would never know, whom she would spend all her life trying to. She looked at him, and the sweetness of the sight made her catch her breath. He caught his, too, but in surprise rather than in open rapture. Polly frankly stared, and Hester stepped forward.

"Joe! I'm happy to see thee home safe! And, Lass, thee's welcome. Come to the fire, for thee's both very wet. Did thee meet Moses or—"

"Moses and Father are putting the horses away," said Joe wearily, "Abe's in Merion, and him and me's going to Lancaster tomorrow to stay till the country's quiet again. Lass hasn't any place to go. The Byes turned her out."

"Poor child! I could see Sam would be provoked. Lass, thee really hasn't done my boys any good with thy tongue, but thee meant to, so we'll take it that way. Polly, there's a kettle of corn stew on the shelf in the pantry. Bring it in and heat it up, and slice some ham. Lass, take off that wet coat."

She whisked Crispin's seaman's jacket from Lass's shoulders.

"Joe, give me thy coat, too."

He tossed her the dank heap of pink velvet. "How's Mary?"

"Mary's well, and Dr. Meredith says bearing will be easy for her. No doubt thee'll raise a large family."

"If somebody doesn't kill me before I have a chance to get them," he jested wryly. "I'll eat a bite and then go to her. The roads are all watched, and we had to keep hiding, and that took time. Mostly below Wrightstown, though. We had no trouble this side. Nobody thinks we'd dare go so near home."

All this time Mahlon had not said one word, for the most part studying the square cowhide toes of his boots, sometimes looking covertly at Lass. She never took her eyes from him at all. She had had to wait too long for this

moment.

Polly swung the iron kettle from the long crane and Hester set out earthen bowls and pewterware. Moses and his father came in and the four men began talking together, knowing that they would not do so again for a long time, perhaps never, in this world. They ate, and passed a bottle round, and Hester insisted that Lass take a little rum mixed with hot water because she had suffered such a drenching; blended it herself in a pewter cup with a hunting horn engraved on it, that she said Uncle Joseph had brought back from Cape Cod thirty years ago and given to her when she was married—the family crest.

By and by Mahlon stood up, stroked the new knife his father had brought him, and thrust it into the sheath that hung against his deerskin breeches.

"I better be going now," he said; nothing but that; stood looking at his family.

Hester kissed him, and then Polly. His father and brothers shook his hand and thumped him between the shoulders.

"Good luck, Mahlon, and keep thy powder dry, and remember, aim between the eyes, every time! We'll be proud of thee yet, runt of the litter!"

Lass lifted the pewter cup.

"To George—his England!" she said in a tremulous voice, smiling at the Doans.

They caught up their mugs from the table, lifted them high, and took the brief swallow.

"And to the Doans—Free America!" roared Moses, and it seemed they would drink forever.

"And to Mahlon Doan—Cane Creek," said his father, putting his empty mug down on the table.

Just then Polly cried out. "Father! Mose! There's two men on horseback in the road. I think they's watching thee!"

Hester walked leisurely to the mantelpiece, picked up the two candles burning there, and carried them out of the room into a small chamber which faced the rear of the house, leaving her family to the protection of darkness, lighted only by the fire. In the scuffle that followed, Lass noticed Mahlon slip into the passage that led to a back door opening on the herb garden. She followed him as fast as she could, stumbling against a row of milk pails hanging on wooden pegs, bruising herself against an iron-banded churn. Once in the doorway, she saw him under the drooping yellow leaves of the mulberry tree. He was about to mount Firebrand. He was about to go. She cried his name—low, but he heard her. He crossed the dripping grass slowly, almost reluctantly, and she watched him come. And then he took her in his arms and held her there, close and warm. His rough deerskins smelled of leaf mould and gunpowder; his lean muscles tightened about her, gentle, but sure, increasingly

eager.

"Poor Lass," he murmured against her hair, sounding tender and amused, "thee's such a child! Thee loves so hard, and thee tries so hard, and thee's so sure of thyself! And thee goes about everything the wrong way, and does sweet things for me I don't want done."

"I know," she whispered humbly. And then, after a moment, "But I can grow up! I can learn. I'll have to—now. Oh, Mahlon, take me with you!"

"I can't, Lass. It's four hundred miles down the Valley of Virginia—wild woods country. 'Twould be the death of thee. I think I'd like to, though. Thee's so good to hold."

"Thee isn't sure thee'd like it?"

"Not quite."

She gave a cry of pain.

"Don't thee be hurt, Lass—please!"

He held her even tighter. She put up her face and he brought his mouth down on hers, and time went out for both of them. His fingers groped in the softness of her neck, strained at the thin violet wool of her bodice; awkward and shy, to his surprise, after being so free and assured with Ruth.

Just then Hester's voice spoke from the door behind them, sharply, not with disapproval, with a greater urgency. "Mahlon, the boys have hid. Thy father thinks it's Robert Gibson and Major Kennedy, and they may be waiting for more to join them so they can raid the house. He says thee better go—"

Slowly he took his arms from about Lass and looked at her, sadness in his eyes, and a yearning light, and the look at once timid and fearless that was common to only two things in the world—Mahlon Doan and the wild deer. Then he blew a kiss to his mother, leaped on Firebrand, rode off across the herb beds, through the yellow cedar hedge, and away in the night.

Lass leaned weakly against the door frame.

"Come in, Lass," said Hester, putting her arm around the girl where Mahlon's arm had so lately been.

And so it was that Lass came under Hester Doan's roof to live like a daughter there while the men were away. Knowing her father dead, but unaware of her inheritance, they assumed she had no other refuge, and she did not enlighten them. This troubled her conscience, but not enough to make her tell. Lying awake in the night beside the sleeping Polly, she comforted herself with the thought that, after all, it wasn't likely God would ever hold against a woman the things she did for love. And it was good for Hester to have her there, her courage, and quick laugh, and another pair of hands, for Doan affairs sank into a more terrible chaos with every passing day.

Abe tried to strangle a British prisoner he was guiding out of Lancaster, and when prevented from this, tore his face open. Nobody wanted to trust

themselves to the Doans after that, so they came back and ranged the woods and caves of their home county in a new war on tax collectors, soon joined by Aaron, Levi, and Joe. The boys drove up and down the country that winter on crude sleds, each drawn by four black horses, robbing, and flogging, and driving off the best stock from every barn and stable. A small army of outraged citizens, Major Kennedy, Gibson, the Harts, the McCallas, Colonel Piper, and Patrick Mechlin on his famous gray stallion, thundered along the roadways in the night searching for them. Judge Henry Wynkoop, not even safe in his gabled courthouse in the center of Newtown, sat there writing furious letters to the Assembly and the Council, and both bodies increased their rewards. The Vickars boys confessed their part in the Treasury robbery and were pardoned. Not so John Tomlinson; he was hanged on the gallows by Newtown Creek. Finally George Wall, confiscator of Tory property, came to the Doan house and started moving its furnishings out on the grass under the mulberry tree, telling Hester he had the authority to sell the land and buildings and all about them, and that she would have to take her family and go.

Lass toiled till her hands were raw in the pitiful struggle to carry across the fields to Grandsir Israel's the few things they were allowed to keep; their clothes, the blackest of the iron kettles and a few blankets, farming tools, and a duck and drake, young Joe's books and old Joseph's violin. They lived in the stone and log house of the old man after that, who now had two daughters-in-law in his household with their young children, besides Lass and Polly, and his granddaughter Mary, Joe's wife, and her baby son. His own son, Israel, Abe's father, got taken to Newtown jail because he had once harbored the cowboys—and there he died. The women worked in the fields the way the German farm wives did, for there was no one else to do it. Lass learned to thresh wheat, and sow, and reap, and smoke bacon; learned how to toughen a young turkey by putting a pepper-corn in its mouth and plunging it in the brook; learned to drive the stock out to crop laurel so they could keep themselves alive the winter through, and root out barberries that caused the blight. She fought the plague of locusts that settled down on them in the spring of '83 and helped save the winter wheat.

Ruth sometimes rode up to see Hester, and though she and Lass had little to say to each other now, each girl knew the other was waiting. Ruth had not believed Mahlon when he said he would not come back. And Ruth had the second sight. Somehow this comforted Lass. Sally Bye found out where her sister was and sent her her clothes and a tear-stained note asking for forgiveness; saying she had given birth to another son and had never felt better; saying Crispin had gone home and would see to everything there till Lass was "possessed of her wits again"; that he would send her money if she wrote for it. Lass was glad to have the clothes, for she had worn out the elbows

of the seaman's jacket. She did not write to Crispin. When the leaves turned green for spring, she told herself that Mahlon would surely come back to her before they fell, but when they yellowed and sifted down, he was still away. Again they turned to green, and still he had not come.

EIGHTEEN

The Knock on the Door

•

And when he came it was on the most terrible night in all the stormy history of the Doans, a hot night in the late summer, loud with crickets, burning with great, bright stars, and beginning so peacefully for all of them. They sat around the kitchen at Grandsir Israel's, Lass and Polly and the old man himself, and Rachel and Hester. Only Mary, young Joe's wife, was missing, and that was for a sorrowful reason. She had gone down to Philadelphia two days before, to be near her husband, locked up tight in the Walnut Street jail.

They could never have caught Joe Doan if he hadn't been severely wounded, and he wouldn't have been wounded if his horse hadn't cast a shoe and gone lame. It happened up at Dublin at the end of July. Patrick Mechlin on his stallion, "Gray," had been chasing the Doans away from Colonel Robinson's, and when Joe had turned to jeer, he'd shot him in the mouth, and displayed four of his teeth afterward in Dublin tavern. Bleeding, and scarred for life, and in great pain, Joe had managed to get himself a good way up the Bethlehem Road before turning into a farmhouse for help. But they'd recognized him there, and tied him up with a clothesline, and hauled him by wagon to the prison in Philadelphia. This had been too much for Hester to bear alone. She had sent to Northampton for her husband. He came, walking the whole way through the August dust, going first to the house which he had built in his young manhood and brought up his children in, not knowing that it now belonged to the new government. George Wall was showing it to Francis Murray of Newtown that afternoon, hoping to sell it to him. They hadn't given him much sympathy, but they had told him where he could find his wife. And then, after a day or two spent in trying to comfort her and do some of the rough farm work that was beyond the women's strength, he'd taken his daughter-in-law and gone into town, to try to get his son freed, or at the worst, to help him break jail.

"How long, Hester, does thee think 'twill be before we hear from Joe?" asked Rachel, her hands held stiff in front of her and wide apart, stretching a hank of saffron-dyed wool for her sister to wind into a ball.

"Longer than we can wait with ease," said Hester. "And I'm worried now about the boys down Tohickon Run. They didn't pick up the basket of food we

hid for them last night in the weeds by the duck pond."

"No doubt they was being watched and didn't dare."

"I know. Likely they're safe enough. Nobody knows the cave but they—not even the Hart boys. But they'll be hungry. They can fish the creek, of course, but they'll need something heartier than those little bony brook creatures that grow there—not like the fat trout in the pools further back."

Ruth Gwydion had ridden up late that afternoon, and she sat on the wide sill of the open door now, the children gathered around her, telling stories to them, stories out of her own childhood that she had heard in a fold of the hills between Severn and the Wye. She told them how the small deer there had black hides and barked white antlers like the boughs of old pollard trees; how the country people saw queer things, like ghost hearses driving through shut toll gates in the night; tales of the doings of Gwydion, the great enchanter.

Lass talked with Grandsir, sitting on the arm of his chair by the open window. He smiled up at her as she lit his pipe for him.

"I'd like thee to marry one of my fighting cocks, Lass. Which one will thee have?"

"What's thee got to offer?" she jested.

"Abe, I got. Moses and Joe is wed already, but thee can have Aaron or Levi."

"Who's thee saving Mahlon for?"

"I ain't saving him. He just ain't handy. But I'd like thee in the family. Thee's a brave girl, Lass."

"Lot of good it does me!"

He looked at her sharply. He'd never seen her with Mahlon, but he'd heard the boys talk.

"That's because men don't set great store by bravery in a Woman."

"My father did."

"Things a man looks for in his wife and in his daughter be not the same."

"What—what does he want—in a wife?"

"Womanly things. Cooking and sewing; children, and loving, and her suiting her ways to his, always."

"He wants a lot for his money."

"May be so, but there's always those that will give it to him. And he'll pass a pretty face for it, every time."

"Yes. Yes—I guess he will."

Both of them looked at Ruth.

And just then, as they sat watching her, Ruth put her hand across her eyes, cried out, and swayed back against the door frame in the midst of the startled children.

"It will happen again," she cried, "just as it did in my father's time! I saw

my grandmother's face, and I heard her say, 'There will come a knock on the door!' "

Lass stepped quickly to her side, and Hester dropped the ball of yarn. Before they could offer her further help, the schoolteacher was laughing shakily, begging pardon of all of them.

"It is my own fault," she murmured. "I should not have talked so of the old country and the magic doings there. It makes me think I see what I do not see at all."

But when Israel hobbled over with a cup of blackberry brandy, she swallowed the dose he had poured her, and sat quiet, not going back to her story-telling.

And it was then, as they all sat there, wanting to laugh and make light of it, but feeling a little shaken, that Mahlon walked up to the doorway, quiet as a shadow, and stepped in, past Ruth and the children.

Hester drew in her breath loudly and Ruth climbed to her feet. Lass stood perfectly still, looking at him. But Grandsir Israel rushed forward, seized his hand, and nearly wrung it off.

"Thee's home, boy! God ain't put out his Light for the Doans, after all! I was most afeared he had! How be thee?"

"As well as could be—after hearing about Joe."

"Thee heard about him—way to Caroliny?"

"Yes. From Foxy Joe Condit and some of the Montgomery boys who was running horses down. They left here the day after it happened, and when I heard, I come as fast as I could."

"Just what did thee hear?"

"That he got wounded and put in jail. He—he didn't—? Has he got out yet?"

"No. We ain't seen him, but we got word his jaw's healing, though he'll never be a handsome lad again. Thy father's gone down to see what he can do."

"And the other boys?"

"They're hiding down Tohickon Run."

Hester had blown out all the candles save one, and now she shut the door.

" 'Twill be close in here, but if anyone be spying about, we don't want Mahlon seen."

Everyone's eyes were turned toward him, straining through the dim light to see his face, and even the children were still. Ruth waited quietly, her eyes shining with happiness. Lass's eyes sparkled like the sun on the sea off Newburyport.

He looked thinner than he had, and his muscles thrust out below the hacked-off sleeves of his tow shirt. His face was browner. He kissed his

mother and flung himself down on a bench far back in the shadow, smiled shyly at a point on the wall between the two girls, not looking at either of them. They would have to wait to see where the choice would fall, and he would not make it openly yet, in front of his family.

"Thee can't do anything tonight, Mahlon," said old Israel. "Nobody'd think to look for thee here. It's not known thee's in the country at all. Thee'll be safe in the hay mow—or take a blanket out under the cedars. It's cooler there. Does thee want some rum?"

"No. And I'm not hungry neither. I stopped by Dr. Meredith's on the way, to see what he knew about Joe. He hadn't heard nothing, except that he didn't think the wound was deadly. He give me supper. I'd like some milk though. Haven't got myself a cow yet, and there's little there for selling, since cattle be scarcer than children."

Hester brought him a brimming pitcher and an earthen cup.

"Drink all thee can of it," she said, fondly, "and then tell us how thee lives there and what the land is like."

He drank the first cupful without stopping, and poured himself another.

"Land's not so different anywhere. Fields and woods don't change much as thee passes the milestones. Some ways they do. Under the grass the ground is all red there—'bout the color of Lass's hair. Never saw so many kinds of leaves in one thicket as thee'll find. I can't put names to all. Isn't a clear, swift stream south of York. They're all muddy and thick with swamp weeds and tree sprouts till sometimes thee can't see the water. It gets colder in winter than thee'd think for, and the sky gets blacker and deeper at night, and the stars seem like wells that reach down into it. Something about the warm air most of the year slows a man down, but stirs him up more. It's hard to tell thee what I mean. Otherwise, it's not so different there from here."

Lass spoke eagerly as he sipped the milk.

"Is—is it like thee wanted it to be?"

"As near like as I'll find, I guess. Haven't seen a tax collector since I went there. Bet I shot more deer last winter than I'd have shot in Bucks County in a hundred years. Good market for hides, too."

"Does thee live with thy cousins, Mahlon?" asked Ruth.

"No. They been good to me, and at first I did. Doan cousins be thicker round Cane Creek Meeting House than geese going south in the fall. There's a millstone there that was brought from Pennsylvania. It was fighting country, too, a couple of years back. They'll show thee the pond that's still got some of Cornwallis' cannon lying on the bottom of it."

"Does thee have thy own house then?" persisted Ruth gently.

"I got a cabin built—a good ways out beyond anybody else's—a few hogs, and a patch of tobacco and one of hemp, for cash crops. Got a corn field

cleared to sow next year. I been working some at the grist mill to pay for what I needed till now. Takes time to burn the tree roots out. They won't come away with a horse and chain, the way they will here."

"Is thee going back?" asked his mother.

"Yes. Just as soon as we can get Joe out. I thought maybe he'd come with me."

"Could he take Mary?"

"Other men has taken their wives."

Suddenly Hester started. "I hear shouting!" she breathed.

Then they all heard it, faint, but growing louder, coming from Plumstead way. Rachel put out the candle, and they sat there waiting tensely in the darkness, braced against disaster, whatever form it took. They heard the throb of hooves in the yard. Then there came a knock on the door.

"Tastes good to have something besides blackberries and fish-bones, don't it, boys?" said Moses Doan, spooning down the last few beans in his trencher and licking his lips. "But ain't thy wife got no bread whatsoever in the house, Nat?" He turned from the rough table to look at his host, Nathan Horsley, lounging on a bench against the cabin wall, watching the Doans.

"No, she ain't, Mose, nor flour, neither, but we've sent our oldest boy down to Warne's mill to get some, and she'll bake tonight. Come back tomorrow 'bout dark, and there'll be a plenty."

"Give me the bottle, Levi," rumbled Abraham. "My throat's dryer'n a corn cob."

Levi gave it to him, taking a swallow first himself.

The three cowboys, unable to reach their grandfather's and the food waiting for them because all the ways up from Tohickon creek bed to the farming country above were so well guarded by Major Kennedy's posse, had remembered this cabin, and knew its owner was friendly. So they had slipped out of their cave about twilight, and gone leaping along the rocky river edges toward the Delaware, when their hunger grew so sharp it was worth taking a few risks to satisfy it. Nat was poor, but he'd given them what he had, and if there wasn't bread in the house, there was plenty of cheap, fiery rum. Moses leaned back, feeling safe for the moment, well-fed and easy, almost ready to laugh again, as he hadn't since the old days when he had a roof over his head.

"It's being told all over the country the Doan boys has buried their treasure to keep till times be safer for them than they be now," said Nat. "That so, Mose?"

"That's so. I buried it myself. Ain't a one knows where, excepting I. I

mean to tell the boys, because it's as much theirs as mine. I just ain't got to it yet." He grinned at his brothers in the flickering light of the tallow dip, and their lips curved upward too, in smiles of utter trust. Moses put his feet on the edge of the table and reclined against the bark-covered logs of the rear wall.

Then the door jerked violently open.

"We got 'em, boys!" yelled Will Hart, leaping into the room, training his shotgun on his old schoolmates. Abe and Levi went bounding up the crooked stairs at the back of the cabin into the unlit loft. Before Moses could get his feet down from the table, Hart had him so well covered that he decided not to move. Major Kennedy followed, and then Robert Gibson, and a McCalla—Mose never could tell them apart—and Philip Hinkle, hawk-nosed and nigh toothless, the old vendue crier. Just then Nat Horsley blew out the candle.

It took the raiding party a few minutes to grope for tinder boxes and strike a light, and by the time they had a pine bough blazing, Moses and Hart were locked in a close, hard tussle on the floor. They wrestled all over the room while everybody stood looking on, but Moses, the stronger of the two, managed to direct their course nearer and nearer to the open doorway. Now came taunts and rifle fire from the tulip poplar grove across the creek. Abe and Levi has escaped through a window in the loft, climbed to the ground, and fled to this place of safety. Through the lighted doorway they could see Moses struggling on the floor, so they fired high into the group.

"I never shot so poor," panted Abe, stopping to load his rifle. "I'm so damn afraid of hitting Mose."

"Watch me get Sam Hart," called Levi loudly as he fired.

Mose, his back to the door frame now, took his attention from the fight for one moment, and he saw clearer than anyone else what happened. The charge from Levi's gun grooved the back of Sam's wrist and shattered the pistol he was holding. At the same time Major Kennedy doubled up with a squeal like a butchered hog and pitched to the floor, clutching his groin with both hands. Flying iron from the broken gun had pierced his body. And it was while Mose watched this that Will Hart with a back grip spun him nimbly to the floor and thrust a knee to his chest.

"I got you, Mose. You better give in."

He's right, I better, thought Moses. I can't escape from here, but once we get out on the road riding down to Newtown jail I can.

He answered readily and without shame, "Beat in fair fight. I surrenders to thee, Will."

That was enough for Hart and he scrambled to his feet to let Moses up, but with an oath Robert Gibson strode forward. Moses, stretched on his back on the puncheon floor, looked into the muzzle of a shotgun pointing down at him. And as he looked, he knew that no matter what he said or did, in spite of all the

rules of honor, Gibson was going to fire. And knowing that and what it would mean, he heard suddenly the Voice again, that had spoken to him in the rhododendron trees on a winter morning seven years ago.

"*Thee can't go against thy time, Moses Doan.*"

He was still struggling to think what it could mean when the whole world exploded in a red mist. Then a whirling wind swept him along through blackness. Then a great orange sun arose. The blood that had fought and spilled at Crécy and Poitiers gushed out of his torn chest, staining the rough-hewn floor of a log hut in Bucks County—in the United States of America. He thrashed for a moment and then lay still—as dead as the Doans who had fought in the Hundred Years' War.

