The Last Gentleman

Shirley Barker

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Title: The Last Gentleman
Date of first publication: 1960
Author: Shirley Barker (1911-1965)
Date first posted: Oct. 23, 2017
Date last updated: Oct. 23, 2017
Faded Page eBook #20171030

This ebook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at http://www.pgdpcanada.net

Books by Shirley Barker

PEACE, MY DAUGHTERS

RIVERS PARTING

FIRE AND THE HAMMER

A LAND AND A PEOPLE (*poetry*)

TOMORROW THE NEW MOON

LIZA BOWE

SWEAR BY APOLLO

THE LAST GENTLEMAN

Shirley Barker

Random House • New York

First Printing

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-6377

Manufactured in the United States of America
by Haddon Craftsmen, Inc.

FOR

W. L. K.

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THE LAST GENTLEMAN

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LIKE WATER DOWN THE MERRIMACK

“She was a scandal to all the province five years ago when you come away from there,” said Mistress Davenport, a long iron spoon in her hand, peering into the depths of the black kettle bigger round than she was. “I don’t see what you be going back to her for.”

“I’m going back to her because she needs me,” said Lydia simply. “And as for the scandal, I don’t know—”

“Ha!” jeered the third woman in the room, a heap of mildewed satins and laces that in a time no man remembered must have been fine. The other two paid no attention to her.

The kitchen in the long wooden ell behind the General Wolfe Tavern was full of sound: snap and crackle and low steady song of the fire; the beat of rain on the roof and the drip of it off the eaves; the murmur of men’s voices in the taproom on the Fish Street side. Early afternoon it was, the last Saturday of August in the year 1774, but dark and cold as an autumn twilight. Beyond the small square panes, the clustered roofs and chimneys of Newburyport in Massachusetts were hidden by fog and rain. Lydia could not see them when she looked out, but she knew well that they were there. She turned again to the tavernkeeper’s widow, who was carrying on the business with the aid of her sons, much as she had done in her husband’s time.

“I don’t know that it be a scandal,” she repeated. “All she did was to marry, and the Bible says that it’s better to marry than to burn—”

“ ’Tisn’t impossible to do both,” scoffed Mistress Davenport. “What’s taken you, Lyddy? You never was a one to quote Scripture, and there’ll be little enough of it where you’re going. Governor Johnny Wentworth’s all for fast horses and card-playing, I hear.”

“There’s far worse things could be said of a man,” retorted Lydia. “Johnny Wentworth’s loved all up and down this coast. He may be the King’s Governor, but he was born a Portsmouth lad. He’s one of our own.”

“Aye,” said Mistress Davenport, her face softening. “He’s one of our own, as you say, and perhaps he’s not to be blamed for acting in too great haste to grasp his pretty wench. I always said the fault was with her. If Johnny was to die tomorrow, my lady Frances would be ready with a third. Likely this time

she'd hold the wedding and the funeral all together, and not have to go to chapel twice and wait ten days in between, like she done before. But I don't need to tell you of it. You was a maid in her house at the time."

"Yes," said Lydia slowly. "I was a maid there—then." She paused a moment, looking into the firelight, then she went on. "You never saw Frances Wentworth, did you, Sarah? If you had, you wouldn't judge her so."

"Indeed I saw her. At her coach window once, as she rode through town. They did not stop here. We were not good enough. She dined at Tristram Dalton's mansion house. She was married to poor young Mr. Atkinson then."

The two women stared silently at each other across the firelight space between them. Then the hostess concluded: "I have to admit, she was middling fair."

"She was more than that," said Lydia. "When Mr. Copley of Boston painted her picture, she was said to be the most beautiful woman in America. But it is not her beauty I am thinking of. There have been women who were both wicked and beautiful. It is a sort of lightness about her—you might as well speak ill of a puff of thistledown. It goes where the wind wills it to go, and you cannot blame it for that, or tell it nay."

Mistress Davenport stood up and smoothed her homespun skirts. "Lightness is no uncommon quality in women," she said. "There's women with lightness in every attic in Chandler's Lane and strutting along the dockside whenever a ship comes in. But I'd not serve them in my taproom. If that is all—"

"It is a different sort of lightness I meant!" cried Lydia, feeling her cheeks grow hot and her eyes widen. "Lightness is not the word—but it is something about her that draws you to her and makes you forgive all. If you knew her as I do, you would see!"

Mistress Davenport went to the tall carved cupboard at the end of the room and brought forth a bottle and glasses.

"You'll have some more rum, Ma'am Hooper," she said to the old woman in the ruined satins. "You want some rum, Lydia? You got a long ride ahead of you."

"I'll take your rum, and gladly," said Madame Hooper. "It has the warmth of the far islands where it came from, warmth that is better than fire to an old body."

It always surprised Lydia to hear the grubby throat, the mouth with its famous double row of teeth, bring forth the same precise cultured speech one heard on the lips of visiting ladies from Boston or finer guests from oversea. The old woman had walked into town from nowhere years ago, dressed in the same draggled finery that still clung to her, and set up a school in a tumbledown cottage at the south green. She was learned, and she could take

the children from the hornbook up through the Latin grammar as well as Mr. Moody at Dummer School, but she fancied herself for a witch and liked to tell fortunes and boast of darker, supernatural powers at her command. You could see her walking at dusk in the salt marshes below the town, closely followed by her "familiar," a black fowl with a square-trimmed beak. Newburyport might have hanged her for such antics a hundred years before, but now it laughed at her openly and consulted her by stealth.

"Yes, I'll take your rum and welcome, so long as it be in free gift," Madame Hooper repeated.

"That's understood," nodded Mistress Davenport, tilting the bottle over the glass in the woman's blue-veined hand.

Lydia watched them, feeling no wonder at the friendship between her tidy hostess, cut to the pattern of all Newburyport housewives, and the outlandish slattern, welcome nowhere else in town. Sarah Davenport was a friend to everybody.

"Rum, Lydia?" she asked, still holding the bottle.

Lydia smiled at her. "What I'd like right now, is a cup of tea," she said.

Sarah tossed her head and flounced back to the cupboard to put the bottle away.

"And who wouldn't, I'd like to know? There'll be a deal of water flow down the Merrimack before we again taste tea here, I'm afraid. We've Liberty Tea, of course—but it's made out of loosestrife I picked by Pipe Stave Hill."

Madame Hooper gave a disparaging grunt. "I'd rather drink from the Frog Pond," she muttered, taking a pull at her glass.

"Well, I don't know but what I had, too—" began the hostess, and then broke off. "Why, Bart Stavers!" she cried. "I thought it be about time!"

Bartholomew Stavers, who drove his Flying Stage Coach on a weekly trip between Boston and Portsmouth in New Hampshire, stamped into the room through the door that led from the stables on the Threadneedle Alley side, and went at once to the fire. His face was brown from the constant wash of all kinds of weather, and he wore a rough canvas cloak above his leather jerkin, pulled cowl-wise over his head to keep off the rain. Flinging the cloak aside, he stretched his hands to the blaze.

"Colder'n a witch's tit, and August not yet gone," he exclaimed.

"If you're cold now, what will you do 'fore winter's over?" demanded Sarah. "Where've you been? Dallying with that yellow-haired widow by Rowley Green?"

Bart Stavers scowled and shook his head. "Nothing like," he complained. "Would that I had been! The bay horse cast a shoe two miles out of Ipswich, and I had to lead him back and leave the young gentleman sitting in the coach all the while. 'Twas lucky I carried only the one passenger."

"Passenger?" cried Sarah. "Where is he? Must I prepare a special meal for him?"

"He's in the taproom, and he requires no special meal. He says he'll eat whatever's laid out there. But he wants to know if there be waiting for us a female passenger—one Lydia March who's bound to Portsmouth to serve in the house of the governor. He was expecting to meet with her here."

"Young gentleman'll find bread and cheese and a cold joint, and Anthony's there to serve him," said Sarah, her moment's flurry over. "What'll you take for yourself, Bart? Was you expecting to meet with a young gentleman, Lydia?"

Bart Stavers peered into the kettle, leaned closer over it, and drew a long breath through his nostrils.

"I'll just dip myself some of this stew, Sarah," he told his hostess, taking a bowl and ladle from hooks near the fireplace, "though why the devil you have to put turnips in it—!"

"Yes," said Lydia slowly. "I was expecting to meet a gentleman. Frances wrote me—"

"You'll get more than you're expecting, Mrs. Lydia," interrupted the self-styled witch woman, putting down her empty glass on the brick hearthstones beside her chair. "More than you're expecting—in New Hampshire. But it won't be a gentleman!"

A silence followed the last ringing words of the old woman, for she uttered them with all the vehemence of a reverend minister in the pulpit proclaiming Judgment Day. Bart Stavers held the ladle poised over the stewpot and turned to look at her curiously. Mistress Davenport frowned and bit her lip. After a moment filled only with the snapping of pine knots on the hearth and the tap of rain overhead, Lydia stood up and smiled across the fire at Madame Hooper.

"Thank you, Ma'am," she answered demurely. "Thank you for warning me." Then she drew her cloak over her thin lawn dress and turned to her hostess, putting out her hand. "Good-bye, Sarah," she said. "Frances wrote that her husband would send his aide to escort me—a Mr. Hugh Giffard. I'll go out and speak with him now, and likely Mr. Stavers will soon want to be on his way. Ask him to put my trunk in the coach, please. It is just inside the stable door."

She paused a moment and then went on, her voice tremulous with controlled emotion. "I'll be coming back—Sarah. I have to, for there's my house by Crane Neck Hill. I did not sell it. I walked out and locked the door and left it, just as it was when we lived so happy there. David's uncles will keep watch of it, and they have taken the livestock to their own farms. But it is still my home."

Sarah Davenport looked at her keenly. "Yes, the house. I knew you had

that, of course. But I hope—did David leave you enough money, Lydia?"

"He left me a hundred pounds," said Lydia. "It is enough and more. I have taught school before and can do so again. There will be always the young needing to learn. I can make my way."

Sarah drew herself up and stiffened her thin shoulders. "When Will went off to fight at Quebec," she said, "we were poor then, and the children small. He left me a guinea—a guinea only—for that was all he had."

Lydia smiled and waited. She had heard the story before, and was eager in heart to be gone.

"And when he came back," finished Sarah triumphantly, "after we'd licked the French and the fighting was over—I handed the selfsame guinea back to him."

"I'm afraid I'm not so thrifty as you are," said Lydia, "but David won't want his hundred pounds again." She closed her eyes a moment and bent her head. Then they stepped into the taproom.

Sarah's oldest son, Anthony, had lit the lamps though it was only midafternoon, and was scurrying among the tables, trying to serve custom. Half the men round Newburyport seemed to be there, Lydia thought, as she looked about her at the scarlet coats of the merchants and shipyard owners from the brick mansions up the hill, at the homespun shirts and leather vests of the fishermen and dockside workers. Plenty of farmers, too, had come in from the back country to sell their produce, for Saturday was a favorite market day. She kept looking for the young gentleman, but at first she could glimpse no strange face in the familiar crowd.

Then she heard Sarah exclaiming at her elbow. "God's mercy, and why didn't Anthony call me? The place is busier than it used to be in Stamp Act time. Men was that troubled and uneasy then, it took so much rum to calm them—the like I never saw! I was running with hot toddy and punch and cherry brandy, till I felt my legs was wore to the shinbone. And now it seems like those days had come again, what with the shipping all shut out of Boston Port, and the King's troops there—not friendly like—and these messages running back and forth between the towns, about a great meeting in Philadelphia. Why is it, the more men be troubled, the more they cry for rum? Ah well, I suppose 'tis a case of any excuse. I'll have to tell you good-bye, Lyddy. Anthony, run to the stable for Mose. He'll have the coach horses fed by now, so Mr. Stavers can be getting on. Lyddy, I wish you well in Portsmouth, and I'll pray for you there. But don't you trust her—the governor's wife, I mean. I don't know what they think of her to the eastward, but it's little enough we think of her here. Good-bye, child! Good-bye."

Sarah elbowed her way among the men crowding round the bar and stepped behind it, reaching for an apron that hung on a hook there. Lydia

looked again about the low room—the firelight shining on the black old rafters, tobacco smoke and woodsmoke drifting everywhere, softening every sharp outline, seeming to mellow all.

Then she saw him. He stood tall and slender, dressed in a suit of fawn-colored broadcloth with ruffles at his throat and wrists; a dark blue cloak hung from his shoulders. He was bareheaded, and he wore his sleek gold hair unpowdered, caught in a queue behind. As she stepped closer to him, she could see that his skin, too, was fair, but his eyes, a light gray and deep-set, shone forth under heavy dark brows. She knew at once that he could not be a Portsmouth man, but she had been certain in her mind of that before. "Giffard" was not a Portsmouth name. He did not come from anywhere in New Hampshire, that she knew, because of the graceful gesture as he lifted his glass and stepped back from the bar a little, looking about the room, looking, no doubt, for her. When New Hampshire men were graceful, it was with the natural grace of the bobcat and the whitetail deer. It was with the studied grace of the ballroom and the fencing school that Hugh Giffard turned to her when she put her hand on his sleeve and spoke to him.

"Aren't you Mr. Giffard?" she asked.

He looked down at her, smiling. He was much taller than she. David had been taller, too. But once, she remembered, there had been another one, and they had stood almost even when they looked into each other's eyes. She put the thought away.

"I'm Lydia March," she said, with an answering smile.

"I'm glad to know that," he told her, and the way he spoke the five words made it plain what country he came from and why his coat was so fine; made it plain that he was an Englishman from overseas, with the English speech still on his tongue. "I was beginning to think I'd have the devil's own time to find you."

Outside in Threadneedle Alley, Bart Stavers blew his coaching horn.

Hugh Giffard turned and put down his half-finished drink on the bar. Then he took her arm and looked her up and down, from the velvet cap on her high-swept hair to the high-heeled slippers on her feet.

"There's mud in the alley," he said, "let our man drive up to the front door. Will he have your luggage stored away?"

"Yes," she murmured. "Mr. Stavers was to take my trunk." She let the young Englishman lead her from the taproom, and turned to wave to Sarah, but Sarah was busy drawing ale and did not see.

At the top of the high flight of steps they stood and waited, looking down at the huddled frame houses looming through the rain. The carved and gilded tavern sign, with the head of General Wolfe encased in a wreath of iron scrollwork, flapped drearily from its long pole, and the fog drifted in banners

down the sloping street.

"Is it a new journey to you?" asked Hugh Giffard beside her, still holding her arm. "Or perhaps you have been in Portsmouth before?"

"I was born there," answered Lydia. "I lived there till I was eighteen." She felt his fingers tightening through the woolen folds of her cloak, and shifted uneasily, puzzled that she should do so, for there was nothing rude or familiar in his touch.

"And that," he said, "was surely not so long ago."

"It was five years ago," answered Lydia. "A very long time."

The Flying Stage Coach trundled round the corner, and Bart Stavers put his horn to his lips again. Hugh and Lydia hurried toward it, and he handed her into the cushioned depths of the vehicle, climbed in himself. The driver called to the horses, the axles groaned, and they were off; down through Cornhill and into Broad Street that ran a curving course past the wharves and shipyards to Carr's Island Ferry where they would cross the Merrimack.

Her companion sat silently in his own corner, and Lydia was glad of that, for she had much to think about as she heard the shouts of the boatmen, felt the lurch of the coach, and then the lift and fall of water under them. She was crossing the river she had not crossed in five years. She was going home. Like water down the bed of the stream, those years had gone. They had flowed past her, and they would not return, and all the other years would be other streams, still flowing on. What would she find in Portsmouth, she wondered, of what she had left there? But what was she bringing back with her, of the girl who had gone away?

She turned her head and peered through the rear window of the coach, saw the scattered lights in the small old seaport town crouched on its low hill. She looked through the window beside her and saw a flash of lantern light strike on the black water moving seaward just below. Then she turned to Hugh Giffard. The lantern light shone across him, too, and he was smiling quietly at her there in the dark. He cleared his throat.

"You were thinking," he said, "of many things, or so it seemed to me. So I would not trouble you by speaking. Do I trouble you now?"

"No," she answered, trying to put a warmth into her voice lest he think her a dead fish of a woman, queer and odd. "It is only—that I am going home, and I have not been there for so long, and I am wondering about all the changes that must have happened while I was away."

He settled himself more easily on the frayed cushions. The coach was small, designed for three passengers at most. Sit decorously far apart as they would, they were still very close to each other.

"I find myself wondering the same about my home in England," he said, "and I have been gone only six months from there."

“But you must have had letters,” she answered. “I have had no letters at all.”

She had had the one note from Frances Wentworth, of course, but she had waited years for its coming, and when it came, it spoke only of the single thing.

“Yes, letters,” he agreed, “but letters do not always tell you what you want to know. They tell me that my brothers’ wives are all with child, that the roof of the west wing leaks and my favorite mare’s gone lame. But they do not tell me that the daffodils bloomed this year just as they used to do, and whether the gulls still nest on Flamborough Head. Does that sound like madness in me?”

“No,” she told him. “It sounds as if you would want to know about the same things I would want to know about. People must die and be born, I know, and roofs fall in, but we want to be reassured about the things that do not change.”

“I have been in Portsmouth since you have,” he said, “and I can tell you that there’s still rough water off Pull-and-be-damned Point. I can tell you that the men still cut salt hay in the marshes, and the fireflies twinkle through all the town gardens in the summer dark. Is it that you want to know?”

“Yes, that,” she said. “I did not realize till I heard you speaking just now, that I had been homesick for it all.”

Deep inside her a voice, wry and shrill like that of a twisted gnome, lifted itself and said, “Why do you lie to him, Lydia? You know that you have been homesick and you know the cause.” And she answered the wry gnome, “Be still. It is not to him, it is to myself that I lie.”

The ferry grated against the Salisbury shore, and the coach lumbered across the wooden ramp that bridged the gravel beach, lumbered forward in the rain. On the box outside they could hear Bart Stavers humming softly to himself. He had a lantern beside him and its light shone through the chinks here and there so that Lydia could see the head of her companion, and that alone, like a disembodied head floating on the dark. She wondered if she looked that way to him, felt sure that she did.

Suddenly she realized that he was speaking to her.

“You have no family left in Portsmouth now?”

“No. Others of the name, but no really close kin. My father was drowned in a squall off the Isles of Shoals the year I was born, and my mother served in rich families to earn our keep. She died when I was sixteen, and I took service in Theodore Atkinson’s house to wait on Frances, his son’s wife.”

Did she imagine that there was a slight difference in Hugh Giffard’s voice when he spoke again, an edge and a tenseness she had not noticed before? Perhaps it shocked the gentleman in him to find himself conversing so familiarly with a servant.

"Would that be she who is Frances Wentworth now?"

"Yes, Frances Wentworth. She was young, and her husband was ailing even then and wanted her constantly by him. She missed the gay life she used to lead in Boston as a girl. I went there to be a servant, to wash linen and scour, and lay the fires, but I became her friend and companion soon, because she needed that. 'I will get a girl from the country to do the chores, Lydia,' she told me."

"And did she?"

It was over and past long ago. Why should it matter to him, or her, or anyone now?

"Yes, she did, and she taught me all the fine things she knew, so that we could do them together. She taught me to sing, and to play on the spinet, to embroider on lace and to do crewel work. She taught me to play card games and even to speak a little French."

"And you were fond of her?"

"Oh, very fond!"

"Then why did you go away?"

Lydia looked out the window. The sky had lightened a little, and they seemed to be passing beyond the center of the storm. The marshes lay in dim twilight now, rather than in midnight blackness, and she could see the long winding channels through the yellow grass, the slanting haycocks, and here and there a knoll of solid ground covered with dwarf cedar and scrub oak and pine. The whole countryside seemed to cry out to her that she was going home. She turned back to Hugh Giffard, whose homesickness was for some far-off place called Flamborough Head.

"I went away because—you must have seen it happen—changes come across people's lives. Doors close, and other doors open."

She could see him nodding gravely through the half-dark.

"It was about the same time that changes came for her and for me."

"What changes came?"

"For her—her husband died, and she was married to another—soon."

"Yes—soon. I have heard talk of that."

"Those who talk about it do not understand. She married, and was lonely no more, and had no more need of me. And there were changes—in my life, too. I wanted to be gone from Portsmouth." She tried to keep the bitter edge from her voice, but knew that she had not.

He ignored it. "You were young," he answered lightly, "and you wanted to see the world."

"Yes, I was young, and I wanted to go away. I went to Newburyport and taught in a school for young ladies there. Taught all the fine things Mrs. Frances had taught me."

"I see," he said, stirring restlessly and gazing out into the night that once more drew around them. She knew that she should have gone on to tell him the final chapter of her little story, wondered why she did not. Instead she turned to him and asked, "You say you have been only six months in America?"

"Yes, six months, and in Boston mostly. I am just now returning from a three weeks' mission there, and the governor wrote that you would join me as I came by the Wolfe Tavern on my way. But I have been long enough in America, Mistress March, to know that you will never understand what it means in England to be the youngest son of a poor family that used to be a rich one. In America such an unlucky lad would take off his fine coat, and roll up his sleeves, and set himself to work."

"Why, yes," said Lydia blankly. "What else could he do?"

The young man shook his head. "Ah, but the matter is not viewed so in England. He cannot serve in a shop or become a blacksmith."

"I do not see why not."

"It would be as if a woman went on the streets to sell her virtue. Do you take the meaning of that?"

"Yes, I know the meaning of that, but I see no likeness in the two cases."

"I told you that you would not understand. Ask John Wentworth when you come to Portsmouth. He lived in England for a time. Perhaps he can make you see it plain."

The chill dank air of the marshes was seeping through the cracks in the coach body and around the ill-fitting windowpanes. He drew closer to her, and she did not draw away. Instead she answered him.

"No, I will not ask John Wentworth. I will take your word. But what is the youngest son to do? Will they entertain sturdy beggars in the almshouses there?"

"Why, if he is a scholar he may take orders and be granted a living within the church. If there is enough money to buy him a commission, he may become the officer of a regiment—" He broke off.

"And if he be neither of those things?"

She felt as if she were standing on tiptoe peering through a high casement that looked on another way of life. Her companion had lived in that way of life and been unhappy in it, and she sorrowed for him. Now she was the one who drew closer.

"Then, he may go into a sort of service—he may go and be a bailiff or a boon companion to one of his richer friends. He may even become an aide to a governor in His Majesty's Colonies."

Lydia felt that at last she understood.

"So you were a youngest son, and poor, and you knew Johnny Wentworth when he was in England, and you have come out to take service with him

now?"

He laid his right hand over her two hands where she had clasped them in her lap. His fingers curved about hers with warmth and pressure.

"It is good that you understand, Mistress March—may I say Lydia? So few understand in this country. You live by such other customs here, and there is so much ill will between England and America nowadays."

"Yes, I know that. I am wondering what will come of it."

She found it hard to talk, to keep her mind on what she was saying, she had grown so dreadfully aware of the warm masculine strength inside the broadcloth cloak.

"I am wondering, myself," he went on. "When I came here, I felt I knew the right of the matter. Now I am not so sure. And as for Johnny Wentworth, I never so much as saw his face until I came ashore in Boston. I was a boy at school in his English days. My father was from Gloucester, penniless like myself, and a younger son. Our family came with Duke William out of France—you have heard of the great duke?"

"No," said Lydia honestly. "I have never heard of the duke."

"No matter. He has been dead a long time, and so has Walter Giffard, the Lord of Longueville, who invaded England at his side. He was a man of possessions. It is a pity they have not endured with us until now. My father married into Yorkshire, Alice Creke, an only daughter, but her inheritance was not large. However, it was because of her that our generation grew up Yorkshire folk—like my brother's good friend, and Johnny's good friend, that Wentworth who is Marquis of Rockingham. It was at the marquis' seat in our home shire that Johnny met my brother. Later, when our fortunes had fallen so, Johnny heard of it, and wrote that he had a place for me here. He said that I could also bring Dorothy, my little sister, since my brothers' wives have small kindliness for her at home."

"Where—is your sister—now?" asked Lydia haltingly. "You say you have been much in Boston. Perhaps she is—there?"

"No—she is in Portsmouth—!"

His speech was becoming as tense and broken as hers, she noticed, with a pounding heart. It was as if her consciousness, while not ebbing wholly out of her, grew dilute and thinned away, so that she could no longer perceive her companion as Hugh Giffard, the English stranger—as any man with a name and identity. Not Hugh, not David, not that other one—only as a young man turning toward her with quick blood and a sighing breath, and she felt herself prepare, willy-nilly, to respond to him with the responses she had learned in her husband's arms. Not in one night had David taught her the way of the body's love, but taught her he had, and now she knew it all too plain. Never again would she be the close tight virgin shuddering away. She would be like

the flower unfolding—the soft arms reaching up and the answering mouth—She would be—

He stumbled on a few phrases further in his explanation.

"She stayed with Johnny's wife. I was in Boston—attending to certain affairs—for him—" He had said that before, but it did not matter. Speech mattered no longer. That they were strangers did not matter either.

Suddenly he turned and took her in his arms. She felt his mouth on hers, felt the lift and throb of the blood through his veins and her own—felt the irresistible march of rivers to the sea. It would be a folly and a wickedness to deny the exulting tide that flowed hot and swift in both of them. They were nothing, and the living stream was all; a glorious strength and a holy power loaned to them for a little time, a stream that would go beating and coursing on when they were buried clay.

To the sea the rivers flow, she thought. No matter in what far-off mountain springs they rise, no matter what dams men raise to hold them back—to the sea the rivers flow—

And then, as suddenly, something seemed to be not as it was. They were no longer alone with the rush of the great rivers. Somehow the outside world had broken through. Hugh Giffard cursed, muttered an apology, and drew away from her before she realized what had happened; realized, more slowly, what the happening could likely mean.

The wheels no longer turned under them, and the swaying vehicle no longer lurched forward on the rutted road. Had Bart Stavers brought his Flying Stage Coach to a dead stop at the head of the Hampton marshes on a rainy night because he knew what was going on inside it? It seemed quite likely to Lydia that he had. He did not call out to forbid them, nor wrench open the door, nor so much as clear his throat. Perhaps he felt sympathy, remembering his own young days. Perhaps he was looking for a good story to tell tomorrow in the streets of Portsmouth. In any case, if he was aware of their abandoned folly, he meant to encourage and condone it! Unwittingly he had done the other thing.

"I'm sorry, Lydia," said Hugh Giffard, his voice still tense, his face turned away from her. "But I have been so lonely. And you are lovely enough—to be any man's excuse."

David had used to tell her that she was lovely, too, when they were courting, but not so much in later days; that her hair was the color of copper beech leaves, and her eyes like amber in the sun. She had not heard words like these for a long time.

"I have been lonely, too," she heard another woman cry out to him.

It must be another woman! It could not be she! She, Lydia March, would never be so bold and brash-spoken. She looked around, but there was no other

woman there.

"I—my husband died last spring," the strange voice babbled on. "Since then—I have been lonely."

He finished straightening his disheveled jacket and gave her a long look.

"I did not know—you did not tell me you had been married, Lydia."

"No," she answered. "I do not know why I did not tell you that—except that it seems so long ago and far off, as if it had never happened at all."

The coach was moving forward now. The moment Bart Stavers heard their voices lifted in speech, he had called to his horses again. Hugh drew his cloak about him and reached for the door handle, leaned toward it, and bent his head.

"Would you take it unkindly, Lydia," he asked, smiling ruefully, "if I were to finish the journey outside?"

Lydia smiled back at him, still shaken and uncertain, but able to answer him in kind. "I should think it very gracious of you," she told him, "to give Mr. Stavers your company."

The door closed, and she heard him climb to the box beside the driver, heard the two men talking together, and smelled the pungent reek of tobacco smoke stronger than the salt tang of the marshes, the mustiness of the coach, or the fresh wet smell of the rain. Slowly her flesh cooled and her blood quieted. An exhaustion that was almost pain took possession of her, and she dozed a little. Once she woke to a sudden flash of terror, a blind fear of the future whatever it might bring. It would be better, she thought, to deny the future, to slip from the coach and flee backward across the foggy meadows, back to Newburyport and the calm gray life of her widowhood there. She actually put her fingers on the gilded handle of the door.

But then she remembered that the road they had come over was winding and treacherous and cut with salt creeks, that she had no lantern and her slippers were thin. More than that, she thought of Frances. "Do not trust her," Sarah Davenport had said, but Sarah might have spoken kindlier words had she known why Frances needed her. She had not told Sarah that Frances was some four months gone with child.

She spoke, thought Lydia wonderingly, as though she feared Frances might do me harm! Why surely, that could never come to pass!

Once more she sank into the cushions and slept, while the coach wheels moved in their endless circles, bearing her back inexorably to the town where she was born, but not even in her dreams would she admit the real reason for her journey there.

2.
ALL BE QUIET IN PORTSMOUTH

"Nine o' the clock, rain, fog, an' all be quiet in Portsmouth!" droned the raucous voice from the small brick watchtower by Market Square.

Lydia, waking, stretched herself as well as she could within the cramped depths of the Flying Stage Coach and peered from the window at the "Strawberry Bank" of the first settlers, named so because of the sweet red fruit that grew so thick on its ancient grasslands in early June. More than a century after, the name still clung, and the country folk went to the "Bank" more often than they went to Portsmouth. The coach rounded the corner now, by the long wooden bulk of the dormered state house, turning into Court Street, and her first thought was that everything looked the same, what little she could see of it. The wet black ledges of the old river headland still cropped out in front of the North Meeting House, the familiar steeple and gambrel roofs of the nearby houses still reached upward in the thick night. They crossed Queen Street, and she gave a little sigh of relief. Since she and Hugh Giffard were the only passengers, Bart was apparently driving them straight to John Wentworth's house instead of making them alight at the stables near the tavern.

As she remembered she would soon have to face the young Englishman openly in the lighted hall with others standing by, she felt her cheeks grow hot in the dark. It was no use to tell herself that he alone had been to blame for the happening between them. She knew better than that. But it was not the past that engaged her thoughts now so much as the future. Living in the same house, as they would likely be for the next few months, what would happen when they were together in some soft autumn twilight with no Bart Stavers by? Oh, it was too soon, too soon, she thought. Lonely as she had been, she was not yet ready to break her fast of loneliness. It was not for some stroke of sudden adventure like this, but to re-enter her old life slowly that she had come home to Portsmouth. Why was it that things happened so swiftly, too swiftly—or never happened at all?

Impatiently she smoothed her skirts and her hair, for the governor's house was no long way from the middle of town, and they should be approaching it. She looked out again. Down Pleasant Street as they drove by, parlor windows were lighted all along, and a snatch of violin music throbbed in the air by

Attorney Samuel Livermore's house, high-voiced, insistent, and sweet. Dancing, cards, and gay dinners with much wine were the common order of Saturday nights here, she remembered. Perhaps John and Frances would not even be at home to welcome her.

A wind stirred in the elm boughs that almost met over the winding road, and a wet leaf hit the windowpane and clung there—a green leaf of summer. It spoke of an ill winter ahead, her mother used to say, when the green leaves fell before the season had turned them brown. Why did folk strive so hard after news of the future, Lydia wondered, seeking it by stars and tea leaves and the changing weather? Madame Hooper earned her bread by pretending to knowledge of it, and she herself but a few moments ago had been turning her own thoughts in that way. Was it so they might be prepared for trouble, the better to meet it when it fell? But then, foreknowing, they might try to avoid trouble altogether, and thus confuse God's plan—if He had a plan. Oh, God must have a plan, Lydia felt sure. Not that she had heard it declared so in church. At St. Paul's and Queen's Chapel, where she had worshipped, the faith was not preached in that way. It was only that she, Lydia, an orderly creature, expected the universe to operate on an orderly plan. She had not been able to see herself that clearly, had never known herself that well. It was David, smiling, who had told her so. She wondered if Hugh Giffard would admire orderliness in a woman. There were those who did not.

She heard Bart shouting to the horses, and the coach wheels ground to a stop at the edge of the governor's clipped front lawn. Hugh Giffard handed her out, his ruffles hanging limp and raindrops caught in his eyelashes, but his face as bland and smiling as when she had first caught sight of him in the Wolfe Tavern.

"Journey's end, Mistress March," he said without embarrassment. "Are you as chilled and hungry as I am?"

She was about to murmur something, not quite sure what it would be, when the heavy dark door under the glowing fanlight swung open, and John Wentworth himself stood there looking out.

His Majesty's Governor at thirty-seven stood no taller than most men in Portsmouth, his lean face, half stern, half smiling, was no handsomer than theirs. His red velvet coat was much like other red velvet coats in the province; his powdered hair was the same soft brown as other men's powdered hair, and worn much the same. If there was a difference about John Wentworth, Lydia thought, as she stood there on his doorstep looking up at him with his wide lighted house behind, it was in the set of his shoulders and the lift of his head. There was a quiet pride and certainty about John Wentworth. Other men might question, but John Wentworth knew. Not that he flaunted his knowledge. But you felt that if John Wentworth said it would rain tomorrow, it would certainly

rain.

The sternness went out of his face as he bent forward to greet them; friendly and affable now, he put forth his hand.

"Well done, Hugh, to get her here through the fog before we had time to worry. Even a Londoner could scarce find his way tonight. Welcome, Lydia! Frances was much pleased that you could come. We feared that there would be a husband with claims on you by now, and I cannot see why it has not happened so. For I swear, you are lovelier than ever. What is wrong with the Massachusetts lads?"

Lydia drew back, felt her shoulder brush Hugh's cloak.

"Why—why, I did have a husband. I thought Frances knew. I wrote to her. When I was married, I wrote. She never answered, but I thought—"

Looking past him down the wide hall with red rugs scattered here and there on the polished floor boards, she could see the graceful carved chairs she remembered so well, the double doors that led to a garden terrace at the back. As she paused to allow herself a moment's enjoyment of the familiar scene, an ancient round-bellied beagle poked his nose out of the library, sniffed, and then waddled eagerly forward whimpering. Straight to her feet he came, braced his front paws against her knees, and stood there, looking up. She bent to greet him.

"Why, Bugler! You remembered me!" she said.

The governor laughed, but not very heartily. "Of course Bugler remembers. He is too fat and short-winded to hunt with now, so I keep him here in town rather than with the pack at Wolfeborough. An excellent watchdog—so good we have not bothered to repair the broken lock on the kitchen door. But about your marriage, Lydia. You are not Lydia March still? Frances directed your letter in that way, and it must have reached you."

She looked up at him over the head of the old dog. "Yes, I am Lydia March. I have never been anything else. My husband was David March, his family name the same as mine but we never heard of each other till I went to Newburyport. We were not cousins as you and Frances are. He was newly entered in a counting-house at the Port and owned a farm in the West Parish—on Crane Neck Hill. If our folk were kin, it must have been back in England a long time ago. But I wrote all that in my letter—"

"Frances has been ill," said John Wentworth abruptly, "ill much of the time. Passed over many of her letters and neglected many things. She has tried to give me a son, but she never carries them full term. This time—as the months pass and she continues well—we dare to hope. Come in, Bart! Take the trunk upstairs to the front chamber at the right. Lydia—Hugh—I have kept you waiting! Let me send to the kitchen for supper, and in the meantime, wine —"

He stood, their host awaiting their pleasure, there in the broad hall that ran between the lighted parlors decked in his wife's sumptuous taste, rich crimson, white, and gold.

Hugh cleared his throat. "Did I hear Your Excellency speak the good word 'wine'?" he inquired mockingly.

Responding to his mood, the governor made an exaggerated bow. "You did indeed, sir. Shall it be the tart golden blood of the French vineyards, the liquid rubies of Oporto, the brown madeira with the taste of island sun in it, or—Forgive us, Lydia! Would you like tea—or to go to Frances at once, perhaps?"

"Yes," said Lydia quickly. "Let me go to Frances, please." She had not once looked at Hugh since they stepped through the governor's doorway, had no intention of doing so. "She is lying down, perhaps? In her chamber? Ill—?"

John Wentworth gave a wry smile. "She suffers a slight indisposition," he answered. "She will tell you about it, no doubt. Shall I call one of the maids?"

"Oh no! But will it disturb her? Would she wish to see me tonight?"

"Yes, very much. She charged me not to let you go to bed till you had visited her. I will have a tray sent to you there."

He turned toward the kitchen, and Lydia walked straight up the wide, gently rising stairs. At the window on the landing she paused and looked out over the garden and its dripping beech trees and evergreens all black with rain. Then she climbed the shorter flight that led to the front of the house, crossed the hall, and tapped on the door of the chamber where the governor had brought his bride.

A low sound answered her, the wind, perhaps, stirring in the eaves, or a muffled voice from within the bedroom. She waited a moment, then put her hand to the latch and softly opened the door.

Ahead of her she could make out the lines of the four-poster bed with its rose-colored draperies, and as she stepped forward she felt the deep softness of the rose-colored carpet underfoot. The room smelled of red roses, too, not only of Frances' favorite perfume, but of fresh flowers, the last summer blooms from the Portsmouth gardens. There must be a vase of them nearby, but it was too dark for her to see. No lamps were burning, or candles, and the dying fire in the marble fireplace gave off just enough light so that she could keep from stumbling against chairs, tables, the mahogany case of drawers, the cushioned lolling chair. From the bed came a piteous moan.

Lydia paused in dismay. "A slight indisposition," John had said. But here lay his wife, all alone and moaning in the dark. She felt a sick fear wake in her vitals. Perhaps Frances' labor had again come upon her too soon. "Candlemas Day," she had written, was the time Dr. Hall Jackson had reckoned for her lying-in. But Candlemas Day was far off, the summer hardly gone.

She tried to make her voice serene and comforting. "Frances! It is Lydia.

You are ill? Shall I bring help? The maids—or a potion?"

Frances moaned again, but it was a hollow plaintive moan rather than one of sharp anguish. Going near to her, Lydia mounted the mahogany bed-steps and stood there looking down at the inert figure under the rosy counterpane. She could see quite well in the dim light now, the outline of the graceful shoulders through the China-silk dressing gown, the cloud of dark hair straying over the pillows. But where the face ought to be was a strange empty whiteness that shocked her. She peered closer. Then she saw that the governor's lady was wearing a mask contrived of white satin and lace. At that moment the sweet petulant voice spoke.

"Ah, Lydia, I am in a sorry plight, a final extremity! Not these three days have I been able to endure a looking glass."

The hall door swung shut just then, and the draft of its closing made the little fire flare up on the hearth, so that Lydia could see even more clearly. Frances Wentworth's changing eyes gazed out through little slits in the mask. It almost seemed that they held a hint of laughter in them.

"Ah, Lydia, a wretched humor has afflicted me. I have implored my governor to hasten to Queen's Chapel and pray for my recovery, but he only taunts me that it is the price of vanity I pay, and goes back to the affairs of the province."

"What is the humor?" asked Lydia uncertainly. "Do you suffer? And why is your face covered?"

"Ah, but I suffer torments," said Frances complacently. "Lydia, do you remember how I would order rouges and perfumes from the House of Gaine in New York—the Venetian paste, and carmine, and Chinese wool; rosewater, and orange water, and *eau de lune*, and oil of rhodium—jars and vials until my governor swore it cost more to maintain me than to administer the province?"

"I remember writing orders to the House of Gaine," said Lydia slowly, "but I was not here long—scarce a month, you know, after you were married to the governor."

"Ah yes, I forget. But you remember that New York potion-peddler, and it was he who brought me to this extremity with his latest importation. 'Balm of Mecca,' he called it, warranted to make the skin bloom like rose petals in the sultan's garden! Fool that I was, I believed his lying prospectus!"

"You bought and applied the Balm of Mecca," said Lydia a little tartly, impatient that Frances had frightened her so when there was nothing greatly out of order, beginning to feel the weariness of the long journey that lay behind her, "and it raised a rash or a blister?"

"I am disfigured! I am utterly disfigured!" said Frances tragically. "I have been hidden in my bed for three days with my face covered. Meanwhile, the life of the town, I suppose, goes on without me. I am an object of revulsion, an

outcast from society! I—”

“Take off your mask,” said Lydia calmly, “and let me see you. Have you tried cures for it? Bathing or ointment? Have you called Hall Jackson or Dr. Cutter?”

Frances flung up her slender white hands as if to protect her face. “I have hidden in my bed and nursed my shame in secret! Not even to you will I reveal —!”

Lydia was tired and hungry and her patience was gone.

“Oh, stop being so foolish!” she cried, and reached out suddenly, stripping the mask away. Then she stood still, gazing down into the red swollen countenance of the most beautiful woman in America.

She looked a long time, unable to turn away. Hair, and eyes, and the perfect planes of the face were still so lovely in spite of the pustules and patches of fleshly disfigurement.

“Is it not like St. Anthony’s Fire?” demanded Frances eagerly. “Is it not like the blight of the smallpox, like the curse of scorpions?”

“It looks more like poison ivy to me,” said Lydia bluntly. “Tomorrow I will make you a poultice of plantain leaves for it—and maybe a dose of rhubarb—”

Frances clapped the mask back over her face, and this time the eyes that peered through the slits seemed cruelly mocking.

“Lydia, will you never learn sweetness? When I turn to you for sympathy, I get the edge of a shrew’s tongue. How you ever think to find a husband—”

“I am weary with telling people that I had a husband,” Lydia snapped. “I had a husband, and I found him with no trouble. He died, but I am not looking for another. I wrote and invited you to my wedding, but you never answered me!”

“Lydia!” the voice from the rose-hung bed had changed, become low and pulsating, husky with compassion. “Lydia, I swear I never had such a letter from you. My dear, what a monster you must have thought me! But tell me—when did this happen?”

“It was that summer, the summer after I went away from here. June the thirtieth, 1770! I could not forget that date, but I had them cut it on David’s gravestone, for when I am gone there will be no one who remembers it.”

A bony woman in a russet dress and a tow apron stalked through the doorway carrying a tea tray. She set it down on the table of japanned walnut near the bed, lighted the candles in a wall sconce, and lingered a moment, tossing her head on its long neck like a restless horse, waiting apparently for further orders.

“It is enough, Prue,” said Frances calmly. “You may go to bed now. We shall require nothing more.”

The woman strode wordlessly from the room, and the governor's lady moved nearer to the edge of the bed.

"One of my governor's Yorkshire serving women," she said. "I had rather have our own maids from about here; a fisherman's daughter raised in Braveboat Harbor or a girl from the farms around Great Bay. But if the foible pleases him—" She flung out her hands in an engaging gesture. "Lydia, will you pour the tea."

Lydia lifted the silver pot and filled the enameled china cups with the steaming liquid. She wondered fleetingly how it happened that tea could be drunk in Governor John Wentworth's house when it was supposed to be outlawed in the province. The New Hampshire towns as well as their neighbors in Massachusetts, she thought, had vowed they would purchase no more tea. But in her weariness the quarrels of nations seemed far off and trivial to her, so she did not raise the question. Instead she pushed the plate of candied fruits to one side and served herself to stewed pigeon from the covered silver tureen.

Frances declined food but sipped the hot tea gingerly through her cracked lips. After a moment she spoke again, and this time her voice was bitter.

"I, too, remember that June of 1770. On the ninth day of it my son was born—dead! And I had been less than seven months married! Gossip was loud in Portsmouth, Lydia. There are many who were not sorry for me. I do not think I read or answered any of my letters that summer."

Warmed and refreshed now, Lydia began to feel ashamed of her former impatience, felt again all her old affection and loyalty for Frances Wentworth.

"I do not see why there should be gossip," she answered. "I was close to you then, and I know as well as you do that the child must have belonged to your husband John. But your husband Theodore was not then nine months dead. In the eyes of the world and the law, it might have been his. Either way, it was not a bastard birth and no shame to you."

"But Theodore had been ill so long, Lyddy! He could not father a child, and the whole town knew it. We knew all that summer he was dying! You remember!"

"Yes, I remember," agreed Lydia.

She remembered the long hot August, the cold rains of September, and the scarlet and gold leaves blowing past the Atkinson house in Pitt Street; the grief of old Theodore, the province secretary, as he watched his son dwindle away. She remembered how she had lain in her attic chamber in that house, waking long at night; lain there hoping for the man to die. To wish death to any person was, she well knew, a wicked thing, but she could not have done otherwise then. She did not even have the excuse that she wished it because the frail young man was suffering. He was not suffering, merely growing shadow-thin

and daily weaker, coughing steadily, the low, apologetic cough.

"I am a trial to you, Frances," he would croak. "The dancing tonight at the Assembly House—you must not miss—for me—you must go—John will escort you." And she had laughed and gone with John.

All that summer Lydia watched the old love that had existed between John Wentworth and his cousin Frances, before she had married and he had gone away to England; watched it wake, and quicken, and burn with intensity that threatened havoc—what havoc she could only guess. She had prayed for the young husband to die before the lovers reached the end of their endurance and a crisis broke that meant tragedy for all three rather than for only the one. Well, her prayers had been answered, as evil ones often are. Young Theodore Atkinson had died almost soon enough—not quite—since Frances had had the ill luck to bear the too-early child.

She became aware that Frances was questioning her.

"Tell me about your husband, Lydia. You say he is dead? Are you sorry? Were you happy with him?"

"We were happy," said Lydia slowly, "that is—we were as happy as most, I think. He was a good man and kind to me. We had our own house, on the side of a high hill, where I could watch the sun rise over the white beaches of Plum Island in the morning, and sink down all red in New Hampshire at the fall of dark. When I went home as a bride, I expected to live there all my life and rear my children there. But I never had any children."

"Nor conceived any?" The mask slipped away from Frances' face as she bent forward intently to catch the reply of her friend.

Lydia shook her head. "No, I do not think so. There was never a sign of it that I knew."

"Do you think you are barren, Lydia? Or was he ailing, like my poor lad? From the first he was, and never a fit husband for me. But you—?"

"I do not know why it was so with us," said Lydia soberly, "for we were both well and strong." She poured herself another cup of tea so as not to have to meet Frances' curious eyes.

"But he died," protested Frances, "he died young! Or was he older than you?"

"He was twenty-four," said Lydia flatly. Best to tell it all now, she thought, and not have to go over it again and again. "And it was not of age or illness that he died. It happened last spring, the day of the fourth return of the Boston Massacre—a foolish thing for men to celebrate, ring church bells and build bonfires about. But that was what they did in Newburyport, and David and I rode down to see. A house by the Frog Pond took fire from a blazing brand that lit on its roof, and David and a score of others hastened to fetch pails of water or dashed inside to save the goods that were there. Then the roof fell and

David—David—! The others all leaped free. They came to his funeral marching two by two, and told me earnestly that if there was anything I needed, to call on them. Three of the single ones have even offered marriage to me."

Both women were silent. Then Lydia went on. "But I could not forget David. Whenever I turned a corner, he was there. Sometimes as I sat alone at twilight in our house on Crane Neck Hill and watched the lights spring up all over the valley when the farm wives lit their candles, I heard his step coming in from the fields to supper, just as he used to do. So you see—when I had your letter I was glad to come away."

"Yes, indeed I do see. Poor Lydia." Frances leaned back on her pillows and readjusted her mask. "But David is gone, and you must forget him. Now that you are at home, do you think to tangle again with your Londonderry lad, by any chance?"

Lydia felt her face turn hot. She did not look at Frances, but she knew the governor's wife was watching her sharply.

"He will have forgotten me by now. I cannot matter to him any more, and I doubt that I ever did," she answered.

"And you sound as if you were sorry for it. I told you then to go with him while you had the chance—if that was what you wanted, and I think it was. I told you then that we do not live forever, Lydia."

"Live forever?" cried Lydia quickly. "He's not—? Nothing has happened to him?"

"Not so far as I know," replied Frances in an idle tone, her interest seeming to wane, "but I am little aware of what goes on in the back country. It seems to me he has served John as a guide sometimes when he went to survey the forests—or perhaps it is in the road-making. But now I am very tired, as I know you must be, and my governor will be coming to me soon. Do you know where you are to sleep?"

"Why, in the east chamber, I suppose. My trunk was taken there."

"Yes, in the east chamber. Little Dorothy has the room behind this one—the room where you used to be. She likes it there, she says, for it does not get the morning sun, and it is her custom to sleep late. Have you heard about Dorothy?"

"Dorothy? The young Englishman's sister? I think he told me that was her name."

"Yes, Dorothy Giffard. She is scarcely more than a child who should be put to school. I hope you will take a hand with her, Lydia, and with our nieces, and one or two more—but Dorothy, the men go mad for her. I cannot see why, for she has scarce the beginnings of a bosom, and a face no one would turn to look at in the street. Well, good night, Lyddy. Tomorrow we will compare

many old notes and spell out plain all that has happened while we were apart."

Crossing to the east chamber, Lydia could hear the men's low voices as they talked downstairs in the library with the door open. Again she caught the familiar word that was on all men's lips nowadays, the word that in her childhood meant nothing but a heap of dried leaves in a crock on the kitchen shelf—tea.

John Wentworth was speaking. "There's a rumor, Hugh, that Ned Parry expects another shipment from the East India Company. We had a near-riot here when it happened in June, you remember. Tempers were high then, but they cooled, they cooled, sir, and if it happens again, I look for no real disturbance. Still, if trouble comes"—his voice rang out like the clang of an iron bell—"I have my tempers, too. I shall meet them halfway."

She strained her ears for Hugh's reply, but she could not catch it, and the voices sank back to a low hum again as she moved away from the head of the staircase.

Once in the spacious bedroom with hangings of blue and ivory, she felt weariness overcome her again. Yorkshire Prue or some other servant had left a small fire on the hearth and a bedside candle lighted, but she undressed hastily, covering the one and blowing out the other, without bothering to open her trunk. She would sleep in her shift for tonight. Thus thinly clad, she stood a moment looking across the narrow street and the shadowy bulk of the governor's stables to where the black waters of the Piscataqua drained seaward like a great snake crawling through the dark. She could not see the river or the low houses along its shore, hardly the stable roof only a few yards off, because the fog was so thick. But she did not need to see. She remembered well. All day she had been looking forward to this moment, wondered how she would feel in her heart when she was finally alone with the exultation of being back in Portsmouth, back at the edge of the familiar river and all the farm and forest country that lay behind. But now she did not feel any exultation. She felt chilled and sleepy. Hardly had she let herself sink down into the depths of the huge featherbed when she felt her limbs grow heavy and her eyelids close—she was at home—at home—asleep—

And then suddenly she started broad awake. She had slept, she knew—but for minutes or hours? She could not tell, for the darkness still hid everything outside. Her room was dark, too, black dark. Save for the gray oblongs of windows, she could see no single thing. Her body seemed weighted with lead when she tried to move, and her mind began to wonder what had awakened her. Then she heard it! A sound like a light step on a yielding stair! Only the one step, and that softer than the tiny thud when you dropped a bobbin wound with thick yarn. She listened for the light step to be repeated, but it was not. And still she lay there, startled and uncomfortable, every moment more wide

awake.

It might have been a servant about some ordinary errand. It might have been a mouse scurrying down from the attic to the kitchen larder. Perhaps she had not heard it at all. She could hardly believe it was caused by some spectral thing. Old houses had ghosts, she knew, but this was not an old house. She herself could remember the building of it! There had never so much as been a death there, so far as she knew. The provincial assembly had rented it for their young governor when he first took office, a bachelor then, just back from four years in England, with no establishment of his own. Everyone had expected that he would fall heir to the nearby estate of the old governor, Benning, his uncle, but that could not have happened, for Benning was dead—she had read in the *Essex Gazette* about his funeral—and John and Frances still lived in the hired house in town. Tomorrow she would ask—! Her mind wandered, still dull with sleep.

Then a long-drawn quavering howl rose from somewhere on the lower floor. At first it sounded to Lydia like the screeching of a demon straight out of hell's pit. Then she remembered the fat old beagle hound. Bugler used to make a noise like that whenever a neighboring cat streaked through the garden. The howl was cut off as sharply as if severed by a knife blade. She heard the governor's voice from across the hall, muffled, since he must have been calling from his bed without opening the chamber door.

"Bugler! What's wrong, lad?"

The light step did not come again. The howl was not repeated. Lydia waited, expecting to hear John Wentworth's steps as he got up to investigate. But John Wentworth did not get up. She lay tense and sleepless, waiting, listening, but nothing happened. Outside, a little wind stirred in the eaves and rattled a loose shutter. Winds were stirring everywhere now, driving the fog seaward. Through the upper panes in the long window tiny stars began to show clear. Tomorrow, she thought, would be a fair day. Now another sound came, a reassuring, familiar sound: the rattle of the swinging lantern the night watch carried, the drone of his gruff voice in the deserted street.

"Stars, wind, three o' the clock, an' all be quiet in Portsmouth!"

Lydia turned on her pillow restlessly. Her eyes felt heavy and stiff and staring but they refused to close. Fear was on her, and uneasiness, and apprehension she could not explain. Then her eyes did close, must have closed, for she was sinking into a deep dream, knowing all the time that it was a dream.

In her dream Governor John Wentworth and his aide, Hugh Giffard, stood together just as they had stood tonight in the wide front doorway. But this time they were facing streetward, and each had his arm across the shoulders of the other.

“You see, Hugh,” the governor was saying, “it’s just as I said. All’s quiet in Portsmouth.”

“Yes,” said the young Englishman grimly, “all’s quiet in Portsmouth. But for how long, Johnny? For how long?”

3.
"WE DO NOT LIVE FOREVER, LYDIA"

It turned out that things were quiet for nearly a fortnight. Lydia spent much of her time in Frances Wentworth's rose-colored chamber or down in the meadows where the South Mill Pond and the sea water from Puddle Dock almost flowed together to cut off Pickering Neck from the rest of the town. Here she gathered plantain and jewelweed to pound into unguents to help heal the consequences of my lady's vanity. It was not all a matter of pride that kept the governor's wife in bed, she learned, for truly the woman's slight shapely body was ill-fitted for child-bearing. Much of the time she suffered racking sickness and visible discomforts that could not be laid to pretense, and Lydia, her quick sympathies aroused, strove her best to be nurse and companion and to ignore the complaints of the querulous tongue.

The fact that Frances had been a subject of gossip herself did not make her any more tolerant toward the failings of others, and Lydia was soon apprised of all the less savory happenings in Portsmouth during the time she had been away. She heard the names of the girls who were married soon enough to fool nobody, and of the wives who dallied too long in their back gardens with husbands not their own. Only one of these little acid news items interested her, and this was about the woman for whom Frances reserved the greatest scorn. The recounting of it also provided the reason why John Wentworth had not inherited the property of his uncle.

Benning Wentworth had governed New Hampshire for more than a quarter of a century, and certainly grown no poorer in administering the duties of his office. In fact, the old man had finally retired under the threat of an investigation which his nephew, then in England, strove gallantly to avert. Some years before this, a childless widower at sixty-four, he had married his housekeeper, Martha—or "Patty"—Hilton, a girl of twenty-three. Lydia had been only a child then, but she could still remember how all the gossips' tongues were wagging and all the town divided upon it, some holding Patty a worthy and accomplished young woman who would be an ornament to her husband's sprawling mansion at Little Harbor, others reviling her for an adventuress and a servant risen above herself.

In any case, no child born to the couple lived more than a few days, so it

had been commonly assumed that John, the popular nephew who had saved his uncle's name before the King, would succeed to the property just as he succeeded to the governorship.

Alas, it had not fallen out so, Frances explained venomously, her fine eyes flashing and her delicate fingers tearing at a cambric handkerchief. None of them would have denied Madame Martha a competence. She could have had an attic bedroom and a place at the kitchen table in any one of a dozen houses belonging to her husband's kin. But no, the old fool had left her his huge house and all his money, besides the five hundred acres reserved for him in every town in the province chartered during his administration! So poor John had nothing but his salary and the allowances made him by his indulgent father, while this slut, who was fit for nothing but to juggle slop pails in a tavern, now queened it over Portsmouth, an enormously rich woman!

And worse, the heiress had remarried two months after her husband's death —Frances passed over this very hastily—to none other than Colonel Michael Wentworth of the English branch of the family, the handsome officer who had come to this country as the boon companion of the disinherited John!

And worse, Patty had borne her second husband a daughter; might, perhaps, bear him a son! After all, the old hag was thirty-odd, but still blooming and buxom. When the King was choosing a new governor for the province thirty years from now—! Frances fairly wrung her hands as she envisioned Patty Hilton's possible son weighed in the balance against the son she herself was determined to bear.

Lydia had no particular feeling about Patty one way or the other, but she sought to comfort Frances by saying that she remembered Colonel Michael well, his fiddle-playing, his love of fine clothes and the gaming table, and she was sure his wife would find him a costly bargain. In time he would lighten her purse for her. One had only to wait and see.

But Frances had flung her hands out, knocking a frail china cup to the floor.

"In time! I want to see her ruined now!"

*

It had been a relief from the tasks of the sickroom when Frances insisted she get on with the work of instructing the governor's nieces, and one sharp bright morning about a week after her arrival, she was seated with a little group around the mahogany table in the dining room, her eyes upon them as they worked at their set tasks. Betty and Ann Wentworth and their friends, Mary Purcell and Becky Appleton, were fair, well-mannered little girls, biddable and deft to work bright yarn into samplers. Sis Claggett, daughter of

Wyseman Claggett, the King's Attorney, was quieter, more awkward. She had, Lydia noticed, the black burning eyes and sharp features of her father, and looked not at all like her mother, Lettice Mitchell, who had been a reigning belle. Frances had had much to say about the misery of Lettice's marriage, and a reflection of that misery certainly showed in the face of the unhappy child who kept snarling her wool and pricking her fingers. Lydia was very gentle with Sis, and none of the others seemed to notice or resent it.

Dorothy Giffard at fifteen was much older than her companions, and Lydia had set her a more complicated task. She bent her brown head over a strip of tambour work and sewed swiftly, her fingers seeming to move by themselves, her thoughts away somewhere beyond the confines of John Wentworth's dining room. It was as Frances had said, Dorothy possessed no great beauty. Gray eyes in a rather pale little face, a tilted nose, a wide mouth, and a childish body. But whenever she smiled her face lighted up with warmth and friendliness and gentle merriment—and Dorothy was always smiling. Feminine as lace ruffles and roses and soft scent, she needed none of these trappings and showed little interest in them. In some ways, Lydia thought, Hugh's sister was still a child with the other children.

Just then Betty Wentworth spoke up, putting down her wool and needle.

"Lyddy," she said, "did you know they broke Mr. Parry's windows last night? Ann and I heard the shouting after we went to bed. There was an uproar all over town."

Lydia's thoughts went back to the night before, a moonless night with a fresh sea wind that blew up from the Piscataqua when she opened her windows before she went to bed. Pickering Neck lay far enough in the country so that a disturbance could have happened in town without her knowing it, but Edward Parry's house was no great distance away. True, she had heard shouting from the wharves and in Puddle Lane; a coming and going downstairs; John Wentworth raising his voice, and strange voices replying. Thomas Macdonough, the governor's secretary, had gone in and out. But she had heard nothing of broken windows.

"I know naught about it, Betty," she said, going over and picking up the child's work. "You have made this great E crooked. It gives the whole of 'Eternity' a queer look."

Ann giggled. Betty uttered a small disgusted sigh.

"So you will have to pick it out and do it over, I think," went on Lydia calmly. "And you have used so much scarlet already. Why not try blue?"

"I heard Mr. Parry's windows got broken," said Betty insistently, "because there's a ship came into the harbor last night at sunset bringing him whole chestfuls of tea."

The younger girls had dropped their work and were watching Betty.

Dorothy Giffard's fingers moved to and fro, and she did not lift her head.

Dorothy was English, of course, and whether American merchants bought tea and American women drank it meant nothing at all to her, Lydia reflected. She had already learned that the ban upon tea-drinking was not so strong in New Hampshire as in Massachusetts. Many of the towns had signed to prohibit it, but others had not. Tea appeared in Frances Wentworth's household regularly, but Frances shrugged her shoulders and insisted she had signed no pledge and she had no quarrel with the East India Company. The governor explained, overhastily, Lydia thought, that they were only drinking up a supply bought before the non-importation agreement came in. But if Betty was right, if a shipload of tea now rode in the harbor—would men swarm out to destroy it as they had done in Boston last December? Lydia felt that she was a patriot, as David had surely been, but she did not approve of the riotous ways of Boston. She sought to find an answer for Betty.

Just then she heard Governor John's voice calling to her from the library across the hall. "Lydia! Oh, Lydia, will you come here and aid us?"

She smoothed her skirts and her hair. "Dorothy," she said, rising, "I must go to the governor. Will you help the girls when they need it, and if I am not back by ten"—she flashed a look at the small gilt clock on the mantel over the tiled hearth—"will you go to the kitchen and tell Prue to send a pot of tea to Mrs. Wentworth."

Dorothy looked up from the gilt design growing so rapidly under her fingers. She smiled her warm smile that went always deep to the heart. "Oh, I'll take Fanny the tea myself," she answered. "And the girls—never fear it! We'll work like bees in blossomtime, won't we?" She winked across the table, and the little group beamed and giggled in agreement, for they loved Dorothy.