Back in Grandsir Israel's kitchen, the knocking sounded with more fury. The women shivered, and Mahlon waited tensely, ready to spring in any direction. Now on the hot still night they heard a ribald voice bawling a song.

"That's old Hinkle, the vendue crier," squeaked Grandsir. "I could tell him anywheres I heard him. Roars like a bull calf!"

"What's he saying?" breathed Mahlon.

The singing came closer, and the low beat of flying hooves.

"*What knave so dead, so dead,*
As Moses, Moses Doan?"

Then the side yard thronged with men on horseback, jeering and shouting around their single comrade who had ridden ahead and knocked. A heavy body hurtled against the door. Israel wrenched it open and he and Hester stood looking out.

"Thank God, the Tory be dead at last!" shouted Hinkle.

He lunged forward and kicked the limp, bloody body of Moses where the mob had flung it, on his grandfather's doorstep.

Tears streamed over the old man's russet cheeks. "My fighting cock," he mourned. "Thee bastards has killed my fighting cock!"

Hester, her face white as a pan of milk, went down on her knees, pulling away the coarse rag someone had stuffed half inside Moses' chest. She had first thought of trying to get Dr. Hugh Meredith. She did not think of that any more. She laid one hand protectively on the body of her first-born son, and looked up at the mounted men whose horses were milling uneasily about.

"Go home to thy mothers, boys. Thee's done a night's work," she said.

Even Robert Gibson, as he looked down at her, felt himself losing a little of his taste for the sport.

"Come on, boys," he muttered. "Let's go to Cross Keys Tavern and get a drink."

After a few moments of argument among themselves, the posse rode away.

None of the Doans moved for a little time or made any sound, except for the sobs of old Israel. Then Mahlon said woodenly, "So they got Mose. I wonder about the other boys."

Hester moved away from her dead and lighted a candle. She walked unsteadily, looking old and ill. Ruth went up to Mahlon and put her hand on his arm. He shook it off.

"Leave me be, Ruth," he said wearily.

Lass looked at him, her eyes dark with pity and horror.

"Get thyself together, Grandsir," he said. "We ain't done our night's work. We got to bury Mose."

Then as the light burned up, and the fear that had held them silent lifted a little, the children began to cry, first Thomas, then Joe's baby son who did not know what he cried for, then all of them, even to Polly. Lass and Ruth tried to quiet them, but Hester paid no attention.

"Mahlon," she said harshly, "I wants thee to get out of here. I had one boy die tonight, and that's enough. Go away—where thee'll be safe—if such a place be." She put her head down on the table.

"I got to bury Mose first," said Mahlon stubbornly. "Come on, Grandsir."

The two men went out, shutting the door behind them, shutting away the dreadful sight just beyond the threshold.

Hours later, when the children had been long asleep, Polly with them; while Lass and Ruth dozed near the chimneyplace, and Hester sat by the open window staring out at the fields beginning to go gray with dawn, the old man stumbled in and dropped wearily on the settle. Lass woke up and ran to bring the bottle to him, but he shoved it away.

"We made a good grave, Hester," he told his daughter-in-law. "Just as good as any they've got by the Meeting House. For a coffin, we put him in that grain bin his father made years back. It's white oak, and it'll keep him safe till Judgment. Down in the field toward Plumstead at the edge of the woods under the hickory trees, we buried him."

"Where's Mahlon?" asked Hester in a toneless voice.

"Mahlon's gone."

"Gone—" stammered Lass faintly.

"Yes. He said he better go 'fore it got light, try to get as far west as he could. He told me to say good-bye for him."

"He did right. I told him to go. There is nothing he can do for us or his

brothers—save to keep himself alive till times are better, and we need not be apart any more." Hester rose as she said this, walked to the hearth and began to lay the fire. Not all the Doans would want breakfast this morning, but she would provide it for those who did.

"Has he gone back south?" asked Ruth, her voice carefully even.

"I don't know. Likely he has. He didn't tell me where—just that he was going—and good-bye."

Lass looked out through the open door, at the hot, red sun, now as high as the green, tasseled tops of the corn. She forgot Mose lying dead under the hickories and all the grief of the shattered household around her. Her thoughts went racing down the great valleys she had never seen, to the country of the thick woods and the bright stars, to Mahlon's country of Cane Creek. Where he would likely go, where if he did, she would follow.

NINETEEN

Southern Willows

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The death of Moses Doan was the talk of Bucks County all that fall, while the brown leaves and small polished hickory nuts dropped on the outlaw's grave, and from that moment surely the downfall of his brothers began, though it was not soon to be over. He had been betrayed unwittingly by the Horsley boy who'd gone down to Warne's mill to buy flour, protesting that the Doans were at his father's house and would pay for it. That had brought out the posse. Moses had been a strong man whose footsteps shook the country for ten miles around when he walked abroad, and many had feared him, and a few had been proud of his courage and stubborn spirit; and the Friends of Plumstead Meeting remembered him as a bold, engaging lad in the old days before the war, and shook their heads and grieved. Aaron and Abe and Levi had escaped to Lancaster and were heard of now and then, stealing horses, or carousing in some tavern—never more than two leaps ahead of the sheriff. Joe, heavily guarded, was brought up from Philadelphia and lodged in Newtown jail till Judge Wynkoop's court could get around to try him, and his father, advised to disappear again if he did not wish to find himself thrust into the next cell, went to the west country too, after his other sons.

Once a teamster driving east from Pittsburgh stopped in Doyle's tavern for some ale and a plate of beans, and told of a jail break in Bedford that had aroused all the Scotch-Irish settlers at the edge of the mountains. Two men, a father and son, had picked the locks that held them and freed all the other prisoners except one—who was held for robbing a woman. "They was strangers to the place, too," said the teamster, hacking himself a chew of pressed tobacco leaves, "and didn't do no harm there, except word got about there was a price on them. 'Twas said they come from around here. Would you a-heard of Joseph Doan and his boy, Mahlon?"

"Mahlon?" asked Dr. Hugh Meredith who'd happened in on his way home from a labor. "Don't you mean Aaron or Levi?"

"No, 'twas Mahlon. A thin fellow with a scar under one eye. They're beating the Alleghenies for him."

Dr. Hugh had ridden up to Plumstead after that to tell Hester the news and come on Lass working in the field before Moses' grave, trying to root up dead

cornstalks to bed the cattle. For a while he watched her, then he climbed down from his horse, clumsily because of his lame leg, and went to speak to her.

"Lass, I haven't seen you since you left Sam Bye's. Sally tells me you're an heiress. Why don't you go home and get the good of it?"

Lass straightened up and stood looking at him. She had scraped her red hair back and tied it in her neck with a woolen string to get it out of her way. She wore an old dun-colored dress of Polly's that hung limply on her slight figure, but her blue eyes still sparkled in her cameo face.

"You know why, don't you, Dr. Hugh?"

"I've heard tales. They be true then?"

"Yes. If you've heard what I think."

"Lass, I talked to Mahlon once. I don't believe 'twill do you any good."

Her delicate brows drew together.

"You think—he'd rather have Ruth?"

"This will hurt you. Shall I say it?"

"Yes."

"I don't think he wants either of you."

"Some ways he's not rightly grown up yet. There'll come a time he will."

"Why are you so sure?"

"You're a doctor. Haven't you ever taken note that most men want a woman?"

"Do you think Mahlon's 'most men'?"

"No. If he was, I wouldn't—I wouldn't love him."

"If you love him, then I got bad news for you as well as for his mother. He's been in jail and out, as I'm on my way to tell her. Something else, too, that Sally wanted you should know the next time I came up this way."

"Never mind Sally. She's probably with child again. Tell me about Mahlon! He's been in jail! Where?"

So he told her the teamster's story and then tried again to deliver Sally's message.

"No, she's not with child. She said I was to tell you—it doesn't mean much to me—that Crispin had got married to Vinny."

"Crispin—married—to Vinny?"

"That's what she said."

"Well—well—I—I—there isn't any reason why he shouldn't. I—oh, Dr. Hugh, you wonder—they were both friends of mine. I—"

He looked at her keenly.

"You're upset, Lass. This Crispin?"

"He—he—I was going to marry him—until I met Mahlon."

"So now you've got neither Mahlon nor Crispin?"

Her blue eyes lighted up and she flashed him a smile that drew him

forward before he knew what was happening.

"Think I'm like to go in want, Hugh?"

"By God—no!" he muttered, digging his heels into the stripped furrows.

"Come," she said evenly, "let's go up to the house and tell Hester."

After that Dr. Hugh rode often to Israel Doan's, pretending that he felt concern for the old man's health, really amused at himself that he could take such a schoolboy pleasure in watching Lass, feeling only a mild sadness that nothing could ever come of it. He was not honest enough to admit what he knew perfectly well—that to her he mattered less than the blowing wind.

Before the leaves were scarcely down from the trees that year, winter settled in with such bitter strength that the Delaware froze so solid you could walk to Jersey, and everyone stayed indoors and kept the chimneys smoking. But in mid-January came a thaw and a great rain, and noisome fogs eating the snow away. Through a foggy twilight Hugh Meredith rode to Plumstead again and rapped on Israel Doan's kitchen door.

Hester let him into a warm room full of children clustering round Polly and Lass at the hearthside, holding up their wooden bowls for the girls to fill with stew.

"Again I got news," said Dr. Hugh, "and it's not good. You'd best sit down. And you, Israel, take yourself a drink out of that brown bottle I see on the table."

Hester drew a deep breath and Rachel, Abe's mother, watched him with terrified eyes. He thought he had never seen any paper so white as Lass's face.

"It's Mahlon!" she breathed. "He didn't get to Cane Creek!"

"No. He didn't. He's in jail in Baltimore. They caught him near York as he was riding south. He won't get out of this easy. They're going to bring him back to Philadelphia and try him for treason."

Lass wet her lips. "I—I'll get him out," she said. "I—I—Dr. Hugh—let me have the money to get down there. I'll pay you back. Crispin will send it to me if I write. I'll get him out."

"You can have the money, Lass," he said, turning out his pockets, flinging notes and silver uncounted on the table. "Mahlon thought different than I, and he's behaved wrong. But I watched him grow up. There's no good and bad among my patients, and I'll help any of them anyways I can. But what do you think you can do?"

"I'll go to my father's friends there. That was the port he always made when he was running the powder from St. Eustatius, and he always knew the men to trade with all up and down the coast. Let me think. Whom did he used to stay with there? I know—William Fell in Washington Street! I'll go to William Fell—and John Moale, the magistrate. I'll get him out!"

And so it happened that Lass rode south in a lurching coach that was little

better than a wagon hung with leather curtains, rode through the familiar fields of Bucks County lashed with black rain. She slept in Philadelphia at the London Coffee House, and set out again the next day, west through Chadd's Ford where there was a great battle once; and then she slept one night at Newport, and another at Havre de Grace, a pretty town with a great river and the bay flowing together before it. And as she traveled south, the farms got bigger and the farmhouses turned into columned mansions set back from the road. She remembered the stone farms of Bucks, and the salt-box houses and dormered cottages round Newburyport, and she felt very lost and alone. She did not talk with her companions in the coach, but leaned far back and closed her eyes when the strange landscape saddened her too much. Sometimes she looked down at herself, and wondered. She had put on one of her treasured dresses, the thin lilac wool with the deep neck she'd worn that night two years ago when she walked out of Sam Bye's house forever. The seams were fraying now, and it did not fit her any more. How could it be that the years went on and changed, and your body changed with them, but nothing changed that was in your heart! Her waist was slighter and her bosom fuller, and here the dress hung gauntly, and there the buttons strained their loops—but she was still Lass, unchanged and unchanging. She leaned against the hard wooden seat and wondered; and in a sodden, dirty gray twilight she came to Baltimore.

A town laid out in the shape of an Indian arrowhead pointed up-country from the bay, Baltimore spread all about a river harbor; low-browed, hip-roofed wooden houses, or houses built of brick painted blue and yellow and white, with courtyards and rows of locust trees. A crew of laborers were laying down cobblestones in the main street, while others worked on a half-built bridge over a creek to the east, or nailed shingles on three new market houses going up. New houses, new roads, frames for dwellings in half-cleared fields with the stumps still spilling yellow sap. Baltimore was new-built and growing, full of busy people hammering up the future. Philadelphia had been a town and its time in step together, a town accomplished and built for now. Beside them, Newburyport seemed old and sleepy and forgotten. There had been Newburyport before there was Philadelphia or Baltimore—before there was a United States—perhaps there would be after they were gone. But in Newburyport Crispin was married to Vinny. There was no comfort remembering that.

In the middle of town, at the head of the bay, all black water with rain falling in it, the coach stopped, and Lass got out and asked the way to the jail. To the top of the bluffs on Calvert Street, a passer-by told her, and pointed up a steep unpaved hill that formed the western bank of a meandering creek with houses on both sides of it. She should have eaten first, or refreshed herself at one of the little brick taverns with lamps burning cheerfully behind their

square panes—made sure one of them could give her a bed for the night—but not with Mahlon so near! She climbed through the slippery red clay on Calvert Street to the top of the bluff where the courthouse perched, pointed cupola on its roof, and workmen digging its foundations bare to build a causeway for a street to pass through. Behind the courthouse, they told her, curiously, was the jail. Maybe she could get in to see a prisoner, and maybe she couldn't; depended on whether the turnkey had locked up and gone home for the night, of course. No, it wasn't guarded all night. Nobody in there just now but one of the Doan robbers from up in Pennsylvania, and they'd got leg irons on him so he wouldn't be traveling far.

Wet, weedy grass covered the side yard of the courthouse, and she picked her way across it, past the stocks and whipping post, and tall and gaunt and more terrible, the gallows. A long wooden hut loomed through the foggy dusk ahead of her, and a fat man lounged in the door of it, smoking a pipe. Far down the hill in the dark she could hear the soft country noise of the running stream.

"Is—is this the prison?" she asked him.

"This is Baltimore jail," he told her, and spat into a puddle at his feet, looking at her out of small cold eyes that had the dull luster of fish scales caught on the cleaning knife.

"Can I see Mahlon Doan?"

He considered her for a moment. Finally he said, "For a price."

She counted some of Hugh Meredith's silver into his soiled palm. He stood one side and motioned with his thumb through the narrow doorway. "In there," he grunted, "to your right. Here—" He took a piece of candle from his pocket and lit it for her. "Don't let it go out. And don't try no tricks setting fires either." He motioned to the gun which leaned against the inside of the door frame out of the wet. "I got orders to shoot—if there's need."

"I'll not try any tricks. I only want to see him."

Shielding the candle with her hand, tilting it so the hot wax would not burn her, she stepped into the hut and turned as the jailor had bade. The place had no floor, only red clay with cornstalks and straw trampled into it. She passed a chair and a table with a half-eaten meat pie and a bottle of grog on it. Across the end of the room stretched a crazy lattice of rough saplings with two cross beams top and bottom. She walked toward it.

"Mahlon!" she called softly.

A stir sounded from the cornstalks in the darkness behind the lattice. Lass pressed her face close, and held her candle up, and looked at Mahlon Doan. As she watched, he pulled himself awkwardly to his feet and stumbled toward her, dragging the heavy leg irons fastened to his ankles. But when he stood close she was suddenly afraid to meet his eyes, afraid to look at him or open her mouth. After a minute he spoke, with a sad gentleness he had never shown her

before.

"Couldn't get so far thee'd not follow me, could I, Lass?"

Then she did look at him. He was thinner than ever, and his buckskins were torn and stained; he had a smudge of dirt over one eye, and bits of cornstalk sticking in his tousled hair. The cell behind him had no bed or chair, nothing but a heap of ragged blankets and an earthen jar of water. But out of his brown eyes looked the man she knew so well—whom she would never know. For her the skies trembled, and the earth shook, and a great wind went over. Mahlon reached out between the saplings and pulled her to him and kissed her.

For a moment they clung as close as they could through the rough lattice. Then she murmured humbly, "Thee's not angry at me?"

"I ought to be. How'd thee get here?"

"Dr. Hugh heard what had happened, and he came up to Grandsir's to tell us. He lent me the money to come by coach and get thee out."

He laughed wryly. "How does thee think to do that?"

"My father had friends here. I'll go to them and ask them to help me—in his name. One's a rich man and one's a magistrate."

"Thee'll do no such thing! I'll not have thee begging in the streets of Baltimore for me."

"It's not begging in the street. I'll go to their houses. I'll sit in their parlors and offer them money."

"Where would thee get money? Hugh Meredith didn't give thee that much."

"I can get some by sending to Newburyport. There's some there my father left me."

He shook his head impatiently. "That's not the Doan way to do a thing, Lass. If thee could bring me a knife now—"

"I can bring thee a knife. But what'll thee do with it?"

He smiled grimly. "I think I know a way to get these irons off—a way I learned in the woods. Then 'twould be easy. The boards are so poorly nailed I could pull them apart with my two hands. Father'd shudder at such carpentering."

"But—but suppose they started shooting at thee?"

"I been shot at before."

She was ready to weep with weariness and impatience.

"Oh, can't thee see my way's better?" she cried.

For a long minute he looked at her. "Oh, Lass," he said, "thy head's so pretty—and there's so little in it!"

Open-mouthed, she stared at him.

"Thee's lovely, and thee's brave and sweet—so that sometimes I think

’twould be worth the trouble to teach thee to live with Mahlon Doan. But thee’s so very hard to teach—”

“What—what do you mean?” Hurt and astonished, still somehow feeling she had caught just a glimpse of paradise, she forgot her Quaker “thee” that she always used with him.

“Because thee’s always so set to have thy own way in spite of all—in spite of the love thee says thee has for me. It’s always thy way—never mine.”

“But—but I want to do what’s best for you—what’s safest—” she faltered.

“There’s things can mean more than being safe. If thee was to do this for me, Lass, don’t thee see, I’d be beholden to thee all my life. Thee’d have bought me, and I’d belong to thee. And if I ever do belong to thee, I want it to be a different way—a free man giving himself in his own right. Can thee understand?”

“Come out of there now, girl,” bellowed the turnkey. “I got to give the prisoner his supper and lock up for the night.” He came forward with a bowl of thick stew and a slice of grayish bread laid across it.

“Come tomorrow,” whispered Mahlon. “Bring me a hunting knife.”

Lass’s thoughts were in utter turmoil as she walked slowly down Calvert Street, and did not arrange themselves in any sort of order till after she had eaten broiled oysters and drunk hot tea at the Fountain Inn, and gone to bed in a high, clean little room up under the rafters. Mahlon was not angry at her for coming. Mahlon had kissed her. He had told her he wanted to teach her his ways, spoke of belonging. But how could he ever belong to her if he was shot down first by some murderous turnkey? Why did he always have to do everything the hard, dangerous, devil-daring, perverse Doan way? But he did, and he’d told her if she wanted him, she’d have to learn to put up with it. Well, she would learn. She wouldn’t go to William Fell tomorrow. She’d go out and buy him a knife.

And after turning and twisting all night, she went out in the early gray of a damp, sunless morning to do just that, picking her way between pools of water and offal, stepping hurriedly to the side now and then, as the Conestoga wagons rumbled in from the country full of produce for market day. As she reached the line of shops and stalls that seemed to be the center of town, she noticed that a great many people stood about in little groups talking excitedly. First she passed a milliner’s with a rosebud bonnet in the window, and then a spirits shop, and then a gunsmith’s. If he had shotguns and squirrel rifles and pistols and blunderbusses, maybe he had hunting knives too, or would know who did have. She would go in and ask.

The inside of the shop was dusty and smelled of oil and gunpowder. Its owner, bald, and humpbacked, and peering under heavy brows, leaned over his work bench to talk with two men, tall rangy fellows in fringed hunting shirts

carrying rifles, with mud on their boots.

"So the boys is all coming in? 'Tain't no use searching further?" the hunchback questioned.

"No. It's the last of the Tory Doans and the country'll be a safer place now."

"Couldn't be no mistake? I'd not rest easy in my bed at night with one of that gang loose in Baltimore."

"Couldn't be. I seen 'em myself. His bloody footprints going down to the bay's edge—ending there. Couldn't get further noways, unless he rid off on a wild goose."

Lass stood in the doorway staring at them, made a little choking sound.

"You want something, miss?" asked the old man.

"I—I did. I don't know. What were you saying—about a Doan?"

"We had one up in the jail last night and he escaped. Got a knife someways and hacked away the flesh of his heels so he could slip the leg irons off."

Faint and sick, she leaned against the door frame. Mahlon in the cell, in the dark, on the dry cornstalks, cutting his own flesh as an animal caught in a trap will gnaw its members to free itself! A way he learned in the woods, he'd told her. The way of the wild thing who will never surrender to the tame. But where had he gotten the knife? And what had these men said about footprints going down to the water's edge? She struggled to keep herself from fainting, and questioned further.

"Did he get away?"

"No. We trapped him in the swamp below Fell's Point. He drowned himself in the bay."

"How do you know?"

"Because his tracks went down there, made in his own blood. There wasn't no place he could swim to that wasn't watched—except the western shore, and nothing without fins could swim that far."

"I see. I don't think there's anything I want." She crept out of the shop and found herself walking aimlessly in the street, asking the way to Fell's Point. She would go down there—go down and find some possible way of escape for him, some proof for herself that this thing could not be true. She crossed the little river below the jail and found herself in a crooked old town on a point of land jutting out into the clear green water; brick houses with gardens and locust trees, log wharves and tobacco warehouses, a busy shipyard with men hammering and shouting in it. Her father'd told her they built every seagoing thing here, from a rowboat to a frigate. No need now to search for his friend, William Fell.

It was beside a row of myrtle bushes in Shakespeare Street that she met Ruth Gwydion. Ruth was coming in the opposite direction. Her trim skirts

were draggled and she was openly crying. The two girls stopped and faced each other.

"I might have known you'd be here," said Lass bitterly.

"I could say the same of thee," choked Ruth.