There were books around the walls of the library, but not too many books; a dying fire on the hearth, for the morning had been chilly; a bunch of yellow and white Queen Margarets unskilfully arranged in a brass bowl. The household wanted its mistress' touch, Lydia thought, and wondered how much she herself might be expected to undertake in this way. She looked last at the men, still feeling herself all in confusion whenever she thought of Hugh Giffard. Though they had been living in the same house more than a week, they had never once met each other after that first night. She had taken her meals upstairs with Frances and been busy with her duties. He, no doubt, had tasks of his own to see to. But now—She stepped toward them, smiling.

"What can I do, sirs?" she asked.

They sat together at one side of a delicate snake-footed table with a sheet of parchment spread upon it. The parchment tended to curl at the edges, and they held it flat with some difficulty. John rose and placed a chair for her just opposite his own.

“Sit here, Lydia. Hugh and I want to study this map. Will you hold the far corners of it and keep it from rolling itself together?”

Lydia sat down and grasped the corners of the parchment, and John went back to his place beside Hugh. Hugh looked up and smiled faintly, so faintly that Lydia did not respond. Perhaps he was ashamed of their adventure and wished to forget or deny it. After all, they were both in service, but she was a far lesser servant than he. Handsomer than she had remembered him to be, his hair seemed even more burnished, his eyes set farther apart. She looked down at the map. She knew that she was looking at it upside down, and tried in her mind to make the adjustment, to see what the men must see. What she saw was a rough, irregular triangle drawn in heavy ink, its apex toward her and its uneven base close to the governor and his aide.

John Wentworth had pulled a length of wax candle from its sconce, using it to indicate the points he wished to make.

“This is a small but faithful copy of Captain Holland’s map, Hugh. An excellent survey he made, and much needed, though I thought the Assembly would never vote the wherewithal to pay for it. If you call on the men of this province to shed their blood in the public interest, they will do so valiantly, but if you call on them to spend their money, they will hem and haw, and say it has been a poor harvest year and they have left their purses at home. At the word ‘tax’ they fall down in an apoplexy!”

“ ’Twas not so different in Boston, from what I could see while I was there,” answered Hugh, “nor in England, either. It’s in the nature of man to rear back from the word ‘tax’ as from the Old Serpent. Where are we sitting on this map, Johnny?”

“Here, sir,” and the governor pointed with the candle end. “This, you see, is Portsmouth. This loop close behind it is Great Bay where the rivers gather—a vast inland sea ringed with salt meadows and fine farmland. I have seen no place like it for duck-hunting in the fall. It catches the little streams that drain God’s part of the province, the counties of Strafford and Rockingham.”

Hugh laughed, she thought, a little self-consciously. “You know, John, I am strange here, so deal gently with me. I’m a Yorkshire man myself, but I wouldn’t say one county of England was more under God than another county. Are you saying that about New Hampshire? What other counties be there?”

John Wentworth explained, not patiently, but eagerly, as if he enjoyed making the explanation. “There were no counties, lad, till a year or so ago, when I set them up for a better handling of things. There be five now, Rockingham, Strafford, Cheshire, Grafton and Hillsborough—”

“Three of the five, I see, are named for English friends of yours.”

“Friends of mine? Yes. I like to hear their names said over. I like to remember my days in England, and as for ‘Strafford’—I haggled with myself

when I named that one, Hugh."

"It was for the old earl, of course. That ancient kin of yours, Thomas Wentworth, beheaded in Stuart times."

"Yes—yes, it was for old Thomas. He acted the part of a bloody knave, and yet, I confess I find a great deal to admire in him still. So long as he climbed no higher than 'Sir Thomas Wentworth,' he prospered, but little more than a year after he became Earl of Strafford, he went to his death on Tower Hill. Strafford! The name has proved unlucky to the Wentworth name. Once I dreamed in an ill night after too much wine, of a voice that rose in myself and spoke to me. 'My doom is in Strafford!' the voice said. I wonder if it could mean—?"

He fell silent, drumming with the candle end on the table.

"This new-formed county of Strafford then? Is it an unruly section that it should doom you?" Hugh asked, bewilderment in his tone.

"Strafford unruly? No, 'tis quiet farmland. There's naught to doom me in Strafford. But let us get to the business. When I say Strafford and Rockingham are God's part of the province, I mean that their leading townsmen are men who will conform—I think—to the interests of the King, the province, and themselves. For I consider that these three are the same."

"And then—beyond God's part of the province?"

They did not know she was there, Lydia thought. She might have been the painting of Queen Caroline hung on the wall, an ivory statuette on the mantel, or an old reflection still held in the looking glass. But she knew they were there; at least, she knew that Hugh Giffard was. When she let herself think about Hugh, it was not the man himself that disturbed her, so much as her response to him, the quickness and the wantonness of it. Years ago when she was a young girl here in Portsmouth and a man had put his hands upon her and his mouth on hers, she had held stiffly from him and withdrawn herself. Then she had married, and learned to respond to David in the ancient and hallowed way. But with David dead she had made the mistake of thinking of herself as again a single woman and a virgin. Alas, she was the one but not the other, and what a difference lay between the twain. She had learned that night in the Flying Stage Coach that she was vulnerable now as she had never been before. Not whole and strong in her own honesty, not sure but what her own flesh might betray her to the unforgivable thing. If Frances had been of a different nature she might have asked counsel from Frances, but Frances, she felt, would laugh and shrug her pretty shoulders and say, "Well, if you want him, and he wants you, why tarry? We do not live forever, Lydia."

John Wentworth pointed again with the candle and went on talking.

"Why, beyond God's part of the province lies its middle and its west, where the two great rivers drain down. Our own stream, Piscataqua, has but a

short course and no hinterland. Here on the far edge, Hugh"—and he traced the tortuous line running up the right of the map as Lydia saw it—"lies the Connecticut, its banks sparsely settled as yet, but full of rich valleys and townships chartered already, in my uncle's time. But its waters ran to the sea in harbors beyond New Hampshire. Its trade flows all to the province it was named for, whence many of its settlers came. It is not of us. It is of Connecticut in its thinking."

Hugh smiled, inclined to take the matter lightly; flashed a glance at Lydia, which she was well aware of although she did not meet it. "Why if 'tis of Connecticut, 'tis of some vast limbo beyond God," he jested, "and we in Portsmouth would better ignore it. This crooked line through our center? Is that a river too?"

"Yes," said John Wentworth slowly, "that is a river, a river deep out of our mountains and our heartland. The Merrimack! It flows from north to south, and then it crooks east to the sea, but it does not crook soon enough."

"You mean God was in error when He formed New Hampshire?" asked Hugh, jesting still.

"Sometimes," answered the governor ruefully, "I think He was not even about at the forming. I think He had done as any country gentleman may do, and gone up to London on holiday."

"You think God's a country gentleman?"

John Wentworth frowned. "Forgive me if I blaspheme, but if He were to turn out to be so, I would still worship him in Queen's Chapel with a glad heart. My meaning is—in terms of the surveyors with rule and line, the mapmakers, and then the merchants who come after—the Merrimack River does not carry the country's produce into Portsmouth Harbor as it ought to do. Instead it flows beyond our borders before it seeks the sea, and takes much of our lumber and provisions and handmade wares down to Newburyport in Massachusetts. You remember, you passed through Newburyport."

"I remember Newburyport," said Hugh, and darted a swift glance at Lydia. She felt her face turn hot, but if the governor saw, he did not notice. He went on talking.

"The men who live beside this river take their thinking from Massachusetts, too, I fear, and are much in sympathy with the rebellious antics of Boston. Nor are they all English folk. East of the river, somewhat south of here, and within our own county bounds, I must admit it, lies a wide townland called 'Londonderry' settled by the Scots who inhabit North Ireland; next to Portsmouth, our largest town. I have loyal friends in Londonderry. Captain Cochran, who commands our fort, is one of them. So is Colonel Holland, who keeps the tavern there. They sent a tribute to my grandfather because he 'cherished their small beginnings, showed them civility and kindness, and

defended them.' But nevertheless, they are, for the most part, a crude, craggy, obstreperous people there, of a different race than yours and mine. But here we sit in Portsmouth, Hugh, like figures on a strip of false painted scenery in a theater, our backs to a great emptiness, all our wealth directed into other provinces because our largest rivers flow that way."

"Did you ever think, Johnny," asked Hugh, toying with the pipe he had taken from his pocket, still eying Lydia, much to her discomfort, "of applying to rule in another province? A province where the rivers run as you desire them?"

"I am a New Hampshire man," said the governor austerely. "There is no other province I would care to rule. While I have not yet quite conquered the greater challenge, I would surely not be off about the lesser thing. That is not the way of a man."

"Your pardon, Your Excellency," chaffed Hugh, "but if you like God's design so ill, perhaps you have found a way to amend it."

John Wentworth's face lighted. His gray eyes shone with triumph and a belief in the future.

"Yes, I think I have done that, Hugh. We can run roads where there are no rivers! I have a scheme in mind to link Portsmouth and Canada—unto Quebec, even—by roads that will make our little capital here into the greatest mart of all the colonies, passing Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. I plan fine things for my province! Let me show you where these roads will lie, marked out and already a-building. The first will run from the tidewater town of Durham—here—north to the rich river valleys of lower Cohos. The second—"

A great clatter sounded in the hallway, the rasp of heavy boot nails on the polished floor boards, and the squeak of an erratic boyish voice demanding attention.

"I be here with a note! A note for the governor! I knocked and knocked! Be there nobody home at all? 'Tis a note from my master, Mr. Parry! Whole town's set by the ears about this damned tea!"

Lydia let go the corners of the map and ran into the hall. A young male creature, half boy, half man, in patched breeches and a ragged shirt, stood there holding a folded paper in his hand. Just as she reached to take it, John and Hugh came out of the library. Hugh turned a look of honest surprise on the messenger.

"Is it the custom here, Johnny," he inquired, "for prentice boys to curse in the front hall of the governor?"

John Wentworth shrugged. "New Hampshire men," he said, "speak their minds wherever they happen to be. What's the trouble, Jonas?"

The youth thrust the paper unceremoniously into the governor's hand. "Mr. Parry's writ down here what he wants," he piped, "I got to go back to the

docks, Your Excellency. There's a ship unloading!"

"Not the tea ship?" asked the governor quickly.

"Naaa, not that! The *Gull* from Barbados—rum and molasses, likely. I've not been aboard her yet, but I got to go. Go and help unload or I'll miss my wages."

He stamped out, not looking back, and Lydia shuddered as she heard his boots scrape across the floor. Fortunately they seemed to leave no mark. John unfolded the paper, and his eyes ran quickly over the message inside. Then he crumpled it in his hand.

"Ned Parry's as nervous as an old woman!" he cried impatiently. "Complains about a great uprising last night, and says whole town's plotting to burn his warehouse and unsettle his family. As near as I could find out, a handful of wild lads and Negro servants went looking for excitement and threw a couple of stones through his parlor window. There's been talk against him, but no real violence—and there won't be. I'll admit it was unlucky his London agent shipped him this cargo of bohea he never ordered, but all he has to do is pay the duty and reship it to Halifax, the way he did when the same thing happened last June. But now he throws himself on our protection! Well, he shall have it. I'll speak to the magistrates, especially Jack Fenton. He was one of the Queen's Royal Irishers, and if there should be a fight, he can handle it. I suppose I'll have to call a meeting of the Council!"

With a gesture of disgust he took his beaver hat from the table at the rear of the hall and clapped it on his powdered hair, strode out of his front door into the crisp autumn sunshine. Hugh Giffard followed him, not stopping for a hat, and Lydia watched him go, his slim shoulders straight, his stride easy and unhurried as if he were off to a cock fight or the gaming table. Hearing a noise behind her, she turned. Her pupils, massed in a little group, stood there watching her with eager, expectant faces. Betty again spoke out as their leader.

"Lyddy," she said, "we heard it all. We heard Uncle Johnny say things have got so bad he has to call the Council." No story ever lost anything by Betty's telling it. "Mary's been watching at the window, and she says everybody from the South End has gone by this last half hour. They're all heading toward Market Square. We want to go too."

Lydia hesitated, feeling herself as eager as they. She had almost made up her mind to refuse, to herd them back to their sewing because that seemed the more orderly and sensible procedure, the thing Frances would expect of her. Then suddenly her heart rose in rebellion. "Why not," she asked herself, "do the thing I want to do, even if it is foolish—when it is such a little thing?" She looked quickly into the wide mirror that hung along the passage to the library and garden, and found no fault with herself, her high-piled curls or the careful loopings of her blue Holland gown.

"Very well," she said. "We'll get our bonnets."

A few minutes later they emerged from the governor's house just in time to meet a powerfully-built young man with a sharp jaw, sharp eyes, and a cocked hat. Lydia had not seen him since her return to Portsmouth, but she recognized him at once, for his was a face well-known there.

"Tom Pickering!" she cried, stepping toward him.

"For God's sake, Lyddy March!" he exclaimed gruffly. "Very sight of you puts me in mind of those fried pies your mother used to make when she was cooking for us. Never tasted the like before nor after. God rest her soul! Haven't seen you since Noah's flood. Heard you was living out of town!"

They swung into step together, following the elm-lined road that wound toward Market Square, the girls trailing along behind them.

"Yes, I've been living in the country near Newburyport. I'm a widow now. You're likely married yourself, Tom."

"No." His eyes glinted, and his chin thrust forward even more sharply. "Mean to pick me a pretty girl sometime. Just haven't got around to it. Still living with Brother John's family and helping him run South Mill. Take a ship on a voyage now and then. This time next year, I expect I'll be too busy fighting."

"Fighting?" asked Lydia startled. "Fighting whom? About what?"

"Fighting them damned lobsterbacks of the King's that's taken over Boston. Johnny Wentworth will have a troop of 'em here to take Portsmouth any day now. Johnny's a King's man and ought to know better, being born here. Can't blame an Englishman for kissing the King's great toe, but Johnny ought to know better, Johnny ought. But I say"—he stopped in his long strides for a moment and looked down into her face—"you was coming out of his house! You living there now? You back waiting on that—that wife of his again?"

"Yes," said Lydia slowly, as they began once more to move ahead. "I've come back to be with Frances—for this winter. But I do not think the governor has ideas of war. I have not heard him mention sending for any British officers. Only this morning I heard him making plans to build roadways for the good of the province."

"And what's to roll on those roadways? His Majesty's cannon?"

"No," retorted Lydia, "New Hampshire trade."

They had reached the edge of Market Square now, but found themselves unable to go any further, the open space between the watch house and the State House was so packed with people. Lydia had not known there were so many folk in Portsmouth. It seemed as if the population of the town must have doubled while she had been away. She craned her neck trying to see some face she remembered, but everyone within sight appeared strange to her. There

were more men than women in the throng, but not so many more; rich men and poor men alike, judging by their dress, and here and there a little knot of farmers or sailors, each keeping to its own kind. It was a colorful crowd, the men in coats of blue and scarlet and green, or the drabber russet and tow of mechanics and laborers; the women in stiff rustling silks, brocade, or printed lawn, most of them with little jackets or shoulder capes, for it had been an unusually early autumn, as often came to pass in a dry year. Frosts had set in already, and the air had a sharp edge to it, the mellow Indian summer more than a month away. At first she could not follow the words of any one voice in all the babel of chattering voices. Everybody seemed to be watching the State House, trying uneasily to press in that direction, but not trying very hard. It was not a tense gathering, she thought, and not a hostile one, assembled less out of purpose and fellowship than out of curiosity. After a moment Tom Pickering muttered an apology and slipped away from them, lost to sight immediately in the shifting, stirring throng.

Lydia counted the girls to be sure they still stood close about her. The younger ones with wide eyes and eager faces kept staring intently at the State House as they saw older folk do, but Dorothy's glances darted this way and that as if she were looking for someone.

Lydia let her own gaze wander away from the blur of faces about her and look upward into the blue air, at the morning sunlight on the North Church tower, on the old gambrel roofs of the houses clustered round, on the older, pointed roofs with dormers jutting through. She looked down several streets and lanes and saw that the houses stood closer together than they had five years ago. John Wentworth's governorship had been a growing time for Portsmouth, and he had fine things in mind for his province. She had heard him say so. Governor John—

"Governor John," a voice was saying close to her shoulder, the voice of a fat red-faced woman in a mantle of green and purple plaid taffeta, "Governor John'll talk his way out of this as he talks his way out of all. A slippery lad, but God's love, we know he means us well. He's one of our own."

"What be a-going on here, anyway?" demanded her companion, a thin, somber-eyed woman clad in rusty black. "I just come up to Molly Treadwell's store to buy me a fluting iron when I seen all this rout—"

"He's called a meeting of the Council," replied the fat woman complacently. "I been here since breakfast. The word was out about the tea, but folks gathered slow. Bye and bye, Johnny comes, and that English lad of his, and his secretary, Tom Macdonough. Then he sent for the others. See, there goes his daddy, Mark Hunking Wentworth, now!"

Lydia looked where the woman pointed and saw a sturdy form in a dove-gray suit with gold lace on his cocked hat emerge from the far edge of the

crowd, pull open the State House door, and enter.

"Having his daddy on the Council," babbled the voice beside her, "convenient for both of them, one might say! And look, there goes Daniel Rindge, his uncle."

Another finely clad gentleman, swinging a cane, hastened through the State House door and closed it behind him. Lydia remembered it had been said back in old Benning's time that the Wentworths and their kin-in-law kept the government of the province as a family affair.

"What do they mean to do, you think?" asked the black-clad woman, whipping a tortoise-shell snuffbox from the folds of her gown and applying the powder deftly to each nostril.

"They mean to decide whether to let Ned Parry sell his tea or not. Could be they've got no choice. If they come out and give orders he's to do it, there'll be other Portsmouth men—not of the Council—will have a thing to say. I seen Tom Pickering go by, Jack Langdon, too." She paused significantly. A moment later she spoke again. "Look! There goes old Atkinson, and he's the last. They're all inside now, for I watched 'em. Ah well, doubt if they'll settle their minds before another hour. Let's us trot over to the Marquis of Rockingham, and I'll stand treat to a mug of cider—I'd never sign no pledge against that now! If they was shutting off cider instead of tea—"

They moved away. Suddenly Lydia found that her eyes were searching the crowd just as Dorothy's had done a few moments before. This was a Friday. On other Fridays, she remembered, when she had lived here years ago, she would pile her hair three stories high and put on her brightest gown. On Friday the lads from the country would come trooping in, bearing their wares for Saturday market day. She stole a quick look at the girls, but they were still watching the State House and chatting with each other. Surely they could come to no harm, and if they took it into their heads to go home, the way was safe and plain. John's nieces lived with their grandfolk in Daniel Street, and the others not much further away. Ten minutes she would steal, only ten minutes, only—. She stopped thinking, doubting, trying to make excuses for herself. For the second time that morning she moved in rebellion against her own good order. Perhaps there was a subtle tang of rebellion in the Portsmouth air and she had drawn it too deeply in. "We do not live forever, Lydia," she heard Frances Wentworth say. She stole one more look at the girls, but they were not watching her. She turned and slipped away through the crowd.

Edging along the shop fronts at the head of the square, she finally reached the Paved Street, deserted except for an old woman with a willow basket and two boys teasing a Maltese cat, and hurried over its rough stones to where Spring Hill ran down near the waterside. At the foot of the hill, overlooking the wide blue river and the Kittery shore, stood the market house where the

farmers brought their produce to sell, floating it down stream in the huge scow-like gundalows or conveying it more toilsomely by oxcarts and saddlebags from the back country far beyond the edges of the Piscataqua and Great Bay. Near Spring Hill stood a little dark shop where Neal McIntyre bought and sold flaxseed, a little shop where the men from Londonderry would always come. Flax was their cash crop, and brought almost as much as their linen, treated and woven by the old ways their grandfathers had learned in Ireland, better linen than anyone else could weave here. Sometimes on Fridays —! She reached the little shop, crooked and narrow, on a crooked arm of the street. She stood still in front of it, braced herself a moment, and then peered inside.

Her eyes were used to sunlight and they could see nothing at first, within the dim cave under the swinging wooden sign whose faded blue flax blossoms had all but weathered away. But she still had the use of her ears, and they served her well. From the interior of the shop she heard a bubbling laugh and a gay light voice that cried, “Later, then!”

It was the voice of Dorothy Giffard whom she had left behind her a few moments ago with the little girls in Market Square. Dorothy was coming toward her, about to step from the shop.

Twisting alleys ran down to the waterside in half a dozen places here, and Lydia fled into the nearest one. She stood there, leaning close against the mossy shingles of the wall beside her, trying to arrange her thoughts in some sort of order, wondering why she had felt a need to hide. Surely it should have been her part to accost the girl for straying from the others, to ask what her reason was, and to reprove her unless it seemed good. But she had not done this. She had slunk away as if she were the one in the wrong.

She heard Dorothy’s high heels go tapping over the doorstone in front of the shop and waited a moment longer before she peered cautiously around the corner of the wall. Dorothy was not going by the Paved Street, the way she, Lydia, had gone. Dorothy had taken off her slippers, clutched them in her right hand, and was running lightly across Madame Wibird’s garden, returning as she had doubtless come, by this straighter, more private path. Now she disappeared behind a lilac thicket. Lydia had no doubt that when she rejoined her pupils, Dorothy would be waiting in their midst, docile and innocent, as if she had never been away.

Sighing a little, quite put out of mind of what she had come there for, Lydia took her more dignified way towards Market Square, her back turned resolutely on Spring Hill where neither she nor Dorothy Giffard had any business to be.

4.
THE CONTRARY WAY

The tea ship sailed on Sunday under fair skies and a brisk wind, taking its delectable cargo off to Halifax where it should likely have gone in the first place. If the Portsmouth maids and matrons sighed over this new denial of their beloved beverage, they were too patriotic to do so audibly. Edward Parry paid the duty, insisting that the fault lay all with his agent in London, and that no man in town had a deeper regard for the good of his country than he. The Council voted to pay for his broken windows, but the "Committee," leaders of that ever-growing group who resisted the new laws and taxes, made it their business to idle about the dock, to take themselves in small boats up and down the river, and to rejoice openly in the streets when the despised chests were wafted beyond Fort Point and away on the open sea.

John Wentworth spent much of his time in the State House, coming home only to his bed and his dinner, but when he did come home, he seemed to be his usual urbane self, more annoyed than deeply troubled by the rebelliousness of the people, not taking it to be any grave matter. "There is no great issue at stake here," Lydia heard him tell Hugh as the two men sat over their wine late that Saturday night. "If they do not want to drink tea, I shall not order their noses held and force it down them. My duty—at the moment—is only to keep the King's peace in this province; to see no violence is done to any man. And that, I mean to do. I wish the Castle had a stronger garrison. Captain Cochran is able and loyal, but what can he do with only five men, if we seek his aid against rising trouble? Hugh, we must see that troubles do not arise. Portsmouth men are neither stupid nor vicious. They are not like the rabble in Boston. I can govern them easily—if I govern well."

Hugh took a deep draft of wine, and watching him, Lydia could not help but ask herself if he did it in order to avoid giving the governor a direct answer. His face looked graver and more troubled than the governor's. Perhaps in England folk were better behaved, and he was not used to the easy freedom of colonial men, the way they took matters into their own hands.

On Sunday Frances came languidly downstairs for a brief time and strolled with Lydia and Dorothy in the garden, seating herself on a bench finally to enjoy the afternoon sun. The old beagle slept at her feet, and the tame squirrel

that she fed and played with when she was in health, darted as near as he dared, fearing only the presence of the dog. The elm and beech leaves were beginning to yellow overhead, and the gold and crimson and russet colors of autumn lay on the formal flower beds that ran from the terrace at the rear of the house down to the grassy edge of the South Mill Pond. John Wentworth kept two boats tied to a small wharf there, and Lydia remembered how in the old days they used to go rowing on the tranquil, dark water above the dam. She looked at Frances, at the ungainliness that had begun to afflict the slender figure, and dared not to suggest that they should go rowing now. Dorothy had brought a pair of sheers and roamed among the flowers, cutting the blooms that pleased her. Once she was well out of earshot, Lydia spoke.

"Frances," she began cautiously, "it is as you say. Dorothy has a great winsomeness about her. I am sure that it draws the men. But do you think—have you noticed—that she has shown a liking for any particular lad?"

She had not spoken to Dorothy about that morning on Spring Hill, not having had a fit opportunity, and she would not tell the governor's wife about it now. For one thing, if she did, she would have to admit that she went there herself, and Frances would taunt her unmercifully. Frances would not need to ask why she, Lydia, went to the flax shop. She would have known. Still, Lydia could not forget the matter, nor did she think it was all wanton curiosity. Dorothy had been placed in her charge. Dorothy was a very young girl in a country not her own. Her friends owed her their watchfulness and protection.

Frances flicked away a yellow leaf that had settled on the velvet cloak she kept drawn around her.

"Man? She does not know what a man is for!" she jeered, and one could not mistake the crudeness of her meaning. "These English girls have all passion bred out of them! They are as lacking in ardor as the wool sack their chancellor sits on. They call that a symbol of England's greatness in the cloth trade, Johnny tells me. But bloodless maids like her are a symbol of England's decline!"

Lydia was a little bewildered that Frances should flare up against her young guest in such an abandoned way. She sought to divert her.

"Is England declining, then?" she asked mildly.

The fire died out behind the lovely distorted face, quite healed now from the rash that had briefly marred it. The governor's wife sagged wearily on the whitewashed bench.

"I do not know," she murmured. "My governor thinks not. He thinks it will go on to further greatness, to absorb the whole world; and our best hope for the future is to cling to it and to follow in its way. But Hugh Giffard who comes but lately from there is not so certain. He says there are rebellious spirits in that country, too, who seek to overturn all the old ways. He told me—we talked

often—before I became swollen and ugly, when I was still fit to talk to a young man—! Help me to the house, Lydia! I am unwell! Oh I am weary of this horrid burden that waxes greater every day! I am almost willing to miscarry. Then I should be the quicker myself again." She staggered uncertainly to her feet.

Dorothy dropped her half-gathered marigolds and ran to help Frances inside, innocently concerned, and unaware that she herself had been the subject of their talk. She offered to run for Dr. Hall Jackson, or to send Henry, the Yorkshire footman, but Frances scoffed feebly at the idea and announced that she would do well enough once she was safe in her bed and warming herself with a cup of hot tea. She was right in this, and after the scare she had given them, settled calmly down for a quiet nap. Lydia then withdrew to her own room and napped too. Perhaps that was the reason she found herself wakeful that night.

*

The household had retired early, its master and his aide still being away in the town. Dorothy had taken a book of Pope's poems from the library, smiled, and said that she thought she would read for a while, and gone away to her little room behind the great chamber where Frances lay. Lydia climbed into her own four-poster bed under the blue counterpane, but her mind stayed clear and sharp, and her eyelids would not close. Once she got up and stood in the window for a little while, the curtains blowing round her. It was a dark night, the moon being but a few days old, and when she saw a figure coming down the street she had to peer very hard before she could recognize him. It turned out to be Tom Pickering, and he carried his gun and powderhorn. He must have been hunting, she thought. She hoped he carried them for no worse reason. In any case, he was going home to the South Mill. That meant he looked for no more trouble now. Portsmouth seemed to be quiet again, and God send it would remain so. She thought uneasily how Tom had predicted the King's troops could overwhelm this town, just as they had done in Boston. She could understand the little reasons for all the unrest, but she felt there must be a greater reason behind it that she could not understand. It was not in the nature of things that men should upset themselves so much, take down their guns and call out the troops over a simple victual like tea.

She watched the pattern of stars over the river, the lights going out in the houses along the waterside. Finally she grew chilled and crept into bed again. This time it seemed that she might sleep. She imagined herself going down to Spring Hill, and surely she meant to go there when another Friday came, this time without Dorothy, this time with no young maids in her care. She would

go into Neal McIntyre's shop and ask—not for flaxseed or Virginia tobacco. She would ask if they had seen—

Suddenly she started wide awake. It had happened again, just as it happened that first night—the light step on the stair. Jumping out of bed, she flung her cloak over her night shift and slipped her feet into a pair of embroidered felt slippers Frances had given her for quiet walking about the house. She tiptoed into the hall.

Then she paused a moment, seeing no one on the wide stairs, broken by the landing midway and reversing themselves. Candles burned in the wall sconces, for it was the custom of the house to keep them lighted until the governor himself had retired to bed. It seemed unlikely that anyone could have taken themselves out of sight with such speed. Then she remembered the inner staircase, narrow and winding, that ran between Frances' chamber and the small room behind it, down to the dining room below. Someone—Dorothy, perhaps—had descended that staircase, was even now moving about the house, perhaps outside it, engaged in some secret thing!

Lydia ran noiselessly down the wide stair and into the dining room. No candles burned there, but the table was set for breakfast, covered with linen and much silver, and a streak of light shone on the whiteness of the tablecloth. The light came from the kitchen. She tiptoed that way and peered around the edge of the door frame into the low-ceiled, shadowy room.

At first she drew a sigh of relief. Yes, the light footsteps must have been Dorothy's, for Dorothy stood here before her, a single candle burning on the table between them. But the girl's purpose seemed so innocent, now it was known. Bunches of dried herbs hanging thriftily from the rafters overhead almost touched her hair as she balanced herself on a three-legged stool to reach up to the higher shelves of the deep closet built into the wall beside the great hearth. In this closet, Abby, the cook, and Prue, head housemaid, kept the baked meats, loaves, and pastries ready for the table, to save themselves from running too often to the shelves in the cellar beneath. Dorothy had grown hungry, that was all. She wanted a biscuit or a sweet cake to munch on before she went to bed.

As the tenseness ebbed out of Lydia she felt ridiculous and a little ashamed to have distrusted her young friend. She was about to step forward, explaining that she, too, had come downstairs for something to eat, and now they could share a late supper together, when she heard another sound, dull, soft, and repetitious, on the far side of the kitchen. She turned her glance in that direction.

The sound was caused by Bugler, the governor's old beagle, tapping his short thick tail on the floor. Bugler sat solemnly in front of the door that led to the back steps and the garden, most effectively blocking it. His front feet were

firmly planted, and the whites of his eyes showed. Lydia made ready again to step forward, ready to laugh. Bugler's appetite was a family jest. He had to be confined at mealtime, and whenever food was consumed in the house he demanded his share. Worse than a tithing man!

But just then Dorothy stepped down from the stool and withdrew from the closet. Lydia noticed with surprise that she was not carrying a cake or a sweetmeat, or any other dainty refreshment fit for a young woman. In her hands she held a large ham bone, still covered with luscious pink meat. She looked over her shoulder once, but Lydia remained safely hidden inside the shadows of the dining room. The girl approached Bugler. The old dog stiffened himself and stood there menacingly, still blocking the door. He growled low. He tilted back his head, and Lydia braced herself, expecting to hear him give his unearthly howl.

But Dorothy moved too quickly. "Here, Bugler," she cried sweetly. "Here, lad!"

She placed the ham bone on the wide stone pave before the kitchen hearth under the shadow of an iron kettle swinging on its crane. The years dropped away from the old hound. He shot forward, spry as a six-months puppy, and oblivious of anything else, with a sob of delight, he sank his teeth into the tallowy richness of the ham.

Dorothy gave a little laugh and slipped through the unguarded door.

Swiftly, almost without thinking, Lydia hastened after. Once outside, she found herself in the kitchen-garden patch to the right of the terrace, a tangle of vines and overgrown herbs at this season of the year. Dorothy moved forward as if on a well-known course, and Lydia followed as cautiously as she could, glad that her felt slippers made no sound, feeling every sharp stone, every gnarled tree root against the soles of her feet. They passed through a narrow wooden gate into the lane that led between the Mill Pond and the highway. Dorothy took the latter turn and headed for the town. She could not think to go back to Spring Hill! The shops would all be dark and shuttered late on a Sunday night.

Keeping about a hundred yards behind the slim form, uncloaked and plain to see in its white wool dress, Lydia hurried forward, holding her own cloak wrapped tightly around her, aware that she had nothing but her night shift underneath. No one else seemed astir in darkened Portsmouth as they crossed Prince Street, Queen Street, and came into Market Square, but lanterns burned all yellow about the watch house, reflected from the walls of the North Church, and lit their path a little as they turned into the Paved Street. Madame Wibird had a light in her kitchen windows at the rear, and many candles shone from Captain John Moffat's mansion house, as if nobody had any thought of going to bed, but darkness covered the little low shops and humbler houses along

Spring Hill.

The street drew ever nearer to the Piscataqua now, and Lydia could hear the tide sucking at the wharves below her, lost in the shadows on her right. She could smell, above the fetidness of the river, the clean salt tang of the sea. Her attention wavered for a moment as she strained her eyes trying to peer toward it, to make out flooding water from embankment, afraid lest she should unwarily stumble over the line between. In that moment she lost Dorothy. She realized suddenly that no figure moved ahead of her; a streamer of mist now and then, or a stray cat searching for fish heads in the gutter, but Hugh Giffard's sister had vanished from the sloping street. Lydia had a sudden conviction that if she were to hasten home to John Wentworth's house she would find the girl eating her supper at the kitchen table, flinging the scraps to Bugler as he crouched nearby on the floor. Was Dorothy a witch woman out of old time, who could come and go, unseen and at will? Even Ma'am Hooper in Newburyport had never pretended to that power.

At the corner of Deer Street Lydia hesitated. Beyond Deer Street the houses thinned out into salt grass and crooked trees where the old Cutts orchard ran down to the outlet of the North Mill Pond. Dorothy could have hidden in the shadow of the Customs House, of course, or she could have gone on to the ferry, but at this hour nobody would be likely to set her over to the Kittery side—if that was where she wanted to go. Had the girl dashed into some friendly doorway that opened to receive her and then discreetly closed itself again? She looked up the hill to the Deer Tavern, a square-built, solid old house, and saw a light behind its narrow panes. Spring Hill, and now the Deer Tavern! Dorothy was only going over the ways her own young feet had gone! She remembered those ways well.

But her feet were older and more tired now, burning in their thin slippers, and the dank river air seeped through her cloak and the flimsy garment beneath. She felt sure that Dorothy had gone into the ale house. Well enough, for Dorothy! Dorothy was a maid, and young, and must follow her destiny. She, Lydia, was a widow woman, all staid and sober now, with nothing ahead. She should go home and wrap her hair in curling bobbins and read her Bible till she fell asleep.

But no, she thought. Dorothy was hardly a maid yet, scarcely more than a child, too young to be trusted with her own destiny. She had come from the placid life of an English country house, and she should not be left to herself in a rude waterfront tavern where hard-drinking sailors from the wharves and hard-drinking woodsmen from the back country were used to coming. Dorothy should have known better! What was she doing here, anyway? Half angry at the girl, wholly curious, shaken with emotions she refused to think about, Lydia walked swiftly forward to the nearest of the two lighted windows,

paused as close to it as she dared, and peered inside. Three men sat at a table with cider mugs in their hands. A whale-oil lamp burned on a wall hook above their heads, shining also on a picture of King George III hanging upside down. The men had shaggy hair and leather jerkins, and she did not recognize any of them. After a moment she moved to the other window.

Behind its dusty panes stood an oak table, small and round like the first. No lamps burned in this end of the room, but lights and shadows flickered through it, so Lydia knew there must be a fire on the hearth which she could not see because of the heavy nail-studded door. Dorothy Giffard sat at the table, her back to the window, and facing her, gazing at her intently and with tenderness, sat a young man. They did not drink, though there were glasses and a wine bottle before them.

"You came at last!" Lydia heard the young man say.

At first she thought she did not know him. He had dark-red hair drawn into a queue behind, and lying in wide shining waves across the top of his head. His handsome boyish face was all alight as he bent forward toward Dorothy. He wore a linen shirt and a homespun coat, decent, but hardly in fashion, and the lean barrel of his musket rested against the table beside him. Now he reached across the table and took Dorothy's hand. Dorothy leaned forward, too, and twisted her shoulders in a playful gesture. Lydia heard her laughing, heard them whisper together.

"Dan MacMurray," Lydia said aloud, letting the taste of it linger on her tongue, the sound of it stay in her ears for a long minute.

After the words died away, she stood there silent, conscious of the fall night around her, mild, now that the wind had lessened; of the stars overhead, the black river slipping seaward below the hill, and the deserted streets of the harbor town. She was conscious, too, of the lighted window, and the pair beyond it who talked as lovers; that she herself stood outside the lighted window. She felt lonelier than she had ever been in her whole life. Not even when she bowed her head by David's new-made grave in the midst of a March blizzard, had she felt so much alone.

Then she heard a sound behind her.

"I thought 'twas Lyddy March," said the familiar voice, close and caressing, and still with an edge to it, an edge that could cut her deeper than any knife Dan MacMurray had ever brought with him when he came down from the farms of Londonderry. She turned slowly, feeling a curious peace inside, as if her heart had ceased to beat and her blood to flow; stood there and looked at him.

The lamplight from the tavern shone out upon him, his dark hair stirred into wisps by the sea wind, his gray eyes hard to fathom as river water, his craggy features and full throat that seemed to grow like the trunk of a young

tree from the open collar of his deerskin hunting shirt.

"Black Dan" and "Red Dan," they had been called in the old days, and likely now; cousins named alike, so that for the difference, men called them by the color of their hair; inseparable, in spite of the five years between them. But Red Dan had been a freckle-faced urchin then, more likely to take off his shoes and go wading in the sedge beyond Cutts orchard than to sit in the tavern where she and Black Dan were sitting. Red Dan was a boy no longer. He had grown tall and poised, and his freckles had faded. He was sitting with a young girl in a tavern. She, Lydia, and Black Dan, his face lined and a little older, stood facing each other almost as strangers in the open street.

"Who else would it be?" she asked him sharply, trying to arrange her stiff and unresponsive features in a smile. " 'Tis not likely I'd loan my face to any other woman in Portsmouth to walk abroad with."

He laughed, slow and teasing. "I thought 'twas you," he said, "when I saw you skulking past the watch house like a Penacook brave hoping to scalp somebody. What be you after the lass for? She's safe wi' my cousin Dan."

"He's grown and changed, has he not?" said Lydia uncertainly. "At first I did not know him."

"Aye," agreed Black Dan cheerfully. "Taller than I be, now. Takes after his mother's folk, more like Aunt Jean."

"Your Aunt Jean was ailing when I went away, ailing badly, you thought. Is she—?"

"Aunt Jean died," he answered soberly, "after you left. That first winter. Dan and I be all alone now, except for Graunie. She raised us, you know—or tried to, God help her!"

She was silent for a moment while her thoughts ran back over all that he had said. Then she asked, "You followed us from the watch house?"

He nodded. "Went there to talk wi' the watch after they closed the Marquis of Rockingham. Folk can put up their guns and go to sleep tonight, now they've got rid of the tea ship, so the town's quieter than the backside o' Moose Mountain. Not a game going anywhere, and nowhere but here a drop to drink. Canna' see what a man should come to the Bank for. I can have me a higher time in Londonderry."

"I know you can," snapped Lydia, angry at him suddenly, just as in the old days, angry because he mattered so much to her. "A high time with Jessie, I suppose."

He laughed again, but this time a harshness had replaced the gentle teasing of it.

"Now I know for sure you're Lyddy March. You went out o' here quarreling, and you come back the same way. I told you years ago you ought to fight fire with fire. If you'd make me welcome like Jessie does—"

"I'll never make you welcome like Jessie does," she retorted. "There be other ways for a man and woman than that. Honest and respected—!"

"I know there be, but I'll have none o' them," he told her. Then his eyes lighted and his mood changed. "Now that we've settled that," he said, "I'll walk back to the governor's wi' you, and hear about all that's happened while you been away."

"How did you know that I was living at the governor's? That anything has happened?"

"I got a tongue, Lyddy. When I saw you go by, I asked the watch. He knows the gossip in town. He's paid for knowing. He said you'd been at John Wentworth's house for a fortnight past. It's where I'd most likely have thought to find you. And to a girl wi' a face like yours, there's plenty bound to happen. You look good to me, Lyd. I watched you close while you was spying on Dolly through the window."

She felt her heart thaw and start to beat again and her blood to flow. "If I look good to you, Dan MacMurray, and you want to walk with me to John Wentworth's house, why you may do so. But first one or the other of us must go inside and fetch Dorothy. She is only a child and should not be in the streets so late. Dan can come too, the four of us together."

He twisted his felt cap in his hands. "Oh come now! Leave them alone a bit. She's none so much a child. You'd trust her wi' Dan MacMurray, sure?"

"No," said Lydia, "I'd not trust her with any man named Dan MacMurray —not in the front pew in the meeting house in the time of prayer. The minute folk had their eyes closed he'd—"

Dan touched her arm. "You're too late, Lyddy," he said as if it pleased him. "They be already gone."

Lydia glanced quickly through the window. He had spoken truly. A fat aging couple sat in their places now; the man, doubtless the host, wearing a dirty white apron, his companion with a shock of coarse gray hair falling into her eyes as she bent to her glass to drink. Lydia pulled away from Dan and hurried over to the low flat steps of the Deer Tavern, jerked open its nail-studded door. She stood there facing the few occupants, remembering to hold her cloak tight.

"Where are they?" she demanded. "Dan MacMurray, I mean and—?"

The man in the dirty apron laughed at her, throwing back his head. "Why they be up and gone, Dan and Dolly. Through the alley door some time ago. Doubt they's still anywhere in this part of town, ma'am."

Gazing up and down the room, Lydia thought that the man had probably told her the truth. She shut the door behind her and stepped into the street.

"I shall tell her brother of this when I get home," she said to Dan. "He'd not want her tempted to wicked mischief."

They walked silently into the Paved Street and back through Market Square. All the houses were dark now, and the watch was crying midnight. Lydia wondered when Dorothy Giffard would come home.

"I wouldna' do that, Lyd—tell Dolly's brother, that is," said Dan coaxingly, seeking for the favor. "Dan means her no harm. He first saw her in the Spring Market two months back, when the governor's wife sent her there to buy fruit in black cherry time. He got in talk wi' her, for she's a sweet friendly lass. Now whenever he comes to the Bank to sell linen or flaxseed, they meet; sometimes at Neal McIntyre's, sometimes at the Deer. She's close-mouthed about herself, but she says her brother is in the governor's service. What sort of work does he do? Is he a gardener, or a he-cook, or a horse-handler? He blacks boots, maybe?"

"He's the governor's aide," retorted Lydia proudly. " 'Tis a position of honor. And he's better born than anybody in America."

"Well, God a-mighty," answered Dan MacMurray without raising his voice. "I thought we was all born the same way—o' woman, that is."

She could not argue that, so she made him no answer. They did not talk any more, and in a few moments they were passing under the elm trees on Pickering Neck and John Wentworth's house loomed just ahead of them. A light burned in Frances' chamber, and a warm yellow glow filled the fanlight over the front door. They stopped and stood still together at the gate. He reached for her hand.

"I'm glad you come home, Lyddy," he said. "I was afraid you might marry somebody else, since you couldna' marry me. But I'm told your name is March still."

She felt suddenly too tired to explain that to him tonight. "You're coming back?" she asked anxiously. "You've said naught about yourself. There's so much to ask and tell. Next Friday—"

He shook his head. "I doubt it. I'll likely be deep in the woods somewhere by then, spotting trees to mark the course o' the governor's new road. But I'll be coming back. You'll wait awhile longer, if you've waited this long."

He looked into her eyes a moment, and then his own eyes widened and a hardness came across his face. She could see him plainly in the light of the lantern swinging from a pole near John Wentworth's front fence, the lantern hung across the street on the small shabby house where Daniel Fowle printed his weekly newspaper.

"And dinna' you go telling any tales that'll make trouble for Dolly and Dan. If you do—" he paused a moment, and she stared at him in quick apprehension, "it's the end o' your knowing Dan MacMurray. I'll never look your way again." He jammed his felt cap down on his head, and strode away toward Market Square.

Lydia looked after him, then turned and crept toward John Wentworth's back gate. She felt confused, and tremulous, happy and unhappy, and tired to death. All she wanted was to sink into her bed and lie still. She did not care what time Dorothy Giffard got home.

*

John Wentworth, Doctor of Common Law from Oxford University, Doctor of Laws from Aberdeen and Dartmouth College—the college he himself had helped to establish in a New Hampshire backwoods town—Captain General, Vice Admiral and Governor of the Province of New Hampshire, Surveyor General of His Majesty's Woods in America, walked in the crooked lanes along the waterside. He walked alone, letting the wind blow through his hair. When he traveled as the King's representative, he went with much pomp, in a coach, arrayed in gold and scarlet. When he went as a private man, he walked softly in old clothes. More troubled by recent events than he had been willing to admit, even to his own father, least of all to his aides and his household, he had stolen out of his house a few minutes before midnight to see if a walk in the night air would calm his spirits a little, before he went upstairs to the uncertain solace of his wife.

He strolled idly among the old cottages, alert for any sounds of disquiet in the town above, but under the moonless sky, Portsmouth lay dark and still. To his right, close by the water, rose up the bulk of his brother's mansion house where his brother had died. He remembered when Thomas had moved his household there first, how in the blithe spring weather they had arranged the planting of the two young linden trees, on the front lawn. The trees did not stand tall enough to look over the housetop yet, but they would someday. Thomas' trees! He hoped Thomas would say a prayer for him, if Thomas was safely established in the realm of grace.

Just ahead of him rose the old Wentworth house, foursquare and weathered, with a lilac bush by the front door. It looked to the river, past the Point of Graves and the thin spirey masts of ships running up the sky by the dock just behind, ships put in here from St. Martin's, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Cadiz, Newfoundland, Guadaloupe, New York. His great-grandfather had kept a tavern in that house almost a hundred years ago, with liberty to entertain strangers and sell wine, beer, rum, and cider, so long as he suffered no gaming or other disorders. His license, yellow and torn, lay with the family papers still. But the tavernkeeper's son had risen to be Lieutenant Governor, and the Lieutenant Governor's son had become a rich merchant, and now, in him, the rich merchant's son had become the Royal Governor, with many titles more. Where next was the tavern-keeper's blood to go?

He thought of the riots in Boston and disturbing rumors from farther south; of the Congress meeting even now in Philadelphia to pool their knavish notions for upsetting the country; of the rebellion stirring in his own province, stronger in the back country away from the bulwark of substantial men in the old establishments along the sea. He thought of the child his wife carried within her as she lay safe in her rose-hung bed, surrounded with every luxurious thing. He intended to maintain and increase that luxury; had never before doubted that he would be able to do so. But of late the whole world seemed to run the contrary way. Perhaps this child would go back to tavern-keeping.

Governor John Wentworth stood still in the dark, in the shadow of the lilac bush beside his great-grandfather's front door. He spoke to dead Samuel Wentworth, his great-grandfather.

"If he's born to be a tavern-keeper, we'll make him a good one, sir. I pledge you that," he said.

A shiver went through him, and he felt unaccountable tears moisten his eyelids. He stared mutely seaward, past the Point of Graves. Something moved there—the flutter of a girl's white dress, perhaps, with a thicker, darker shadow looming beside it. On the wind from the river he caught the sound of a girl's laugh, a laugh he thought he remembered, but whose it was, he could not tell. Lovers, most likely, seeking privacy among the turfy graves of the dead. Well, the old dead would not cry out against them if they could. The old dead in their time had doubtless gone out two by two, at the dark of the moon, to seek privacy for love.

John Wentworth felt his ill mood dissolve away. He was himself again, governor of a province, trusted servant of the King, strong and competent, and sure. "Candor and reason are better than troops and ships to govern by," he told himself, half-aloud. "I am honest with the New Hampshire men. Above all, they value that. They know I serve the King, but they know I come of the same stock as they, and serve their interests, too. They trust me, and so long as they trust me, order will prevail here. So long as I am honest with them, and do not betray—"

What had ailed him a moment ago? The result, no doubt of supping on oysters in wine at his mother's plenteous table. He strode back to his fine house, whistling a ribald air current in the London taverns ten years before, cropping the wayside goldenrod with the light cane he carried in his ungloved hand.

5.
MAY WE ALL GO TO PARADISE

So far as Lydia could tell, the town settled calmly back and went about its business once it had seen the last of the tea ship. At least, no messengers or whispered conferences troubled the peace of John Wentworth's house. The governor spent much of his time in the stables with the fine horses he had purchased in England and the south, but more time working with his official papers in the library. In the late afternoon of that mellow autumn season he would stroll up to town and spend an hour or two at the State House, available for those who wished to see him, going home by way of the taproom at Stoodley's or the Earl of Halifax where he could drink a glass of wine with his friends and talk over the latest reports of violence in Boston.

Frances usually stayed in her room until supper time and then came downstairs leisurely, dressed in a flowing gown of some rich fabric. After the meal she and her husband would climb into their coach with his crest and seal on its painted sides and drive away to watch the dancing at the Assembly House, or take tea with the governor's parents, or enjoy cards and wine at Jonathan Warner's, or music at Dr. Cutter's below the Square. Lydia spent her mornings with the girls and her afternoons at the disposal of her mistress, sewing, sitting by the rose-covered bed for long chats, or walking to Jacob Sheafe's store in Queen Street to purchase some new trifle advertized in the *Gazette*; raisins, loaf sugar, French silk ribbons, a gilded hand mirror, a spelling book, red and yellow sealing wax. Hugh Giffard had boarded the Flying Stage Coach for Boston the day after Lydia's adventures in Deer Street. She did not see him before he left, nor did she know for what purpose the governor had sent him there, unless it was to carry some official report of the Parry incident. But his image had dwindled in her mind, and his absence troubled her little.

She had lain awake for several nights and asked herself many questions before she decided how to proceed with Dorothy. It was plainly her duty, she felt, to carry the whole story to Frances Wentworth, but she had a suspicion that Frances would only shrug her shoulders and say, "Leave be, Lydia. Let her run as she will. Dorothy will not live forever, either."

Perhaps the governor would have shared her concern for the girl, but she

wouldn't go to the governor. In her heart she knew she would take no steps at all, because of Dan MacMurray's warning. Now that she had seen him, she could be more honest with herself than had been possible before, when for five years she had no chance to test the state of affairs between them. She had tested it now, and knew that unluckily it was the same as it had always been, as it was likely to be forever. Best to set her face another way and forget him, as she had tried to do before; as she had never quite been able to do, she now admitted ruefully, even while David still lived, while she was living as David's wife. And yet, when Dan talked of setting his face another way and coming no more to her, she was ready to run crying after him in the street.

There was one thing she could do, however, and would do, when she found the mood and the moment. She would talk to Dorothy and try to find out how much Red Dan MacMurray from the backwoods of New Hampshire really meant to this daughter of a cultured English family. If the girl was only amusing herself, she would warn her that in a dozen ways the MacMurray boys could be dangerous playmates; that her midnight adventures when they became commonly known would hurt or destroy her chance for making an acceptable marriage. But if Dorothy was already deeply in love with him—well, in that case, Lydia had no advice to offer her. In the meantime she thought of another thing that she could do.

The night of the full moon Lydia sat long at her window after she had closed her chamber door, watching the streak of golden light on the dark river, the faint lamps that burned in cottages on the Kittery side. John and Frances had retired early, but Dorothy, romping late in the garden, like a little girl with Ann and Betty, had not gone upstairs to her own room till Lydia had called her in, sent the children home, and locked the terrace door. Sometimes she wondered how much Dorothy knew about Black Dan, whether she knew that her governess had met him that night in Deer Street. Whenever they were together, which was often, she watched the girl closely to see if her features betrayed any sign of such knowledge, but Dorothy treated her with the usual light-hearted courtesy and easy obedience.

Lydia sighed as she sat there by the window and thought about it. Then she forgot Dorothy and thought about the deep woods far up the country, beyond the little seacoast strip of it she knew. Black Dan would be somewhere in those woods tonight, lolling by a campfire, smoking and drinking rum or cider, jesting with other men in the survey party who had gone out to lay the course of the governor's newest road. At least, he would not be with Jessie. Would he be thinking of Jessie? Or thinking, perhaps, of her?

She heard her chamber door open softly and a low voice call to her, "Lydia!"

She turned around; Dorothy Giffard stepped into the room and closed the

door. She wore a dark red cloak wrapped about her and a scarf tied over her flowing hair that she refused to wind in fashionable puffs on top of her head. Her delicate brows drew together in a frown, but she spoke pleasantly enough.

"Forgive me for not knocking, Lydia, but I did not wish to awaken anyone else. I think it must have been you who locked the kitchen closet and took the key away. I want the key."

Lydia looked at Dorothy for a long moment before she spoke. "Sit down," she said finally. "I have been wanting to talk with you. Yes, I have the key."

Dorothy sank into a low, cushioned chair near the fireplace. "You took it so I couldn't feed Bugler to keep him from barking. You took it to keep me from going out," she said, her voice cool and steady.

"Yes," agreed Lydia, not speaking as firmly as she wished she could have spoken. "I—I'm afraid I did. Believe me, dear child, it is only your good I am thinking of. You should not steal out after dark. Rough sailormen and woodchoppers from the back country roam in the street sometimes, drunken, and looking for sport, and careless of what they do."

She watched the tense young face before her, the reflection of the candle flame in the clear young eyes. Behind her the lights and shadows played on the tapestried wallpaper Frances was so proud of. Lydia suddenly realized that Dorothy set no value on such baubles as tapestried wallpaper and never would.

Uncertain just how to proceed, she was saved from having to do so. Dorothy's features softened and she began to laugh.

"Oh Lyddy," she cried, "a fig for your sailormen and woodchoppers! Let us say what we mean! We are like two fools who stand up in a boat to wrestle each other. What we should do is sit down together and row."

"I do not understand you, Dorothy," she answered as calmly as she could.

Dorothy gave her a slow, warm smile.

"It must be because you are older, or because you have been married," she said gently, "that you are so careful and so cautious and so unwilling to own what is true. Lyddy, I know you were with Black Dan MacMurray that night the tea ship sailed, and I know what he said to you that night. He said you should not cause trouble for me and try to keep me away from Dan. I think you will abide by his word."

"How much more do you know, Dorothy?" asked Lydia, shifting in her chair and gazing helplessly out of the window at the wide streak of moonlight far below on the river, wishing that for the moment she could sink into that cool brightness and become a part of it, escape somehow from the relentless candor of the young girl. "How much more of what he said to me?"

"Why, Lyddy," answered Dorothy, leaning forward and resting her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, "Dan will wait for me at the Deer, and I think I should take the time to tell you all, since it may help us both to a better

way of things. I need not bother to say how I first met Dan, but it was long before you came here, and I have gone out to meet him many times since then."

"I know that," said Lydia faintly. "Black Dan told me that."

"I used to sleep in this room when I first came," Dorothy went on, "but I made an excuse to move to the little chamber because it was so easy for me to slip down the narrow stair. After I knew you were coming I wondered if you would watch me close and make it harder for me, so I told Dan. When he heard your name it seemed to trouble him. He wanted to know if you were the same Lydia March who lived here before. I knew that you were, and I told him so. He said then that you had been—a friend—of his cousin, Black Dan. I saw Black Dan often, for they would always come to town together, the two of them, but I never spoke your name to him. He never said it to me."

"He must have said it," retorted Lydia. "How else could you know what he told me that night?"

"Oh that was later!" cried Dorothy. "Not until that night did I ever talk about you with either of them, except for the one time; the time I told Red Dan, my Dan, that you were coming. I never even told them you had been married, Lydia."

"I am glad," said Lydia slowly. "I will tell it myself when I see the need to."

"But that night, I was sitting with Dan in the Deer Tavern, and of a sudden I saw his face change, and he said, 'Dolly, Lyddy March is out there in the street watching us.' I was so frightened I near burst a bodice lacing."

Lydia looked at the outlines of the slight form, thin and angular under the cloak, and giggled in the midst of her dismay.

Dorothy continued, "But he said to me, 'Dinna' turn around, Dolly. Perhaps she will go away. Talk to me as if naught were wrong.' I tried to talk to him, but in a moment he caught me by the arm and pulled me to my feet. 'Quick!' he said. 'My cousin is out there. He'll hold her in talk for awhile. We'll leave by the back door.'

"We did leave, and we went for a walk down by the river where all the old graves are. Bye and bye we heard a whippoorwill—only we knew it was not a whippoorwill, we knew it was Black Dan. You know the way they whistle to each other?"

Indeed Lydia knew.

"We met him at the corner of Dock Lane, and he said to me, 'Doll, you better go home. Lyddy's got a conscience, and you canna' tell what Lyddy will do. But I told her she was to leave you be, or I'd think I'd had enough o' her.'

"So I came home quickly, and I have not seen Danny since then, but he rode by here in the street this afternoon, slowly, so I could not miss him, and I

know he will be at the Deer tonight. I want to go there, and I am going. Black Dan said you were not to hinder me. Let me have the key, so I can give Bugler his bone and go."

An idle question came into Lydia's mind as she sought for all the details to make the picture clear.

"How do you bribe Bugler when you come home?" she asked. "Before I even lifted the latch that night he set up a howl that they must have heard over the water in New Castle. Henry came running down from the attic in naught but his breeches, and I had to tell him I had come to the kitchen for hot water to ease a cramp."

Dorothy stood up. "Dan always brings a bit of duck or venison for him," she said. "Don't forget, Lyddy, you'll have to reckon with Bugler both coming and going when you think to meet Black Dan."

"I do not think to meet Black Dan," said Lydia coldly. "I am a widow, and it is not improper for a man to come where I live if he wishes to court me. He would be welcome here. We need not resort to the taprooms or the open street."

Dorothy sighed. "He certainly will never court you, Lydia, if you make it so hard for him. It is true, John and Frances would not turn him away. The maids can invite whom they will to the kitchen when the work is done, and you would be allowed no less than that. My case is different. I could not bring Red Dan here. The whole household would be up in arms, my brother more than any. I am expected to make a rich marriage some day. But they think of me as a child still."

She paused, and when Lydia made no comment, continued, "So it is with us—we must seek other ways. The question of his coming here never arises. We both know better, and little as we like it, we meet stealthily. But one thing I can tell you. Your Dan MacMurray will never bow and smirk and flatter and balance teacups Portsmouth fashion. He will never visit you in John Wentworth's house, because he knows he is as good as John Wentworth is, but he knows, too, that John Wentworth would never believe that—"

She broke off, almost as if her own speech had frightened her. "Now heaven forgive me for talking like an American," she cried. "Give me the key, Lyddy!"

Lydia pulled the key from her pocket, but as Dorothy's fingers grasped the bit of iron, she heard herself speaking almost desperately.

"Dorothy—I should not mention such things to you, but you know so much —more than I thought. Perhaps you know another thing. Have they ever mentioned Jessie Guptill to you? Does Black Dan visit her still?"

Dorothy stood now on the threshold, eager to be gone, but Lydia imagined she could see pity on the young face.

"Yes," she said. "He visits Jessie."

"He should be proud to tell of it!" cried Lydia sharply, her inner hurt bursting forth in the form of quick anger. "Did he tell you Jessie is a married woman, thirty past, with a worthless husband always lying off drunk behind a barn somewhere? A woman with four children?"

"Five children," said Dorothy, looking into the dark beyond the window.

"Oh no!" wailed Lydia.

Dorothy shook her head. "The new child is not Dan's, Lyddy. He says he was away in the woods all the month 'twas gotten, so do not let that trouble you. But he said another thing. Do you want to know what else he said?"

Stiff and tense, Lydia answered. "Yes, I suppose I do."

"He said, 'Jess knows what I come there for, and she does na' bandy words.' Why do you always bandy words with him, Lydia?"

Before she could answer, Dorothy had vanished into the hall, triumphantly bearing the key.

*

September waned, the nights grew sharper, and the elms turned gold along the streets of Portsmouth. When Lydia went to the Spring Market to buy for the governor's table, she no longer found the fresh succulent ears of Indian corn, the green peas, and red and purple berries of summertime. Squashes and pumpkins, rough brown turnips, with earth still clinging to them, tight-curled cabbage heads and glossy apples filled the farmers' booths and tempted her to purchase large quantities to store away. Prue and Abby had warned her against this, however, saying that the winter provisions would be brought down from the Wentworth estate far up the country at Wolfeborough. She saw no more of the MacMurray boys, though she felt sure Red Dan must come often to the Bank, since this was the time of year when the flax growers had pulled up the last stalks and were beginning to market the dry seed. Black Dan had said he would be far in the woods, so she relaxed in the comfortable certainty that he would not appear. She had much to settle within herself before she met Black Dan again.

"She does na' bandy words," he had said, but then, what did Jess have left that was worth bandying words over? Dan MacMurray was not the first lad who had visited her, nor the only one. Years ago she had learned this much from his cousin. And to do herself justice, there had been a time when she, Lydia, had not bandied words either. Not that she had yielded completely to his ardor, but she had been almost ready to do so. She had been as sweet and gentle and responsive as Dorothy—at least, she thought she had been. But perhaps she had never worn her sweetness on the outside, the way Dorothy

seemed able to do. And then, he had hurt her so! She had wanted to throw herself into the rough tide off Pull-and-be-damned Point the night she found out about Jessie, and maybe if she had, it would have been a better thing. For it was surely then that the sweet young Lydia had died. She had turned bitter and scolding after that; she had reproached him and quarreled with him on every excuse, even though she could not bring herself to send him completely away.