"Have you been to see—where it happened?"

"Yes."

"Is there any chance?"

"No! No, I don't see how there could be."

"I'm going there just the same."

"I'll go back with thee. I've nowhere else to go."

Silently they walked out beyond the town and into the matted gold beach grass veined with tiny, dark salt streams. Here and there patches of dingy snow undissolved by the rain covered the roots of swamp willows and scrubby cedar trees. Clear gray sky and gray-green water made a landscape carved in slate.

Lass heard Ruth catch her breath in a sob.

"Thee was always after him," she wept. "Even when thee saw at the first so plain he was mine. And I think thee had him in the end, for he'd have none of me at all. Thee's like we said in Wales of all the Saxons—like the coiling serpent, clever at carnal things."

"You're the one to talk of carnal things, but what cause have we got to quarrel now?" asked Lass brokenly.

Just ahead of them a half dozen men carrying guns poked in the weeds and cat-o'-nine-tails where the grass went down to end in swirling water in the midst of a willow thicket.

"No—we've no cause now," murmured Ruth. "Here—"

The brown willow fronds hung all about them, and Ruth pointed to a strip of snow running out into the deep green bay. First Lass noticed broken twigs embedded in its surface, and skeleton leaves, and a litter of spiraled shells, pinkish brown, empty of the sea creatures that had dwelt in them. And then she saw her last token of Mahlon Doan, the running footprints of a desperate man, fleeing on crippled feet, spilling his own blood down on the snow, ending in a dark smear at the waterside. She forgot her own grief and loss in terrible pity for his agony. And last night he had lain so warm against her!

"I went to him last night," Ruth was saying relentlessly at her elbow. "I went to him after thee'd left him. And I brought him the things I knew he needed. A little pistol, and a hunting knife. Thee with thy pride and thy money'd never think of those. In the front of my dress I carried them. And I took him money, too."

Lass stood absolutely still, but Ruth went on and on, in a voice as colorless as the day. "Once when he and Abe robbed a man in Philadelphia, they hid the money in a bush by the potter's field and never got to go back for it. I went

there in the dark, and found it, and brought it to him. I wanted him to take me with him, but he wouldn't. He said he might live or die, but I'd not see him again, either way. He said—buying a thing didn't mean I'd get what I paid for."

Ruth gulped, starting to cry again. "There was silver spoons hid with the money there. He said he'd always meant for me to have the spoons."

"He didn't even leave me spoons," said Lass dully, staring out over the broad reach of water.

One of the posse hailed them jovially, "Well, girls, I think that's the last you'll see of your Tory Doan!"

"I think thee's right," wept Ruth.

Lass parted the willow fronds and stared soberly at the water. Southern willows—in the old war, she'd heard, one of the generals spoke of them to another general ordered south. "You'll change your northern laurels for southern willows," he said. That meant to go to grief from honor, just as she'd done, and the further south she'd gone, the worse she'd fared. Well, it was all over now, and she would turn north again, go home to Newburyport, and Crispin, and his new wife. Between these boughs Mahlon had taken his last look at daylight—or had he? Beyond the bay the other shore curved upward dimly, seeming nearer every minute—seeming not too far. Suddenly hope and confidence came over her like a tide flooding up the beaches. She put her arm about the weeping Ruth and answered the posse man leaning on his rifle.

"I don't," she said. "I don't think I've seen the last of my Tory Doan. I think you lie." And then, softly, and for only one pair of ears to hear and understand, "You wait. We'll see which one of us has the second sight."

THE LOVE

TWENTY

“Come Back to Bucks County”

•

The hot, young years go over. The times when new delights and heartaches happen every day, dwindle and pass, and the slow years come on, as the seasons turn their inevitable course downward to November where all things end. The men who came back to Newburyport after the war were older and harder than when they went away, with a world-wise sharpness on them. Freedom had been all well enough to take down your gun for when you were a young man and had more passion than principle, and less common sense than either—and no wife and children to feed. They had fought for freedom, but what they had got was a democracy, and they had discovered that the two were not the same. True, they had the free trade they wanted, and on the whole, now, seven years after, that trade was going well enough; well with the French and the balance still swinging toward them; well with the Dutch who could do business with all nations and go to war with none; the bulk of it turning still to England, as if the two countries had never fired a shot at each other. Times were more settled now in all the world, and they could begin to laugh about that winter when they had stood in naked, lousy regiments at Valley Forge and listened credulously to rumors of the great fleet made up of Moors and Eskimos, and Laplanders, and Persian archers, and Fiji men, and Japanese, that was coming to take America.

But there were other things they had not counted on. For instance, the way the back country opened up after the fighting stopped, all down from Connecticut River to the Gulf of Mexico, and the men who went there built a different kind of life from the life of the eastern towns, a way that was beginning to cost the East money. Two Scotch-Irishmen in a hut on the Ohio, without a penny in their pockets or a word of King’s English in the mouths, could outvote and have their way over one merchant who owned six ships and had been to Harvard College. They could pass laws that must be obeyed in Boston and Philadelphia. This wasn’t what the Newburyport men had gone to war for. Already, in this new country, something seemed to be wrong—if this was what democracy meant. It meant that in a time of disagreement the few had no way to protect themselves from the many, even though the many were wrong. Democracy had done fine things for the world, but it had drawn a line

under the old truth, that too often there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang them up. So thought most of the merchants and seamen who lived by trade, all up and down the coast of the new United States, that had drawn itself a Constitution last year that everyone would soon be living by. What they wanted was a strong government settled in their midst, so that they could keep the rebellious frontiersmen in order, keep them, for one thing, from sending their goods easily down the Mississippi instead of carting them over the mountains to put more money in the coffers where money had always been. Times were not bad; with the export rates going up, too much paper money still changing hands, but a kind of confidence and morning optimism about everything. King Congress had not pleased people much better than King George in the last seven years, but next year a new government would be chosen and set up, and every man felt sure that it was designed especially to profit his interests and thwart his enemies. Good times were coming in! The men of Newburyport built new ships and warehouses to prepare for them, and put up new houses for their wives; tall, box-like houses facing the Merrimack, with rooms enough for more children than any woman would be likely to bear.

The women of Newburyport had changed, too—all but Lass Marvayne. They had changed in the ways women change; the older ones grown thicker and grayer, and the younger ones plumper, a little more smug and sedate, the bloom rubbed away. Girls who had gone to school with Lass had daughters as tall as they were. But Lass had not changed, because women are less changed by time than by the things that happen to them, and since she had come home from Bucks County four years ago, nothing had happened to her. She and Hannah Hildreth lived quietly in the weather-worn, gabled house Silas had built for his bride more than thirty years back. Sometimes in the fall she would take her gun and go into the woods behind the marshes, aim half-heartedly at a wild duck or squirrel, and lower her arm sometimes, without even bothering to pull the trigger. She had tried to make an herb garden like one she remembered in Pennsylvania, but the tansy died and the pennyroyal crowded out the other plants, and she gave up the whole sad business. Now and then—not often—she walked past the Frog Pond and along the high street to the great house her father had been building when the war began, where Crispin lived with Vinny and their two sons. Not that she was never courted, for her hair and eyes were as bright as ever, her figure as slim and curved, and her red mouth as tempting. You had to look close to see the lines beginning to sharpen in her face, to see her beauty wearing a little too fine. But most of Essex County knew by now that courting Lass Marvayne was a waste of time. She waited, untroubled either by hope or despair, like the beautiful sleeping girl in the old fairy tale. So far as she knew, Mahlon Doan had never come home to Plumstead, for

Sally's infrequent letters never mentioned him. So far as she knew, he might be drifting bones by now on the bottom of Chesapeake Bay.

Seventeen eighty-eight it was, a night in late May, but a raw wind blowing straight out of March, driving spurts of cold rain through the town, and Lass went out to walk in it, feeling restless and at odds with the whole world and with herself, wanting desperately to live a little before she died. Most people were wise enough to stay inside tonight, in their small, old-fashioned brick houses, all over the sloping hill above the black river that drained down from the sharp valleys and great, wild mountains of New Hampshire. Lass met no one as she passed the dwellings, and shops, and lighted windows of the Wolfe tavern. She turned seaward past the part of the town men made their money in, the three ropewalks, the ten distilleries, the shipyards and warehouses. In one of them, belonging to her, a light still burned, and peering in she saw Crispin at a slanted desk bending over a ledger. Crispin spent all his time there now, the town said: once there was a rumor he hadn't climbed the hill to his house for ten days, and nobody wondered, with his wife turning more thin and sallow every day, and giving you back a sharper answer every time you spoke to her. They said, too, that Crispin was a hard man to do business with; honest, but cold about his dealings as a dead fish, with never a smile, or a friendly word, or a glass of ale to clinch a bargain. He was making money, but he wasn't the open-hearted lad the whole town had thought so much of ten years ago. He wasn't the man Si Marvayne had been in his time. Lass bit her lip when she heard these stories. Now as she watched him, he rose from the desk, turned and walked to the window, and stood looking out into the rainy spring night.

Not wanting to be seen, she hurried farther along the winding cart track that led past the last of the warehouses and into the fields of beach grass and twisted trees that stretched along the river toward Plum Island. An old house loomed on her right, deserted, the chimney crumbled and the roof collapsed inward, but an apple tree beside it covered with white blossoms, giving off an unearthly fragrance in the rain. She stopped still under it, looked around her at the world that was hers and had been her father's; the flooding salt marshes, the river full of ships, the lighted town half-hidden in clustered trees on the top of the hill. Judge Sewall, a famous man of Boston, had made a prophecy about this town in her great-grandfather's time, she'd been told; it was a story every child there could repeat before he ever went to school. So long as the dwarf trees on Plum Island stood up despite the boisterous winds of ocean, and the sea fowl made their appointed visits; so long as cattle grazed in the meadows before Turkey Hill, and pigeons gleaned after barley harvest, there would be Christians in Newburyport, and so long as there were, the rich and gracious Lord would confirm them in the possession of their valuable privileges. Well —privilege of land she had, privilege of money; privilege to worship under

any of those three steeples gleaming whitely in the rain—a privilege that had meant much to men, one time or another. But if only she could give up all these and have the other thing—the privilege not to take and hold, nor to renounce either, but to give, and joyously to keep on giving. Most bitter of all her bitterness was the memory of the words Mahlon had spoken to her in Baltimore jail. "It's always thy way, never mine." And he had been right then. She had been willful and stubborn, bound to have her own way no matter whom she hurt. She had put her love for the man ahead of the man himself. She had wanted him whether he wanted her or not. But four slow years had taught her to put want away. That much she had changed, if in no other essential. Only to know he was alive, and whole, and sound, and the world going well with him; only to be allowed to be near him, and see his face, and hear his voice. To be allowed to be something to him—if not his wife, then the serving woman in his house who did his wife's bidding. The slow empty years had not been wholly wasted, for she had learned patience of them.

Just behind her she heard the familiar sound of Crispin clearing his throat, heard him splashing toward her through the pools of rain.

"I saw somebody going by and I thought it looked like you," he said. "What are you out here in the storm for?"

They had not spoken together for weeks, except for a few curt words in front of Hannah when he brought papers for her to sign or explained to her some counting-house matter. She turned to look at him as he stood there under the apple blossoms, his coat collar turned up because of the weather, his hair tousled by the sea wind. She looked at him and thought how changed he was, and her heart ached for all the lives that had ever gone wrong.

"I wanted to get away from the town—and be alone with the fields and the night around me, to think."

"To think about what?" He kicked a piece of driftwood stranded there by a spring tide.

She laughed shakily, and gave him the stale old answer of school boys. "If I told you, you'd know as much as I."

"I do know as much as you, I think."

Something about the look in his eyes made her remember the Crispin she had walked with under the summer moon and had thought to marry.

"You wanted to be sorry for yourself without ever thinking of all the other people you've made sorry."

"I didn't know, Crispin," she faltered, "that you had such a fine opinion of me."

"Not that I did right either," he went on grimly. "I wasn't nothing worse than a fool, but that was bad enough, it turned out. You weren't that. You knew what you were doing and you meant it all. You were going to have what

you wanted, right or wrong, if you had to go to hell for it."

She interrupted. "I did go to hell for it—and then I didn't get it."

"I know you did. But I've been there too because of the way you acted. I've taken Vinny there. Look at us! Do you think either of us is happy?"

"Is that my fault? What should I have done?"

"When you saw you couldn't get him, you should have done the next best thing; married the man who loved you when you couldn't marry the man you loved. Most women do."

"Let them! I never will! You married where you didn't love, and what good did it do you? I belong to Mahlon. Would you want that? Would you want a wife who'd jump out of your bed and run to him if he walked by the door and whistled?"

"He's through whistling."

"I've never talked to the man who saw him buried."

"Lass." The sullen anger had left his voice, and a pleading note crept in. "How long are you going on like this? Living there alone with Hannah—with nothing—?"

"Quite a few years, likely. Most of the women in my family have lived to be old, except my mother."

"You mean—you're not going to give up—to keep on hoping he may be alive and come back? Just like Hannah wouldn't marry your father because she thought—"

"Yes. Like Hannah. I shan't marry without proof I'm widow. Likely, not then."

"And how are you going to be widow who was never wed?"

"But I was wed. I was married to Mahlon Doan the minute I saw him."

"He didn't think so."

"I think—he was beginning to."

"He was slow. I knew, almost the first time I saw you, that you were married to me."

Suddenly he took her roughly in his arms. The drooping apple boughs seemed to close around them. He kissed her and kissed her, and she stood there passively, allowing it. "Oh, Lass," he murmured against her hair, "it's all come out so wrong—all of life—every damn moment of it!"

"I know," she agreed, "it has, hasn't it?"

"Lass—you know—Vinny and I. It's not her fault. I was wrong to marry her. All these years—pretending she was you!"

"But you want me to pretend you are Mahlon."

"No. I only want another chance to make you love me for what I am. You did—once. I'll send Vinny away—back to her own people. She'll be happier that way. I don't want to go on hurting her like I have. She can take my sons

and all my money with her. I've got to put an end to it."

"You can't do that, Crispin—turn her out of your house!"

"Then let her stay here, and we'll go away. I'm going to take a ship to China soon. I been studying the map, and I think the trade's going to shift that way the next few years, away from rum and Negroes. The Derbys down to Salem think so. I want to go and see for myself, get to know the ports there, and start in the thing while it's new. It's the ginseng market—"

"What's ginseng?"

"A plant. In China they say it'll make youth and love to rise again in old men. It'll be—all kinds of trade. You could go with me; you as owner, I as master—all a proper thing."

She stared up into his face. The hard set of his jawline had softened a little, the warm light come back into his hazel eyes.

"Lass," he whispered, "kiss me!" And then Lass did a cruel thing that had to be done.

"Yes, I'll kiss you, Crispin," she said sadly. She reached up and kissed him coolly on the mouth with the tranquil kiss she would have given Polly, or old Israel, or one of Sally's children. It was more final than the drowning of Mahlon Doan.

He wrenched away from her and uttered a despairing sound. She could not tell whether it was a curse or a groan. He stood, unmoving for a moment, with his back toward her, then with no more words started swiftly toward the town. She watched him till he passed into the shadow of the nearest warehouse, then slowly she too walked back along the rutted lane the way she had come.

Crispin had offered her the thing she thought she had been wanting. He would give up his wife and sons for her, his growing fortune and his honor before the town. Next to Mahlon, Crispin would always stand first in her heart. But she didn't want love from Crispin and she never would. She would rather do without. Yes, many things had changed with the years, but not Lass Marvayne.

Not wanting to pass the window again, for she could see from a distance that his lamp burned there once more, she climbed up to the high street and walked toward the Frog Pond on the common and her own house facing south across it. When she came to the mansion where Crispin lived, she lifted her eyes to it, for it sat on a terrace in the midst of young horse chestnut trees. A single lamp burned in one of the wide front windows behind silken curtains. Vinny would be reading or sewing. Lass had an impulse to go in, just to sit and look at her for a little, because she too shared the grief that had come on all of them—and was the least to blame for it. She walked up the brick-paved path between the lawns and lifted the brass knocker in a quick tap.

She heard Vinny's steps dragging across the hall carpet. It was late by now,

and the two maids would be in their beds at the top of the house, the little boys asleep in their wide, airy room on the second floor. Vinny would be alone. She opened the door and stepped back for Lass to come in.

"Oh, Lass! I wondered who'd be out in the rain tonight," she said listlessly. "Come sit down. Is thee very wet?"

"Only my cloak," said Lass, taking the garment off and flinging it over the scrolled foot of the mahogany stair rail, following Vinny into the east parlor.

If Crispin had not given Vinny his love, he had given her rich carpets and carved furniture, jade vases, and silver candlesticks, painted landscapes and chinaware. Silas had known what he was doing when he had chosen the stonecutter's son to inherit his affairs, and had lived long enough to teach him of his own knowledge the look you must give a shilling to turn it into a pound. Vinny sat down on a sofa all sandalwood curves and embroidered satin and stared at Lass, and Lass stared back from the dark violet depths of a wing chair. Vinny had grown thin, she thought; no worry now that her costly dresses would get too tight and pop their hooks off the way they used to do. The amber lights had dulled in her eyes, but tonight her sallow cheeks burned as if from deep excitement. When she spoke, the rich, merry voice that used to remind one of bubbling spring water sounded dry and thin.

Hearing that voice. Lass swallowed hard. She wanted to tell Vinny how sorry she was for her part in it all, but at the same time, how she couldn't have helped it; if it was all to do again, it would be the same.

"Lass," Vinny was saying, "thee's been staring at me for five minutes and said no word at all. I know I'm not that good to look at—now."

"Oh—I'm sorry. I've been out alone, Vinny, walking in the rain, and I got to thinking about that winter in Philadelphia when we first met each other—when we were both so young."

"That was a lovely time," said Vinny, something of her old sparkle coming back. "I danced my slippers through so many times Uncle said he was going to move the cobbler into the spare bedroom where he'd be cheap and handy."

"You danced beautifully, Vinny. And do you remember that night just before the Mischianza, when Ruth brought me Crispin's letter and you took the picture Charlie Peale made? You knew then that he was meant for you."

But Vinny was staring now. Shadows seemed to come under her eyes, and the eyes themselves to be looking on the dark ways of pain. The matter was too near the surface with both of them. It had to be spoken.

"He wasn't ever meant for me, Lass," she said. "Thee knows that."

Lass sat looking at her with misery in her blue eyes.

"I didn't take him from thee. I couldn't have. No girl could. Thee didn't want him, and I made myself think I did because he was so handsome. When thee's young, it's so easy to love, Lass. Thee's so ripe for it thee can love

anybody. Why did I have to settle on someone I couldn't have?"

"You have him," said Lass, the rough edge of tears in her voice. "You're married to him."

"No," said Vinny tensely, "thee is."

The wet leaves of the chestnut trees threshed against the panes as the wind drove them, and the lamp flickered. Lass fastened her gaze on a brass bowl full of blue lilac sprays sweetening the whole room. She felt she could not look any more at Vinny. But Vinny went on.

"Now none of us three will ever know a happy minute, Lass, and 'twas all because of thy willfulness. Can't thee see thee never decides a thing for thyself alone, that when thee does it, thee must think what it will mean to others?"

Lass crouched in the great chair, her face white and her eyes very wide; she ran a hand backward through her wet, red hair.

"But, Vinny, what did I do that hurt you? What should I have done?"

"Thee should have married Crispin when thee found thee couldn't have Mahlon—made him happy if thee couldn't be happy thyself. I'd have cried for a night, maybe—but nothing goes very deep when one's that young, and the world's so bright, and there's so many smiling young men. I'd have put my mind to somebody else in a week or two. I'd have a husband of my own now, instead of bearing sons for thine."

"But I didn't want Crispin."

"And thy own will was always more sacred to thee than the will of God or any man's happiness, wasn't it?" There was a taunt in Vinny's voice.

"How do you know I wasn't doing the will of God?" cried Lass, leaning forward, a light flooding through her mind, bringing peace and conviction with it. "Mahlon said to me once that God's will was like fire and a hammer working in us. I've only lived by the fire and the hammer in me, done what it drove me to do. How do you know that wasn't the will of God?"

Vinny smiled, but with no warmth and merriment. "Look at me," she said. "Look at thyself and the way thee lives. Look at Crispin. Think of what we were like when we were young. Think of the changes that have come on us—and all of them for worse. Does thee think so evil of God as to believe He was the one who willed it? And it will never end—till we do."

Footsteps sounded on the wet bricks of the pathway.

Lass knew it would be Crispin. She ran into the hall and seized her cloak.

"I'm going out the back door, Vinny. I'm sorry for everything, but I couldn't help the way it went. And if 'twas to do again, I'd have to do it over!"

Wordless, Vinny sat looking after her, not rising to welcome Crispin, though she could hear him scraping his boots, lifting the polished doorknob.

Once outside, Lass ran through the dripping plants in the kitchen garden, the green knives of onion and trellised peas. She circled the house and crossed

the wet lawn sloping to the street, ran on and on till she got home. Dr. Timothy Fletcher sat in the kitchen talking to Hannah as she flung into the room and took off her sodden cloak. Hannah had a china cup in front of her with tea grounds in it, and Dr. Timothy was sipping a glass of the brandy Silas had stored away to drink in the old age he never lived for. On the hearth they had a little fire going. There was more comfort for the heart here among the iron kettles, under the smoke-stained rafters, than in all Vinny's rich and shining rooms. People had loved each other here.

Hannah had changed little since Lass could first remember, except for gray come in her rough, dark hair, and a fine down on her upper lip. She had been quieter since Silas' death, less given to her well-meant scolding. And she moved more slowly. She knitted silently, listening to the doctor. He had grown heavier, and here and there a distended vein stood out redly in his face. His hands were never quite steady any more.

"Of course it's lawful now in Massachusetts," he was saying. "Lawful by act of General Court. But do you think it'll be allowed in Newburyport? In any ways that isn't ships, we're a hundred years behind the rest of the world. Timothy Dexter says if he hears of my doing it to anyone, he'll see me tarred and feathered and rid' on a pole down Fish Street hill."

"What are you talking about, Dr. Tim?" asked Lass, perching affectionately on the arm of his chair, trying not to think of all that had happened to her that evening.

"I'm talking about smallpox," he growled. "There's a new case now, just about every day. I want to inoculate, and town won't let me. I been to Boston and talked with men there and studied on it. They been doing it over sixty years and knows nothing better. I swear 'twill keep away the disease."

"You got a letter, Lass," said Hannah, getting up and sliding a white square from under the clock on the mantel over the hearth. "It come from Boston on the last stage, and Mark Plumer brought it here on his way home from Wolfe's tavern."

Lass took the letter. "Maybe it's an offer of marriage," she jested, smiling down at Dr. Timothy.

"I hope 'tis," he rumbled, "and if 'tis, you better accept it. It isn't well for a girl to go unmarried. Even your grandmother saw that, and she was as stubborn a wench in such matters as ever I knew."

Lass remembered her grandmother suddenly; the old lady's beauty thin and fading; how they had sat in this very room together once. Summer it was, and hollyhocks nodding outside the window, and her grandmother had leaned forward and spoken earnestly, as old folk will, to a child too young to understand but not too young to remember.

"It only happens once in a-many year, girl, and only one in all a-many has

power to feel it; that great love that does na' come and go, that is for once and all. I had the power in my time, but him it was meant for never came to me. I never loved, Lass. But I'm of the few who could."

"But you married."

"Aye. That's the way of the world, and stronger than Peg Magoon. But I pray ye'll be stronger than Peg, Lass. Ye'll know him when he comes, and it's him ye must take or nane."

Poor Peg, lonely all her life, lying alone under the gravestone she would not allow to be marked with her husband's name! Lass tore open her letter.

She read it through quickly, and then again, and then she looked up, pale and radiant. Twice she tried to speak and couldn't. Then she put her head down in her hands and began to cry for the first time since that winter dawn in Robert Morris' house when she had stood shivering in her nightgown before the window, watching daybreak over the Delaware, weeping because she wasn't good enough for Mahlon Doan. But those tears had the taste of gall on them, and these were honey-sweet.

Hannah made a clucking noise with her tongue, and Dr. Timothy took the letter from her hand.

"Dear Lass," he read, in an expressionless drone. "Come back to Bucks County and help us! We loves thee and thee has lived in our house, so we be not ashamed to ask thy help when we need it so bad. Abe and Levi are in jail in Philadelphia and the Court thinks to hang them. We are trying to get them out. All our friends are signing papers of petition, and we know thee has lived in Philadelphia and conversed with some who has power there. Perhaps thee would speak for us. We have not heard from thee since thee left us, and perhaps thee is married, or otherwise bound at home. Mother sends thee her love, and Mahlon has come back from the south to help. Your loving friend, Polly Doan."

The clock ticked and the candles sputtered, but in Silas Marvayne's kitchen there was no other sound at all after Lass's tears ceased.

Finally Dr. Timothy reached for his brandy and took as long a drink as if it had been well water. "Women'll have none of it," he said, holding the glass up to the candlelight and staring lovingly at it. "Praise God for that! It's all that's saved the race."

Lass laughed shakily.

"Don't make fun of an old man's failings, girl. Listen, Lass, I know more 'bout what that letter means than you think. I know why you wouldn't marry Crispin. I know all about that Pennsylvania lad—what he was, too."

"I don't care what he was—or is—so he's alive! How did you know?"

"Crispin told me. He was uneasy and wanted to know what your father'd think of the business, and nobody living would know Si's mind better than I.

Fifty years we was friends."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him he done wrong. I told him he should have waited till you got your wits back, and not got married the way he did, just because he was a man alone with his pride hurt, and Vinny laughed with him and told him how fine he was."

"He'd have had a long wait, and it wouldn't have done him any good. And now Mahlon's alive, and I'm going to him."

"I was afeard you would." The doctor put down his glass and eyed her solemnly. "But before you decide for sure you will, I'm going to tell you something I've not told another soul in town. I hope—I hope it'll change your mind for you."

"Whatever it is, it never will."

"I think it might, Lass. I'm going to tell you something about Vinny that she don't know—that Crispin don't."

"What is it?"

"Vinny's going to die," he said slowly, taking another swallow of brandy.

"No! No! She isn't! How can you be sure?"

"I ain't so bad a doctor but what I can see death when it's written plain as it is on her. Crispin should not have brought her up here away from the seasons she was used to. Every winter for four years now I seen the cold eating her lungs away. They're about gone now."

"How—how long will it be?"

"Not past the leaves coming down in the fall. 'Bout the first frost, I'd say. She can't last longer than that."

Hannah started to speak, thought better of it, and began to knit again, clicking her needles sharply, dropping stitches without bothering to pick them up. Lass kept looking at the doctor, and he went on. "I'm telling you this for a reason that don't sound decent, that sounds like I had no heart at all, but you're Silas' daughter, and I got to let you know before you go away from here that you can still have Crispin honest if you want him; if you'll wait for him only a little while. He's always loved you. He'll be a fine lad—once he's happy again."

"Yes. I know."

"If you want to bring me Ann's Bible, I'll swear to you on it that he'll be a free man at Christmas—free to marry. Isn't that worth staying home for?"

Lass did not hesitate after that. She rose from her chair, walked over and kissed the old man gently on the forehead.

"Thank you, Dr. Tim," she said. "Thank you for telling me. I feel worse than you know about Vinny—as if I were to blame somehow for all the unhappiness that's come on. And I'm sure both of them blame me. They've

told me so. I hope you'll take good care of her—and make it easy—"

"There's nobody can do that."

"And I know you'll stand by Crispin when it happens—and after. But now"—she tilted the bottle over his glass—"have yourself another drink while Hannah and I get to work. There's so much to do—and I want to get the early stage in the morning. It's a long way from here to Bucks County."

TWENTY-ONE

"One Last Night like in the Old Days"

•

The high heart and the singing in her veins stayed with Lass while she rode through the salt swamps and familiar villages on her way to Boston. But when the stage began to lumber through the steepled towns and green valleys of Connecticut, she felt her mind slowly darken over like the skies of late autumn north toward Amesbury before the first snow came whirling down. She thought then of Vinny and Crispin and all their unhappiness and the horror it would end in. Dr. Timothy, sodden with brandy the night before, had told her finally just how Vinny would die, much as men die in battle, choking with her own blood, wounded with the savage arrows of New England cold. She remembered Vinny under the white blossoms in her uncle's walled garden in Spruce Street, her gay greediness for eating turtles stewed in madeira at The Bunch of Grapes; remembered how Vinny had walked out on the stage of the Southwark Theatre, and clasped her hands, and rolled her amber eyes piously, and sung,

"*Our Polly is a sad slut—*"

She remembered a rhyme Johnny André had made about the two of them—something about how a soldier far from home should take a little innocent pleasure before the mortars cut him down—

"*. . . when the south wind blows from Virginia*
And the petals settle and cling,
With Lass and Lavinia
Make merry in the spring!"

And now Vinny would never see another spring, much less make merry in one, and Johnny had got himself hanged just for being a brave man doing what he could do for his own country. Maybe having too gay a youth was a sign of woe to come, like Hannah's old saying, "Laugh before breakfast and cry before supper." She thought how Vinny had always shriveled and turned blue when the winds of wintertime blew down the Merrimack, and kept the Franklin stoves, set in the midst of the old fireplace holes, red-hot and roaring. But

Crispin could not build a fire for her that would make Massachusetts as warm as Chester County—or he hadn't wanted to. And now Vinny was dying and Vinny blamed her. Crispin blamed her. And were they being so very unreasonable when they did it? It could be argued that they were—or the other way. Did any man have the right to follow his own heart ruthlessly, unheeding how that course might affect others?

She had often looked at herself, Lass Marvayne, in mirrors—cracked, cobwebbed ones in the attic when she was a little girl, gilded mirrors painted with cupids in fine houses, empty mirrors in the bedrooms of strange inns; the strip of silver-backed glass over the sink in Hester Doan's kitchen where Mahlon used to stand and part his hair. And she had always seen the same thing in them, the face too finely cut and tense, the hair and eyes touched with too-vivid color. But now she looked into the formless mirror of her own mind and saw a different image there; the girl that other people thought of when they thought of Lass Marvayne. Fire, and pride, and stubborn spirit; courage and perseverance that would go out of her when her consciousness went and not before; honor—and no will to do harm. But she saw blindness, too, and a smiling indifference to anything that was not herself and her own desires—even a kind of indifference to Mahlon. She had wanted him. She had not cared what he wanted. That was why he had preferred in his bed a woman made with the softness of flowers. And now—after all the years—she was older, but with no more wisdom. Unless she could change and keep herself always aware of him and his need, ignoring her own, it would be all the same again, and she would dash away from her the thing she wanted most.

By the time they reached the rivers before New York, she had begun to fear more tangible things. How would he look at her the first time they faced each other? What would she find in his eyes? Once he had called her a rebel. Once he had told her their ways were different and must stay so. Once he had thrust her away from him. But once he had held her in his arms. When he had gone from her it had been to save something more than his life. But he had never sought her out afterward nor sent her any word. Perhaps he would not let her help Abe and Levi any more than he had let her help him that time in Baltimore. And Joe, she wondered. Was he still in Newtown jail? Perhaps Mahlon did not know that the world had changed in their lifetime to a place where it mattered less how well a man could make his way alone than how well he could dovetail to make his way with others. He had wanted to teach her to live in his way. Was it likely he would sit down now and copy on his slate what she told him should be written there? And as she thought of the schoolroom phrase, she remembered Ruth. Ruth had believed that he was dead. Would she be sitting in widowhood, or keeping another man's bed and kitchen? Would she have to tear herself again on the old, thorny quarrel

between them?

The ferry over Hudson, the nine-mile ride to Bergen Neck, and her nerves tensed and the food on the inn tables tasted like straw thrown out for the horses, and all the time the summer weather deepened and grew more lush, and all the primrose lanes, when they kept driving after dark, seemed to bloom alive with lovers. A ferry at Woodbridge, and then at New Brunswick they crossed the Raritan in a scow, and after a long drive on a hot afternoon of copper skies and thunder they rowed over Delaware, and a wagon took her north to Coryell's Ferry. Just at dusk she came there, and stood with her boxes beside her, against the wide, dusty door of Parry's flour mill, and asked all the farmers coming out with the bags of white powder in place of the bags of golden grain they'd brought there, which of them was going Plumstead way, which of them would give her a ride. It wasn't hard to find one, for everybody knew by the look of her dress and slippers and bonnet that she could pay; those who looked the second time knew by her eyes and drawn mouth that she wouldn't care what she paid either. And soon she was clutching the side of a rough farm cart that smelled of cow dung, trying to keep her place beside a sandy, grizzled Scotchman, one of the Deep Run folk.

Yes, he knew the Doans, the Doans of Plumstead. Few of 'em left, though, and a good thing. He could take her where they was, right enough, but not on their own place. General Francis Murray of Newtown had bought that from the confiscator, and rented it out. At Grandsir's? No. He'd got feeble and sold his land, and gone to live with his daughter who'd married over west among the Germans. Old Joseph took care of what there was of 'em; lived in a run-out farm now nobody else would have because 'twas haunted—son had killed his father there with a scythe—and the fields was mostly sand. Buckingham and Wrightstown was fertile, but 't had always been "poor Plumstead," he'd heard, since old Penn's time. Yes, Joseph lived poor, mending fences. The boys? Why, there was two of them in jail now, down to Philadelphia, and like to be a new war fought over it, folk had taken that much concern. Some wanted 'em hanged and some wanted 'em pardoned. Two was dead, everybody knowed—Mose got shot by Rob Gibson down to Horsley's, and Mahlon drowned himself off Baltimore—

But he didn't—he didn't—he didn't, thought Lass, and her blood sang, and her eyes sparkled, and the old Scotchman misinterpreted her look, forgot about the Doans, and ran a furtive glance toward the rhododendron clumps they were passing. Lass drew away from him, trying to dim over the brightness that had taken possession of her. "I'll wager your wife's at home watching the clock," she chided gently. "I'll wager she knows to a minute how long it takes to go and come from Coryell's Ferry."

"Ye'd na' lose, lass," he chuckled, and clucked for the horse to go on.

Gently still she continued to question. Aaron, it seemed, had lain in jail till a year or two back and then suddenly the Law had found out it had been right to move against him but wrong in the way it was done. Some old paper made in England a long time ago, but still with power; something called "Magna Charta" said you could not outlaw a man except by the law of the land, and as they'd not taken care to do it in just that way, he was free. Gone to Canada, he had, to live under King George again; word came back he was doing well. And young Joe, the teacher, the dandy, with the scarred face now and shattered jaw —he broke out of Newtown jail before Judge Wynkoop could try him, and set up a school over in Jersey. Last accounts, he was going north and take up land near Aaron; said there'd be more wars against the United States, and he meant to fight in them. As for the other Doans—likely they'd be at home.

And they were. Hot, starless dark it was, and ten o'clock at night, and thunder filling the whole sky and fire curling up the horizon edges, all four sides, when she stepped over the tumbled porch of the crazy wooden house that was hardly more than a series of crudely joined huts, and walked, without knocking, through the open door. A clean, bare, lamplit room stretched before her, with most of the faces around it she remembered from those days when she had lived among them, but all the children had grown incredibly tall, and Joseph and Hester and Rachel grayed and old, and Polly so beautiful and rounded, with her dark eyes and golden hair. But he! Polly had said he was there, and he was not! She felt a terrible weariness and despair flow through her body like a tide of poison—all this in the moment before anyone had seen her. And then Hester's arms went round her, thin, stripped to the sinew, but full of strength and love and courage, and the comfort that can only come from a mother.

"Lass! Polly said thee'd come! And I near forbade her to write! Oh, my dear child!"

She found herself in a rough, uncushioned chair, the best in the room, and Polly kissing her, and laughing and crying at once, and Rachel running to and fro with a teapot, and the others standing round.

"I didn't think there was aught thee could do, Lass," said Joseph, fear for his son and nephew clouding his brown eyes, "but the women wanted to send —"

"Maybe there isn't," she told him, "but there's a thing to try. Maybe the men in Philadelphia's forgotten Si Marvayne—but they do business every day with Crispin Corey. Maybe they've forgotten what a shilling is. Two things I mean to go down and remind them of."

"Thee means, Lass," asked Hester, troubled, while rain slashed and drove a mat of swaying vines against the broken windowpane, "to *buy* the boys' freedom?"

"Why not? Is there an easier way? What's wrong with buying and selling, if you have the money for it?"

"Some things—come of the spirit—the spirit that speaks in men. They can't be bought in the marketplace."

The merchant's daughter put both hands over her face suddenly. She's right, she thought—oh, she's right. I must believe her if I'm to be the fine, new I that I want to be—all sweet and patient and good, like the Friends are. But *why*—when my way's so common sense and plain? Have you got to be a goose to wear white feathers?

"Thee's tired from the coach ride, dear," said Hester. "Rachel will bring thee tea in a minute."

Their voices lulled and died as the shower tapped relentless at the roof. Joseph climbed up to stuff rags along a crack that the wet came through. Hester did not leave her, finally spoke very low.

"I saw thee, Lass—look around and not find what thee was looking for."

"Where is he?"

"Down in the cave on Tohickon. He came back by night, and none save us know he's here—know he's alive even."

"Ruth?"

"Ruth's married. Like to bear her first child any day now. May have already. We have not heard."

"Who—whom did she marry?"

"Not from these parts. She met him when she went to buy books in Trenton, I think. John Teeple from over in the Jerseys; steady and kind to her. He bought land from Sam Bye—at the foot of the mountain."

"Is—is *he* married?"

"What does thee think?"

"He—he never seemed to want to."

"Nor has he—yet."

And as Lass lay in bed beside Polly Doan all that black rainy night, the rising sun was in her dreams, the prospect of a world more beautiful than God had found it when He rested on the seventh day.

It was mid-summer eve before she saw him, and she had made no move in behalf of the prisoners, partly because she knew Hester disapproved of the only weapons she could use, and partly because the feeling had grown up all over Bucks that the boys were in no real danger after all. Their friends had petitioned Benjamin Franklin, President of the Council, old, but in noways past himself, and always a mild, temperate man, and most folks thought he would

arrange a pardon. After all, the Congress itself had passed a law forgiving Tories, a law that had been shamefully broken, but not by men with the good sense of Poor Richard. Mahlon waited in the cave, his only plan being to slip down by night and help them break jail, if it came to that, and Polly carried him food every day. Lass helped Hester make strawberry jam, helped Joseph fight the newest pest that the hired armies had left behind them, the Hessian fly that sucked the life from the young wheat. And everyone waited, and the summer wore on.

The shortest night of the year came finally, with gentle airs stirring, and a moon so big, and round, and heavy-gold that it looked as if it might fall like a ripe peach into Pine Run or Neshaminy. All the wide checkerboard fields spread out in purple over the hills and long valleys. And Lass went out to the tumbled barn behind the house and dragged a saddle over Firebrand's ancient back, too restless to stay inside any longer. Last time Mahlon had been home he had left the aging horse and taken one of his colts away south, but the old hero lived on, dragging a plow sometimes, bony, blind in one eye, but still as quick with the blood of Godolphin Barb and Tamerlane as when the boys had stolen him off Judge Wynkoop of Vredens Hoff twelve years ago. She wanted to ride out through Plumstead, down toward the Delaware, down toward the craggy run, all choked with pickerel weed, and pink-veined pond lilies, and cardinal flowers, to the hollow back of the cleft rock where she knew he would be. But she did not. He must know she was there. Polly must have told him. But he had sent her no word. She would ride the other way. She would go down to Buckingham. Maybe she would see Sally. Maybe she would see Ruth Gwydion beside her new husband. She let the old horse amble along the winding road through the mild, fertile fields of this country, so different from the one she was born in. Something there was about the gentle swell of the land, the even, untroubled quality of it, that might well provoke a man to burst forth in violence the way the Doans had done twelve years ago, just in search of change and relief from it. As she rode, the moon seemed to grow bigger, and the farmhouse honeysuckles more unbearably sweet, the shadows thicker and softer under the groves of hickory and walnut, under the soaring tulip poplar trees.

She passed Bogart's tavern, run by other folk now, and took the Wrightstown road, turning into the water marshes after a little, riding up to the hedge at the west of Sally's garden, hoping to see Sally moving behind the lighted windows, see her and watch her for a little without being seen. She had no wish to talk with her. Sally's letters suggested that her tongue might have sharpened with the years, though Lass had long ago paid her what she deemed was her rightful inheritance. She had no wish to try again the Quaker tolerance of Sam Bye. Firebrand wandered, and began cropping at the rank, tufted

grasses. A curtain fluttered; a shadow moved behind it; but she saw no one.

And then a sweet, thin voice spoke from the shadow of a low dogwood tree just beside her.

"What is thee looking for? Has thee lost thy way, or does thee wish to see my father and mother?"

Lass looked down. There in the grass stood a child dressed in a long white nightgown, a small, slender child, staring up gravely. And as Lass looked in its face she caught her breath. For it was her own face she saw, and her grandmother's face—except that the colors were different, for the hair hung straight and pale gold, not ruddy, and the light from the Byes' windowpanes shone on eyes that were serious and gray-green rather than flashing blue.

Oh, thought Lass. It's Sally's girl! It's Christine! But it's not Christine! It's Lass Marvayne, and Peg Magoon—and all the too-much-loving! She's like we were. It's in her face. And it'll go on being born. It'll never die. And after her, her child—maybe a Sally now and then. And it'll hurt them so! She bent down.

"You are—Christine?"

"I am Christine Bye. How did thee know?"

"Why is thee out so late, Christine?"

"Sometimes—when Mother has put me to bed—I run out like this. 'Tis no harm to anyone. And the stars help me to think."

"About what?"

"About what I shall do when I grow up."

"What will thee do—then?"

"Why I shall stay up every night as late as I want to, and have a pair of red slippers with high heels, and honeycake for supper instead of porridge."

"I am sure thee will. But what else will thee do? Does thee think to have a husband?"

Christine pondered.

"Yes. Yes. I am sure of it. I shall have a husband. And he will be so very wonderful that all the carts and carriages and people in the streets of Philadelphia will stand still to look at him when he rides by—just as still as in Meeting."

"I'm sure of it too, Christine. But remember—if he's long to wait for, thee mustn't marry anyone not so fine."

Her voice trembled and broke. The child looked up at her with grave concern. "Would thee like to see my mother? She can help thee if thee's lost or in trouble."

"No. No. I'm going now. Don't tell thy mother thee saw me. Don't tell her thee saw anyone at all."

"But she knows I slip out—and if she asks me, I cannot lie."

"Then—then tell her thee saw—Peg Magoon. Tell her thee looked in a mirror and saw her."

Suddenly Lass cut Firebrand with the reins. The startled old horse lumbered off across the water meadow, finding his own way. His rider clung to his neck, lost, shaken from having seen for a moment behind the shining veil of chance the dark, dreadful logic of the way things fall. At the Wrightstown road she stopped and waited till she was her own mistress again. Then she rode back to the tavern and asked where John Teeple lived.

John Teeple's new house stood in the midst of a bare field with no trees around it yet, and builders' planks and mortar tubs still littered the side yard. As she picked her way across the grass, rank, smelling faintly of sorrel, she almost stepped on a tiny shrub tied to a white stick, stark and narrow in the moonlight. She recognized the leaves of the ash tree. Ruth had brought a cutting from the ash by Buckingham school. It was Wales to her, and she would take Wales with her wherever she went because she knew so little of her place and people there, not like Lass who needed no reminders of Newburyport because she was as much of it as Plum Island and Turkey Hill. Ruth was a childbearing wife now, but still the woman that Gwydion, the old enchanter, had made out of flowers to be a wife for his son. But Lass had asked her father once about Gwydion and he had snorted.