He had grown harsh and stubborn, too, and demanded her love on his own terms or not at all. Finally, when their relationship grew unbearable, she had fled, and sought to make a new life for herself in another colony. She had succeeded, too, so long as David lived, but with David gone, she had taken the first opportunity to come running back. What a foolish thing to do! She had not changed, and Dan MacMurray had not changed. Strong forces within them drew them still together, but stronger forces kept thrusting them apart. Perhaps in the spring, once Frances was safely delivered of her child, she would go back to her house on Crane Neck Hill, or if David's presence still haunted it—for she had loved David, though not as she loved Black Dan—she would sell that house and take herself further off—to Boston, maybe. But she could not, all her life, keep running away.

She tried to shut her ears at night, muffle them with her pillow and remain unaware of whether Dorothy stole out or not, but once when they had all gone to bed early, Bugler did make such an outcry that she could not ignore it. When she slipped into the hall, she found the governor there, half-dressed and impatient, Henry and Prue stumbling down from the attic where the servants slept, the whole household awake. This time Dorothy was not at fault, however. A soldier from the Castle had come to the back door with a message from Captain Cochran. John Wentworth stood in the kitchen clad in breeches and a night shirt and read it while the others watched him. At first his face darkened; then it cleared.

"A devil's cause to wake a man in the night about!" he said, flung the note into the banked embers on the hearth, and strode back to his chamber.

It was at breakfast that Lydia finally learned a little more of the matter. When she came downstairs she was surprised to see Frances sitting in the usually vacant seat at the foot of the table, carefully dressed in a gown of pale green wool with a matching cloak on a chair nearby. Frances was pouring tea, handing cups to Dorothy and John.

"Sit down, Lydia," she said. "I've sent the porridge back. 'Twas too sweet, and I'll speak to Prue about it when I get home from the Castle. But there's bread and bacon and blackberry conserve. John, pass the bacon to Lydia."

Lydia sat down and unfolded her napkin.

"You're going to the Castle this morning?" she asked, still surprised that her mistress had so suddenly abandoned the role of invalid.

"Yes, and so are you—to be near me in case I am taken with sickness. When John told me he had to go there this morning, I looked out of my window and saw the sun dancing on the river, and the sky so blue and clear, not plagued with mist as it is in the hot weather, and I wanted to go, too. So John sent Henry to hire a boat from Captain Salter, a tight-built boat that will not leak or rock too much. I have not been on the river since May, and I love the river."

"When the girls come for their lessons—" began Lydia, but Frances interrupted her.

"Dorothy will mind the girls. She has already agreed, too, eager as she is to see her brother again."

"Her brother?" Lydia asked the question calmly as she helped herself to rather too much blackberry conserve.

"Yes, Hugh landed at the Castle last night, so we hear. General Gage sent him by ship from Boston. There is something Johnny and Hugh and the captain must talk about. Something—"

"Frances!" said the governor sternly, pausing with his teacup half lifted, staring admonishment at his wife.

"Oh do not fear, Johnny!" she cried, giving him a tender smile at the sight of which his whole face lighted. "I cannot reveal the mighty secret of your business, since I do not even know it myself. Let us hurry! I am anxious to be on the water."

And on the water they soon were, driving by coach to Captain Titus Salter's wharf near his mansion house by the South Mill dam, and embarking on a two-masted sloop manned by a pair of sunburnt lads and piled with cushions that Henry's English training had told him would be needed to make the ladies comfortable.

Frances leaned close to her husband and chatted with him in low intimate tones as if they were alone together. This gave Lydia the feeling that she, too, was alone, and she rejoiced in it; in the warmth of the morning sun, the gentle motion of the sloop as Titus Salter's lads maneuvered it down the river. Behind her lay the town with its church spires and fine houses, on her left the trim little fishing village of New Castle, its cottage gardens still full of bright fall flowers. The river was alive this morning, all dipping oars, and swelling sails, small boats busily threading among the treacherous currents, and stout weather-worn ships dropping down on the tide for the open sea.

Fort William and Mary, known all through the province as the Castle, was a rambling enclosure of old gray stone, running down to the water where the river widened out, just below the village. Close by it, a massive eight-sided wooden tower straddled the rocks, and John was quick to point it out to her.

"You have not seen my lighthouse, Lydia. I had it put up after you went

away. I thought that enough poor ships and seamen had gone to their doom because we had never raised a warning light here, save for a lantern hung on the fort's flagstaff." He smiled wryly. "The Assembly has not yet paid for it. They say they were not voted into office to squander other men's shillings."

After a moment he shook his head, and his mouth stiffened. "I can deal with the Assembly," he muttered. "I shall see that they serve their own best interests, however they may damn me to hell for it!" He turned halfway round, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked seaward. "How clear the Isles of Shoals stand out today!" he said more softly. "It is a beautiful country, well worth that a man take trouble over." Lydia's gaze followed his, and she saw the low-lying islands clustered on the horizon, the islands where her father had died. Forgetful of that fact, if he had even known it, the governor went on. "They are the far edge of my province, a handful of New Hampshire earth flung out nine miles in the sea. And they look to England—as New Hampshire has always done. God keep her in that way!" His face darkened, and he fell silent. When he spoke again it was in a lighter, caressing tone that seemed to indicate his mood had again varied. "Frances," he asked, "are you going ashore with me?"

The sailors were making the sloop fast to an iron ring in the slippery stone piling below the wall.

Frances smiled at him and shook her head. "For me to take three steps on yonder moss and seaweed, would be a grievous threat to your posterity," she said. "Get your business over, Johnny. I shall sit here and enjoy what I came for, the sunlight on the river."

But no sooner had her husband clambered up the wharf and disappeared within the gate of the fort than she settled back on her cushions and went to sleep.

Lydia dozed, too, lulled by the motion of the sloop as it bobbed gently on the sparkling water. No autumn chill came with the light breeze today. It might have been mid-summer. She lay back almost prone and stared dreamily up at the white clouds floating over, at the sharp blue of the sky, an autumn sky, after all, with nothing of summer tenderness in it. There used to be an old saying, she remembered; something about the need to work hard and do good deeds if your soul was to be saved; that you could never expect to "drift into heaven on a featherbed," but she felt at the moment as if she were doing that very thing. Then a pair of gulls swooped across the brightness above her, and lighted on the stone wall of the fortress. The lads had climbed there, too, and sat cracking and eating shagbark nuts, throwing the shells into the water below. She could see the wall from the corner of her eye, an old wall, green here and there with patches of moss and sea growth, darkened by the weather. Fort Point had always had its cannon, she knew, since the first days of the

province. Every generation had fortified it a little more, first with earthworks, and now with granite, thinking to keep the country safe forever. Lying there on her back in the blue morning, Lydia felt very safe, and warm, and in harmony with herself and all outer things. She seemed to have left her griefs behind her in Portsmouth, to be free of desires and indecisions, free even from Dan MacMurray, most of all from him.

"Now I am happy," she told herself, wondering that it should be so. "And happiness is not in passion, it is in peace. And peace is not plenty. It is lack and dearth. My heart is empty and my hands are empty, but I am happy as I have never yet been. This is wisdom, and it will not last, but at least, I have known it. I shall remember this morning."

She heard footsteps on the wharf above her, heard men talking together. Reluctantly she felt herself start wide awake to listen.

"I shall write to General Gage that I will undertake the matter," John Wentworth was saying. "It should be no trouble to procure skilled carpenters in New Hampshire, and I understand his need for barracks for his troops before the winter sets in. It seems strange that he cannot recruit them in Boston."

"Boston be grievously affected," said a thin, piping voice unfamiliar to her. "And the rabble are all risen above themselves since the Congress commended them lately. Come out in black and white, they have, and refused to obey English law!"

"May God damn the Congress," muttered John Wentworth. "Every dung-cart driver who owns a second shirt and can write his name suddenly wants to take a hand in governing this country! I tried to keep New Hampshire from joining in the business. They kept out of the Stamp Act Congress, and I recommended them to a similar procedure in this case. But a rump assembly met at Exeter, and whom did they choose for delegates?" His voice had a sneering note in it. "John Sullivan and Nat Folsom!"

Hugh cleared his throat. "I have heard you say often, sir, that Colonel Folsom was a good soldier."

"He is. None better—at backwoods fighting. But they're separate trades, lad; shooting a brave and ruling a province. And John Sullivan sets himself up for a lawyer, but he got no nearer the Inns of Court than Attorney Livermore's woodshed when he was a chore boy there. Ah well, they'll be back from Philadelphia when their money runs out, which should be soon. What else can you tell me, Hugh, about men's tempers in Boston?"

"They resist the quartering of troops upon them, and are at present all enflamed by unscrupulous leaders," said Hugh promptly. "They say once the barracks are built, the King will keep Boston a garrison town forever. That generations of soldiers will swarm over them to drink up their rum and seduce their daughters."

The laughter of his companions interrupted him. Then the governor spoke again.

"Captain, when I write to Gage, I will tell him we may need warships to support us later, but not now, surely. It is impractical to raise a dangerous mob, if all the business is understood, and I try always to let the people understand what I do. Men will not be led to broken heads and the gallows unless they are somehow deceived. There is much uneasiness in the province, but I cannot believe we shall have violence. In any case, we are cooler-blooded and more orderly here—"

Now Hugh laughed. "You may be more orderly," he said, "but when you say you are cooler-blooded—"

John Wentworth, too, spoke lightly, as he answered. "You have hardly been here long enough, sir, to speak for the nature of our blood."

Lydia wondered what it was about their jests that set her own blood stirring. She sat up. Captain Cochran, she saw now, was a slight man, trim and alert, dressed in a blue coat with much gold braid. Hugh and the governor were shaking his hand, taking their leave.

"Good-bye, Captain," said John Wentworth. "As we agreed, I shall go to Wolfeborough. You must come and dine with us when we are back in town."

Then she felt the sloop settle in the water, steady itself, and rise. The men had stepped aboard.

"Why Lydia!" cried Hugh with a gladness in his voice, "John did not tell me you were here! Nor Frances—!" As he spoke, the governor's wife opened her eyes and put up a filmy silk handkerchief to stifle a yawn. "Johnny, you did not tell me you had brought the ladies."

"Indeed I did not," answered John gaily. "If I had, I could never have kept you within bounds while we transacted our business."

The sailors had cast off and were working the sloop out of the strong sea-flowing currents, tacking upriver.

"Welcome home, Hugh," said Frances with a fleeting look at him through her long dark lashes. "Johnny, I feel suddenly like singing."

"Very well," said her husband, "then we will sing." He set the pitch and burst forth merrily.

"Oh good sportsmen live happily, happily forever,
Following the stag and the roe—"

Tumbled together in the little boat, two men and two women, warm, and alive, and young, they sang and held hands and let the sea wind blow through their hair, oblivious of whatever troubles might be awaiting them when they reached home.

"And when they die, they all go to Paradise!"

boomed John.

"And when they die, they all go to Paradise!"

trilled Frances sweetly.

Again she gave Hugh that sideways look through her lashes, but instead of responding, the young man shut his eyes and drew his head slightly away. Lydia did not see what passed between them nor know of its cause, any more than she knew of the sudden turmoil of thought awakening behind his closed eyelids and under his ruffled blond hair.

From Hugh's first days in Portsmouth, his blood had been troubled by Frances Wentworth, his benefactor's wife. He had recognized the absurdity, nay the sacrilege of it, but he could not help turning his head toward her whenever she passed, any more than the sunflowers in the Portsmouth gardens could help turning toward the sun. Queen Charlotte herself had no more imperious way of calling her coach; the little courtesans in Drury Lane could behave no more artfully with a fan. Frances Wentworth had oogled him, but not with more ardor than she had shown in her open parlors to other young men. Her husband remained bland and unobserving, but Hugh would not have trusted that unobservance too far.

And then, in the late spring, there had come a time when she seemed to turn more to him than to the other young men. They had walked in the garden and traced the course of the stars in the dark millpond. They had lolled on the grass by the shelter of the rose arbor in the long hot afternoons when the governor had been meeting with his Council in the State House. By then Hugh had long faced in his mind the possibility that he might be in love with John Wentworth's wife. But he was utterly shaken by the new possibility that John Wentworth's wife might be in love with him. And then, before he could quite come to terms with the sweet, the terrible suspicion of it, Frances had fallen ill after a state dinner and not rallied as she should. Dr. Hall Jackson had come to the house, and soon after John announced, with his wine glass filled and his eyes glowing, that Frances ailed because she was with child—his child. There had been such utter pride in his voice when he said it. Hugh's heart had gone leaden then. For all he knew, it was surely John Wentworth's child, he truly believed that it was—but he remembered the wanton touch of her soft exploring hand, the light in her changing green eyes, and wondered how a man could speak so certainly of such a woman.

Frances had withdrawn herself from him after that, less from inner decency he felt, than because her frequent and harrowing illness had eclipsed her

beauty, and she chose whenever possible to remain out of sight. Then, too, the governor's affairs had taken him much to Boston. Hurt, bruised, and disillusioned, and a little relieved that the threatening crisis had never engulfed them, he found himself one day in the Wolfe Tavern in Newburyport, meeting tall, cool, stately Lydia. His heart had turned to her then, but he had tried to keep it from turning too hotly and too far. Lydia was not a woman to be enjoyed casually behind a haystack after dark, and he had as yet no mind to take a wife in America. Better, for the moment, to drift lightly with closed eyes on a sunny stream.

But how different boating had been at home, he thought, on the gentle English rivers half-choked with rushes and water lilies, still pool meandering into still pool over which the willows leaned. You could fall asleep on an English river, with the sun on your hair and the green willow shadows on your eyes; fall asleep, and drift on through the still afternoon, and wake, and gaze across the meadows; mark your progress by a far-off castle tower or church steeple, and fall asleep again. But here this raw salt stream drove seaward like a millrace, and if you took your eyes one moment from the course, your hands from the tiller or the stout oars, you were done. And yet, he found it somehow pleased him to be joined with those who had pitted themselves against the harsh earth and cruel waters of this new land. When he went home to England, he wondered, would he find the old ways of living had turned sluggish and tame?

And suddenly he opened his eyes and sang lustily with the others,

"And when we die, may we all go to Paradise!"

till the old song's chorus rang against the gray stones of the fort behind them, among the green river islands, and halfway to the Kittery shore.

6.
COME BACK IN A HUNDRED YEARS

For the next five days nothing was talked of in the governor's house except his coming journey to Wolfeborough. He meant to start on the first Friday in October, going by horseback, alone except for Hugh Giffard, but for some unaccountable reason his wife took it into her head that she wanted to go too. This bewildered everyone, for Frances detested country living and often declared that she had never learned to prefer a grove to a ballroom, and doubted if she ever would. Moreover, she was now some five months gone and should have been content to remain under the eye of her physician instead of jolting in a coach about the countryside. But as often as John tried to dissuade her, just so often she laughed and kissed him lightly and went on to direct Lydia about the packing.

"I want to go with you, Johnny," she said, "and if you leave me behind, I shall behave in such wise that your Council will send for you posthaste to come back and suppress me. I shall give a dinner—a dinner that is only for gentlemen—and invite every gay blade in Portsmouth. I shall let them drink your best brandy, and win your money from me at the card table, and race your horses lame in the minister's pasture. I shall have Patty Hilton's hired husband to play the fiddle for us in concert with Henry's French horn. In that, I shall be even with you, and Mrs. Pat as well.

"Lydia, you must take quilted bedgowns for both of us, for the nights may be frosty, and at the bottom of the oak chest in the attic, I think, you will find a small red one that Dorothy can wear."

John Wentworth gave in finally, unable to deny his wife, but he did insist on taking a doctor along. And he was surprisingly firm, Lydia discovered, in his refusal to invite Dr. Hall Jackson, preferring instead his old friend, Dr. Ammi Ruhamma Cutter.

"Oh, I know well why you want Ammi," Frances sighed. "It is because he was with you at Harvard, and he came to settle in this province because of you. You want to play billiards with him, and show him your hawthorn seedlings, and your English pheasants, and your Narragansett pacer horse."

"Hall Jackson has too much sympathy with the rebellious element among the people," said her husband coldly. "Why do you prefer Hall Jackson?"

“All the women in Portsmouth prefer Hall Jackson,” replied Frances patiently, as if in answer to a stupid question, “because he is so handsome.”

John Wentworth swore and went to make arrangements for the journey.

They left on a clear, cool morning after a night of rain, with Pleasant Street a sea of puddles that reflected the windy blue sky. Frances and Lydia climbed into the coach with Hannah Cutter, the doctor’s wife, a pleasant-faced matronly woman in a sensible brown dress and neat cloak. John had invited her as a gracious gesture, but it also comforted him, he confided to Lydia the night before, to have in the party a married woman who had herself borne children. Hugh swung Dorothy to the seat beside the coachman where Bugler already crouched, his nose laid flat, one eye wide open, the other fast asleep. John Wentworth and his friend the doctor sat easily in their saddles, chatting while the ladies made ready to start.

As they were settling themselves, Lydia heard a wry, rasping voice outside the coach window. “Your Excellency! Oh, governor! Oh, Johnny Wentworth!”

She turned her head. Tom Pickering stood there, still carrying his gun and powderhorn. He had an older man with him, a lean weathered man in homespun breeches and deerskin hunting shirt, armed with a musket.

“What do you want, Tom?” asked the governor. “Do you speak as a neighbor, or on official business? I’ll hear the one, but the Council must deal with the other. I have empowered them to act for me while I am gone to Wolfeborough. Which is it, sir?”

Tom eyed him shrewdly. “Neighbor,” he said. “Since you’ll hear me no other way.”

“Speak then, neighbor,” said the governor smiling. “Is this likewise a neighbor with you?”

Tom Pickering did not smile. He looked downward, twisting the toe of his boot in a little patch of mud.

“This be Major Tash come down from Great Bay—”

The governor interrupted him. “Indeed I should have known Major Tash, the Indian fighter. Forgive me, sirs. You commanded a party at Fort Number Four, did you not, Major? And you were at Fort Edward and Fort William Henry in the old French War?”

“Aye,” said the major. “I was there.” He spat tobacco juice into the mud and stared back at the governor. He had ice-blue eyes, cold and piercing.

Tom Pickering shifted his gun uneasily from one arm to the other.

“We hear—neighbor—” he gave a bitter twist to the title, “somewhat about a matter of carpenters to be hired to build shelter for the lobsterbacks in Boston.”

“It is likely that carpenters will be needed,” said John Wentworth evenly. “But you did not come to tell me that, Tom.”

"No." The man looked up now, his jaw stubborn, a hard light in his eyes. " 'Twas another thing I came to say. The word's about that General Gage has asked you to find the carpenters for him. To send New Hampshire men down there because no man in Massachusetts is traitor enough to do the work. Would you get our province a name like that, Johnny Wentworth?"

Hugh had mounted his horse and sat there watching intently. Dr. Cutter watched, too, a somber look on his face and his shoulders sunk in his coat like those of a man on his way to a friend's burying.

"Tom," said the governor, "look at me, lad."

"I be looking at you," said Tom, his voice thin with a break in it.

"Tom," said the governor steadily. "You've known me a long time. Have you ever known me to do aught that would bring shame or dishonor to New Hampshire? How could I, when I am a New Hampshire man myself? What sort of devil do you take me for?"

They looked at each other for a long moment. Tom's glance was the first to falter. He turned away, his bluster and aggression gone. "No," he mumbled. "I guess you wouldn't do aught against us. It was a lie we listened to. It must ha' been."

"Then refute that lie whenever you hear it—neighbor!" said the governor, smiling widely now, grasping the reins to signal his horse. He turned to Dr. Cutter. "Come, let us ride. I had hoped to be in Dover by noon, but we'll scarce get over Bloody Point Ferry."

Slowly, a little pompously, Lydia thought, the procession moved off. The governor rode ahead, closely followed by Hugh and the doctor. The coach trundled after them, and Henry, the footman, straggled behind it on a raw-boned yellow nag, his French horn hanging by a leather strap from his shoulder. As they drove through Market Square, Frances leaned from the window, smiling and bowing and waving her handkerchief. Though the passers-by saluted her politely, few cheered very loud or paused to gaze after, and the men who lounged in the sun outside the Marquis of Rockingham—favored haunt of the more rebellious spirits in the province—stared straight along their pipestems paying no heed to the governor and his lady.

They drove out of town over the North Mill Bridge and up the hill above Christian Shore. Gazing through the rear window of the coach as she turned to adjust a cushion for Frances, Lydia looked back. Already the seacoast city with its church spires, its ropewalks and docks and shipyards and high rich houses, seemed very far away. They were headed straight inland for the heart of the province, for the back country, a world unknown to her, but as familiar to Dan MacMurray as the taverns of King and Queen Street. Would she be likely to meet with him on this journey, before she came home again? Perhaps Dorothy might know. But she could not ask her, for Dorothy, riding beside Rafe, the

Yorkshire coachman, now lifted her voice with his in the sweet singing of an old round.

"Oh go to Joan Glover
And tell her I love her—"

In the rear, she could hear Henry's full rich voice answering them. When John Wentworth had written to England for a footman who could play the violin and the French horn, his friends at home had sent him back his money's worth.

Frances bit her lip in vexation. "Miss Dorothy was represented to me as one brought up for an English lady, but every day her behavior grows more like that of a backwoods hoyden, more common and coarse. In Boston, where I was bred, we ladies do not sing with our coachmen."

"Aye," retorted Hannah, "the ladies cannot afford it—in Boston. They have had coaches such a short while, and their grandmothers were more used to the plow and the barrow. So they must always be showing they have come up in the world. Dorothy's people have ridden in coaches a long while, and can be trusted to know the way of it. Leave the girl be, Frances. She's too free and friendly for Portsmouth custom, but 'tis only her innocence makes her so."

Frances eyes flashed. "That we shall see, Madame Cutter," she snapped. But just then her child quickened within her, and in the moment of pain and confusion the argument was given over.

A few miles above Portsmouth, the pleasant fields and farms sloped down to the ferry where the waters of Great and Little Bay and the Back River poured together into Piscataqua's broad flood. Lydia peered over the side but once while they were crossing, frightened by the gray sucking whirlpools, the savage currents driving hither and thither between the black, rocky shores. But Dorothy and the serving men sang blithely on:

"Oh leave poor Simon's beard alone,
'Tis no disgrace to Simon's face—"

Beside her, Hannah and Frances had begun to talk of the discomforts of child-bearing, the minor, almost ludicrous discomforts, not the descent to anguish and near-death when the final crisis came.

Once they had left the ferry behind them and started up the long neck of land between the Fore River and the Back River, a feeling of strangeness came upon her, but there was no real reason for it, since the small square farmhouses and the large square farmhouses were no different from those in the countryside she had always known, from her own house by Crane Neck Hill many miles away. Pumpkins lay golden on the vine, and apples hung red in the orchard still. The men in the fields were planting winter rye, digging potatoes, and shocking up corn. They straightened themselves to wave as the painted

coach went past, and women craned their necks at the kitchen windowpanes, and sturdy children scrambled over doorsteps and ston ewalls shouting, “A coach! A coach! A coach from the Bank going by! Come see!”

Dark patches of pine and crimson patches of maple lay beyond the tidy harvest acres, and as the road twisted among them she could catch glimpses of shining river, now to the left, now to the right, depending on the thickness of the trees or the fall of the land. And whenever they topped a rise, she saw the shadow of purple mountain ranges far to the north, incredibly far.

Her companions had gradually fallen silent, and she wondered if they, too, were as troubled as she was by the scene in the road in front of John Wentworth’s house that morning. But they had far less reason to be troubled, for they did not know, as she did, that John had promised Captain Cochran he would procure the carpenters, that John had lied to Tom Pickering and Major Tash. No, he had not really lied, but he had trapped Tom into believing a lie. Tom had acquiesced and turned his head away. The old Indian fighter, she noticed, had done neither. Major Tash, it was likely, saw that the governor had made no answer to Tom’s question, no answer at all.

You could cross Dover and never know you had crossed it, Frances often said, but her husband told her that in saying so, she spoke like a Portsmouth woman. It was a small village, surely, but it had two mills, two meeting houses, a schoolhouse, a jail, a river landing piled with shaggy logs, and a tavern where they stopped a little past noon. Here they sat on rough benches and ate fried salt pork and succotash, served with thick tumblers of rum. Hugh and Dorothy kept up a light jesting throughout the meal, because they knew the English Dover and did not think this upstart place was a fit successor to the name.

John Wentworth shook his head and flung their jests lightly back.

“My poor children,” he murmured. “Those to whom the Lord has not allowed vision, shall indeed be unable to see. You find my province crude and meager now, but it will not remain so. Come back in a hundred years!”

The curious townsfolk peered through the windows at them while they were eating, and half a dozen bluff over-genial gentlemen stopped in to shake the governor’s hand, to eye him keenly, and ask what he did, going up the province so late in the year.

Governor Johnny greeted them, as genial as they, ordered more tumblers of rum, and told them that he was going up the province to choose winter provisions from his harvest at Wolfeborough, and had they heard about his plans for the canal he hoped would soon be cut through their town, connecting the great Lake Winnipesaukee with the sea?

They were so eager to hear about the canal that they forgot to question him in regard to anything else, and kept delaying the party long after it should have

been on its way.

But finally the travelers left Dover behind them and their horses plodded steadily toward the north. In the afternoon the rain came on again. The fields seemed narrower, and the patches of dark pine growth encroached more and more; and always the land rose. After four o'clock the darkness settled in, so that Frances could no longer read the dial of the gold and enamel watch that hung from a chain around her neck. Dorothy had to come inside in order to keep dry, and the four women huddled together, chilled and miserable. The governor's wife furrowed her brows whenever the coach wheels jarred heavily against a stone, or the clumsy vehicle rocked and heaved, trying to free itself from a mud hole. She would grit her teeth with pain, and then laugh as the pain subsided.

"I swear," she told them once, "my child has been jolted a month forward. He will come, full term, on New Year's Day."

Finally they heard a tapping at the windowglass. The governor had ridden close and bent down to speak to them.

"We are entering Rochester," he said, "At the foot of Haven's Hill now, and Stephen Wentworth's tavern lies just the other side. Are you comfortable, Frances?"

"I am in Paradise, riding on swansdown, sir," retorted his wife through chattering teeth. "Do Stephen and Molly know we are coming? I hope she has heated her warming pans."

"She's scarce likely to think of warming pans in October," said John, "They are fitter for Christmas weather. But I sent word by a post rider, and Hugh has gone ahead to let them know we are here indeed." His voice faded out in the rainy night as he rode off.

"I am sorry," said Hannah, relief in her tone, now that the end of their immediate discomfort seemed near, "that Dorothy and Lydia should make their first journey over this hilltop in the night when the countryside is all black with rain. If you look yonder on a clear day, you can see the White Hills. Even in July they are rimmed with snow. It is such a beautiful prospect that it makes you catch your breath. Do I not speak truly, Frances?"

Frances heaved a long weary sigh. "No beauty would impress me at the moment," she answered, "save that of a glass of madeira, a spiced ragout, and a well-warmed featherbed. You know I am no lover of the wilderness, Hannah. But alas, I knew when I married my governor that he burned to be a country gentleman."

Rochester seemed to consist of a few one-storied houses, a meeting house, and a graveyard. There might have been more, but it lay invisible behind bleak walls of rain. The coach moved slower and slower through the mire, and finally its wheels ceased to turn. John Wentworth opened the door and lifted

out his wife. Hannah and Dorothy stepped out after her, followed by Lydia. The cramped, cold, wretched travelers straggled across a worn strip of sodden grass and entered Stephen Wentworth's tavern.

It was a generous low-built house, one-storied, with a wing at either end, and the inevitable portrait of General Wolfe hung near the front door, guarded by a small rusty iron cannon that must have been old in Queen Anne's time. The host hobbled eagerly forward to welcome them, a cripple with a young man's face and hair turning too early white. John greeted him briefly and strode past, half-carrying Frances to a settle near the fire. Lydia stopped just inside the door and watched while the governor ensconced his wife in the clean homespun cushions placed there for her. Molly Wentworth, a plump, brown and ruddy woman hovered anxiously about, arranging a footstool, fetching a broad pillow, calling to a servant to hasten preparations for supper. Hannah began to unfasten her cloak, and Dorothy had already gone forward and knelt on the hearth, holding her hands to the generous blaze.

The main part of the house seemed to be one great room, the kitchen and chambers doubtless hidden away in the wings that flanked it. To the right of the hearth stood the serving counter and four small tables where half a dozen men in tow and russet homespun were seated together with cider mugs in their hands. On the left side, the side where Frances sat laughing and chattering and pulling off her cloak, a long table had been spread with a linen cloth, laden with covered dishes of earthenware.

Once his wife was made comfortable, the governor stepped away from her and looked about him. He saw Hannah and Lydia standing with their host, having come no further into the room. He went toward them.

"Cousin," he said, "forgive me for brushing so rudely past you just now, but I had a precious burden, as you could see."

"Yes," said Stephen Wentworth laconically. "I could see that."

"Mrs. Cutter, you know," went on the governor. "She has lodged here before when making the northern journey with us. Lydia March—our host! Another Wentworth like myself, as you see."

The lame man bowed stiffly. At that moment Hugh and Dr. Cutter strode through the small door in the rear of the taproom, shaking the rain from their cloaks, and joined Dorothy near the fire.

"The horses are stabled, sir," said Hugh, "and the luggage brought in." He spoke to John, but he smiled at Lydia. Dr. Cutter nodded gravely to the occupants of the dining room. He did not smile. Lydia had known him ever since she was a child, but she had never seen his face wear such a sorrowful look before. She wondered if he were ailing of some inner disease that had no cure.

But Molly was urging them to the table now, and they all sat down

together, eager for the hot hearty food that she ladled into their plates. Still feeling a little strange and shy, still a little unsettled by Hugh's looks of kindliness toward her, Lydia ate her bean porridge and hasty pudding and venison stew. Tallow candles burned in iron sconces on the rough-hewn walls, and roasting apples hissed in the ashes at the edge of the fire. A bald-headed man in a leather apron was filling the mugs in the taproom as fast as they grew empty, cutting a foot or so from the long brown braids of tobacco leaves that hung near the bar, whenever a customer indicated that he wished to buy.

John Wentworth sat at the head of the table and lifted his glass. He gazed smiling around him.

"You keep a good house, Cousin," he said, "and set a good table. I commend you."

"Is he in truth your cousin, John?" asked Dorothy with a gay smile for Stephen as she poured maple syrup on her pudding. "You have so many, I can never keep count of them."