"And what do you think our name comes from? Why 'Marvayne' comes from 'Merlin,' and when 'twas a test of magic, Merlin could send Gwydion home any day in a wheelbarrow."

One light burned at the back of the house. Lass walked toward it and stepped into a clean, fragrant kitchen, with new brass and polished ironware shining round the hearth. Ruth sat in a carved pine chair looking strained and wan. She was suckling her child. When she saw Lass, she started forward, then sank back, tightened her arms round the little cocoon in its homespun blanket.

"Lass! Lass!" she breathed. "What's thee doing, back in Bucks County?"

Lass looked at her steadily. "I came back to see if I can help Abe and Levi," she answered.

"But—what can thee do? Mr. Franklin will let them go free. My husband says he will."

"So you did take yourself a husband, Ruth?"

"What else? Hasn't thee?"

Lass smiled, her eyes very blue. "Not yet. Most others have, I know—all my friends—and Vinny—you remember, you met Vinny that night when you came to see us in Philadelphia."

A different trouble darkened Ruth's flecked eyes. "Yes, I remember," she murmured. "I have often thought—is all well with her? I saw a death's head —"

"What?"

"She stood there laughing and put the blond boy's picture round her neck, and as I watched it lying there against her white skin, it turned into a death's head. I felt that he would bring her harm."

Lass tried to collect her wits for an answer, but just then Ruth gave a great gasp, almost letting the baby fall. Lass turned. In the doorway behind her stood Mahlon—older, and browner, more lines in his face, deeper shadows in his eyes, but still with the sweet curve to his thin lips; the boy who had first stood in front of her, slim, and straight, and nineteen years old, in Croasdale's tavern. For a moment she felt her whole body flooded with fountains of sweetness and beauty, and lifted up—and then she fell a long, long way into blackness, like falling from a star. He had come back. But he had come back to Ruth. She dragged herself a little aside, stood there unable to move further, while the two faced each other.

He smiled, not knowing what whirlwinds swept the quiet room—or not caring.

"Ruth! Lass! I meant to see thee both, but I never thought to see thee together. 'Tis not safe for me to be about in the country, but tonight stirs in a man's blood till he can't rest. I had to come back—to look at what I used to know."

"I thought thee was dead," Ruth croaked. "I saw thy bloody prints go down into the sea at Baltimore. They said no man could live—Why didn't thee tell me? Thee knows I'd have waited."

"Thee was supposed to know without being told," said Mahlon severely. "Lass did."

"But—but even thy family thought—"

"My family knew. Friends travel back and forth between here and Cane Creek Meeting—thee knows their ways of doing. I sent word, but I sent word for them to tell no one whose name wasn't Doan. I knew thee was married. To a good man, I heard. He's down drinking at the Anchor. I made sure of that before I dared to come."

Oh, please God, thought Lass, help me to move myself. Help me to get out of here. But God did not help her, and Mahlon kept on.

"Time was when I'd never have thought to see thee with another man's child in thy arms, Ruth. Time was when I'd have taken unkindly to the idea."

Ruth's face was bleak and tearless. She stared blindly ahead of her.

"But now—I wish thee joy of both of them."

Suddenly Lass remembered her father's last words to her and drew herself together with all of his stubborn strength. She smiled, and dimpled, and stepped gaily toward the doorway.

"Thee two'll have things to talk over," she murmured, "so I'll leave thee

now."

Mahlon's voice did not lift, but a sharp edge cleft it.

"Wait a minute, Lass," he said, "and I'll go with thee. Years back, Ruth and I said all we have to say."

He looked long at Ruth. "It was good to have," he said, "good to have—good to have it over. But I'm glad I did thee no harm that couldn't be made right. Thee's got thyself a husband, and that was what thee wanted mostly—not Mahlon Doan."

He turned to Lass, put his hand under her elbow, and guided her over the yellow pine of the new threshold, down to the road where the two horses waited, Firebrand, and the younger heir of Godolphin Barb. Once there, he lifted her lightly to the front of his own saddle.

"Ride here with me," he said, "so we can talk. Firebrand'll follow."

And so they rode, but they did not talk, not one word at all. They rode back through Buckingham and up the York Road, the moon behind them, and the dark runs before, and she felt the easily-moving hardness of his muscles as he rode, and he felt the soft warmth of her as she clung there, and neither of them knew where the other's thoughts went.

Finally she spoke. "Thee—thee's not angry at me for coming back? Thee'll let me help Abe and Levi—?"

"If thee can. I learned a man can't refuse no man's help. He can't afford to."

"Thee knows that?"

"I known it a long time. That morning in the Chesapeake Bay I learned it—time I saw thee last—when two duck hunters pulled me into their boat and rowed so deep in the marsh creeks the posse couldn't find me. Did it because they could see I was marked with leg irons, and they was free men, and against leg irons, and jails, and posses, and such. I got south after that. But I learned a man can't stand alone—he can't just be proud and give—he's got to be willing to take, too."

"I'm glad thee knows that, Mahlon. Is Cane Creek—what thee wanted?"

"I got a house and a strip of farmland there. I guess it'll do for my time—unless"—his eyes lighted—"they say—further west—past the deep woods, where the great rivers are—" He did not finish.

They had crossed another run and climbed the last ridge toward Plumstead before he spoke again. On the high ground he reined the horse up and sat there, looking out across the long, well-ordered fields sloping gently under the moon, the darker lines of road winding across them, the farmhouse lights scattered here and there. He drew a sigh, and she knew that it hurt in his chest and throat.

"Oh, Lass," he murmured, "if I could just ride out with the boys again—

like we did at first—threatening a tavern for a drink or two, or stealing an old horse from a man who had too many, or tickling a tax collector's feet now and then—doing no particular harm; all of us alive and together, and wild, and young, and ready to thumb our noses at death and hell! If I could have just one last night like in the old days—"

Leaning against him, she could feel his anguish cut through her heart. She could give him many things, but not the one thing he wanted now. Suddenly she put her arms around his neck and began to cry, all wet and sobbing like a child.

"Lass—what—?"

"It's for thee," she choked. "Because I know thee'd like to cry—and a man mustn't. So I'm—doing—it—for thee!"

And she wept against him all the rest of the way home, where he set her down on the broken doorstep, and left her with a whispered word she could not hear. She did not go inside at once, but stood there among the twisted grapevines, staring after him, her tears gone dry. She couldn't have imagined it! When he rode away, he had been whistling!

TWENTY-TWO

A Free Man's Country

•

Summertime deepened over Bucks County. Dust settled on the greenery of fields and thickets. The colors of the countryside turned gold and ruddy; melons ripened, and Joseph's lean, razor-backed hogs wallowed in bruised and fallen peaches under the laden trees. Wheat harvest was meager because of the Hessian fly. Judge Henry Wynkoop boasted round Newtown that he'd stamped it out at Vredens Hoff by sowing only yellow-bearded wheat, and that late in the fall. The trouble with that trick was that late-sown wheat was more likely to break out with the black stem rust, especially on such poor land as the Doans now toiled with. Joseph and Polly and Lass, with young Tom big enough to help now, kept the weeds and thistles out of the buckwheat and loosened the earth all down the tall aisles of maize plants, white and yellow for bread, black and brown for beer—all of it good for cattle. Mahlon did not venture up again from Tohickon Run, but Polly did not always find him there when she took his supper down. Whatever errands he attempted in the interests of his brothers, he told no one.

More than a month had passed since the petition for Abe and Levi went up to Franklin, and as yet no word had come down. Perhaps that was because of the great celebration on July fourth when Robert Morris signed the new Constitution for Pennsylvania, and Christ Church bells pealed and cannon boomed, and the river flowered with a water pageant said to surpass the Mischianza. The new country was a-making fast, and its sponsors had little time to waste on two remnants of the old, safely stowed away in the Walnut Street jail. In mid-July the boys petitioned again and were again ignored. Lass held her peace till the month's end, watching Joseph grow more slow and clumsy every day with the farm work till he could hardly hold a sickle or milk the lank cows; watching Hester's face blanch and sharpen, and the dumb misery in Rachel's eyes as she yearned for her son, the half-mad Abraham. Finally one night after supper when they sat around the table sorting blackberries to boil in the jam kettle next day, she spoke.

"I've been thinking. It seems that the ways of the spirit may fail. Sometimes. Will you let me try my way now?"

Hester started to speak, then looked at Joseph, but he bowed his head and

said no word. She too fell silent. Lass went on.

"Tomorrow, I'll find out when there's a coach or a wagon going to Philadelphia. I'd like Polly to go with me—if she will."

And three days later Joseph rode with the two girls down to the Wrightstown Meeting House where they were to join with a group of Friends from that part going to trade in town. They waited under the great chestnut tree to keep themselves from the dripping skies of a rainy morning, and he told them about the uncle he was named for—the Cane Creek uncle—who'd laid down the course for the men who ran the famous Walking Purchase fifty years ago, starting from that very tree. That meant he'd been one of the strongest, swiftest men in Pennsylvania, able to outrun the Indians. And then a little adder wriggled through the wet clover, and that made Lass think to tell them about the famous snake of Newburyport with a head to either end of it. They talked about everything but the two boys fighting for their lives in the cells of Walnut Street. Then the travelers gathered and Joseph kissed each of the girls on the forehead, murmuring, "Good-bye. God travel with thee, my daughters."

Polly wept all the first mile, and Lass rode quietly beside her, very white, her hands too tight on the reins, her mind running ahead round every curve of the road faster than any horse could ever go. The gentle rain kept coming down all day on clipped, yellow stubble fields smelling sweet and fresh, on the stone villages and taverns where they stopped now and then to dry their cloaks or take a little ale and food. Riding into Philadelphia through the early dusk, Lass hardly recognized the town she had dwelt so gaily in ten years ago when it was all a British barracks. To begin with, the houses and shops reached back further and further from the Delaware, almost to Schuylkill wood. There had been a great leveling of streets and filling in of old creek beds, so one could walk on paving stones now where once clear water had trickled down through scattered fern. The State House had a maze of stripling trees set out in its yard, and serpentine walks, hard-rolled and prim. It was a seat of stable government now, not at the mercy of every man who could carry a club to town meeting. Tall, fine houses crowded in among the older ones, and the row of stalls lengthened along High Street, gleaming with rich goods, smelling of wine and oil and spice and leather. A stone arch with wooden planking covered the noisome channel of Dock Creek, and they rode slowly over it, marveling at the changes, down to Mr. Morris' house on Front Street, only to have strangers open the door and say that he no longer lived there. They went then to the London Coffee House, but its door was locked and its windows shuttered over, and loungers in Black Horse Alley advised them to turn up High Street to the corner of Fifth and ask for Mrs. Mary House who took lodgers—General Washington himself had stayed there last year.

Once established in a gable room with an enormous bed, facing the rear

and too humble to have held the general, Lass left Polly still sitting at tea and potato custard, and stepped out into the wet street. A fresh wind blew up from the river and clouds with edges like curdled cream drove across the sky, letting the summer stars shine through. Robert Morris, Mrs. House had told her, lived only a block to the west in the mansion that had belonged to Richard Penn, and then to General Howe during the Occupation—and then to Benedict Arnold. Poor, pretty, unlucky Peg Shippen had gone as a bride there—exiled to England forever now, with her traitor husband! Peg who'd been put in a dancing rage when she had to miss a party! Most of the girls she and Lass had known were married now, to colonels or generals, and most of the boys dead or gone abroad. Feeling like a ghost or a dismal old lady walking the streets she had laughed and been young in, Lass approached the home of the patriot, her father's friend. As she came to the steps, she remembered how Mahlon had held her that night riding up to Plumstead, and she did not feel old at all. She felt young, and tremulous, with all the world beginning; and the days of her other youth were as if they had never been at all. But she must go to save his brothers now. She must not wait for another morning.

A three-story, red brick house, she found it, well designed for a rising man, with kitchen and smoke house down a long passageway at the rear, and a tree-shaded lawn within the privacy of a high wall. Lass climbed a little hesitantly up the white marble steps and sounded the brass knocker. After a long wait a thin woman in a russet dress with sandy hair and a tight mouth stuck her head out and asked what was wanted. Mr. Morris was at supper. He had just returned from his country house, "The Hills," where Mrs. Morris and the children were summering. Lass Marvayne? Yes, she would tell him.

The maid came back after a moment, still disapproving, and led Lass down a long carpeted hall to a rich room furnished with satinwood and foreign tapestry. Mr. Morris sat at a marquetry table spread with silver dishes patterned in grapes and banded sheaves of wheat. Candles flared from a dozen sconces, all to light the supper of one man alone. Mr. Morris had always kept a proud house, she remembered, but this far surpassed his style of twelve years ago. Somehow, amidst all this splendor, the great man looked a little forlorn, perplexed, lonely. The well-kept fingers trembled on the delicate handle of the painted china cup. The brow furrowed deep between the wide-set blue eyes. Somewhere he had lost the dash and brilliance that had led him to corner the country's flour market when he was fifteen. He rose as she entered and pulled out a tall-backed chair for her. She balanced on the edge of it, leaning forward, her eyes bright, her face tense, eager to set forth her business. But the master merchant sank back into his own chair and waited, brooding; he did not ask her to share his meal or in any way encourage her. Finally he said, in tones that seemed to come from far off, "It's been a long time. And your father's dead. I

met him when we were both young men voyaging to Jamaica. His father was a trader before him, like mine. We were born to the trade."

"Yes. He always thought of you as his friend. I'm sure he'd hope—you would help me now."

"Help you?" He leaned forward sharply. "You can't be needing money!" The barbecued shoats and brandy noddy made by the James River recipe sat neglected before him. Through his mind went those cursed bills—those debts—those creditors. What happened to a man who had spread himself out too far? A man whose credit had been better than that of the Congress ten years ago, how was he to face the murmurs of distrust on the lips of his countrymen when he could not always give the lie to them?

Her lip curled. "No," she said. "I don't need money." And then as he did not answer, she went on. "I only want you to speak up for me, to help me get the thing I want."

"I see." He toyed with his brandy glass. "How are your business affairs, Lass?"

"Well enough. You deal every month or two with Crispin Corey. He sees to them."

"Ah, yes. I'd almost forgotten 'twas the Marvayne firm he took over. One of the sharpest merchants in New England. Sees already the China trade's the coming thing. He's doubled what Silas did."

"He's not so well liked."

The merchant waved his hand. "A man of affairs cannot always afford to be liked—"

"Can he afford not to be?"

Again the furrow drove between his blue eyes.

"You may be right, girl. Nowadays, many—who have always been right—are wrong." He was silent a moment, then he said briskly, "I'm just back from a journey south and west, down the back of Maryland and Virginia. There's a fortune to be made there in land if it's bought and sold right. We're forming a company. If you and Crispin—?"

Lass turned her eyes away from his, and spoke cautiously. "I—I'll speak to him when I get home. We had some shares in your Bank of North America—"

"And they may yet pay you, if they seem all loss for now. But what was it you wanted of me?"

" 'Tis said you are to be a—a—I think the word is 'senator' in the great new government that's for all the country. I think you must be a man of power. You always have been. I want you to let out some friends of mine who are in jail."

"Who are they?"

"Abe and Levi Doan."

"The Doan robbers? Oh, Lass, you don't know what you're asking! True, I loved your father, and I could make use of Crispin's good will. But the Doans! There's well nigh a war about them. I'd put myself in the wrong!"

"There was a time you weren't afraid of that."

He stood up and paced back and forth across the rich carpet he still owed money for, his chin sunk in the ruffles beneath it.

"Lass, when men stood alone, I wasn't afraid to stand with the best of them—to stand against the strongest. But now—we're so close-meshed. A man can't move unless he thinks first what six other men will say to it. Was it that I feared when I would not sign their Declaration years ago? I don't know. But I'd like to help you for your father's sake."

"Well—can you?"

He took a deep swallow of brandy. "I'm afraid—not enough. It's up to the Council, and I can't move it there. The Doans have petitioned already. If you wish to take another petition amongst the men your father knew here, I'll sign it. But that's all."

He fell silent. The candles burned down and the locust trees rustled beyond the open window.

"If that's all," said Lass, very low, "how do I go about it?"

"Go to a lawyer tomorrow. No, go to the Prothonotary's office—in Third Street near Arch. Get him to draw the petition right. Then bring it back. I'll make a list of the men I think might sign, and you try to remember all those you knew when you were here before. You can try. But don't take too much hope of it. I think the Council means to hang them. It's jealous of the fact they're liked too much by the Legislature."

"You mean they'd take two men's lives away—just to spite each other?"

"I think they might."

He seemed to have no more to say, and Lass rose. "Thank you," she said soberly, "for doing what you feel you can. I'm sure my father would be grateful." She spoke evenly, but Morris' ruddy cheeks flushed a dark red. "I'll come back with the petition."

And she did come back the next night, and he signed it with a flourish and seemed eager to have her gone. After ten days of sounding knockers and climbing the splintery stairs of counting houses in the hot city summer, she and Polly took it to the Council chambers, proud that it had a hundred well-known names signed to it. And they left it there, and they never heard of it again. Three times Hester and Rachel wrote, asking mercy for their sons, and in September, Joseph joined the girls at Mrs. House's and made his own plea. Fifty-six men of Bucks County petitioned that they should be spared, and seventy-six petitioned that they should be hanged. Finally Charles Biddle, man of affairs in the city, visited the prison to carry news of a short reprieve, but

warned them sternly they could expect nothing more.

So the hot month passed; close nights and brassy days. The green gardens dried to a mellow brownness and the shrunken river crept blackly past the town, smelling of offal and decayed water plants. On the faces of a thousand tall clocks the days of the reprieve ticked themselves away, but Philadelphia men went and came about their business, not unaware—worse, not caring. The men of government sat at meetings in the State House, and the merchants crowded to the wharves, all excitement, to look at the ship *Alliance*, not because she was part of history and had carried John Paul Jones sea-fighting in the last war. She mattered now because she was just in from a voyage to China, round New Holland and the islands of the East. Talk of the China trade now, and a man's head would go back and his nostrils twitch like those of a hound dog scenting rabbit on the wind.

Once Lass walked down into Southwark where she had heard that the convicts from the prison were hauling barrows of stone to level the streets there, and she saw the huddled figures toiling away, each chained to a huge iron ball he must pick up and carry with him whenever he wanted to move. Guards kept her from going close enough to tell whether Abe and Levi were in the group. Sometimes, they told her, a desperate man enraged and hating the world would pick up his iron ball and hurl it at the head of the nearest bystander. Jeering boys particularly had been injured in that way. When she got back to the lodging house in the sultry, shadowy time of yellow sunset, she found Hester Doan sitting in the parlor in her shabby country dress, her eyes, so like Mahlon's, now bright with anxiety in her thin face. She had arrived an hour ago by stagecoach down the Easton Road. Polly and Joseph had gone up Vine and Callowhill way to the sheriff's office to see if there was any last thing they could do.

"But I believe there is not," Hester told Lass, shaking her head and clinging to the girl's warm wrist. "Thy ways have failed, have they not? And mine do not prosper. Still, I shall not abandon prayer."

And Lass looked up at Mahlon's mother, seeing only Mahlon. "Keep on praying, Hester," she answered soberly. "But tomorrow—I'll try one more thing."

A little off the high street, in a broad courtyard between Second and Third, an old man leaned heavily back in an arm chair supported on two huge rockers, and dreamed in the afternoon sunlight sifting down through the limp, yellow leaves of the mulberry tree. He was a short, fat, old man with a bald pate to which a few locks of white hair clung, and he wore Quaker-gray clothes. Now

and then he opened his eyes to stare contentedly at the gardens spread all about him, the grass plots, the trees and flowering shrubs; the stone steps leading up to the house, where he'd got that bad fall last winter—as if gout, and old age, and the stone weren't ills enough for a man who found himself still with posterity when he ought to have been long a-bed and asleep! On the grass beside him sat a young man with dark, bowed head, writing on sheets of foolscap.

"Do you have that down, Jenkin?" he questioned, intent but not querulous. "I want it in my memoir as I myself said it. Will you read it back to me?"

The young man hunted through his notes. "Is it this you mean, sir? 'Nobody can say Ben Franklin has wronged me—'?"

"Begin a bit further back."

"Here then? 'There are men in England who hated me as an American; men in America who hated me as a diplomat—but thank God there are none anywhere who hate me as a man'?"

"No, no. Take that out. It's too fine-sounding. Didn't I put in a piece of plain wisdom anywhere? Have I grown too wise for that?"

" 'To the young man who would love, I recommend a seasoned woman. Virgins be for plowboys—' "

"Did I write that? Take a look yonder at what's coming through the street gate, and cross it out, boy, cross it out!"

Jenkin, the printer's apprentice, loaned to Mr. Franklin for an hour's copying, looked, then stood up and brushed the dirt and clinging grass blades from his jacket. A young woman walked confidently toward them along the gravel path, tripping in high-heeled slippers. She wore a thin, blue dress on her slender, curving body, and no bonnet on her shining red hair. Mr. Benjamin Franklin, President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, looking in her face, thought of another thing he had written about her sex. He had written of them, "All cats are gray in the dark." Now he was not so sure. Perhaps, somewhere, there was the unlooked-for, silky, white kitten—a kitten who did not scratch. He leaned forward. The young woman spoke.

"Are you Mr. Franklin? The first man in Pennsylvania?"

"I be Ben Franklin. As for 'tother thing, I lay no claim to it. Will you sit down?" He motioned to the low, cushioned chair across from his own. "Be off with you, Jenkin. I have a guest." And as the young man shuffled toward the stone stairs carrying his papers, the old man bent closer toward her, murmuring, "A welcome one."

Neither of them spoke for a minute or two. The old eyes, still keen behind their mildness, noticed that her brows were drawn together, that her fingers twisted in her lap. Lass, for her part, saw that she confronted a plain, honest man, set four-square. It would do her no good now to speak her father's name

or jingle his money. Her looks might help her a little, but what counted would be the merits of the case. She put her wits to work on the matter.

"I should be most happy to be of service, madame. I have seen nothing like you since my young days in Paris—perhaps not then. 'Tis true, the air of the Seine puts a certain magic on women that I have not found beside the Delaware—before—"

She gave him a demure glance out of eyes bluer than either river.

"May I recommend the Merrimack, sir."

"Ah! So you be from that country. I know your voice is like a Boston voice—the sound of one always restores me."

"My father said that when Pennsylvania wanted an able man to set their affairs in order, they had to send and have one down from Boston. He meant you, Mr. Franklin."

"Madame"—a glint of iron flashed suddenly in the faded eyes, but the voice did not lose its tone of ancient play—"you flatter me so far that I know you want something of me."

"Yes, I do, Mr. Franklin."

"And it occurs to me that when you said, 'first man,' you thought of me as President of the Council."

"Yes. I meant that."

"Then you should go to Thomas Mifflin. The Council met here in my house yesterday, to tell me the eleventh state, New York—God bless her good citizens—has signed and ratified the Constitution. It was my last official act, to receive this news. Thomas Mifflin—"

"Yes, I know. Word of the meeting was cried through the town last night. It was also cried that Mr. Mifflin does not take office till October. Till then, you are still first man in Pennsylvania—what I said you were."

The sun slanted lower across the grass and a cool little wind rustled in the Seckel pear trees round the stone stairs. The old man glanced at the books and cribbage board on the table at his side, and back again to the girl's face—so tense, so beautiful. But he was tired and old, nothing but a body full of twinges, and whenever he moved in the street now, it shocked him to hear folk he had known as children spoken of as "Old man such-and-such."

"Madame," he said a little pettishly, stretching his legs forward just to prove to himself that he could still uncrook them, "I have no patience with a woman who is always right. But perhaps, out of your great wisdom, you will tell me—what can a man do who has lived too long?"

"Why, he can still do good," said Lass Marvayne.

"And what good would you have me do?"

"I would have you pardon some men and let them out of jail."

"Is this the Doans again? Am I never to be done hearing of them? Petitions

settle on my desk thicker than northeast snows at Christmas time. And I refer them to the body of the Council, whose concern it is. Has not my silence given answer that I cannot act in this matter?"

"But you know they should be freed. There was a law passed forgiving all Tories. They were not declared outlaws according to the law of the land. For that they can plead Magna Charta."

"I can remember Massachusetts was ever a great country for learning, but I cannot remember when I dwelt there that the pretty girls went about spouting English common law. Let me stop to think if it is an improvement."

"Oh, you do not need to stop to think!" cried Lass, too impatient to follow the devious courses the old man's mind would lead her. " 'Tis well known that no man thinks on his tongue quicker or wiser than Mr. Franklin. I wonder if you know this: that the Doans' crimes are all old and over now, and their pardon seemed sure till the Council and the Legislature began to fight about it? That the Legislature urges they be allowed to go free, and the Council takes this ill and says 'tis their business to give pardons? And because these two groups want to spite each other, want to test their powers, two men will hang? Do you know this, Mr. Franklin?"

Shadows deepened under the dogwood clumps against the curving brick wall. Benjamin Franklin had to try twice before he could meet the accusing blue eyes in the tilted face. Finally he found himself looking straight at his visitor, struggling to frame an answer.

"Yes," he said, "I know these things. I know there are many who think the Doans should go free, who think that they were wronged in the beginning and have overpaid in suffering and exile and loss of land for what harm they did. I might, perhaps, interfere and save them—"

He hesitated, and Lass leaned forward.

"But I shall not."

"Oh—why—?" she gasped in anguish, hearing yet hating to believe, seeing Hester's tortured eyes, Mahlon's eyes.

"You think I am cruel, madame, but it is not that. We must be governed by law and order now, and by our Constitution, not at sixes and sevens by private men. We are trying to build a free man's country."

"So I have heard. I haven't seen much proof of it. How can it be a free man's country if men can be wrongly put to death?"

"I do not say we have it. I say we are trying to. There has never been one before, madame, in all the years of the world. Are we to be blamed if we do not know our way, if we make mistakes? For a hundred years we may make them—but we shall keep trying still."

Silent, bewildered, she stared at him. His old voice thickened with weariness as it plodded patiently on.

“We have met and soberly considered a plan for orderly government, and we have set it up. I know it is not perfect. I admit there are things about it not to my own taste. But it is the best we have for now, and no man should move to corrupt and overthrow the workings of it, even though his whim may have some right and justice. It is so set up by Constitution that the pardoning of criminals is the duty of the Council; the Legislature to have no part. Friends of the Doans in ill-advised eagerness have corresponded with their friends in the Legislature, but in this matter the Legislature is without power. You ask me, as governor, to move against my own government and its orderly processes which I have helped to establish.”

“I ask you to save two men’s lives.”

“Madame, I cannot. I am sorry. I know there is a mistake somewhere. It will have to be thought on and pondered over, that our state may be made a better one where injustices cannot happen. If your Doan friends die now, it will be the cause of an inquiry and adjustment that will save the lives of men another time. They will have done as much to make this a free country as if they had fallen at Valley Forge or Bunker Hill. And it is not as if they were blameless. For proven criminals, they shall have a good ending.”

“I am sure their mother will be much comforted when I tell her so,” said Lass, struggling to her feet. “She thought there was nowhere to turn but God. I thought we could get justice by going no further than Benjamin Franklin.”

A gray shadow went over the old face that did not come from the movement of fruit tree boughs in the falling sun. “Tell her I will do all I can without treason. When the Council meets next week I will ask that they vote on the matter again. It will be the day before that set for the execution. There is no further act within my lawful power.”

So Lass went home with her unwelcome news, that they had no more to hope from money or high-placed friends, no other stay but the spirit. And behind her, the first man in Pennsylvania stared somberly at the twilight thickening round his grape arbors and chrysanthemum beds. “Would I have told her the same,” he murmured, “in the days when I was writing Poor Dick’s almanac? I think—I serve my country—with an old man’s wisdom. But who can tell when that commences to tremble on the brink of folly?” Twice he called a servant to go to the Walnut Street jail, and twice he stopped him from going. And all night long he lay awake in his bed drawn near the window for coolness, watching the bright stars circle the sky, knowing, as he had never known before, the heavy burden and cost of rearing a free country.

TWENTY-THREE

Higher than Haman

•

The minutes of the next week ticked forward like the terrible, slow, relentless footfalls of a marching army. The heat waned, and now and then, especially at dusk, a chill little wind or a dry leaf drifting down spoke of the changing season. The night before the Council met it rained hard and many leaves fell. Hester and Lass sat late, looking out on the wet roofs of the town, finding no words for each other. Polly slept, her tear-stained face tight to the pillow. She had tried to smuggle a file to her brothers that afternoon, but the guards had caught her and jeered and driven her away. Joseph visited tirelessly among the Friends round the great Meeting House at the corner of Second Street, and they prayed with him and shook their heads, and at dawn he went back to the women. The daytime vigil began then, and it seemed even worse than that of the night. A thin, cold fog hung in the air, hiding the gray sky and Christ Church steeple, and the stalls of bright-colored silks and vegetables in High Street. Lass looked out once and caught sight of the narrow dwelling in Brick House Row where her father had died. She moved away from the window then, and went and crouched by the cold hearth, and counted the bricks in the chimney. She and Polly managed to swallow a little porridge and dry bread, but the father and mother neither ate nor drank. They sat on the sofa, silent, holding hands, young lovers who had rambled along the green river banks of Makefield near forty years ago, grown old now, with a tall son and nephew facing death.

Finally, in the dank, cheerless twilight, three sober Friends in gray brought the word they had feared would come. The Council had met, had considered the Bucks County cowboys for the last time, had voted that the execution should go forward. Joseph put his head in his hands then, and Polly stiffened with horror. Hester did not speak or move, and Lass stared, unbelieving. It was she who, at the Friends' urging, ran blindly upstairs for their cloaks and helped to shepherd the Doans down High Street to the warm, lamplit parlor next door to the Meeting House where others of the faith had gathered to support their own kind in this hour of trouble. Once there, she sank back in a low chair in a corner and watched the kind-faced women in their gray and brown and lilac skirts of incredible neatness as they hovered over Hester, somehow making her

swallow a cup of hot broth; the low-voiced brothers touching Joseph on the shoulder, filling his glass with brandy. She listened to their gentle speech and there was comfort and wisdom in it, but it reminded her once again that the ways of the Friends would always be strange to her; the patience, the resignation.

"Man's soul," she heard them say, "is a clear sky through which the Seed is blown, like milkweed on silken wings, and in the heart of the Seed is the word of God. His power is over all weakness and death. Blessed be the Lord."

"He tasted death for every man," she heard them say, "and the ocean of His light and love flows over the ocean of darkness."

"We are not to dispute of God and Christ," she heard them say. "We are to obey Him."

And she twisted her hands in her lap and wondered how such talk could comfort a man and woman whose beloved son was going to be hanged the next morning. But somehow it seemed to. Joseph held his head up, and the color came back into his gray face. Hester began to weep quietly, the sweet, wholesome tears of a hurt soul that can be mended. Then all words ceased, as if an invisible hand had raised up demanding silence. They were waiting for a Word; for the spirit to move within one of them and speak through that one to all. Lass knew she would not be the one, so she turned her head away, almost ashamed to watch them at their holy moment. As she turned, she glanced through the window into the black rain outside. A magnolia tree grew close to the house, its broad leaves stirring in the gusty wind, and there among the leaves stood Mahlon. The lamplight shone on his face and she could see that it was streaked with dirt. His tousled brown hair hung into his eyes. He had a swelling bruise on his forehead and a long red scratch across one cheek. He waited there, unmoving, on his face the look of a desperately hungry man watching a feast he cannot share. Quietly, unnoticed by the rapt Friends, she made her way across the room and ran outside to join him, slipping on the wet grass, breathless with haste and surprise.

"Oh, Mahlon!" she cried as she reached him.

"Hush!" he whispered, drawing her within his arm. "They may have followed me. I don't think they did, but they may have."

He darted a quick look behind him and then started leading her toward the high brick wall around the Meeting House. Mint plants, crushed under their feet, lifted a moist fragrance all about them; Christ Church bells rang, and the watch plodded down High Street, swinging his lantern and crying the weather. When they came to a little gate let into the wall, he wrenched it open and they crossed the yard of the Meeting House to the shelter of a narrow, whitewashed porch built out from its rear door. Here he stopped, still holding her lightly against his side.

"Don't know it's safer here," he muttered, "but somehow I feel like it is."

"What happened? How did thee get hurt? Won't thee be put in jail if thee's caught?"

"Likely I will. Jail's where I just come from."

She noticed then the iron-heavy bulge of the pistol below his hunting shirt.

"I went there to see if there wasn't no way to get the boys out. I found there wasn't."

"What did thee try?"

"First I got a rope to 'em. I netted it round a rock and kept throwing till I put it through their window—low, on the Walnut Street side. Abe bent the bars apart. His strength ain't that of a man—it's so much it scares me. Then I circled round by the debtors' cells on Prune Street and starts shooting to call the guards over there. One of 'em got me. We had a difference of opinion." He touched the bruise on his forehead and smiled.

"But thee got away."

"Yes. Spun him over with the collar-and-elbow. It's a wrestling trick I learned in the south. The Virginia men use it. I'd ha' liked to ha' seen Mose clamp it on one of them taxing bastards in the old days. Mose would have admired it. Anyhow, I doubled back to see if the boys got away all right—and I found they didn't. Seems I fooled nobody but myself. 'Twas expected they might try to break jail, so guards was posted all over, thicker than quills on a hedgehog. I went back to the Conestoga Wagon then. That's where I been staying since I come to town three days ago. Found I was remembered there from the old days, and got a hideout and horses ready, and a way to pass word to the boys. I did everything I could, but I couldn't get them free. Lass, I'm afraid they'll hang."

"So am I," she whispered sorrowfully, clinging to him. "I tried everything I knew. And I failed! Mahlon, remember when thee looked through the window and saw thy mother and the Friends all praying—trying their way? If we were to admit we were wrong and acted in false pride—? I don't know much about God—the way He is among the Friends. We didn't have God in the First Church really—only the minister. I haven't ever thought much about God anyway—doing His will—loving Him. I—I only loved—Mahlon Doan!"

He stood wordless beside her for a long moment, then he spoke soberly, but with a tremor in his voice that might have been happiness.

"That was wrong of thee, Lass."

"Was it—really? Thee's made in His image, isn't thee? I don't think God'll ever hold against any woman the things she did because she loved a man. But doesn't thee think, if we waited here—thee can't go in with the others and let thyself be seen—doesn't thee think He might speak to us and show us His way to save them?"

"He might. He's forgiven worse sinners than Abe and Levi 'fore now."

"Then—let's try."

"If thee wants to."

For a long time they stood there, bowed, speaking no words, not quite in each other's arms, each unmoved by the other, waiting for a greater love to breathe upon them, for the ocean of light to flow over the ocean of darkness, seeing and hearing nothing but the black Pennsylvania rain.

Finally he gave a spent, despairing sigh that was half a sob, and led her back through the dripping shrubs and the little gate to the shelter of the magnolia tree.

"Is thee going to sleep at the inn?" she asked him. "Where'll thee be tomorrow, if it happens—and after—?"

"I'll be around, close as I dare. And after—whichever way it goes—I'll see thee back in Plumstead before I ride south. I might have a thing to say to thee—I don't know."

Again the sweetness rising from her bosom into her throat, rising up from her to kindle fires across the rainy sky.

Even now with the lighted window, they stood still and looked into the room. The Friends sat there, serene in their passive silence, but as they watched, Hester rose to her feet and stood staring straight before her, speaking with the spirit's voice and not her own. She stood near the window and spoke the doom clear and loud, so that her words carried to the straining ears of the huddled pair under the magnolia tree.

"Joseph is not," she said, "and Simeon is not. And now thee will take Benjamin away!"

Sometime in the night the rain blew over and the clouds scudded down the Delaware valley toward the sea. Then the wind ceased, and a clear, sharp, frosty cold came in with the sunrise, bringing shivers with it, a cold like that of the uplands in late October. Philadelphia men swallowed their hot porridge early and slung their cloaks around them before they started west for the Common to see the Doan boys hanged, a lesson to all enemies of the United States of America.

Behind the gray stone walls of the jail house, Abe and Levi crawled out of the straw where they had burrowed when the first chill seeped in. Levi stretched and yawned. Abe went to the grated window and looked down into the yard, with the flight of steps leading to it, and the mounted cannon, a guard lolling by its breach, half-asleep. Then he turned back and looked at his cousin. Levi's face, pallid under a film of dirt, stared back at him sullenly, and Abe knew that he himself was as pale and dirty. Stench, almost like a living

presence, hung in the room, a stench like rotting lemons and old cheese long forgotten on a shelf, like evil fungi sprung forth to destroy the living tree. A rat ran across the narrow beam of sunlight on the rough floor stones, and Levi shied a piece of dried filth at it. Then he shivered.

"It's cleared off cold, Abe," he said uncertainly.

"Yea," rumbled Abe, brushing the bits of straw from his unshaven chin, "but we won't be feeling it long."

"May be colder—where we're going."

"But it won't bother us none."

"Thee doesn't think there's any hope—any way we can get out of it now?"

"Not now. No way."

"They'd never have caught us if thee hadn't felt the need to leap over that Conestoga wagon that was drawn up in Lancaster Square. Folk knowed nobody but a Doan could leap like that. It give us away to the sheriff."

"Time I'm afraid to leap over a wagon when I want to, I'll leave off being a man. I'll go and be a ringer of bells in a steeple house."

"Thee still talks like it was the old days, Abe, when we was all together and riding out—"

"That was a good time," said Abe, throwing back his massive head, with an air proud and satisfied rather than sorrowful. "We knowed what we wanted and what was right for the country, and we done what we could to get it. But we didn't get it. Now we'll be strung up, and everybody'll march in line, hayfoot, strawfoot. No better way for 'em to learn we Doans was right after all."

"Does—does thee still think we were?"

The sunbeam widened across the tumbled straw. Levi looked down at his broken boots as he asked the question.

"What's thee saying, Levi?" Abe's jutting brows drew together, his dark glance fixed itself on the younger man.

"I don't know, Abe. If thee's still sure—I wouldn't question. I agree with thee—that was a good time. We had all Bucks County astir, didn't we? Remember that night up to Pipersville when the colonel's wife chased Joe with a flatiron?"

"Aye—if it hadn't been for their plowboy—"

"He slipped out and called the militia, didn't he? We never brought home a shilling that night."

"He bilked me," said Abe, smiling, twisting his thick fingers rapidly in and out like a nest of serpents coiling. "He did that—but only the once. God cut him off soon after."

"I know he was found in Rob Gibson's buckwheat with his throat slit. Did thee do that?"

The sunlight widened on the floor. Abe went on grinning and did not answer. The turnkey, his eyes still red with last night's whiskey, stumbled down the passage outside and let himself into the cell. He bent forward unsteadily and placed on the floor a wooden bowl full of chunks of mildewed rye bread and greenish beef. Then from his own pocket he added a leather bottle.

"Compliments of t'other prisoners," he muttered. "Said to tell ye they hoped on their gallows day somebody'd do the same for them."

Abe gripped the bottle in his great hand.

"Thank thee, Turnkey. Will thee drink to us Doans afore we die?"

The turnkey retched slightly. "Not now, thank 'ee, lad. But ye could leave the bottle when they takes ye out. I'll feel more settled in the gut by noon—and ye won't be needing it then."

"No. We won't need it then. And our thanks to them that sent it."

The turnkey secured the iron grating again and shuffled off. Abe stood, holding the bottle.

"Does thee want breakfast, Levi?"

"No. I'm not of a mind to eat."

"Cheer up. There's good men gone ahead of us. Remember Jim Fitz? He flogged near every Whig in Montgomery and got hanged in Chester. And Foxy Joe—killed a man in the street on New York Island, and they hanged him there. Remember Mose?"

"Aye. To the end I'll remember Mose. He could stir a glass of rum with a bloody finger one night, and get a Word from the Lord the next. There ain't no men like Mose in Bucks County any more."

"Nor nowhere else."

"Not where we're going?"

"There, maybe."

"Did thee really believe in his Word from the Lord?"

"Thee couldn't doubt Mose—could thee—the way he told it all so plain? How it come to him above Tohickon, under the rhododendron trees—"

"Aye. They shot him just below there. Remember how we hid under the hill firing—trying to help him get away?"

"And the night he wanted all us boys to go out alone and see if the Word would come again. I don't know what the others did, but we went and had the German women up by Richland Swamp."

"And whole county said we was to blame for the killings at Wyoming that night. Abe—thee wanted to go to Wyoming—and kill. I heard thee told Moses so. Why was that? And thee shot the parson's wife in Jersey. Why? I never knew. And I always wondered. And I can't ask thee after today."

Levi lifted his eyes and stared straight into the dark, burning eyes of

Abraham. Abe brushed a ragged sleeve upward across his forehead.

"I don't know, Cousin. I never knew. I been bewildered. Somehow—this morning—since daylight come—I call it all up and I see it—a little more clear. 'Twas a grief to lose Deborah, but there was worse come after that. Black turned white, and right turned wrong, and whole world went askew. I was—like a blind man tied in a sack and prodded. He'll lash out wild, hitting where he may. It's not clear yet. And I got no time to find out now."

The turnkey had roused the other prisoners, distributing breakfast. Across the squalid yard, from the grated windows in the debtors' wing, poured a flood of sound; obscene cries, a hymn tune lifted dolefully.

Abe uncorked the bottle.

"Does thee want a last drink, Cousin?"

Before Levi could answer him they heard footfalls and mild voices in the passage, and a little group of Quaker gentlemen, smooth-faced and gray-clad, paused outside the cell and looked in at them.

"We are Friends from the Great Meeting House, Brothers. Last night we prayed with Friend Levi's father and mother. We have come here now to bring thee the Lord's comfort, if we may, since thy kin is not allowed."

Abe almost dropped the bottle and Levi stepped forward.

"Father and Mother here—to see—?"

"They have been in town trying to arrange thy pardon, but—so far—they have failed. We fear thee must prepare to change worlds."

The Doan boys looked at each other. Finally Abe spoke, with a meekness that surprised Levi.

"We professed the truth when we was young," he murmured, "but since then we—we walked disorderly." He bowed his head.

Outside the cell the Friends began to pray, even as the brightening sunlight tempered the chilly morning air.

"The day of the Lord must come upon all flesh. May these, our brothers, be given one little glimpse of the glory that was with the Father before the world began. May they have new names in the Book of Life—"

Levi shifted his feet in the dirty straw and muttered without lifting his head, "Our name be Doan. We want no other—here, or wherever we have need of a name."

"Hush," rasped Abraham.

"May the power of the living God go with thee. May thee die in the Truth—that all is not in our wills, but in the will of God."

A shouting burst forth in Walnut Street and along the edges of the potter's field.

"Bring out the Doans!"

"There's Sheriff's men to fetch 'em!"

"They're going up, boys!"

"Aye! Higher than Haman afore noon!"

Prayers ceased on the lips of the startled Friends. With a hasty, "God be with thee," they hurried away. Their footfalls dwindled and died along the stones. The ring of heavier boots sounded on the courtyard stairs.

Abe bent over and picked up the wooden bowl, sweeping the bread and meat from it. He filled it with thick brown rum from the leather bottle, handed the bowl to Levi and lifted the bottle to his own mouth.

Madness and bewilderment gone, he stood up straight, the young Abe Doan, black, and fierce, and handsome.

"To George, his England!" he cried, and took the short swallow. Levi did the same.

"And to the Doans—Free America!"

They emptied bowl and bottle.

Then the sheriff's men swarmed into the cell, grouped around them, and herded them out like beef cattle in slaughter time.