John took a sip of rum and smiled complacently. "Aye," he said. "Anybody by the name of Wentworth, I'll own for my cousin. I can do no less. My great-great-grandfather, who was the first of our name in this country, had nine sons, and they all flourished and peopled it. Stephen and I both come down from old William, the preaching elder, but that's as much as we know. I remember Stephen as a lad, when his father used to bring him to town, before he was hurt in the storm of '59. But if I were to stand in the door of my house in Portsmouth and shout, "Cousin!" half the town would come running to me. Am I not right, Stephen?"

"Aye, that's true, and not all of them would be Wentworth cousins. The great families of the Bank forever marry with one another. There's many of us in Rockingham, but there's near as many here in Strafford now."

So we are in Strafford, thought Lydia. "My doom is in Strafford," John Wentworth had heard in his dream, but he must have forgotten it. And then in a moment the smile went from his face, and she knew he was thinking, if not of doom, at least of more than a pleasant discourse and an early bed. He bent forward.

"Stephen," he said, "I had expected to meet Judge Plummer here. I sent him word. He will be in later, perhaps?"

Stephen's eyes darkened, and his mouth twitched a little. Molly upset the syrup pitcher and hastily mopped at the brown pool spreading on the linen. He cleared his throat. "Judge Plummer's out of town," he said shortly.

The governor's eyebrows lifted. A slight edge came in his voice when he spoke. "Where has he gone? When is he coming back?"

"He did not say—only to tell you that he was not here."

John Wentworth shrugged his shoulders. "We all know the Judge. Noted

for his amours and the fines he incurs for Sabbath-breaking. Perhaps he had good reason not to say where he went. Still, he owes his appointment to me. I thought he would be loyal. Well, where is John McDuffee? He's a man of affairs among you and helped me map my Durham-to-Cohos road. I had hoped to talk with him about getting some bricks for my terrace from the clay beds at Squamanagonic. John will be coming to me surely?"

Again the landlord shook his head, not meeting the governor's eye. "John McDuffee's gone to Exeter. When he'll be back, I cannot say."

Looking around, Lydia observed them all: Molly scuttling toward the kitchen with a tray of empty dishes, Frances studying one delicate ivory thumbnail as if she were seeking for a flaw in it, Dorothy nibbling a fruit pasty. Hugh was lighting Dr. Cutter's pipe for him, and Hannah sat white and stiff at her husband's elbow.

"Cousin," said John Wentworth, a look of bitterness in his eyes, but his voice kept carefully even, "my great purpose in coming north is to try the temper of the province. To see if our people mean to support the rebels of Boston, or if they will remain loyal to their King and their country—if they will continue to trust in me and the future I plan for them. I believe that they will. I believe that they are good men and not knaves. I believe that they are wise men and not fools. Perhaps it is coincidence that those whom I have sought to talk with turn away from me."

Stephen Wentworth's face was dark red, from the reflection of the fire, doubtless, or the smoky heat of the low room.

The governor went on: "I know that you were active here in Rochester, as they were in other towns beside, to appoint committees for obstreperous connivance among yourselves not long after the Boston vandals destroyed the tea. I know that Plummer and McDuffee were members of that committee. But that was early in the year. I thought reason would have returned by now, and I wanted to examine their thinking. To learn if these committees still exist, and what they hope to do." He fell silent, and the landlord did not reply to him.

The fire crackled, and rain beat on the shingles overhead. The men in the taproom laughed and jested with one another.

"But I do know, too," went on the governor after a moment, "that the disposition of Rochester has always been to let well enough alone. It was that way in my grandfather's time. Will you remind your committeemen of that, Cousin, when they return. Say it is a practice I recommend to them." He lifted his chin a little and stared imperiously across the table.

"I will remind them, sir," said Stephen Wentworth.

The little group went to their chambers soon after that, weary and disheartened by what they had heard, knowing they would have to rise early the next day. Lydia and Dorothy shared a narrow room with a rope bed, a

cornhusk mattress, and coarse sheets, but near to the kitchen, and so, very warm.

"Lyddy," said the girl, once they had blown out the candle and settled themselves, "I think that before we return to Portsmouth, we shall see the lads again."

"But how can that be?" gasped Lydia. They were further off from Londonderry than when they had been in Portsmouth, she knew. She felt Dorothy's warm little toes brush her own, as the girl stretched herself in the bed.

"Because I left a note at Neal McIntyre's telling Red Dan where I had gone. That is enough. I do not need to tell him more than that. He will come to me."

"No doubt he will," said Lydia, "but what is that to Black Dan? He is deep in the woods far up the province, out of reach of all."

Dorothy's reply came sleepily. "But we are going deep into the woods ourselves, Lyddy."

They both dozed off after that, being too tired for further chatter, even about the MacMurray boys. Lydia woke only once in the night, and when she did, she heard a hushed broken sobbing the other side of the wall. In the next room, she knew, lay the doctor and his wife. Some deep trouble must be threatening them, she thought, for they had been nothing like their usual placid selves that day. Perhaps one of their children might be the cause. She was lost in sleep again. Once she stirred, and wakened half, and half heard voices on the other side of the wall.

"Oh, Ammi," sighed the doctor's wife, "I am afraid for John and the course he takes—for the King and against our people here. He is your friend, and you love him, but I—!"

And her husband's voice had replied, low and rumbling, and equally distraught, "I know and I, too, am afraid."

*

They left early the next morning under a pearl-gray sky, with Stephen and Molly waving as they drove off. The innkeeper's wife had provided them with a willow basket full of roast fowl and ham, hickory nuts and apples, and thick slices of Indian bread. Frances looked white and tired, unrefreshed by her night's slumber, and she insisted that Dorothy ride inside with the others, in spite of the cramped space. Governor Johnny Wentworth smiled and jested and mounted his horse in his usual jaunty way. Hannah Cutter's nose was red and swollen. She tried to say a flea had bitten it, but Molly heard her and took offense, and said if she found a flea in the house, she must have brought it

herself.

The way led into a river valley first, past a sawmill and a gristmill, a handful of houses, and then north and east over a long sandy reach called Norway Plain. Pine and scrub oak and blueberry bushes came down to the sides of the narrow road, and the farms seemed further apart, with thicker, darker stretches of woodland between them, their fields turning into boggy meadows and patches of juniper. Sometimes an oxcart or a single rider would pull into the ditch to let them pass, but the countryside seemed to grow ever more lonely. Housewives still stared and farmers waved, but there were not so many of them, and the children scattered, timid as fawns, distrustful of the creaking coach and the bright-coated gentlemen. The road wound downward through tangled swamps threaded by sluggish streams of black water. Or it wound upward through rocky pastures where they could see the whole heart of the province spread out before them, range after range of pale blue mountains like the billows of an endless sea.

But the life and wonder of it all was in the living color of the maple leaves with the sunlight on them. Long ridges, purple or gray in the distance, turned, as the eye came closer, into towering walls of scarlet flecked with gold. Long valleys lay like lakes of shining fire that opened out wherever the forest dwindled. Lydia's eyelids hurt and her heart ached with the terrible burning beauty of John Wentworth's province going down to its yearly death of flame.

Once they dismounted and sat on an outcrop of ledge under a hemlock tree and ate the food Molly had given them. Hugh strolled with her a little apart from the others and reached up to tear down a bough of vermilion leaves still edged in summer green.

"Today I am seeing New Hampshire for the first time," he told her. "What passion must lie buried under the gray crags of it, to color its woodlands so! Portsmouth, one could take for an English town—a town that had burned two hundred years back, and been rebuilt in the newer way. Your sea meadows are not strange to one who has seen the sea meadows of Suffolk and Lincolnshire. But this—" He looked about him at the vivid landscape, at the broken bough in his hand. "If Johnny Wentworth thinks to set up England here—"

"But it only lasts for a week or two," she interrupted him. "A rainy day and a windy night, and these leaves will all come down and the hills be bare. It is only for a brief season that you could find the country so disguised."

"I do not believe it is disguised. Perhaps because I do not want to believe so." His lips quivered in a smile, then turned sober again. "I believe this is its true face that reflects its spirit. The grayness and the barrenness are the disguise, rather. And if it only appears this way for one brief season of the year —"

His words broke off and he stood still, looking at her. She shifted her feet

on the dry moss of the roadside, refusing to meet his gaze. She wished that she possessed Frances' wit and grace to answer him, but she had no skill in such unfamiliar discourse as this, and she would not attempt it.

"Then hail the brief season!" he finished, a tremor in his voice she had not noticed before. "Tell me, Lydia! How is a man who is used to an English spring to behave in a New Hampshire autumn?"

"I do not know," she murmured desperately. "I do not know how a man should behave in either. Frances has need of me, I think." She stumbled across a ditch choked with pine needles and abruptly joined the others, even worse discomforted by the mocking glances she received from the governor's lady.

Climbing into the coach again, they rode onward through the interminable afternoon. Narrow farms and sparse orchards succeeded each other at infrequent intervals, and now and then they passed a sawmill or a rude tavern. The forests closed in everywhere; pine, oak, maple, beech, with an occasional grove of hemlock or wand of swaying white birch. Rabbits scuttled away from their iron-rimmed wheels, and squirrels chattered overhead. A partridge drummed up from a tangle of wild grapevines. Bugler, who had been asleep at his mistress' feet, clawed frantically at the door, even at silken ankles, anxious to leap out and renew his youthful hunting.

As they came to the rough green by Middleton meeting house, Lydia saw a long brown mountain reared across their way impassably, the color of dying oak leaves.

"Moose Mountain!" said Frances, a note of relief in her voice. "Only a few miles more, and this wretched journey will be done."

"Do we have to ride over it?" asked Dorothy faintly. "It looks like the wall at the end of the world."

"No, we go around," answered the governor's wife. "But it is the end of the world indeed. You have described it well."

They turned east along a rutted roadway that wound uphill and down, through wooded valleys of dead fern, and on and on forever into a chilling darkening wilderness. The governor rode close to them once and called through the coach window in a cheery tone.

"Wentworth House should prove lucky for Dorothy and Lydia. They will see it first under a new moon."

There was the same quaver of love and pride in his voice when he said, "Wentworth House" as when he said, "My wife."

Just as Lydia began to feel that they had lost their way entirely and must be approaching Canada, the road widened out. On their left the forest thinned to a single row of trees, with a wall and cleared land behind. She heard John calling, far ahead of them.

"We are here at last! We have come home!"

In the pale yellow sky of twilight hung, just as he had predicted, the pale-yellow crescent moon. Somewhere to the west a strip of dark water glimmered between the dark pines, and a night bird called from the distant wood. A cold fall wind blew through the coach window, bearing the smell of cut pine, and cider apples, and woodsmoke, and cattle dung, a smell to tell any New Hampshire farmer he had come home.

Frances settled her cloak around her, and Hannah and Lydia began to collect shawls, chatelaines, and reticules, and Molly's willow basket that had held the lunch. Dorothy still lay back in her corner, looking like a sleepy, happy child, only half-aware. Low stone walls bordered the roadway now, and making a sudden leftwise turn, the coach wheeled awkwardly between two stone posts. Henry stood a little way off, holding the iron gate open.

"The gentlemen have ridden ahead, my lady," he called apologetically to Frances. "His Excellency bade me say he has gone to decant the wine of welcome."

Frances flushed angrily, and then burst into sweet sudden laughter. "A wise precaution," she cried. "We shall need it indeed, after the trials we have passed through!"

They drove slowly up a long avenue edged with young trees. Clipped lawns lay on either side of it, and banks of shrubs, and once Lydia thought she caught a glimpse of a formal garden. The dark bulk of the mansion house loomed ahead of them, tall and wide and gambrel-roofed. A dozen outbuildings were scattered behind it, and spreading elms cast their shadows on a brick terrace laid like a carpet before the massive front door. Soft candlelight shone through the many small panes of its lofty windows, and curling plumes of white smoke thrust up from the chimneys high above.

"It is very fine," said Lydia wonderingly. "Finer than anything I have seen in Portsmouth or Massachusetts."

"I wish my husband had seen fit to build it in Portsmouth or Massachusetts," replied Frances petulantly. "Lydia, let Bugler go ahead of us, lest we fall over him when we seek to dismount."

Lydia opened the door a little and released the eager squirming dog.

"It is like our country houses in England," said Dorothy, "and I am glad that I find it so. Johnny told me he has tried so hard to build it in that way."

"It seems a folly to me," said Hannah sharply, "here in the backwoods, with no towns or neighbors by. I am thankful my husband has never forced me to live on his Wolfeborough land."

"A country house does not have near neighbors," explained Dorothy simply, "only the people of the estate. Johnny tells me there are other such houses a-building a few miles off, and will be more. He told Hugh he thinks in time to have all the courts and council and province business conducted here,

and to keep Portsmouth only for the sea trade. Remember what he said to us in the tavern yesterday? We may not be able to tell New Hampshire from Yorkshire in a hundred years."

"We won't be able to tell black from white in a hundred years," said Hannah briskly, "nor wet from dry—nor no thing on earth at all. Johnny was safe there."

The coach drew up at the edge of the brick terrace bordered with dwarf cedar trees, and Henry appeared from the shadows behind them to hold open its door.

"Go first, Frances," suggested Hannah, "and we will shake the cushions to be sure nothing is left behind. We—"

At that moment Bugler sped howling across the trim lawn in pursuit of some unseen thing. Away to the right, beyond Wentworth House, the voices of kenneled hounds lifted up in answer, and then died out, one by one. In the silence that followed their outburst, the low provocative call of the night bird rang again from the wood, this time very near.

Lydia caught her breath. "Dorothy," she asked tensely, "was that a whippoorwill?"

"Yes," said Dorothy. "That was a whippoorwill." Her soft eyes lighted, and she tossed her head and smiled upward at the young moon.

7.
THE WHIPPOORWILL BUILDS NO NEST

When Governor John Wentworth left the Bank with his household and headed northward, he had made it clear to all that he intended to remain only a few days in the country. But once arrived at his wilderness estate, he let one mild autumn day follow another and gave himself up completely to the delights of being a private gentleman as if he intended to do so forever, while his Council governed on without him. Frances lay ill in her chamber much of the time, suffering from the effects of the journey she should never have taken, and Hannah Cutter nursed her, thus leaving Lydia free to wander with Dorothy and sometimes Hugh, over the rough New Hampshire acres that Governor Johnny was doing his best to reshape into England's green and pleasant pattern.

Much of the land was cleared, and there were fields and orchards already yielding a plentiful harvest; a few tracts of stumpage remained here and there, and natural hay meadows along the shores of Smith's Pond, the broad lake that lay just to the southwest of the mansion house. Sometimes they rode over to the six-hundred-acre park to peer through the wall of interwoven branches and felled trees at the moose and deer straying about, large-eyed and restless in captivity. On clear days they would take the two-masted sailboat, the *Rockingham*, and go scudding across the waters of the pond to visit the blue heronry on Stamp Act Island or eat from a lunch basket on Tea Rock. Often the governor himself would keep them company, eager to point out this project or that, and enjoy their surprise at all he had been able to accomplish in the six short years since he had felled the first tree here and set out to realize his boyhood's dream. They visited the gristmill on Clay Pit Brook and the sawmill on Rye Fields Brook. They talked with Bob Calder, the Scottish gardener, and ate "Farm Sweets," an oval red apple peculiar to this place, and of a peculiar flavor. The doctor, too, had a prideful interest in everything, since he had been one of the first proprietors and still owned Wolfeborough land.

The English pheasants loosed here last year had vanished, John admitted reluctantly, somewhere into the woods; no doubt, to become the meal of a bear or wiley panther, but he meant to send to England for more. He knew the breed and was confident that it could be made to flourish in America, just as the Romans had made it flourish in Britain more than a thousand years before. He

talked much about his plans one day while they were riding home from the tiny village growing up some three miles away on the shore of the great inland sea, Lake Winnipesaukee. He meant, he said, not only to maintain his deer park and build a race course for sport with his fine horses, but to adapt the whole countryside for hare and fox hunting. And other improvements interested him as well.

"When first I returned to this country," he told Hugh, "I landed in Charleston and rode north to become governor. I visited many fine estates on the way, and in Philadelphia my friends took me to inspect the botanic gardens of a gentleman called Bartram. Never have I seen such a collection of plants and shrubs as he maintained there. He had contrived to procure seeds and cuttings from all over the world, it seemed. I would not go as far as he. Still, we have plenty of space, soil, sunlight, and water, and nothing to stop us from here to Cropplecrown—" He waved his hand toward a tall blue mountain south of the blue lake.

"Philadelphia," said Hugh thoughtfully. "When you speak of that town, I am reminded of the great Congress meeting there. I wonder what they are about."

The governor's face darkened. "A pox on the Congress!" he muttered. "Let us forget them while we can. Come, sir, we'll stop by the kennels and take a look at the pack. Sons of bitches they may be, but withal more noble and better-brained than our upstart congressmen! Like our good King, 'Farmer George' himself, I have a weakness for my beagles, though a taller, stouter breed might fare better in this rough country, and I think—"

Lost in sporting talk, they rode back to Wentworth House.

The sprawling community that served the mansion, Lydia thought, was larger in itself than many country villages she had known. Barns, stables, coachhouses, a dairy with its own well, a smokehouse, a cabinetmaker's, joiner's, and blacksmith's shop stood at a respectful distance beyond the green lawns and gardens, the elm-bordered mall leading down to the waterside. There would be plenty of dark nooks here at night to shelter the meetings of Dorothy and Red Dan which she knew were taking place. The two girls shared a chamber with green hangings and a broad window that looked out on the lake, and neither could have left it unknown to the other. Every third or fourth night, shortly after the last light went out in the house, far in the pines the whippoorwill would call, and Dorothy would rise without a word, put on her cloak, and go. Nor did she make an explanation when she came back. Lydia could not help but wonder how matters stood with the young pair, how far their hearts and the moonlight nights of fall were taking them. But she never found out, for Dorothy did not chatter or confide, but kept her own secrets in quiet dignity.

Whenever Frances and the solicitous Hannah failed to appear at mealtime, Lydia sat in her mistress' place to pour tea and order the maidservants, awkward, ill-trained country girls who giggled and dropped the silverware. So it was as his hostess that she met Colonel Jack Fenton, erst of the Queen's Royal Irish Regiment, now magistrate of Portsmouth, landholder and probate judge of Grafton, the northernmost county. A friend of John Wentworth's, he had helped to calm the town, she remembered, the day after the riot at Edward Parry's, and now the governor brought the dark, wornly-handsome stranger to the supper table one evening, introduced him, and said he would spend the night there, being on his way from the Bank to his newly cleared farmland on the river intervals beyond Plymouth.

Colonel Fenton had ridden in only a few moments before, and John was still eagerly questioning him about the state of affairs in the province capital.

"Did they raise any money to send to the relief of the rebels in Boston?" he inquired. "The committee was urging folk to bring their contributions to Stoodley's tavern when I came away, but I doubt that they collected more than a few guineas. Somebody sent a dozen fat sheep, I believe, but money is another matter. New Hampshire men will give away their blood before they will give away their money."

"They may give away both before this business is over," muttered Hugh into his wine glass, but only Lydia heard him.

Colonel Fenton shook his head. " 'Twill likely shock you as it did me, Johnny, and I hate to tell of it, but they held a special meeting and voted to send those Boston bastards two hundred pounds—four times their province tax!"

"Two hundred pounds! Well God ha' mercy!" exclaimed the governor blankly, then recovered himself. "Jack, their tempers are worsening! A month ago they voted against this very thing. And yet, I still trust that this agitation will fail. Sometimes I find it in my heart to wish that the God who destroyed the cities of the plain would lay his hand on Boston."

"Oh not on the whole of it, Johnny! Stay your curses! There are some honest souls and loyal gentlemen in Boston. And spare my Charlestown farm. Elizabeth is there with the children, for she has a great love of the place."

"Where is it, Jack?" asked the governor. "I never knew your exact holdings."

"In the hills above the town. Along the side of Bunker Hill and Breed's—you know them! I have a comfortable house, a stable, orchards, and gardens, fit to entertain you and your lady."

The governor poured his guest another glass of wine. "Yes," he said unsmilingly. "I know the hills you speak of, Breed's and Bunker. Perhaps when the times are more favorable and the troops withdrawn, Frances and I

can visit you there."

"I pledge you a warm welcome," said Jack Fenton lifting his glass, "a warm welcome to Bunker Hill for my good friends from New Hampshire. But now I have another word for you. Captain Cochran received a message from the general. He says the weather waxes cold, and he hears that in this intemperate country the snow falls often in November. He still thinks to put up a barracks on Boston Common, and he wishes to know from you when he can expect the carpenters."

The governor's face cleared.

"He can set his mind at rest, for I have procured the carpenters. It seemed a harmless enough favor to do for the King's general. But I learned just as I left town that the people were ridiculously aroused against it. Therefore, I did not accomplish the business myself in Dover or Rochester as I had thought to do. I waited till I came here, and then rode down into Middleton one morning to a man who has served as my agent in times past, one Nicholas Austin. Nick searched all over Strafford, I believe, but he has finally assembled fifteen able builders, each possessed of his own tools, and promised them a suit of clothes and a dollar a day in wages. I did not make very clear to him the work they would be engaged in, nor who came forth with such a liberal offer. Yes, if the general has no more worries than that, he is indeed a man of peace. Before the month is out, he will have his carpenters."

"I do not like it, Johnny," said Hugh. He had been watching the governor intently, the venison chop lying untouched on his plate, his wine forgotten in the glass. "I thought from what you said to Tom Pickering the day we left, that you must have decided not to engage in such an unpopular business."

The governor laughed shortly. "So you were as gullible as our neighbor from the South Mill! I hope you remember our conversation well, sir. There is a lesson in it. You might wish to use a similar device if you should ever rule a province."

"I do not think I should ever use such a device," said Hugh flushing. "It was—forgive me, Your Excellency—it was a lie you told him."

"No, lad, it was not a lie," said John Wentworth easily. "I told him I would do naught against New Hampshire, and that's God's truth as I'm man alive! I never will! But I did not promise to refrain from doing what he in his ignorance might think was against it."

"Eat your dinner, lad," said Fenton soothingly. "You've told lies in your own time, and will again likely—as a gentleman must. We're none of us lily-white in the matter."

To Lydia's surprise the governor shook his head. "Nay, there's more ways to train a young dog than rapping its nose, Jack! Even more with a man, for you must explain to him and show him your reasons. I shall ask you an old

question, Hugh, one that wiser men will be asking each other after we are gone. But I shall give you my answer to it."

"You are most patient, sir," said Hugh stifling his resentment.

"The question is this," went on the governor calmly. "Should a ruler do what he knows is best for his people, or what his people wish him to do?"

"I do not take your meaning, sir," Hugh replied to him stiffly.

"Let me put it thus. Suppose my people come to me and say, 'We are very poor. There is no money in Portsmouth. But Daniel Fowle has a printing press and reams of paper. Command Daniel Fowle to print us money. Then we shall all be rich men!' "

Lydia saw the light of understanding wake in Hugh's eyes.

"I know that printing paper money with no gold to redeem it will not make them rich men. It will make them a thousand times poorer than they were before. But still they plead with me, 'Print us money!' You would not have me do what my people wish in this case, would you, Hugh? Abandon my own greater wisdom?"

"In this case—no," said Hugh slowly. "But can you be sure that your wisdom is always greater than the people's?"

"Certainly my wisdom is always greater," said John Wentworth simply, with no boasts or pomposity in his manner, only utter self-confidence. "That is why I am the governor, rather than some other man."

"You are governor because your uncle was governor before you, and your grandfather before that," was the thought that cried itself aloud in Lydia's mind, so loud that she clapped her napkin over her mouth to keep from uttering it. When she lifted her eyes again, she saw Hugh looking at her. In his eyes, there was doubt and uneasiness. She wondered if it was the same doubt and uneasiness that troubled her—the first faint doubt of Johnny Wentworth. They smiled ruefully at each other.

Nobody seemed to have any further interest in dinner. Making excuses, the men shoved back their plates, and the governor took two bottles of wine with him when they vanished into the library.

That night Dorothy spoke softly to Lydia when she returned from her trysting, and told her that Black Dan MacMurray was on his way down from the forests of Cohos, that within a week he would be in Wolfeborough.

She lay long awake after that, till the stars paled in the gray sky and the wind before morning stirred in the dark pines along the shores of Smith's Pond. In her mind she went over the last meeting between them, the last words they had said.

"You'll wait awhile longer, if you've waited this long," Dan MacMurray had told her confidently. Well, he was right. She had waited, waited because she remembered how sweet their love had been, what he had been like in those

first days of tenderness, before she learned that he had not kept himself for her. But she knew now that there might be another choice for her to make, another issue she must settle soon. More and more Hugh Giffard had sought her company in the chilly sunsets when John and the doctor had come in from riding about the estate and gone upstairs to take tea with their wives; in the long evenings when he might have joined the others at the billiard table.

He had never taken her to him since that first night in the coach on the Hampton marshes, never so much as held her hand; but he had striven by every word and gesture of late, in a masterly way, to further their acquaintance, to foster a sort of tender restrained intimacy between them. Perhaps this was the kind of wooing that belonged to an English spring. He talked of his home in Yorkshire and questioned her gently about her girlhood and her marriage, but what could this be tending to, she often asked herself. Impoverished exile that he was, it seemed hardly likely that he would so far forget his blood and breeding as to take an American wife whose mother had served for hire in Portsmouth kitchens. His sister, though she seemed to be much in love with Red Dan, had openly admitted that some day she would be expected to make a rich marriage. No doubt Hugh would be well-advised to do the same, and thus repair his fortune. And yet, what could he mean toward her if not marriage, since he had come forth with no more importunate suggestions? Well, she could not refuse him before he asked her, and in the meanwhile she could look forward to seeing Dan again, perhaps to tell him that she did not intend to wait forever.

The next day her horizon clouded with another worry. Colonel Fenton rode off soon after breakfast saying there was a boundary dispute between Plymouth and Cockermouth, and he had to be in at the ending of it; but his visit had grievously unsettled the governor. After he left, John grew increasingly restless; started for the kennels and changed his mind midway; returned, and sent for Bob Calder; dismissed Bob after a few minutes, and went upstairs to Frances' chamber. He did not come down again till dinner time, and then it was to make the announcement that they must prepare themselves to return to Portsmouth. Lydia was shaken with the quick fear that she would be gone from Wolfeborough before Black Dan arrived there.

But Frances herself came down, soon after the others were seated at table, took the place hastily vacated by Lydia, and insisted all through the meal that she could not think of leaving until she had invited the country folk to Wentworth House for supper and a merry evening, as it was her custom to do. Eager as he was to return to the duties of his office, her husband finally gave in and allowed her a week's time to prepare for her festival.

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The bright leaves had all come down, and the flowers turned to dry stalks in Bob Calder's carefully tended gardens, but Dorothy and Lydia and the maids brought green boughs and vines from the forest and red berries from the swamps to decorate the great ballroom. And then, because the governor said it looked more like Christmas than Hallowmas, they piled red apples and orange pumpkins on the broad window ledges. Frances sat in a cushioned armchair and watched their efforts, bewailing that there could be no true elegance in the country. Hannah Cutter sniffed at elegance, and said that if folk got enough to eat and drink and two hours or so of dancing music, they would count themselves well served, and go away blessing the governor.

The night of the merrymaking, their last night at Wentworth House, turned out to be black and windy, with rain in the air, a gust of it flung sharply now and then against the windows while Dorothy and Lydia were dressing. The English girl combed out her hair before the mirror, and pirouetted in her green gown with gold lace ruffles at the wrists and edging the low-cut bodice. Then she sighed a little.

"It is very fine," she said. "I had forgotten how fine it was. I have not worn it often since I brought it with me from England. Dan says that too-splendid dresses frighten him. He likes me best, I think, in a shawl and a wool petticoat."

Lydia wore yellow taffeta looped in a polonaise, and an amber brooch and earrings Frances had added to the costume. Peering over Dorothy's shoulder, she decided that she looked very well—except that her straight black brows drew together in a worried frown, and her red mouth curved downward unhappily.

"Dorothy," she said as they stood together, uncertain how to put the question, "this is our last night here. We start back to the Bank tomorrow. Do you think Black Dan will come?"

"I do not know, Lyddy," said Dorothy. "He reached Wolfeborough two nights back. He has been spending his time drinking in John Sinkler's tavern, but when we ask him if he means to come to see you, he says he does not know whether he will or not. And yet, we thought he came down from Cohos only for that, when Dan sent him word you were here."

"You mean," gasped Lydia, "he has come already? And I have not known?"

Tears welled suddenly in Dorothy's soft eyes. "Oh Lyddy, I wanted to tell you, but Dan—my Dan—said I should not meddle in what was no concern of mine. It seems Black Dan arrived here one day at dusk and saw you walking by the lake with Hugh—"

"Oh Lydia," called Hannah from the East India chamber down the hall, "I need your help!"

Hannah Cutter had seemed to recover somewhat from the unhappiness she suffered on their journey north, but her husband remained unusually quiet and stern, depending more and more on the comfort of his pipe. Both Dorothy and Lydia hastened into the spacious bedroom, its walls covered with painted paper depicting gorgeous eastern scenes, columned temples, brown, jeweled women, and turbaned men. But nothing serious ailed the doctor's wife this time, it seemed; merely that an earring had slipped down the back of her bodice, and Dorothy's slim fingers expertly pulled it out again.

"The men have gone downstairs already," said Hannah, "and the country people have come. Can you not hear the stir?"

Then Frances called to them from across the hall, and they went into the room called the Queen's Chamber where she waited in her rose-red dress in front of the gray marble fireplace. In wall niches on either side stood alabaster statues of King George and Queen Charlotte, the latter much admired by the governor's wife who had sought to arrange her hair in the same fashion as the grooved locks of the statue.

"Give me your arm, Hannah," she said. "I had thought to receive in the library, but it is too late for that. We will go directly to the supper table."

With a heavy grace Frances Wentworth descended the white carved stairway. Her dress of soft china silk was skillfully draped to hide the swelling evidence of her condition, but it could not make her lithe and willowy. She appeared to have a fresh young face above a dowager's body. With her three friends around her, she entered the ballroom.

Yellow pine boards had been spread on hurdles to fill the floor space with temporary tables that could be removed when it was time for the dancing, and benches ranged along them. John Wentworth had insisted that his guests should sit down to their meat, and not be expected to "balance teacups Portsmouth fashion." He stood just inside the doorway now, talking to a corpulent man in ragged breeches and a hunting shirt, who carried a musket with him. The candlelight from the silver sconces fell on a company, that, if far from elegant, certainly lifted up a cheer of hearty welcome at the sight of its lady.