Out on Walnut Street, in the sharp blue and gold air, being tied with ropes to the hangman's cart, the cousins looked around them: at the State House, all fresh white trim and little new trees, drooping with fall; Christ Church steeple, and the cupolaed courthouse where they'd heard their death warrants read; blue Delaware flowing past the town's end, an open road into Bucks County, an open road to home; the Conestoga Wagon where they had caroused away their young nights with no thought those nights would not last forever; the road to Southwark and Old Swedes' Church where Abe had dallied in the moonlight with Deborah Mave, to "Duke" Wharton's coach house where Levi had lain on the night of the great fete with a bullet in his arm. Wagons rumbled into High Street full of red apples and russet potatoes, orange pumpkins and purplish turnips, cackling chickens and wicker egg baskets; all the sweet, lush treasures of earth, surpassing gold and silver.

Levi cleared his throat.

"Seeing the crops come in makes me think of home," he said.

Abe thought too of the windswept Doan farmland on top of Plumstead Ridge, the barn where their six black horses pawed and munched, the long attic at the top of the house where all the Doan boys slept together in fellowship, tired out with riding and fighting and loving and drinking grog.

"Whatever thee wants to think of," advised Abe softly, "thee better think of it now."

The cart began to move through the street, drawn by two heavy-hocked, dappled horses, driven by a sharp-faced man with a red coat and a cock's feather in his hat. The Doans walked slowly along behind it, aware that a shouting crowd had gathered and was following behind and beside them,

keeping their eyes blind to the faces in it. They passed the edge of the potter's field, still a forlorn sweep of hummocks and tangled vines.

"Me and Mahlon buried some money there once," said Abe, pointing to a thicket laced with bull briar. "Four hundred pounds and a bag of silver. I never went back for it. I wonder if he did."

"There was the treasure Mose hid up Tohickon," Levi reminded him. "Rob Gibson shot him afore he could tell us where. I wish we knew. Father and Mother could use it now."

Beyond the potter's field the road ended and a rutted track led out across a half-cleared field made when the British had burned the east edge of Schuylkill woods. Just ahead of them now they saw the gallows, a raw yellow pine trunk still shaggy with bark, its crosspiece of older, darkened timber, the noose hanging straight down in the windless air. The hastily built platform beneath it stood in a patch of half-crushed goldenrod and milkweed pods spilling their white silk. Rough hands jerked the boys out on the platform.

They stood there and looked around them, knowing it would be their last look at the world of flesh and blood, at the men who had come to see them hanged, who if things had fallen out a different way might have been their brothers. They saw Charles Biddle, the tight-mouthed councilman who had told them they could hope for no second stay, no lasting pardon. He looked pleased with himself, as if his breakfast had suited him well. Would his dinner taste as sweet? They saw Robert Morris—"Bobby the Cofferer"—plump and worried from counting money all night in his restless sleep, but not enough money to pay his creditors. Philip Hinkle, the hawk-nosed vendue crier who had kicked Moses' corpse, and Judge Henry Wynkoop, vise-jawed, whose court had proclaimed them outlaws, exiled forever from the United States of America. Farmer Nugent and Quaker Hallowell, whom they had beguiled and robbed, and made a jest of in the taverns afterward.

The sheriff's men pulled the rope down and adjusted the knots of it. A blackbird called, clear and loud, in the oak grove toward the river, flew up from a mesh of dried honeysuckle hanging down, and winged away through the bright sky spreading west.

Abe bent over and touched Levi on the shoulder. "Levi! Look there! There's that little German girl who sold corn pie and quince chips in Lancaster Market, who was so doting on thee."

The Doan boys stared down into the crowd, their eyes fastened on a young face, lovely last time they had seen it, but now blanched and taut, its frightened gray eyes welling tears.

A tremor went through Levi.

"Aye," he said softly. "We talked of marrying. Under the apple boughs in the spring we talked of it. Maybe next year—when the trees bloom—she'll talk

of it again. A maid's tears dry."

"And look! There's Mahlon's redhead! Remember that night at the Anchor when she gave him Sam Bye's money? Sam's face was something to study on!"

"But, Abe—look! Beyond her—there's Polly—and Father and Mother!"

Abe gazed into the tense faces of Joseph and Hester Doan, who had stood all his life as close to him as his own parents, whose faces, two of the first he remembered, would be the last he would see. Hester's head was bent, and his eyes followed the sleek parting of her hair. Joseph stood up, square-shouldered, meeting him look for look. And seeing them so, where he had brought them, to this last extremity of love and anguish, the mist cleared from his horizons, the sick uncertainty left him. He knew, as he had not known before, the world of Abe Doan, and the world of all mankind; the old, wild, free America, and the new United States, where the lesser freedoms were lost, that the greater might be sure for all. And still not understanding how, he knew that those worlds could be the same. His muscles stiffened, and his heavy fingers gripped his cousin's shoulder through the tattered coat.

"Don't thee grieve at it, Levi—or fear at all. We done wrong, and I know it now. Come my last minute, I know it. A man can't go against his time! And if he tries it, he's a fool—but he ain't nothing worse. There'll be forgiveness. I tell thee, there'll be heaven, sure!"

Levi heard his words and half believed. He straightened up and smiled at Abe, smiled out over the crowd. He walked casually across the platform and put one hand on the shaggy trunk still oozing amber from the knots where green boughs had sprouted forth in its growing time. He thrust his head back and let his eyes follow the rise of the tall shaft. Then he remarked, clear, and loud, and careless, for all to hear, "Looks like we're going up, Abe. Higher than Haman!"

"Aye," boomed Abe, with his gaze also lifted, seeing beyond the gallows the blue, blue sky, "that we be!"

TWENTY-FOUR

“Like Adam Married Eve”

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With the hanging of Abe and Levi Doan on Philadelphia Common, most of Bucks County felt that it had cleaned its house at last, and set its affairs in order, could go forward with the rest of the country to build an America that would be free for every man, the city apprentices as well as the squirrel-hunters. Of course there were those who muttered that they had hanged the two smartest men in Pennsylvania, but as a Jersey man wrote home in the days of Penn the Founder, “no land can please all.” With three of the cowboys dead and three scattered beyond the frontiers, none of the Tory Doans were left alive in Plumstead except children and women and old men. Polly and her father drove the bodies home in a farm cart, and Lass and Hester followed by the stage that ran through Coryell’s Ferry. Grandsir Israel, eighty-nine years old, the weak tears of age flowing from dim eyes that used to snap and sparkle, pleaded with Plumstead Meeting to let the last of his fighting cocks be buried with the other Friends on the sunny hillside turned forever south toward Pine Run. His plea was soberly considered and denied. The boys had their rest finally, in a bed of mandrake just outside the graveyard wall. Hester and Rachel went there and wept for their dead sons, read from God’s word, and tried to reconcile themselves to His Will. Joseph toiled alone on the land to reap the autumn harvest that must feed his family the winter through, remembering that once he had had five sons to help him and sighing for that time.

Lass waited for Mahlon.

She knew that he had returned to the cave by Tohickon, for Polly slipped out every night or so into the dark fields that lay in that direction, a basket of bread and baked meat swung on her arm. Lass knew that he would not ride south until they had spoken again, for she had his word.

One night about a week after they came back from Philadelphia, Hester called her into the kitchen and handed her the basket Polly usually carried. Lass took it, uncertain but eager, question in her eyes.

“Does thee know where the cave is, Lass?” Hester asked, keeping her head half turned away.

“Yes. Yes, I know. I went there once with Polly the time Mose had to hide

just before he—just before—! Do you want me to take Mahlon's supper?"

Suddenly Hester looked straight at her with sober eyes.

"Lass," she said evenly, "I'll not pretend to thee—like I meant to. I'll tell thee my whole mind. I sent Polly to carry home a petticoat I frilled for Hugh Meredith's wife. I wanted her away. I wanted thee to go to Mahlon tonight because I'm afraid—I'm afraid tomorrow he's leaving for Cane Creek. He might come here to see thee tonight, but then—he might not. We'll never know Mahlon, any of us. And I've hoped all the years that he and thee—!"

Lass gripped the handle of the basket so hard that the woven willow twigs splintered but she did not feel the prick of them. She stared wordless at Hester.

"First time I saw thee," went on the older woman, "the day Ruth Gwydion brought thee here, I knew thee for my daughter."

She bowed her head.

Finally Lass spoke. "Thank thee for telling me," she whispered. "I'll go to him—Mother."

She walked slowly out of the ramshackle house, half-covered with crimson woodbine, that had sheltered the Doan family since the downfall of their sons, and stepped into a mild autumn night lighted with stars and a great moon. A little wind rustled through the dry cornstalks left standing in the field, not shocked up tidily after the New England way, and the difference this gave the look of the land she was crossing made her think of all the differences between her and Mahlon, made her wonder how they could ever be at one. Perhaps he had been right years ago, in the boat on Trenton night, in the violets by Sam Bye's brook, when he said their ways were different and must stay so. Tonight she would know. If he turned away from her this time, stiffened that thin, sweet mouth and stared straight at her out of the bottomless brown eyes—and set his hands on her shoulders and put her from him—if he used her so tonight, it would be for the last time. She would take her defeat and go. Where, would not matter. After all, had she not died once—on the stairs in Ruth Gwydion's house, on a summer morning when she was seventeen?

She came out on the cart track leading down from Plumstead to the Delaware between ragged patches of blackberry vines and worm fences hung with bittersweet, followed its windings to the edge where the land broke sharply away, high above the creek bed, where the rhododendrons began. All around her the moon had turned the night air to the color of the dark honey at the center of the wild bees' secret hoard in the heart of the oak trees. Ahead of her the hills of Jersey stood up in a stern black-purple line—a wall forever between her and her old life in New England, for though she might have to go back to it if Mahlon turned from her forever, all of her could not go back. Part of her would stay forever here, among the stone farmhouses and long, mellow runs of Bucks County where she had met her love, and part of her would go

with him, wherever he might go. But if he should not turn from her this time—if he should take her in his arms and hold her, and kiss her mouth, and not put her away—but that was too great a sweetness to be thought of.

Down through the scrub oaks and stunted firs she picked her way, down the craggy drop, more cliff than hillside, to the edge of the still, dark water in a backwash of the Tohickon, choked with pickerel weed and lily pads and thick stems of cowslip. Under the hill, towering above her now, sprouting its dwarf trees between her and the moon, she could guide herself only by her fingers touching the slate ledge and the sapling root. That she finally found the cave must surely have been because God meant her to, she thought, there could be no other reason. First she saw a light creeping out between the rocks, and then the ledge she had been following gapped all about the light, and she stood in the cave's mouth shrouded with the heavy, waxy leaves of rhododendron. Back in the shadows she could see a little fire burning, see its flames leap up outlining the taut, thin figure of Mahlon as he bent to throw a branch on it. She moved slowly forward, still feeling her way along the moist limestone sides of the narrow tunnel leading inward. The further in she went, the damper the stones felt, the chiller grew the air.

When she reached the spot where the roof lifted and the tunnel widened out into the round, vaulted room where Mahlon stood, she called his name, low, but quick and all in one breath, so as to spare him any possible moment of frightened surprise.

"Mahlon, it's Lass! I brought thy supper."

He stood, stiff and tense, nothing moving about him but his eyes, but they turned toward her, shining with the reflection from the fire—shining, and soft, and eager.

"Why did thee come tonight instead of Polly?" He took the basket from her and set it on the shale beside him.

"Because thy mother sent me."

The sharp planes of his face mellowed in a smile.

"Women be all alike," he said. "They don't want to let a man stay free. Even his own mother don't."

"Thee thinks I'd try to bind thee, Mahlon—to keep thee from living as thee wants—?"

"I think thee'd like nothing better."

She stared miserably about her, at the pink and brown flutings of limestone overhead, the long spirals of stone thrusting down from the roof like candles upsidedown, the spirals standing around the wall like altar candles in a popish church. The whole place shone with the soft lustre of the inside of a sea shell, she thought, a sea shell washed up by the tide on the beaches below Newburyport. Behind them the cave ran out into blackness alive with the

murmur of underground water. This had been the hideout of the Doan cowboys through their declining time, when not even their heavy pistols and hard riding could keep them safe above ground in Bucks County. Hanging on a point of rock by a rawhide loop was a crooked, yellowish powder horn with "M. Doan. 1771" marked in awl holes on the bottom of it, and pulled through the loop, too, hung one of Moses' red silk handkerchiefs, tattered and awry. Along the wall nearest the fire stretched a row of heaped-up blankets, five spread smooth and untroubled as graves in churchyard, covered with a film of lime dust; one untidy and crumpled, where Mahlon must have slept last night. Five rifles stood neatly stacked in a bay of livid rock, but Mahlon's own rifle lay on an outcrop of slate beside him, close to hand. Here hung a plaided hunting shirt that had been Levi's, and Aaron's round hat with a partridge feather in it, and one of Joe's velvet mantles with a couple of calf-bound books tossed down underneath, just as if the scholar dandy expected to come back and read them some day. And near them waited a pair of buckskin moccasins that could have fitted nobody but the giant Abraham. Her throat choked with grief for everything that had ever been and was not any more. Her eyes went back in misery to Mahlon and found him standing there, miserable for the same reason.

"Thee's right, Mahlon," she said, looking up into his eyes, bold, but not with the old, gay boldness of the young Lass Marvayne who had never been hurt, or troubled, or frightened, or denied in all her life; this was the boldness of despair. "I would like nothing better—the half of it, that is. I wouldn't want to keep thee from living where thee would, or thinking as thee liked. Just so long as thee'd have me with thee—that's all I want."

"Maybe thee thinks that, but I seen thee in silks and satins, dancing in Philadelphia and going into fine houses there, and likely thee owns a finer house than any of them. There's nothing like that in Cane Creek. Nothing fine but the free air. Thee wouldn't live in a hut in the woods five miles beyond any man's chimney smoke, and help skin a deer and tend the sows when they litter, and wait alone all night for a man out hunting who don't come home. Thee'd never leave thy counting house and thy ships and that blond boy thy father left thee to in his will, who runs whenever thee whistles to him. I'll never believe thee'll do that, Lass Marvayne, never until I see."

"I'd admire to show thee."

She watched his face closely and saw the resolution start to melt out of it, saw the questions ask and answer themselves behind his troubled eyes. And then the lashes flicked and the jawline stiffened, and she knew that his answer would be no. She stepped up to him then, having nothing more to lose, and clasped her arms around his neck and put her mouth on his and held him, close and warm. She laid her mouth against his and kissed him, a kiss that she tried

to keep from being passion rather than promise, to keep from being the kiss that a man gives a woman rather than the kiss that a woman gives a man.

His arms curved around her finally and held her, half clinging, half reluctant, but growing less reluctant as they stood there, fast together. Not moving out of their circle, she drew her face away from his and looked up at him, the hot confidence of her youth rushing back, because she could feel that the increasing tenseness of his muscles flowed all toward her, was not summoned to hold her away.

"Doesn't *this* mean anything to thee, Mahlon Doan? Anything at all?"

"Thee wants," he asked her in a strange, tight voice, "for me to show thee what it means?"

"I do."

In a moment she was lying on the crumpled blankets and he bent above her, outlined in the flickering firelight on the limestone wall. He held himself back from her with difficulty only long enough for the last word before the two became one.

"Thee's not first woman to me, Lass."

"Yes. I know." There was no need to tell him of her own condition. He would learn it soon enough.

"Thee wants to marry me, but I'll not promise that. If I takes thee, it may be for only like this—like Adam married Eve."

"I'll take thee any way I can get thee."

Once in the night she woke and felt on her breast the weight of the dark head heavy with sleep, felt her own flesh rise and fall ever so slightly with the rhythm of his deep breathing. At last she had known Mahlon Doan—as much as she would ever know him, and that was not at all. She lived over again the night in the Wrightstown tavern when she had first seen him, first known dimly the way a tree feels when the warm flood of lightning pours into it from the sky, when it receives at once its glory and its death. She was lying at the heart now of the invisible storm blown out upon her from another world, and if he turned to her again when he woke, she knew that all the rest of her life would be spent in the heart of that storm, following him as one follows a star across the sky and as far removed from him, even when she lay in the crook of his arm. For the mystery of him was in part the mystery of the old, wild, free America, always receding beyond the tree-line, keeping a little to the west of the United States; and part the mystery in the blood that could breed so true and make the Doans of Bucks County so like the black Doans who had been considered old fighting stock in the days of the Third Crusade and the Hundred

Years' War; and it was part the mystery that lives in the heart of every man who never grows up, who keeps one corner of himself forever untamed and inaccessible, and unsurrendered to life, who may play at being a lover and a father, but in his deepest being remains a lad—and that is every man. To be allowed to live out her life with this special mystery would be in truth her glory and her death, but she prayed that she might be so allowed, and put her cheek against his hair and slept again.

She slept so soundly that she did not wake when he wakened, in the cold hour before dawn when the cave was dark and the fire had died. First he moved cautiously away from her and rolled to the edge of the blankets and lay there briefly, just long enough to be sure that she still slept. She stirred and murmured, and flung out one arm, and he could see the blur of it, white in the darkness, see the white blur of her face, smell the fragrance of the rose scent she wore still clinging to her hair. That rising fragrance decided him. There would be no place for carved scent bottles out of France among the rough wood and leather noggins on the hewn shelves of his cabin by Cane Creek. His flesh was urging him back toward her, but he could not be conquered by the flesh, for he had been steadily armed against it all his life by the precepts of Plumstead Meeting. He rose swiftly, fumbled his way into his breeches and hunting shirt, groped for his rifle, and stole out of the cave into the cold, yellow morning, climbed through the woods to his mother's house and the stabled horse that knew as well as he did the way to Cane Creek.

He did not mean to say good-bye, for there had been too many partings in the Doan family for any of them to wish to endure another. He had sent them word that he must go before he was discovered and hustled off to Newtown jail, and they had given him leave and approval. He had named the day and knew that his saddlebags would be filled, ready for him to ride. But when he slipped cautiously into the rutted yard by the kitchen door, Hester stepped out of the house, a shawl around her thin shoulders, her face drawn with a night of sitting by the window watching for that which never came home. The mildness of last night had vanished from the air, and the fields and runs and ridges of Bucks County stretched before them, their persisting greenness dulled to the gray of slate under a lowering sky raked with a cold wind. Crimson leaves blew down from the great vine that had spread over the half-ruined walls and roof behind Hester, clung to her skirt, to her graying hair. Mother and son looked at each other, not thinking it might be for the last time, concerned for a more urgent thing.

"Where's Lass?" asked Hester, trying to keep her voice even. "She didn't come home."

"She's in the cave, asleep." Confusion and anguish twisted his face, and clouded the brown eyes. "I—I loved her—and I came away from her." This, he

knew, was not a time to lie.

"Was that the way thee was brought up to use a girl, Mahlon?"

He looked down and did not answer her.

"Or was it"—for after all, however he might have sinned, he was still her dearly beloved son—"that she tried thee too far, and thee didn't really want her after all?"

"I told her I wouldn't promise myself to marry her—no more than Adam married Eve. She agreed to that."

"But now that thee's had her and left her—does thee feel any different now?"

"I don't know. The further I get away from her, the more I feel as if there might be something in her that I hadn't thought there was. Like she might be strong enough, and minded enough, to put off her silks and scent and the little gold crown she thinks she wears, and run with the wild deer in a free country. If I thought she would do that—and be with me there like she was last night—I'd take her with me if I had to carry her over my shoulder every step of the way and go afoot."

"She'd run naked with the lost souls in hell if thee wanted it, Mahlon. That's not to say I condone or condemn it—but that's the truth of her."

Shocked by the violence of his mother's speech, he turned his eyes away.

"Go back and get her before it's too late. Take her with thee. It'll be easier for me if I know thee goes secure in a woman's love."

He hesitated. Dr. Hugh Meredith galloped into the yard, hatless, his powdered hair flying in the wind and his coat blown open.

"For God's sake, Mahlon, what are you doing standing here in the daylight like this? Sam Bye's been prying! He thought you must be about the country because of the way Lass tarried here after the hangings and wouldn't go. There's a posse riding up from Buckingham. They swear they'll beat Plumstead through with barley flails and fire the woods if need be. Get on your horse and ride!"

Mahlon stood perfectly still, darting swift glances about him, moving no other muscle. Then he turned his head and caught the beat of hoofs under the edge of the hill toward the Neshaminy. Hester had run to the crude shed that served for a stable and dragged out the whinnying black horse. Mahlon still hesitated.

"Get up, lad!" pleaded Dr. Hugh.

Hester wrung her hands. "Oh, go, go, Mahlon! What good'll a dead man be to her?"

He sprung swiftly into the saddle then and followed the doctor without looking back. They spurred through the first pale shoots of winter wheat, away and into the oak grove that stretched west, that would give them a good three

miles of cover. Hester turned weakly around and saw the posse, decently coated in Quaker gray, Friends as she and their quarry were Friends, sweep past the house heading for the Tohickon. Apparently they did not think even Mahlon Doan was foolhardy enough to hide under his parents' roof. And then Lass Marvayne stood beside her.

Her face, white as a wintered beech leaf, had fallen under the stress of the moment into lines that were not really there, that would not be there for a score of autumns. Peg Magoon in her coffin might have looked like that. Her blue eyes stared wide, and dark, and helpless, like a child hurt and abandoned in the night and not knowing why. Flakes of the powdered limestone that floored the Tohickon cave clung to her tangled red hair and disordered dress. She caught Hester by the sleeve and held her, her delicate nails thrusting like five sharp thorns into the flesh beneath. But Hester had borne too many children to flinch easily at pain. She took Lass's other hand firmly, soothingly, in her own.

"Mother! He left me! Has he gone?"

"Yes, Lass. But he went unready. The posse was riding this way. He had to go."

Lass's fingers loosened their grip and she leaned to Hester who put her arm round her.

"Did—did he get away safe?"

"I have faith he did. Dr. Hugh'll ride a ways with him—maybe into Montgomery."

"I'm glad. But—he left me!"

"But I think it was in his mind to go back, Lass. At the end—when the warning came—he stood here, and he could not move. For he was not sure! He was waiting a convincement, I thought."

Lass drew herself away and let her hands drop limply to her sides. She looked up at Hester and gave one last cry of appeal, "Oh, Mother! What shall I do?"

Hester smiled back in serenity and faith. "Thee must go on. Lass—the way thee always has. I think—thee need only follow him a little further now. Can thee do that?"

Lass stiffened and flung back her head, the bleak wind whipping her bright hair and her dusty skirts, and spoke with the strength of her father's son, and the sweetness of her father's daughter, and the unconquerable spirit of love wherein man and woman are one.

"I'll follow him forever," she said.

TWENTY-FIVE

November Round

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All down from Plumstead now to the sea tide's rising, the land lay still under the iron air of November, the time when all things turn to the earth again. Fulfilled and defeated lose their difference now, the one no quicker than the other, no surer to rise and take part in the inevitable spring. Major Kennedy, the patriot, lay under the oaks round Deep Run Presbyterian Church, a good man who had died a hero and been followed to his grave by a loud and splendid train of mourners. Moses Doan, the outlaw, lay in unhallowed turf where his grandfather's barley field ran out to hickory wood, thrust hastily away in darkness and shame by his own kin. Each of them was missing from his mother's house and the land he used to plow, from the country and the coming time. Both of them were a part of Bucks County forever now, part of its history and legend of brave men; turning to part of it another way, as the flesh of man goes back to the flesh of earth, to feed the roots that must nourish all.

But the dead can never die while any of those who loved them are breathing still. Hester and Joseph and widowed Rachel Doan moved among the gravestones below Plumstead Meeting House, huddling together, their heads bowed because of the sharp fall wind. Brown leaves swirled about them and blackbirds gathered and circled in the lowering sky colored like a pewter bowl. At the southeast corner of the graveyard they halted and stood mutely, staring over the low wall into the thicket outside it, staring at the grave of their sons. Joseph had heaped cedar boughs on the carefully replaced turf to keep the forest creatures from burrowing there. He was the first to make any sound, clearing his throat nervously, lifting his eyes to look out over Pine Run, down toward Buckingham and Wrightstown and the whole broad harvest sweep of Pennsylvania, the greatest colony ever built upon a private credit. He and his father and grandfather had helped build it, nor was he willing to admit that his sons had not. Again he cleared his throat, and turned from the brown and yellow and green chessboard of fields, and spoke to the women.

"We laid 'em as close as we was allowed," he said humbly, "as close to where the other Friends are."

Hester took his hand. "Thee did indeed," she replied, "and I don't doubt

but what they'll sleep as well."

"Does thee really think so, Hester?" asked Rachel sorrowfully, shivering in her rusty black cloak. "After all the harm they've done?"

"They was in error. They heard the word of God and mistook it. They thought God spoke in their terms and they didn't understand His. I'll not allow they did any worse. That He'll forgive them that, I believe."

"Thee'd say so because thee's the mother of one of them."

"He's the Father, isn't he—the Father of us all?"

Rachel and Joseph stood looking at her. Clouds of storm gathered black behind the gray-white stones of the Meeting House where its people had prayed for a generation against wars and fightings, where the blood of soldiers wounded in the Revolution stained its clean-swept floor.

"Then thee feels sure of heaven for our boys who are dead, Hester?" Joseph leaned heavily on the wall, keeping his head down.

"I think—'tis likely we'll meet them there."

"And for those alive?"

"Of them I am not so sure. The dead are safe, for they can no longer fall into sin. But the living and what way they'll go—none can tell."

"Thee hasn't—" he whispered desperately, "any convincement at all?"

"Nothing so strong as that. But I will tell thee what I think. Joseph and Aaron have chosen to go north and live under King George again, and in that I give them my blessing. But they say if there are any more wars against the United States they mean to fight in them."

"I know."

"And to do that is to persist in error."

"Thee's become a Whig, Hester?" asked Rachel, startled.

"No, but it's a Whigs' country. I've seen it turn into that the past ten years. I think it was always a Whigs' country at heart, that it'll stay that way a long time. And I want to live at peace with my neighbors in it. So long as they don't disturb me in the ways I worship God, they may order other affairs as they will."

"But Mahlon? He went south. He said nothing about fighting the Congress."

"I can't tell—about Mahlon. I never could. But I believe—though they killed our boys on the gallows—that the men in power now are ruled by a dream and a vision. I believe they have the Light in them. Why else were they given the victory? They couldn't have had it any other way except from God—with all the great armies fighting for the King. I hope Mahlon will come to see the world as they do—to find a way to live in it, to share. I don't know—"

She stood still, her hands spread flat on the crude slates of the wall and looked down to Pine Run across the stripped fields—and time came back.

Twelve years ago she had stood like this in November, then as now by her sister's side, and watched her five sons troop home to supper, four tall men, dark and shaggy, coming on with great strides like moving towers of bone and muscle; and among them, Mahlon, taut as a woods creature, treading light. Before her eyes the field stretched empty, and then, as she watched, a buck deer, tawny-white, loped out of the willow hedge by the creek and ran, easy, and confident, and unafraid, to vanish in the thickening dusk—to vanish to the southwest. To her it was a promise and a sign. Her sons were gone from her, but she put her faith in the wild deer. She turned to her husband.

"Joseph," she said, "I think the day may yet come when thee will play thy violin."

Far down the Valley of Virginia—in that November—on that very afternoon—a girl rode slowly between the narrow fields and scattered cabins, following the dusty ruts of the wagon road, urging her ancient black horse gently toward the south. Sea-born Thalassa, lost inland, still feeling the fire leap forth, still feeling upon the iron of her spirit the hammer strike and strike again, still wanting Mahlon Doan. The low hills around her bore forests of tossing leaves, troubled with the cold wind that rises just before sunset; leaves of rust, and olive, and amber, and garnet color, worn tapestry beside the scarlet and gold that had always been the banners of autumn in the country where she was born. A blue mist thickened the air over this valley running wide and unendingly southwest between two far blue mountain ridges, and blurred every roughness in the landscape, giving it the look of a sunken province, lost forever undersea.

She had been riding all day through rough farm country and woodlands tangled with meshes of vine still summer-green; now and then beside a crooked, sluggish river; now veering away from it as the road veered, through corn land and sheep pasture; now into stretches of blackjack oak and hickory; now down by the waterside again. She had been riding so for many days. Somewhere behind her and above, far up America somewhere, north of the frontier towns, lay the great turbulent meeting of the rivers where the cliffs came down; lay Lancaster and the Old Conestoga Road whose milestones still bore the coat of arms of Penn. That road led back past Merion Meeting House where Abe Doan was to have married his sweetheart; led back to Philadelphia —and from there to home, the road was all clear and plain. For home was not Newburyport any longer; home was the old Doan house under the sycamore, the country of wide corn fields and stone houses, and the long ridge where she had first seen the Doan boys and their wild black horses sweep, singing, under the moon. When she drank ale at the Anchor tavern that first night in Bucks County, she had been like the human child who tastes bread in fairyland, bewitched and unable to leave it any more. And when she left it finally, it was

only because what was for her the heart and essence of it had gone ahead.

Hester had packed a saddlebag for her, still in the early fall morning before the rest of the family were awake, and leading out Firebrand, had pointed her the way to go. Hester had given her the pewter cup with the hunting horn on it that had come from Massachusetts just as she had, that had crossed the sea from England before there ever was a Pennsylvania. Before Lass knew it, almost, she sat on the back of the old horse with Polly's shabby cloak around her, and looked down into Hester's face.

"Thee won't mind—Mother—Mahlon marrying out of Meeting? One who isn't a Friend?"

"Thee'll be a Friend in time. He'll help thee to see thy way to it."

"I'll try to learn. But—does thee think he really wants me?"

"Thee's been all night with him and still thee can't tell?"

"Then—then I think he does."

"Thee better go, Lass. If he's delayed somewhere thee may overtake him, and it's a long rough way for a girl alone."

And they had parted then, perhaps forever, but any parting can be that.

The road curved through a broad pasture, down a little slope with a brook and willow trees at the bottom of it. Miles away, but seeming just at her shoulder, the hills took on the purple and pink of the setting sun. Bells jangled and she pulled Firebrand into the weed-grown ditch to let the trading caravan pass by. A dozen farm horses, belled and collared, hobbled together with hickory withes, toiled slowly past her, carrying the country goods that were left to sell after harvest up to Winchester and Frederick, and the towns beyond. She had met many such caravans on the long way down the Valley, and talked with the drovers, trying to find out what she could of the road that lay ahead of her. She knew that the heavy packsaddles carried salt meat and flour and ginseng for the coast and the China trade; coming back they would be full of clothing and ironware. Whiskey, she knew, traveled both ways.

But when she thought of the China trade, she thought of her father, not of Silas, dying, yellow, in Brick House Row, but of the way he had looked that night watching Job Corey cut tombstones, drinking with Timothy Fletcher—wondering whether to let her go to Sally's or send her to Eleanor Druitt's school to learn to speak French and mend rich laces. What would he think to see her now, in a tattered cloak, a borrowed one at that, on a shambling old horse? Riding down the heart of the backwoods country to follow a man who had married her like Adam married Eve! It would likely have broken his heart, she thought, and turned, sorry for a moment for all the men in New England, or Bucks County—or maybe Cane Creek a generation from now—who planned so well and foolproof for their children and saw it all fall out so ill—if they lived long enough.

Women planned too. Up in Buckingham, Sally would be planning for little Christine; a sensible husband, no doubt, contained and prosperous; a man you need waste no time getting to the bottom of, a second Sam Bye. But Sally had reckoned without Christine herself, without the undying singleheartedness of Peg Magoon. Christine would have her way in her time. And I ought to be there to help her get it, thought Lass. Some of her own blood seemed to drain away from her when she realized that she would probably never be again with Sally and Christine. She had been growing steadily more unsure of herself with every mile she traveled, down the muddy streets of the market towns, past the blockhouses left over from the Indian wars. Now this uneasiness welled suddenly up in her as the yellow twilight waned.

The caravan passed by, and the drover eyed her sharply but did not speak to her. He had a sullen face and wore a peaked knit cap which made him look like a bad-tempered gnome. A little wary, Lass reined Firebrand into the path again and urged him down the hill toward the brook with a rail fence beyond it, stripped cornfields and a cabin, smoke pouring from the rough stone chimney that formed half of one outer wall. Just before her horse stepped into the shallow current, the wind freshened, came in quick gusts from the north. She shivered, and a storm of dead leaves poured down, brown and yellow, all around her, falling on her hair, her clothes, catching in Firebrand's mane, sinking through the clear green water.

"*Not past the leaves coming down in the fall!*"

Dr. Tim had told her that Vinny could not live longer than that. One of these harsh gray mornings when you couldn't see the Merrimack for fog—perhaps this morning, perhaps tomorrow—Vinny would waken choking, her pillow soaked with red. And Crispin would stand by helpless, lashing himself with inner whips, knowing too well that he had been to Vinny the death's head.

"I ought to go back," Lass murmured half aloud. "I ought to be there to help them if I can. I've done enough to harm."

Firebrand stepped gingerly through the brook, came out on the other side, and plodded past the cabin. The land rose beyond it, and at the top of the hill the road forked under a leafless hickory tree. One way would lead to Cane Creek, but which way she did not know. Behind her stretched the road to Newburyport that she knew so well. She climbed down from the old horse's bony back and left him to crop the rank grass that grew from the dried reddish clay of the wheel ruts.

I'll step in here and ask, she told herself, just where I am, and how far it is—either way—and how—There's sure to be somebody at home with all that smoke coming out.

She walked up to the cabin and tapped on the huge, nail-studded door. A

babble of women's voices broke and died away inside, but for a moment nobody answered her knock. She studied the walls before her, great, round logs, still bark-covered, the cracks between them filled with gray-green limestone clay. She could not look through the tiny windows at each side because they had no glass in them, only panels of some bleached, dried animal skin nailed across. And then a sharp scream leaped forth like an arrow cleaving the still dusk, went on and on at the same high pitch, till Lass, unable to think, even to fear, clapped her hands over her ears and held on. After a moment or two it broke and died away in a whimper of agony. Again the women's voices sounded, and a fat slattern in a dirty petticoat and a man's hunting shirt flung open the door.

"What d'ye want?" she demanded.

"I only wanted to ask—What's the matter?"

The woman shrugged. "It's a birthing," she said. "Have any of yer own?"

"No. No—I haven't."

"Then ye better ride on. Ye'll learn soon enough. It's her first, and that takes time an' yelling. We give her juniper tea an' hid scissors under the bed to cut the pains—don't often fail."

"Can I fetch any help? A doctor? Or her husband?"

"Him? No knowing where he is. He's off with his gun. Can't never expect to keep his kind home when the deer's running. We don't need him, and there ain't no doctor in forty miles."

Lass glanced through the door into the cabin, shadowy, smoky, stifling hot, full of the rank smell of illness and fresh blood. On a rope bed furnished with cornstalks and a dirty blanket lay a swollen figure struggling painfully with the unseen, like one who fights with a ghost. But the face under its masking of sweat and blotches carried still the luster of apple blooms in spring; the lank, untended hair was a golden color, and the suffering eyes as blue as Lass's own, and younger, and more sweet. The girl screamed again. Two women bent over her, and a third sat at a crude table helping herself to a bottle of grog. Lass took a few steps backward and closed her eyes.

Behind the lids she did not see this cabin any more, but one very like it, further into the woods, further to the south, with thicker bark on the walls, and coarser cornstalks for a bed. She saw herself on the cornstalks, struggling in childbirth, the hidden scissors, and the slatterns passing a bottle from hand to hand. And Mahlon would not be there. He would be off somewhere with his gun. He was the kind you couldn't expect to keep at home when the deer were running. Nights of mild air and love, and then the bitter autumn afternoon like this one always to follow. Oh, she must think—think clear, and in another moment take to the road again, the road she would have to follow all the rest of her life. The choice was now. Crispin would be a free man by the time she

could get home to Massachusetts. She could go back there and take his hand, and touch his rough blond hair, and they would stand together and watch their fleet homing from China, past the sand bars and Plum Island, white sails in the Merrimack. They could stand up together in church as soon as he'd been a widower for decently long, and bring up Vinny's boys to love and remember her—all they could do for the girl they'd injured so. She could go back to that, to love and all the comforts of life men had been able to make for themselves in her time. Crispin's wife would bear his child in a bed with satin hangings. Perhaps she could even find that Lass Marvayne, that Crispin Corey who had walked out under the summer moon and kissed, tender, and innocent, and shameless, in the lilac thicket when she was sixteen. Perhaps they had been there all the time, had never gone from home and drunk the ale of Bucks County. Perhaps it was worth going home to see. Swung free from the drive of fire and the hammer, she stood up suddenly to make her own choice. Inside the hut the young wife screamed again.

Only a mile further down the Valley, still a long way from the rich red lands and reed-choked water round Cane Creek Meeting House, Mahlon sat on an outcrop of limestone and rested, chewed down a cold roasting ear and a slice of jerked beef. The muddy Shenandoah wound through the meadows below him, and a hill rose up behind, rounded, a stone house on its crest, and a girl in a blue dress wandering through an apple orchard, gleaning for late fruit. A spring of water bubbled out of the ledge beside him, gathered in a cup it had worn for itself, and flowed away through the lush grass. He looked all about, feeling suddenly lighthearted, satisfied, pleased with his world, a part of it as he had never been before. He loved this country, he thought, more every time he went across it between his father's home and his own. He hadn't been north too far. New England he didn't know—except that it was all wharves and ships and Bunker Hill and Lass Marvayne and Crispin Corey. He knew New York Island, the shops, and the harbor, and the taverns, and the forward-plunge in the gait of every man who walked there. Jersey and Pennsylvania he knew too well to need to think about. He had run horses down the coast in the war years and lain in Baltimore jail, and the richness of the tidewater country pleased him, like stroking sleek fur. He could find his way about the fashionable streets of Philadelphia better than most of the Congress could. He wouldn't run off to Canada like Joe and Aaron. This country suited him, especially the patch of it he'd cleared for himself in the North Carolina pine woods. America suited him so much he'd even put up with the United States in order to stay in it—even pay taxes if he had to. And then he smiled. When he talked that way, he wasn't

thinking his own thoughts. It was Mose, still alive in his head, and talking.

I wonder what ever happened to Mose? he thought. How he got took like he did and thought it was a Word. He said the Lord meant America to be a free country. I don't doubt the truth of that. But I don't think either Mose or America knew what a free country is. I think maybe the Lord himself don't know. Ben Franklin told Lass there wasn't ever one before. I thought it was only shooting squirrels—but a man's got to have more than that.

He knew he should get up and take to the road again, and ride while the daylight lasted, but every day he had found that he traveled more slowly. He eased his shoulders back against the moss, filled and lit his pipe, and stared into the blue mist over the Valley. It used to be a lake, the Indians said, a lake round which the stars danced every thousand years. East of it, beyond the long line of the Blue Ridge, lay the homes of the great Virginians; Washington and Tom Jefferson, John Marshall and Patrick Henry, and Light Horse Harry Lee. Coming down through Winchester he'd passed the house of General Dan Morgan, greatest man with a squirrel rifle this country'd ever seen; and had had pointed out to him the road where Dan piled up stones on his way to the tavern of an evening so he'd have them to fight his way with coming home. Virginia was a proud colony all right, second to none, except Pennsylvania. To the west swept the Alleghenies, blue in their hollows, rose-tipped with the sun that had gone down in Ohio somewhere, beyond the wide looping river where the Indian wars were still going on.

He sat and mused till his pipe burned itself out, then picked up his rifle and climbed to his feet and whistled to young Firebrand who pranced up from the sedge grass, obedient. Still the lightheartedness bubbled in him, the sense of all things going well in a good world. A damn queer way for a man to feel when he was riding home from seeing his brother hanged. Maybe he was glad to be free of the old, rebellious life he'd lived, and grieved for, and never quite been convinced was what he wanted. Or was it all because he'd been with a girl? Being with Ruth had never made him feel so. He refused stubbornly to think about Lass. Before he mounted to ride away, he stretched himself flat on the moist turf and put his lips to the spring for a long drink, and looking in he saw his own face, every line and hollow, every year he had ever lived printed on it plain; every rare smile that had ever crossed it, and every grief cut forever in. He drew back, gasped harshly, and looked again. He hadn't realized before—even in the years away from home—that he wasn't still the youngest brother, the runt of the litter, riding out in his nineteenth year to steal horses and rob taverns and make love when his brothers told him to. He was a man alone, with no brothers now, who'd fled the law to make his home in a far country, a man past thirty, a man who would grow old. When his father was that age he had five sons about him. He looked into the gray-green waters again, but the

face there had aged suddenly. It was his father gazing back. And then a gust of wind troubled the pool, and when it quieted, young eyes smiled up at him out of a boy's face—and he saw his son. Shaken as if a spirit had passed by, he picked himself up, balanced his gun in front of the saddle, and vaulted after it. He smiled, a smile that it would give him pleasure to see reflected anywhere. "I got a good reason now to go back after Lass," he told Firebrand. "I wanted to—all the time."

Firebrand whinnied and leaped ahead. He wasn't used to being ridden with spurs as his father had been in the old headlong days.

"I'll tell her I've come for her," went on Mahlon, still grinning, "remind her I married her like Adam married Eve. 'Course we never passed Meeting no more than they did, but I'll tell her Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years, and I never heard of him wanting another wife." He didn't know all that he felt about Lass, and all that he did know he wouldn't tell her. But it was enough to send him riding north up the Valley, riding hard.

Outside the hut in the brook meadow, Lass stood to consider and choose her own doom, believing she could do so. It came in the end to this, she found: the country you lived in and the bed you lay on made no difference; how much money a man had in his pocket, or what the world said about him. What mattered was the man himself and what he was to you. Crispin was good and needful as bread, familiar as the old songs her grandmother used to sing in the twilight. Crispin was earth and home. Mahlon was as sweet and relentless as the spirit's hunger; as unknown as heaven, the goal all men have set their journeys toward since the world began. And she was free to choose between them. The way of the world had been stronger than Peg Magoon. It was not stronger than Lass Marvayne.

It was almost dark now; the cries inside had dulled away to a background for the high, thin wail of the newborn. There was no need to wait any more. She remembered words her father had said once. "You can't pursue happiness. It comes to you or it don't." But he was wrong. You can pursue it. You can, you can, you can! Congress was right, she thought, when they wrote that Declaration! She turned again to the scowling old woman in the doorway and looked at her with eyes as blue as the sea off Newburyport a-sparkle in the summer morning.

"I want to know," she said, "the way to Cane Creek."

And once they had pointed it out to her, she took it, the narrow lane between tall thorny hedges that would run half a mile before the turn.

At the same moment Mahlon entered the lane too, riding up the hill as she rode down. He was thinking of what Hugh Meredith had said to him that morning when they had parted at the edge of the Neshaminy just below the stone tower built by Crazy Tom. "It's a big country, Mahlon, and there's room

in it for both Whig and Tory. If it's to keep its balance, it'll need both. How'll we ever have a free country if free men won't join together to make it so?" He guessed now Dr. Hugh had been right. We Doans had plenty practice being free, he thought. I'll bring my sons up in the way of it. They'll have it in their blood—from both sides. And he smiled. Perhaps they would live to see the Carolina forest the way he had seen Bucks County—beautiful as all things are beautiful that a man has found fair, and cherished, and would spill his blood to keep the way they are. Without reserve now, he gave himself up to the new world and the coming time. He put his head up and looked at the myriad points of brightness kindled far above him in the still November air.

"I don't know why," he murmured, smiling upward, "but somehow I feel like it might be one of those thousand year times the Indians talk of—I feel like the stars might dance round the lake tonight."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Fire and the Hammer* by Shirley Barker]