Lydia looked about her, at the weathered ruddy faces, the coarse clothes and heavy boots, and shy awkward gestures as the country people surged forward when Frances Wentworth stood in proud dignity beside her husband. Now she saw Hugh coming toward her, smiling to her, pressing to her side, utterly unaware, of course, of Dorothy's news that had left her so sick and shaken. Standing between him and Dr. Cutter, she found herself greeting the guests as each was presented to her along with his little share of fame.

There was Reuben Libbey who had killed thirty-six bear in one season, and Henry Rust's wife, so fat she traveled by oxcart; Tom Lucas, the moderator;

Sam Tebbets, the millwright; John Sinkler who kept the two-room tavern—the tavern, she thought bitterly, where Dan had been drinking while she waited for him. After John, came Tom Piper's wife who frightened the bears from the young corn by lighting torches when her husband was from home. She heard Ebeneezer Meader tell how he had traveled from Durham in the early days of settlement, in company with a cow and a pig his father had given him, and she shook the hand of Molly Blake, the midwife, a massive woman able to travel on snowshoes when she could reach her patients in no other way. She chatted with Widow Fullerton and her eight children, and listened while Dr. Cutter introduced Aaron Frost and told how the man had taken clapboards on a hand-sled to Dover to exchange for a grindstone, making the seventy-mile journey in two days over crusted winter snow. Wolfeborough was still a young settlement. People seemed to have enough to do to build their cabins and tend their cornfields. Nobody mentioned Boston, or the Congress, or the general's carpenters, or the tax on tea.

When the procession had all passed by and been welcomed, and the governor started the move toward the tables, Lydia caught a brief interchange between him and his wife that revealed a side of his nature she had never suspected before.

A young farm couple had just turned away after the customary handshaking, and John Wentworth's eyes followed them, a smile on his lips, and in his eyes a slight sadness. The woman was a brown-skinned laughing creature, with a mop of rough dark hair, her feet thrust into leather mocassins. She wore a homespun petticoat and a deerskin shirt hanging over it that revealed plainly she was some months gone. But she showed no embarrassment at her swollen condition, instead she seemed to display herself with pride. The governor bent his head and spoke very low.

"Her son will be a proud man," he said gravely, "for his mother is proud of him even now." He stared at the fashionable draperies that disguised the form of his wife.

"Her son will be an oaf," retorted Frances, "with a cow for a mother and no measure of civilized living. Lead us to the table, Johnny. Your people are hungry."

Grouped at the long plank tables, they bowed their heads while the governor said a brief formal grace, and listened while he made a little speech introducing the "honored guest" of the evening. The "honored guest" turned out to be also the main dish they were to regale themselves with. Several seasons back, he told them, he had brought a number of cusk, a species of salt-sea codfish, frozen in blocks of ice, from Portsmouth, and released them to thaw in Smith's Pond and the brooks of his estate. The cusk had flourished and bred, and now, some fifty miles from the seacoast, it would henceforth be

possible to sup upon a creature of the deep sea. And Frances made a little laughing speech, too, saying woe to the cook who tried to fry a cusk, for treated thus, its flesh would sliver in pieces and dwindle away. No, they must always bake it, as she had done. She curtsied, and held up her hand, and in the following silence the first cusk was borne in on a platter, surrounded like a Christmas pudding with a glorious aura of burning brandy, while Henry tootled on the French horn.

Lydia could not have heard a whippoorwill through all the tumult if one had called in the wet black night outside the long windowpanes, but it was not possible to miss the nervous clutch of the serving maid's fingers at the shoulder of her yellow gown.

"Mistress March," whispered the girl, "a man come to the kitchen door asking for ye. He wouldn't take no. He says he'll wait by the kennels, for the dogs be better friends to him than those in the grand hall." She slipped away.

Her companions were scurrying among the tables with platters of cusk, stewed vegetables, sauces, and meat pie. Henry had put down his horn and assisted by Rafe, the coachman, had just rolled in an iron-bound keg of rum. A pleased, slightly raucous murmur rose all over the room. The guests were eyeing their napkins curiously and picking up their silverware. She looked at Hugh seated on her right, even now turning to her, ready to speak; at Dr. Cutter, impassive on her left; at Johnny and Frances at the head of the table, handsome and smiling, and self-possessed, waiting for their guests to be served.

After one desperate moment of groping, her wits came back to her and she knew what she must do.

She spoke aloud, as if her remarks were meant for both Hugh and the doctor, started to push back her chair.

"I am sorry. You saw the maid speak to me just now. There is a crisis in the kitchen, it seems. She did not tell me what, only that Cook sent word she does not know what to do and needs help. I had better go, without disturbing the others."

"Shall I send Hannah after you?" asked the doctor.

"Oh no, of course not!" she smiled at him, at Hugh. "I shall likely be back in a moment, and if I am not—well, you will know what is keeping me."

She rose and hurried out of the banquet hall.

The country women had left their cloaks and shawls in the parlor, and she snatched a rough garment of russet wool and flung it over her bright dress. She tugged open the massive front door and stepped out on the damp terrace. A gust of rainy wind blew in her face. The boughs of the tall elms tossed and sighed. In a moment she was running across the grass, away from the merry sounds heard dimly from within the lighted hall.

The kennels stood in the shelter of the coach house, a row of sturdy, pointed-roofed, waist-high hutches, with a strip of carefully raked sand in front, and carpets of fresh straw within. Tall pines grew just beyond them, and at the edge of the pines she saw a dark figure looming through the lesser dark. Vague white blurs moved about him, and as she stumbled nearer, she saw that Dan MacMurray stood in a sea of beagles, their tails waving, their tawny heads thrusting upward for him to stroke them, their black and white bodies writhing in delight. Not a bark sounded; only a chorus of soft whimpers as he bent down.

"Here, Knave! Here Rambler!" he was murmuring, "Down. Quickly, down, lass!"

Lydia drew close before he realized she was there. Then she cleared her throat and spoke timidly. "You sent for me," she said, "to come to you where your friends were."

He straightened up and answered easily, but she could not see his face in the darkness of the rainy night.

"Lyddy, is it? I dinna' send for you. I sent you word I was here. Indeed they are my friends. I lived here amongst them a winter when I was spotting the Pequaket Road."

Not knowing what answer to make, she kept silent, and he spoke again. "I set a lantern burning in the coach house," he said. "Shall we go in there, out o' the rain?"

He did not take her arm, or touch her in any way at all. Thrusting the dogs from him, he strode to the long wooden building. Mutely she followed him inside and waited while he closed the door. When she lifted her eyes, it was to look at anything but Dan.

Iron lanterns hung here and there on the rough-hewn walls, and the one nearest the door burned with a smoky glow. In the shadows beyond stood the fine vehicle that had brought the governor's family from the Bank, a light chaise or two, an oxcart, and a farm wagon. She looked at the dirt floor, then up at the leather harnesses hanging on the blind wall.

"I seen you are thinking to take yourself another husband," said Black Dan coolly. "Was the first one a pretty boy like he?"

Oh why, why, must it always be this way between them? Why must they be forever drawn together, if it was always to quarrel so?

"Dan," she said, feeling as if she were trying to keep afloat on the current of a swift river that strove to drag her down, "I see you know by now that I have been married. I would have told you myself, if you had given me the chance and the time."

"You had the chance and the time," he said. His mouth was hard, and his gray eyes veiled. She could not look anyways into them at all. "I walked wi'

you in Portsmouth. From the Deer Tavern to Pickering Neck, I walked. I asked what had happened to you, but you never said."

"It was because—because we were so strange after all the years, and so near a quarrel. I knew you would never understand it then."

"Did you think I would understand it better when I saw you walking out wi' Johnny Wentworth's hired man? I come down from the woods to see you, left my spotting crew on the road there, and come away. I come to see you, and I seen you with him. In the tavern, I heard more. John Wentworth's servants know more about you than I do; know about your marrying, and all. But I saw you walking close beside him—walking in the sunset and later under the moon. I never saw his face plain, but I saw his tall shoulders, his yellow hair.

"I have little choice but to walk with him," retorted Lydia. "We live in the same house, and he treats me courteously. I can hardly insult him. Would you have me walk alone?"

"No," said Dan, "I would have you walk wi' me, but you are too good for that. You would never belong to Dan MacMurray, but instead you chose a counting-house clerk, and now you want a King's man in a red coat."

"The counting-house clerk married me," snapped Lydia, "which is more than you would do!"

"You're right," said Black Dan. "Way you are now, wi' the tongue and temper you got, I'd rather marry a hedgehog! But if you won't love me, Lyddy, dinna' think I'll go without."

"I'll never love you until you do go without!"

"I think you'll get tired o' that game quicker than I."

He drew away from her and stood silent for a moment, then he spoke again, more quietly. "If you're like the hedgehog, Lyddy, maybe I'm like the whippoorwill. The whippoorwill builds no nest. He settles down in the dead leaves and the brushwood margins. He catches his food a-flying. He never settles long or stays."

Then he flung open the door and stepped outside, but she could not believe that he had really gone from her with no more farewell than that. She stood and waited, irresolute. Then fear gripped her heart; the awful knowledge that he had indeed gone. She rushed into the night calling him, "Dan! Dan!"

The beagles eddied round her, howling mournfully. She broke away from them and ran, shaken with sobs, toward Wentworth House. Light poured from the long windows, and the creaking notes of a fiddle, a burst of music from the French horn. She sank down at the edge of the terrace and crouched under a dwarf cedar tree, the cold rain dripping on her face and neck and hair. A bleak wind rustled through the pine forest circling round, and patches of fog—or was it cloud—drifted across the low black sky. Moose Mountain and Cropplecrown were all hid away in the mist. There was no hill for her to lift up her eyes to,

and no help in all the dead dissolving landscape, no pity in the night; nothing to soften the edge of the words he had said.

"A hedgehog!" She wept. "A prickly hedgehog! Oh Dan, Dan, Dan!"

*

A week later, and far down the country, Dan MacMurray stretched himself in the blankets that covered the rope bed and braced his shoulder comfortably against the rough bark that clung to the cabin wall. He could not see his companion's face in the faint light of the dying embers on the hearth, but there was no particular need for that. It was not a fair one, and he knew it well.

"Oh, Jess," he said, "I forgot to tell you. Lyddy March has come back to Portsmouth."

"Lyddy March is a fool," replied the deep soft throaty voice in the dark beside him.

He laughed. "I know it," he said. "If she was as smart as she thinks she is, I wouldn't want her. But she'll never be as smart as that."

"What's she got for ye, Danny, leave off she's pretty and young?" asked the woman nestling against him. "It'll take more than that for the long pull. Ye'll be wanting more than that."

"You know, Jess," he answered thoughtfully, "I've often wondered what Lyddy March has got. She's pretty, but I've seen others as good to look at. She's got a shrew's tongue and a mind to use it. She's that proud she wouldna' call the Queen her aunt, and she's vastly admirous o' her own ways. What she'd be like in love, I never been able to find out. But she's for me. I always told you that."

"And ye're still thinking to wear her down, Danny?"

"Yes," he replied confidently, "I think I can wear her down."

8.
"I COME HERE TO SEE A GIRL"

"Our Sovereign Lord, the King, chargeth and commandeth all persons being assembled immediately to disperse themselves," quavered the shrill old voice of the province secretary and chief justice, Theodore Atkinson, as he stood with his back to the State House, the winter wind flapping his fur-lined cloak about his thin shanks.

Black Dan MacMurray lounged against the tavern wall under the swinging wooden sign that bore the painted arms of the Marquis of Rockingham. Over his head the iron-gray skies of mid-December seemed to press down on the old gray houses round Market Square, on the slate-gray river draining seaward beyond the town. The square was thronged with men, from the Paved Street, down the hill past Molly Treadwell's store; muttering, restless men, dressed in their warmest, shabbiest clothes and carrying their muskets. They had not come here for any Sunday-go-to-meeting, that was plain. Dan recognized the faces of many of them, for he had been coming to the Bank for almost twenty years now, ever since he used to ride in from Londonderry on the front of his father's saddle when he was a little boy. The Langdon brothers were there: handsome Jack, and Woodbury, thinner and sterner-looking, but no less handsome. Sons of a farmer, just as he himself was a farmer's son. But they had gone to the grammar school and into the counting-houses, and they were rich merchants now, while he had gone beyond the mountains to spot trees and lay out the roads into Grafton and Cohos, and he could carry in his pockets all the wealth he had—except for the home farm which he shared with his young cousin, Red Dan. Never mind, he was ten years younger than the Langdons were. When he reached their age, he might own a mansion, too. There were more doors open now to a farmer's son than ever there used to be.

The wind blew a spit of snow in his face, and he narrowed his eyes against it, wondering if there could be a blizzard on the way. He saw Pierse Long, and Tom Pickering, and Samuel Cutts, leaders, all of them; and Clement March who ran the almshouse, and Dr. Hall Jackson, and Noah Parker, come down from the big outlandish mansion of his known as "Noah's Ark"; Sam Drowne, the silversmith; Ben Lear, the hermit; Mr. Haven, the minister; Hunking Wentworth, the old epileptic councilor, and Prince Whipple, the black-faced

slave. He saw other men he had done business with in the shops, and drunk with in the taverns; shipwrights, cobblers, fishermen, tanners, butchers, coopers, and cabinetmakers. Some of them had come there to take action, he could tell by the look of them, and some to see what others would do.

"Upon the pains contained in the act made in the first year of King George, for preventing tumultuous and riotous assemblies—" shouted the resolute old man, his words blown back at him on the sharp air, echoed mockingly from a dozen raucous throats. Just then the bells of the North Church began to ring, and Dan watched them tossing madly in their steeple, noticed that the hands on the steeple clock pointed straight up for noonday. From Daniel Street sounded the insolent roll of a drum.

Dan held his gun upright, its stock resting on the frozen turf, and fumbled inside his leather jacket for his pipe and tobacco pouch.

"I dinna' know what old Atkinson's talking about," he muttered. "He dinna' know himself, likely."

"He was reading the Riot Act," said a voice behind him in the tavern doorway. "I heard it read to the weavers in London when they were angered by the importation of French silks and marched out to throw paving stones at the Duke of Bedford's house. I was a young lad then, and I thought it very daring of the weavers—"

Dan swung around and looked at the speaker narrowly. Just another bland, plausible young Englishman, such as he had already seen too many of in his time.

"What good does he think that's going to do?" he asked. "The lads are up to something. I just rode in from the country, and what it is, I dinna' know." He shivered inside his thick clothes. "I got me a chill coming down Dover Neck," he said. "Wind blew strong enough there to take the tails off horses, and it looked to me like Great Bay was all froze over, except for here and there a channel through. Guess I'll go inside and fetch me a drink before aught gets started out here."

"Do you think they will disperse as they were ordered to do?" asked the young Englishman. "Judge Atkinson read the act at the command of the governor."

Dan made a rude sound with his mouth. "That for the governor!" he said. "As I come through Strafford, I heard talk o' the governor."

He brushed past the stranger who followed him into the tavern, followed him to the round oak table nearest the fire. The low smoky taproom was deserted, save for the host who stood peering through the window at the mob in the street, and one poor wretch of a sailor, quite overtaken with drink and snoring, laid under the stairs on a heap of clean straw.

"I'll take a slug o' hard cider!" called Dan, sitting down on a stool and

leaning his musket against the brickwork of the chimney, a good safe distance from the open blaze. He stared at the man who was now seated opposite him. "You drinking apple cider?"

The Englishman shuddered slightly, lifted one eyebrow. "Yes, apple cider," he murmured. "May I stand treat, sir?"

Dan flung a shilling on the table. "Dinna' know you," he said frowning.

Jacob Tilton, the tavernkeeper, brought an iron-banded wooden pitcher with two tumblers and set them before the young men. "Serve yourself, Danny," he said. "Keep count and pay me later. I want to watch what's happening out there."

"What d'you think's happening?" asked Dan. "What's turned folks out?"

The host shook his head. "I heard many stories. Some say there's British troops marching in through Greenland and a fleet o' warships been sighted off Rye. But if you want the truth, it is that I wouldn't know." He returned to the window.

Dan shrugged and filled both tumblers. The Englishman lifted his and held it half aloft, smiling.

"My name is Hugh Giffard," he said, "from Yorkshire in the old country round Bridlington; more lately, traveling in America."

Dan took a swallow of the fiery liquid, coughed, and spat into the fireplace. "I be Dan MacMurray o' Londonderry," he said.

"I have heard of Londonderry. Once I met your fort's commander, Captain Cochran. I believe he was a native of that place."

"Captain Cochran is a damn Tory. But he comes o' honest folk. We got Cochrans at home better than he."

Hugh Giffard ignored the comment and leaned forward. "Tell me, Dan MacMurray," he asked, "what did you hear in Strafford about the governor?"

"Why I heard he sold us out to those British sons-of-bitches in Boston," said Dan, reaching again for his tobacco. "He disgraced New Hampshire before all America. That's what I heard he done."

"How disgraced New Hampshire?"

Dan gazed past Jacob Tilton into the street. Beyond the small panes the mob seemed to be milling around, with no forward movement to it. He turned back to his glass.

"I was in Steve Wentworth's tavern in Rochester last night," he went on. "The tale was more than a month old, they said, but they still would talk o' naught else there. Matter o' some carpenters, it were."

Young Giffard sighed. "Ah, those unlucky carpenters! I have no doubt that the governor erred therein. I thought so at the time. But why is the province all aflame about so small a business? I would think they had mightier causes for worry, what with all the rebellions stirring to the south."

Dan put his glass down and stared across the table. “So you would think,” he said, “but you wasna’ born in New Hampshire. It’s a little country here, and little things make a great matter. We trusted Johnny Wentworth. Everywheres, from Cohos to New Castle, we trusted him. He was richer than most o’ us, and wore better clothes, and lived in a finer house, and married a better-looking woman; his family was more account, and he’d been to England, and he’d been to Harvard College; he talked better, too. But still he understood our talk and what we meant by it. I’ve known men to stop him in the street and say, ‘Good morning, Governor, and what the devil did you mean when you said thus-and-so to the Council, yesterday?’ And he’d hold up his journey, wherever he was going, and make the matter clear. He always said ’twas no trick to govern folk if you told them the truth and never tried to deceive them, but laid all open and plain. And we loved him for that! And then to have him go behind our backs and dishonor the province like he done!”

Dan seized the pitcher and slopped more cider into his glass. The Englishman stared back at him across the table.

“Perhaps I know the way you see things better than you think I do, Dan MacMurray,” he said soberly. “I have heard several stories of what happened in Rochester. What do you tell me—you who were there?”

“Why, when the carpenters found out what they was sent to Boston for, they packed their tools up and come home, saying they wouldn’t build barracks for no lobsterbacks—and then the story was out. There was talk o’ sending the militia to get Nick Austin. Some folk said he ought to be tarred and feathered and rid on a rail from Norway Plain to Squamanagonic. But in the end, Nick come o’ himself to Steve’s tavern and did penance on his knees for his part in the work, explained how the governor put him to it. All Strafford County was there to see.”

“My doom is in Strafford!” murmured the Englishman, gazing into the fire.

“How was that?” asked Dan. “Was you spouting poetry? Sounded like you were.”

“Not poetry,” said Hugh. “I was—”

The outer door swung open and three men entered the tavern—lean, grizzled men, in homespun and leather, with knit caps pulled over their ears and muskets, pointed downward. Dan knew them all by sight, seasoned militia officers from Great Bay and the towns behind it, Thomas Tash, John Demeritt, and Hercules Mooney. His heart lifted. Now he would find out what was going on. He stood up to welcome the older men.

Major Tash stepped to the fire, pulled off his leather mittens, and stretched his hands almost into the blaze. “Cold enough to frost your gizzard,” he complained. He looked at Dan. “Bet I can name your father. Andrew MacMurray of Londonderry. Go by your face, it must ha’ been he. Andy was

with me at Fort Number Four. A good soldier."

"Yes, I be Dan MacMurray, and Andy was my father," said Dan. "I heard o' Fort Number Four. He lived to get home, but he took his death there." His voice sounded flat and toneless in his own ears. In his heart he endured again the grief of the little boy who had helped to dig a grave in a frozen hillside fourteen years ago.

"Stir your stumps, Jake," cried Hercules Mooney. "Get out of that window and fetch me a slug of whiskey—I'm dryer than a smoked herring, and there's dry business afoot. We're going back upriver to raise the towns. The word's about that the governor has sent to the British in Boston for warships and armed men, so we're calling out our own. There'll be shooting in King Street any day."

Dan noticed that Major Tash was eyeing the young Englishman thoughtfully as if he had seen him before and wondered where it was. For his own part, he wished he could peer under the close felt cap that completely covered the stranger's hair. Was it yellow hair, he wondered, like the hair of the governor's serving man who had walked with Lydia March under the autumn moon?

Dan and the officers sat down and Jake Tilton brought them the drinks the newcomers had asked for. Unasked, he brought another pitcher of hard cider. The five men drank together.

"He says his name is Giffard. He be only traveling through here," offered Dan in grudging introduction.

The militia men eyed the stranger without interest, inclined their heads slightly. Major Tash grinned and lifted an eyebrow. Then Dan spoke again, his voice now tense and eager.

"Curiosity killed the cat," he said, "and puss had nine lives. I only got one. I been perishing to ask you, sirs. What's set Portsmouth men to take down their guns and turn out together? Is it true what Herc Mooney just said—that there're British on the way?"

"I was about to ask you, lad," said John Demeritt, clearing his throat and sipping his rum, "if the word had gone as far as Londonderry? If you come all the way down here to take part in this fracas?"

Dan shook his head. "I didn't come here to take part in no fracas. I come here to see a girl."

Major Tash laughed wryly, and Colonel Mooney slapped his leather-clad thigh.

"Keep the girl waiting, Danny. She'll love you all the better. We got nigh four hundred lads out there, but we can't tell how many redcoats are on the way, so one more among us won't come amiss. Nor would two more." He looked significantly at Hugh.

The Englishman bowed. “I am unarmed and not sure of your purpose,” he said, “but I will go with you, if you wish. After all, I have come here to observe whatever I can in this country.”

“I just come out o’ the wood,” cried Dan impatiently. “Since September I been away. And I want to know—”

“There’s plenty gone on since September, Dan,” answered John Demeritt. “But I can’t go back that far. I’ll begin with yesterday. You know about the carpenters and Johnny Wentworth?”

“All over hell and part o’ the Isles o’ Shoals, they know about the carpenters. And they know about Johnny Wentworth.”

“Being upcountry, maybe you heard, too, how the towns was all banding together now, choosing committees, and signing their names to the Association, like Congress said they was to do.”

“Yes, I heard that,” said Dan. “We’re to give aid to Boston and buy no British goods. That’s known from here to Canada. What happened yesterday?”

Major Tash continued the story. “Yesterday a man from Boston rode up to see Sam Cutts and the committee. His name was Paul Revere, he said, and he was a silversmith by trade, but he wasn’t thinking much of tankards and porringers yesterday, from what I hear. He’s been long known as a Son of Liberty, and he was thinking more o’ that. He said there had been an order by King in Council forbidding the sale of powder and arms to all his Majesty’s colonies in America. That by this time next year we wouldn’t have enough powder left to shoot a skunk—”

“And he thought there might be skunks who would need shooting?” asked Dan, beginning to see a shaft of light strike across the matter.

“Aye. I think likely he said that. I’d as soon as not go skunk hunting on Pickering Neck—round that house we hire for the governor.”

Dan looked at the Englishman. His face seemed flushed, but maybe that was only the reflection of the fire. Could he have been the lad who walked with Lydia? Dan thought not. That lad had more swagger about him, a gayer, more careless air.

Hercules Mooney tossed off the rest of his whiskey and stood up. “I’m going home to Madbury,” he announced, “but I’ll be back tomorrow, and more men with me. We’ll rout out Colonel Sullivan in Durham and Nat Folsom in Exeter, and give the King’s men a red-hot welcome. In case you want to know what else Revere said, Danny, he told us that the Rhode Island men had taken matters into their own hands and seized what public powder was stored within their bounds before the royal officers could lay hands on it. He thought maybe New Hampshire men would elect to do the same. Sam told him he thought we would. Told him we were just as fond of liberty as the men round Narragansett Bay.”

"Powder? Why that's mostly in the province magazine," said Dan slowly. Then he took one last swallow of cider and got to his feet. "So we're going down river to rob the Castle—is that it?"

"Aye," said John Demeritt. "There's more'n a hundred barrels of powder there, small arms and cannon, too. We'll try and bring back some bigger gundalows tomorrow that will be more fitting to move the cannon, if you boys only get the powder out today."

Dan fastened his leather jacket and picked up his musket. "Then if that's the play, what are we waiting for?" he asked. He grinned at Hugh. "Come on Yorkshire!"

Hugh rose dubiously, folding himself in his broadcloth cloak. "I will go, but you cannot expect me to take active part against the laws of the King. As you see, I am unarmed—"

Dan studied him for a moment, then, reluctantly, held out his own musket.

"Know how to use it?" he asked gruffly.

The Englishman's eyebrows lifted. "Yes. I have been often to Scotland for the grouse and the deer hunting, though I am used to a lighter arm. But what will you use—?"

"I have this," said Dan, pulling out a long pointed knife with a double-edged blade and a horn hilt that seemed to fit naturally, lovingly into his palm. "I'll have to do my fighting close in."

Hugh shrugged and accepted the musket. Carrying it awkwardly, he followed the Americans out of the tavern.

"Good luck," called Jake Tilton. "Bang 'em one for me, boys. I'll have up more kegs from the cellar whilst you're gone."

"Don't bother scouring my glass, Jake," called Dan MacMurray over his shoulder. "Leave it set where it is. I'll be back to claim it soon."

"Thought you came here to see a girl, Danny," teased Major Tash, his eyes twinkling. They stepped out into the gray air, the press of armed men growing ever thicker in King Street.

"Now, I dinna' know, Major," said Danny innocently, "wherever you could ha' got such a peculiar notion."

*

Outside the tavern they parted, the militia officers heading for the Paved Street that would lead them to where their boat was moored at the wharves below Church Hill. Dan worked his way through the crowd and Hugh kept close at his shoulder, round to the east side of the State House where men stood clustered thick about the town pump. Tom Pickering had come out on the balcony over the wide front door and was addressing them.

"No, by God," he cried, smiting his left palm with the clenched fist of the other hand, "I know they done it that way in Boston, but we're not a-going to do it that way here! Easy enough it was to steal the tea when they waited till after dark, and then got themselves up like red Indians! But we're going to march out bold and open and take this powder in daylight—like white men. Can you see me—me, Tom Pickering—with my face painted like a whore's, wrapped in a bed blanket like a stinking, skulking, hell-damned brave? Can you see me with the quills off a rooster's rump sticking out o' my hair?"

A cheer rose higher than North Church steeple, louder than the swaying bells or the drum that sounded in Daniel Street.

Dan grinned and spoke close to Hugh's ear. "Tom's got no love for Indians," he said. "Two of them come innocent-like to his house once, and his mother warned them off and told them to run. They did, and Tom come after. Found he couldn't catch them, they wearing moccasins and he boots, so he threw his axe at them. Passed straight between their heads it did, a clean shot but missed the pair. I always thought 'twas a pity he didn't get at least one. Indians killed his father, cut him up piece-meal, and that's the cause he hates them. But Tom's a young man still. He'll get him a copper-face some day."

"I say we're going after that powder in broad daylight," yelled Tom Pickering, "and we're going now!"

He put one hand on the rail of the low balcony and vaulted over, landing lightly on his feet in the midst of the crowd below, where men moved swiftly back to give him passage through. He strode off toward the waterfront, and after him poured a living, roaring river of men.

Dan forgot all about the young Englishman, but at the waterside he suddenly realized he had not lost the fellow. After all, he had never meant to, for when the fight was over he wanted his musket back. There he stood, amidst the shouts and confusion as the crews poled out the wallowing, haphazard fleet of gundalows, the water slapping the long sweeps and square bottoms. With his dark cloak and unhappy face he looked like a minister ready to threaten hellfire and spout gospel over a casket.

Dan reached out and took back his gun. "You dinna' have to go, Yorkshire," he said. "I can see your heart's not in it. Get to the tavern and finish the cider."

"Two more here!" snapped Captain Langdon, a grim look on his handsome face as he stood at the edge of the wharf directing the embarkment, and waved his hand at a last gundalow sunk low in the water, already full of men. "This will hold two more!"

"I—I must go! I am commissioned to observe—" muttered the Englishman.

Dan heard the words but for the moment they were lost on him, as the men

behind them surged forward and the men in the gundalow gave them a hand, and together they were tumbled rudely overside. Thrashing about, trying to make a place for himself and his musket, he felt the icy wind that swept down the river, and on his face the sting of snowflakes beginning to fall. A thick mist hid the gray Kittery shore and the black ledges of the river islands as the gundalows swept past them, borne swiftly downward on the ebb of a slate-gray swirling tide, their passengers huddled together, swearing a little, shivering, and trying to keep their guns and powder dry.

It was a black, salt-caked craft, smelling of dead lobsters, even there in the clean cold, and it wallowed crazily as the pull of the tide drew it down the cove toward mid-stream. Boats moved ahead of them on the river, but the south end of Portsmouth, as it slipped rapidly behind, lay deserted and still. No voices rang from the usually busy rope walk, and no workmen labored in Titus Salter's yard, no living thing was there, save a bluejay hovering in a salt-stunted apple tree. A woman in a scarlet dress came out of the Pickering house, and stood on the doorstone, shading her eyes, and looking seaward. Up the slope of the land toward Portsmouth, a dog howled persistently, and a man in a dark cloak moved out of the lane that led to the water in front of dead Thomas Wentworth's mansion house behind the linden trees.

On his left Dan recognized a rosy-faced boy from Daniel Rindge's counting-house, whose beard was nothing yet but a golden down. On his right crouched an iron-muscled man with a bald head, Old Joe, who helped unload poultry and vegetables from the farm boats at the wharf by the Spring Market. Dan bent toward him.

"Joe," he said, "this looks too easy to me, as it's come about. Dinna' the governor do aught to stand in our way?"

"Did all he could," growled Joe. "Called out the militia—but they wouldn't come. Called for the King's revenue men—but they went and hid." He spat over the gunwale into the turbulent water. "They say he's got redcoats on the way from Boston."

Dan suddenly remembered the English traveler who had followed him down from the Marquis of Rockingham, the traveler who had said, "I am commissioned to observe—" A spy, he thought! Have I been drinking with a hell-got British spy? Drinking with him, and never knew? He gazed quickly round him.

He saw Yorkshire wedged in the rear of the gundalow between a couple of stevedores from Wentworth's Wharf and a heap of axes and crowbars tossed down all askew. The man caught his eye and smiled wanly. Dan smiled back. Better be smart and not give it out, what he suspicioned of. But when they went ashore, he'd stick close to this lad, and if he tried any tricks, he'd wish his cake was dough before Dan MacMurray got through with him.

They swarmed ashore at New Castle and up through the crooked streets of the fishing village, through gardens of snowy rosebushes and dry bleached cornstalks that seemed to shiver humanly in the bitter wind; over the frozen yellow grass in the dooryards, each separate blade coated with a crystal sheath. Faces of women and children pressed against the square-paned cottage windows to watch them pass, and here, as in Portsmouth, the church bells were ringing. New Castle men turned out to join them, and a score or more of others had gotten the word and come in from Rye. The drum, ferried all the way from Daniel Street, began to sound now, and the throng moved forward in marching time.

Dan kept close to Yorkshire, making sure that he himself was the one who hung back and followed at the shoulder, ready to club his musket or fling it by and strike with his hunting knife. But the young man in the dark cloak trudged ahead, steadily as the others, turning neither aside nor back. Once as they neared the western wall of the Castle, they stopped to load and prime their muskets, and the Englishman spoke.

"Have you ever been in battle, Dan MacMurray?"

"I been shot at by Indians in the woods sometimes," answered Dan calmly. "But in battle—no."

"I have been thinking as we marched along. Asking myself if I am afraid. Have such thoughts occurred to you?"

Dan looked at him curiously. "Listen, Yorkshire," he said, "we jested there at Jake Tilton's when we asked you to come. But I'm honest wi' you now, and I tell you, you make too much o' the matter. There's no danger here."

"No danger?" asked Hugh, "in a press of armed men?"

Dan shook his head and lifted his hand to flick the snow from his eyelashes. He could see the outlines of the fort ahead, and the governor's lighthouse rising out of the ledge beyond. All seemed quiet and half dark in the gray winter afternoon.

"Armed men, yes. But you notice the guns be all pointed one way. There canna' be above five men in the Castle. There's near a hundred times that many out here. They may fire off their cannon once or twice. But then we go over the wall—take 'em, tie 'em up, lug off the powder, and there's an end."

"Aye, but you admit they will fire the cannon in our faces—at least once. Does the thought not come to you that you might be in the way of that single blast?"

"No," said Dan almost blithely, "the thought never come to me at all."

"I was thinking as we came down the river, Dan," went on the low, controlled voice of the man beside him, "that this is probably the first time in America that a province has sent its army out in defiance, to take a fortress held in the name of the King. Have you thought what it can mean to your

country and to mine—to all the countries of the world—when this day's work in New Hampshire is made known?"

"Why likely I'll think about it when I get home, Yorkshire," muttered Dan. "But right now I got other work to do."

They heard a shouting up ahead, a muffled explosion, and then a rattle of muskets going off. A hundred spurts of fire leaped out toward the rambling wall.

"That sounds like they let off a four-pounder," said Dan coolly. "Hark! There goes another! Then, that's three! Come on! I want to move up now. Might as well ha' stayed in Portsmouth as to lag around here!"

The whole field of men broke and ran forward all around them, scrambling over the low walls, half turf, half crumbled line, but Dan MacMurray, prodding Hugh with his musket now and then, ran faster than most, and was soon in the front ranks as they came to a stop before the cluster of squat wooden houses in the walled yard. One house had the King's colors flying over it, and Captain Cochran standing bold as a bantam cock in its front door.

"Ye come on at your own peril, sirs!" he cried, quite foolishly, it seemed to Dan. The attacking party had passed the walls and the gun mounts, and what possible peril could await four hundred men at the hands of five? Unless somewhere there lurked the expected troops from Boston—He looked about uneasily.

Big Tom Pickering loomed through the falling snow and taunted, "We come to take a glass of wine with you, captain!"

The captain looked him straight in the eye and answered coldly. "I am not serving wine this afternoon. Take your rabble back to the stews in Portsmouth."

Tom Pickering laughed and strode forward, half a dozen men following at his heels.

Dan hesitated, uncertain where he could be the most useful, unwilling to take his eyes from the Englishman, half-disappointed that the affair had gone off so tamely. Jack Langdon stood over a group of men who had broken open the long wooden magazine with axes and crowbars and were rolling the powder barrels out, lining them up in the Castle yard, mirey with snow and sand. Pierse Long directed a pair of stalwarts who were hauling the King's colors down. Shouts arose from the dark water flooding below.

Dan lifted his head and his muscles tensed. He moved in that direction. Could it be the King's troops come to a landing? No, over from the Castle wharf rushed a score of Portsmouth lads. Likely they had brought up the gundalows closer along the waterside. Yes, that was it. He watched them start to roll the powder barrels away. He turned back to Tom Pickering and Captain Cochran.

They still stood at the door of the captain's house, and though Dan was too far away now to hear what they said, he could see them plain. As they spoke together for a moment, the massively built patriot loomed over the proud little Tory. Then the captain slowly unbuckled his sword and held it out. Pickering looked down, and with a magnanimous gesture waved the sword away.

"He is right," said Hugh Giffard approvingly. "It is tradition—when a man loses in combat, he may keep his side arms. It is the proper courtesy."

"Maybe," growled Dan, "but myself I wouldna' trust—I'd unarm the bastard. See there!"

As Pickering turned his back in order to join the men who were hauling the colors down, the vanquished commander took one look at the weapon in his hand and then launched out at his retreating enemy. Perhaps some small sound, some disturbance in the air had warned Pickering. In any case, he whirled in time to raise his left arm and deflect the blow. With his right fist he drove forward, his knuckles crashing on Cochran's jaw. The captain went down like a felled sapling, and in a moment Pierse Long and his men were binding his feet and wrists.

Dan MacMurray, the Londonderry farm lad, spoke softly to the knight's son from the Yorkshire wolds. "When you let a gentleman keep his side arms, you better make sure he is a gentleman," he said.

The Englishman stared back somberly. "It may be," he said, "that in America you have a different code for gentlemen.

"In America," answered Dan, "we got no gentlemen at all."

Dan looked around him. He'd come out here spoiling for a fight, and no fight had come to pass. The troops from Boston hadn't shown up, and there was nothing to do but roll the powder barrels into the gundalows and ferry them upriver. Seemed to be enough hands to do that, and the idea didn't appeal to him. He liked sound turf, not the treacherous heave of water under his feet. He'd join them again later, maybe, but right now he'd go aboard, and ask them to let him off at Portsmouth, and then—But first, there was one more thing. He cleared his throat.

"You said," he reminded his companion who still stood, his arms folded, watching the invaders search every nook of the Castle's enclosure for arms they could carry away, "you said you was 'commissioned to observe.' What d'you mean by that? Who commissioned you?"

Hugh Giffard bit his lip and looked down at the dark brown mire in the walled yard.

"There is surely no harm to tell you now, if there ever was, but I might have been forbidden and left on the shore. His Excellency, Governor John Wentworth, commissioned me. And by the way, in him your country has produced at least one gentleman. He ordered me to join you if I could, to take

note of all that transpired, and report back to him how things went. He has sent for no troops, in spite of your hysterical rumors. Warships to guard the harbor and enforce order—but no armed men."

"Ha," said Dan. "To know so much, you must be close to him, 'twould seem."

"I am his aide," confessed Hugh Giffard, lifting his eyes and looking straight ahead of him.

"So? Queer none of our boys recognized you and drove you back. But we was crowded thick, and busy, or likely they thought it wouldna' matter—a one like you." He stepped suddenly forward.

"I been wanting to do this all day," he said tensely. "I guess I'll do it now." He reached out and tore the felt cap from Hugh's head. The rising moon had struggled through the clouds, and a shaft of light fell across the yellow hair.

"Ha!" said Dan again. Then he stood back grinning and leaning on his musket.

Bewildered, Hugh reached down to pick up his fallen headgear and wipe the mud from it. "Your pardon, sir," he murmured. "I do not understand."

Dan's grin widened. "Could be, that's just as well. But the full sight o' you puts me in mind o' something I'd forgotten. When I came here, it was to see a girl." He turned and strode away, lightly swinging his musket, and climbed over the turf wall; vanished into the twilight toward the streets of New Castle village, and beyond them the lights of Portsmouth.

9.
THIS NIGHT'S WORK

In another twilight, some forty-eight hours later, Hugh Giffard made his way over the hard-packed snow in Dock Lane. The cold moon nearing its full shone brightly on the weathered cottages and black old wharves heaped with crates and barrels, on the smoking chimneys, and steeples, and lighted mansions of the town. Hugh put up his head and drew a deep breath. A child cried behind a gable, and a dog ambled down the street, a raw fragment of a deer carcass in his mouth. The young man smiled as he recognized the governor's old hound, Bugler. It was good, he thought, to be back in Portsmouth, after two days of aimless loitering within the walls of the Castle, sleeping in a fireless wooden hut, and eating the Indian bread and salt meat the men had grudgingly offered him. Not that he had been their prisoner exactly, but no boat seemed to have room enough to carry him away, and when he attempted to slip over the wall into the village, a red-faced giant in leather breeches and a deerskin shirt motioned him back with a musket barrel. Captain Cochran and his soldiers had been released, but not the governor's aide. Someone had recognized him, perhaps; perhaps Dan MacMurray had given the word. In any case, the fort's new garrison had kept him from returning to John Wentworth's house until tonight. As he thought of the governor his steps slowed, for he did not relish the tale he would have to tell him.

In Pleasant Street, in front of the hired mansion, he stopped a moment and gazed up at the broad windows all alight. His glance went swiftly to the eastern chamber on the second floor. As he watched, the shadow stirred behind the clear yellow panes, and a figure stepped from the chamber doorway. He saw her plainly through the hall window then, Lydia March, carrying a candle, as she moved across from her own room to the room of Frances Wentworth. It was a tall bright candle in a massive holder and it threw a circle of light upward and all about her clear-cut features and shining coppery hair, reminding him of the nimbus round the heads of saintly women in paintings, or stained-glass virgins gazing forever down on cathedral worshippers. But Lydia was not a virgin and not saintly. Her beauty had the touch of earth about it, the strength of New Hampshire crags and the fire of New Hampshire autumn. Being of earth, it would not endure, except for a brief season, no more than Lydia herself. But he felt in his heart that he wanted her for the whole of that brief season, that he would never again be satisfied with the soft swell of

English meadows, the pale tints of an English spring. And with the realization of how much he wanted her, came a sense of peace and security, a confidence of ultimate fulfillment such as he had never known in his life. He felt glad, too, that this was no sudden decision with him, no whim born of his passionate need in this single evening. He had been growing toward it for a long time—ever since their coach ride over the marshes in the early autumn rain.

He stood there, silent in the dark street, watching her as she crossed the wide hall and vanished into the chamber occupied by the governor's lady. In that room the hangings were drawn, but a rosy glow seeped around their edges, shone through where the folds of velvet did not quite meet. How like Frances herself, he thought, not the clear profile held up white and golden in the candlelight, but the mysterious inner gleam, moonstone and opal, shining forth, promising much, giving—well, he had never found out what Frances Wentworth had to give. Thank God, he never had. He shuddered when he thought of his escape, less escape from her than from the folly and loneliness of his own young manhood. He ran up the steps and flung open the heavy door.

John Wentworth must have heard him enter, for he strode suddenly out of the library. He looked ten years older than he had the day before yesterday. Lines of repressed and helpless anger marred his handsome face, and he moved with an unnatural stiffness in place of his usual easy carriage. But his eyes lighted as Hugh went forward. He put out his hand.

"God's sake, lad," he cried, "I was beginning to think the knaves had killed you. Were you ill-treated? Have you had food and a bed?"

Hugh laughed wryly. "I have—such as they were," he replied. "But I have had naught to drink save a pitcher of hard cider two days ago. I can taste the filthy stuff yet."

A fleeting smile crossed the governor's face. "No man can properly love hard cider," he said, "who was not reared in this country. I lost the taste for it while I lived in England, but it used to slip down my throat easily enough when I was a young man. Come, sir. There's madeira in the library. Perhaps if we put our heads together, we can lay bare the whole of this monstrous business that is going on."

In armchairs drawn to the tiled fireplace they sat down together, pipes and glasses on the tea table beside them.

"Take off your wet boots, lad, and tell me what happened," said John Wentworth settling back on the tapestry cushions, his face in the shadow, his long legs stretched in front of him.

Hugh bent down to loosen the sodden leather fastenings, kicked the boots off, straightened up, and spoke.

"How much of it have you heard, sir? I would not tell you an old story—

particularly such a wretched one."

"Captain Cochran came here yesterday, as soon as they released him. He told me how he was over-powered, felled, and bound."

"Did he tell you how he smote Tom Pickering in the back?" Hugh wanted to say, but thought better of it and remained silent.

"He told me how they made off with the powder," the governor went on. "He remained in the Castle that night, but the next morning they allowed him and his men to come upriver. By that time, the town was overrun. Colonel Sullivan of Durham—our erstwhile Congressman—had rounded up every man-jack from the Great Bay country and led them into Market Square. A pretty press around the State House they made, believe me. The very air reaked of hog slaying and cattle dung. Once I heard myself called a bastard, but that was the mildest thing—" he broke off, grinned mirthlessly, and continued. "Sullivan and his committee talked with me. I advised them to return the powder and disperse. I spoke in discredit of this meddlesome Boston man, this Revere, who had aroused them. Tried to give reassurance that they had no need to steal fodder for their wretched muskets, that the King would surely allow it to be issued to them for any legitimate need. When we parted, I thought we were in agreement. I expected they would restore what they took and make the disorders to cease. But no! It is the weak and ignorant who rule in these times, and the men with no integrity of spirit. They caroused awhile in the taverns and then marched to the waterside. What happened then, I do not know, and I cannot find out."

"I can tell you what happened then," said Hugh, sipping his madeira and staring into the fireplace, seeing a woman's face in the tawny flames when he should have been seeing armed men and boats moving swiftly through the night. "They came down the river with flatboats and gundalows, and began to strip the Castle—sixteen cannon, sixty muskets, what else they could carry away. Colonel Folsom from Exeter led out a new group this morning. He and his men have been standing guard where the plunder is heaped in a nearby field. I think they mean to float it far inland on tonight's tide. The powder is said to be already there."

The governor flung out his hands in a helpless gesture. "And there is nothing I can do to prevent them," he muttered. "No one will rally to my commands at all. No one will so much as listen to me. I meet open defiance on every side. Everyone talks of the carpenters, and says I am a traitor to the province. My own uncle, my own councilor, Hunking Wentworth, calls my conduct cruel and unmanly, and the committee raised against me enjoys the hospitality of his house. True, he is a weak superannuated old squire, and already forgiven. But there are others. Dr. Cutter avoids me, but with sadness, I think, that this issue should be a rock to split our friendship apart. Woodbury

Langdon has had British dealings himself that would make him ill-liked if they were known, but he, too, turns on me—the pot who cries black to the kettle. His wife, Sally Sherburne, was my wife's dearest friend—though they have drawn somewhat apart lately. That was why Frances sent to bring Lydia here —"

Hugh stirred restlessly at the mention of the name.

"And Woodbury now, I think, instigates much of the town's treasonous behavior. Even my own father comes here with a worried look to take a glass of wine and say, 'Son, it was an unlucky thing for you to do.' "

He leaped to his feet and began to pace the thick turkey carpet.

" 'Fore God," he cried, his tone rising, angry and incredulous, "can't they see? Can't the people see there are great evils loosed upon this country? That its own members rise up in rebellion and threaten to destroy it? Hundreds of conscienceless men conspire against them now, all up and down our coast from the Kennebec to Georgia. And they work themselves into an apoplexy about fifteen wretched carpenters!"

Hugh tried vainly to interrupt him with soothing words, but he raged on.

"Can't they see that corruption spreads amongst them every day from the plague spot that festers and stinks in Boston? And they cry out against their neighbors who do nothing worse than shingle a roof or hammer up a scaffolding! It would have been no crime had these honest workmen stayed to build barracks for General Gage. It was no crime for me to set them about the business. It was my executive duty as a servant of the King. But I am called an enemy to the community! The enemy is that pothouse bastard, Sam Adams, and his Sons of the bitch goddess, Liberty! They ought to be hanged, cut down while still alive, drawn, quartered, and—"

"Oh Johnny," called a gay voice with a lilt in it, "Fanny wants you to come upstairs to say good night to her. She thinks she will fall early asleep."

Hugh turned and faced his sister as she stood in the doorway, a slight figure in a full-skirted dress of dull blue. But she had a different look to her than she had ever had before, and through no fault of her own. The difference lay in him, the beholder. The last time he saw her, he had seen a delicate young girl he must shelter and care for. Tonight he saw her as an embodiment of the family, her family and his, the Giffards of Gloucester and the Crekes of Bridlington. All the long lines of stately men and women, back to Walter, Lord of Longueville, who came ashore with Duke William at Pevensey. There was no one else of his blood on this side of the heaving leagues of ocean, no father nor brother—no lady mother even—to whom he must say, "I am resolved to offer our name to an American woman. Will you support me in what I mean to do."

John Wentworth got quickly to his feet. "I shall be gone briefly," he said.

“Frances is heavy and wretched—within six weeks of her time. Later we will go to the wharves and see whether they are bringing off their cannon. I am relieved to have you back, Hugh, but in one way it is an ill omen that they let you go free. It means they are certain I cannot move against them, even though I am informed of their plans and I cannot—as yet. But believe me, I will! I bide my time only till the warships arrive from Boston. We shall see who governs this province then!” He strode into the hall, and they heard his quick step on the stair treads as he hastened up to his wife.

“I am so glad you have come home safe, Hugh,” said Dorothy eagerly. “Though I was not really worried for your sake. I have a confidence, you know, that matters will always turn out aright.”

He smiled at her. “I know you have, Dorothy,” he answered, “and I trust that for you they always will.” He stood up. “John asked me if I were hungry,” he went on, “and I denied it. But that was two wine-glasses back. The drink has sharpened my appetite. Come into the kitchen and forage for me, since you are more at home there than I. Besides, I wish to speak privately with you.”

Brother and sister tiptoed into the shadowy kitchen, clean and empty, deserted by the maids until the sunrise hour before breakfast time. Dorothy found a candle quickly, lit it, and opened the cupboard door, letting her glance range over the shelves inside. Hugh sat down at the trestle table, pushed back a bowl of russet apples and a deep pan of sliced vegetables put to soak in some sort of meat broth. He smelled the mingled fragrances from dried herbs hung on the rafters over his head; marjoram, mint, rosemary; the tangy sage that made him think of poultry stuffing, the clean aroma of bay. He turned half around.

“Dorothy,” he asked with the easy familiarity of close kinship and a shared childhood, having plundered the kitchen many times with her at home, “is there a bit of fowl there—a chicken leg—or a wing?”

She looked at him over her shoulder, wrinkling her white forehead. “You had rather have that,” she asked, “than cold roast venison or ham?”

“Yes, I believe so.”

She peered once more into the cupboard. “Ah, here is the carcass of the wild goose we dined on at noontime. But you will have to lift it down; the platter is too heavy for me.”

Seated together at the table, they were soon flaking the dark rich meat free from the bones and nibbling away.

“Dolly,” said Hugh, “I wonder what you will say to the thing I have in mind?”

Watching her keenly, it seemed to him that a look resembling fright went over her face. She dropped her silver fork on the table.

“What is it Hugh?” she gasped. “What do you have to say to me?”

"Why nothing that should cause you to start so," he answered. "What I have to say might cause you to be angry, but certainly not to be afraid."

She clenched her hands on the table and smiled resolutely at him. "You are my brother, and nothing you have to say can make me either afraid or angry. But what is it, Hugh? Do not keep me waiting. Tell me plain."

"Dorothy," he said, "have you ever thought that we may perhaps live all our lives in America? I have been struggling for some time with the idea. I doubt that I shall ever be able to make a place for myself at home, once having been away. After these troubled times are over, and the governor's power once more secure, I shall expect to undertake more advantageous commissions. Perhaps I shall yet become a Portsmouth merchant, for that seems to be the path to riches and respect in this country. It is not the way of life we were brought up in, but I believe I can reconcile myself to it in want of a better way. Could you resign yourself to make this province your home?"

She was looking steadily at him now. Her hands were still clenched, but lay on the clean boards very still.

"I have thought—Hugh—that perhaps for me it might come to that. I never thought but what you would someday go back to England again."

Surprise turned him from his purpose for the moment. "Why should you think of that?" he demanded. "Why should you stay here, and not I?"

She laughed, a thin nervous laugh with no mirth in it. "Why I thought—you know, Hugh, women marry. And I am now come to an age for it. I might marry an American, I might thus become an American myself."

He stared at her, overwhelmed with the realization of his own inconsistency. He had purged his mind, he thought, of every prejudice and obstacle. He had resolved to marry an American woman and live in her country. Never had he once thought of taking Lydia home to Yorkshire—it would have been as incongruous as to plant a formal garden with tall sweet stalks of Indian corn. Besides, he had no heritage there with which to maintain a wife. But for his sister to marry an American man—that was a different thing.

He played with the wishbone of the plump young bird that had once soared up so confidently from the marshes round Great Bay.

"Have you chosen—fixed your mind on—any particular American?"

Dorothy began to play with the silver fork, watched her own fingers as they twisted it.

"I have been here scarcely a twelfth month, Hugh, and met with few men. But once Frances is well again, we shall go more into society, she says—perhaps sooner than that. Madame Michael Wentworth has invited us to a great ball at Little Harbor at Epiphany. It is likely I shall meet someone to take my fancy, now that I am grown. But perhaps I shall not. Girls are always dreaming

so."

He felt the unreasoning anger within him begin to cool and ebb away. For a moment he had been struck with the sudden fear that Dorothy might have more to confess than he had, but now it seemed only the usual maiden hopes she had been expressing. Relentlessly he drove himself once more to the purpose he had in mind.

"I do not think to become an American, Dorothy," he said. "Though I should live here forever, I could never be that. But I am thinking soon to take an American wife."

He made the announcement truculently. Now he sat back, waiting for her to fly in the face of the idea.

Instead she sat and stared across the table, across the pan of sliced vegetables and the heap of goose bones on the platter, stared at the chimney behind his head. Nor did she meet his eyes when she finally spoke.

"I know, Hugh," she said. "You are thinking to marry Lydia. And I am afraid that is a thing you cannot do."

"How did you know it was Lydia?" he cried hotly, dismayed that she already knew what it should have been his privilege to reveal.

"How could I help but know, Hugh? You so often seek her company. Your eyes light when you see her, and when you speak to her, it is with a different voice. I have watched it grow on you, and I have turned more and more afraid."

"Afraid of what?" he demanded. "Why do you say that I cannot marry her? Some vow she made to her first husband, perhaps? Surely she courts with no other man!"

Dorothy no longer played with the tableware. Instead she had taken a filmy handkerchief from her bosom and was picking at the lace work sewn around it.

"I should not betray her confidence, Hugh, but you are my brother, and I cannot allow you to hope where it is a vain and foolish thing. I will not tell you his name or aught about him. But I will tell you there is such a man, and Lydia cares for him deeply. More than she will ever care for you."

"You are nothing but a child," he cried, his voice rough with shock and disappointment. "What do you know of the way men and women care?"

He lifted his head suddenly and saw John Wentworth in the kitchen doorway. Awkwardly he got to his feet. He wondered how long the governor had been listening, how much he had overheard.

"I'm sorry, sir" he said, crushing back his own turbulent emotions. "I found I was hungry after all, and I put my sister to robbing your larder for me. Do you wish to go down to the river now?"

"Yes," said the governor. "I shall fetch my cloak and be with you. Yours, I believe is in the library." He disappeared from the doorway.

For a moment Hugh turned back to his sister. Her lips trembled, and tears ran over the lids of her soft gray eyes and caught in her long lashes.

"Oh Hugh, I am sorry," she cried. "Sorry I said to you what I did about Lyddy, and perhaps I am wrong. He was here two nights ago—the night the men stole the powder and he quarreled with her. They quarreled fiercely, as they often do, for they are both so proud—and I have thought—so deeply in love with each other. But since this last visit, Lyddy cries much when she is alone and says she will never see him again, since he continues unfaithful to her, and that after Frances' child is born, she will go away. I have not believed her, for I have heard her say the same thing a dozen times before. But she may mean it now. If you wish to advance yourself with her, perhaps this is a fortunate time."

Looking into the troubled young face, he realized how much it had cost her to betray her friend, as she surely felt that she had done.

"Thank you, sister," he said simply. "I am grateful to you for confiding in me. Lydia shall never know of it, nor suffer in any way for this night's work between us. But," and he smiled at her, feeling warmth and self-confidence flooding back into his own heart, "pray for me that it may be indeed, as you have said—a fortunate time."

He strode after the governor.

*

Half an hour later he stood with John Wentworth in the graveyard round Queen's Chapel, on the hill where old Strawberry Bank used to be, watching the winter moonlight on the snarling, bubbling, cross-grained currents of the Piscataqua far below. The wooden steeple loomed above them, and the old graves swelled and rose in hummocks all around; the old stone tombs of the parishioners, the richer families of Portsmouth, crouched forever against the rough black ledges of Church Hill.

"Here a Wentworth, there an Atkinson, a Sherburne, or a Jaffrey," mused the governor grimly, his cloak whipping about him in the sharp wind. "Living Portsmouth and dead Portsmouth—the same race of folk are there."

"May it ever be so," murmured Hugh piously, thinking in his heart that the way things were going it seemed likely that new times might bring riches and power and a place in Portsmouth to new men, thinking for the first time, treasonably perhaps, that he himself might be among them. He wondered, anger rising in his blood at the thought, if Lydia's lover—and the man might well be her lover in the fullest sense—was a Wentworth, a Sherburne, or a Jaffrey.

"I came up here," said the governor stamping his feet on the frozen turf,

blown clean of snow, "because I thought this hill would make a good vantage point, since the river before it is uncluttered with islands as further downstream. We worship here when we worship—in the Episcopalian way—but we have had no regular services since Reverend Arthur Brown died more than a year ago. I'd a deep affection for old parson. He married Frances and me."

"I have heard," said Hugh, glancing up at the round-arched windows of the chapel, dark on this western side away from the moon, "that it was indeed a fine wedding."

"You have heard, too, no doubt, that her husband was buried from here—scarce a fortnight before?"

"Yes, I have heard that, too."

"Have you ever loved a woman, lad? Loved her in a fleshly way, that is? No!"—for Hugh had drawn a quick breath—"No, do not answer me! I have no right to ask you that. I do not want to know of the matter, really. It is only that—so many friends fall away from me now, that I treasure so much more the few that are left, of which you are one. I would have you understand the precipitance of that wedding. After all, we had waited two years for an ailing man to die. Many have said we did not wait, but I swear to you—"

"I can understand it, sir," muttered Hugh remembering his own passion for the governor's lady, knowing well what he would have done if she had made her soft provocative beauty available to him, with John Wentworth two-weeks dead. "There is no need to swear! But I thought I heard oars! Is that a lantern moving on the river?"

" 'Fore God, it is, lad! Here they come!" cried the governor. "They'll pay for this night's work when the frigates arrive from Boston tomorrow."

After all, it was only a little fleet, a handful of scows and flatboats guided with sweeps and long poles through the moonlight darkness, borne upstream on the inflooding tide. But there was a portentousness about it, Hugh thought, and a greatness of meaning he could hardly grasp at. He stood there silent, hearing the cries of the boatmen, the rush of wind through the garden trees back of Bow Street. He stole a look now and then at the governor's brooding face. This little group of salt-creek farmers and village tradesmen, making their way up the black river between the snowy banks, moved in open defiance of English law and custom that England should rule America in all things and forever, set up when Queen Elizabeth was scarce five years dead, and followed into all time since then. He did not see how this defiance, small as it was now, could help but come to a mighty thing. They had robbed His Majesty's fort, and carried off His Majesty's cannon, while His Majesty's governor stood by and watched, as powerless to move against them as one of the gravestones standing beside him on Church Hill!

Hugh felt a shudder go through him that was not caused by the chill of the winter night. Was it some inner foreboding that had driven the governor to take up his vigil in this somber place already consecrated to death?

But if it was, the man himself seemed unconscious of it, nor did he share Hugh's apprehensions in the matter.

As the scows moved out of the swath of moonlight and vanished upstream in the direction of secret coves and unknown marshes, John Wentworth turned his back on them. Nor did he pay any more attention to the shouts of ribald triumph from the wharves along the waterfront where other Portsmouth men had been watching the passage, too.

"Hardly worth turning out for, was it, lad?" His voice sounded lighter, and the old grace had come back to his shoulders, the old jaunty lift to his head. "I should beg your pardon, for I thought they would make a better show. Well, the least I can do is to stand you a drink at Stoodley's on the way home."

10.
WHITE EPIPHANY

"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the East saying, where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and are come to worship Him."

Dorothy Giffard sat in the governor's pew in Queen's Chapel, her hands clasped loosely in the lap of her green silk dress, and her ears intent on the voice of the young curate from Boston as he celebrated the feast of the three kings, the cold white sparkling night of the Epiphany. Tall wax candles burned at the altar and in heavy sconces about the small wooden church shining on its rich appointments. The chapel was like a jewel box, Dorothy thought, all sturdy plainness without, and glowing splendors within: the silver christening basins and chalice; the font of brownish-yellow veined marble; and the red plush curtains festooned about the dais where His Excellency's party sat, under a heavy wooden canopy emblazoned with the royal lion and unicorn.

The stately pews in the body of the church overflowed with richness and color, too; men in huge snowy wigs, their scarlet and blue and green coats trimmed with gold lace and delicate ruffles, gold-headed canes in their hands and gold-buckled shoes on their sturdy feet. And in this color and richness their wives outdid them. Blond lace and black jeweled net, knots of cherry-colored ribbons, and wide skirts spread out like rows of fantastic garden flowers—marigold brocade, carnation velvet, primrose sarcenet, and forget-me-not taffeta.

Queen's Chapel was not for the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. Let such folk worship, as they preferred, homely Puritan fashion, in the North Church or the South. Queen's Chapel, Dorothy remembered Lydia's telling her, had been always for the King's servants and their friends, those with wit and wisdom and learning and fine coats to their backs, too fine, some thought, for honest wear. She herself, she said, had never attended there till she went to serve Frances, but later, in Newburyport, she had been baptized an Anglican on her marriage to a man who worshipped in that way. Dorothy looked at Lydia now, her somewhat severe beauty softened by a low-cut gown of smoky-colored gauze, but Lydia's eyes were fixed on the altar, and their glances did not meet.

The curate's piously modulated voice continued to recount the old story of

how the three kings went down to Bethlehem to worship a virgin's Son.

Dorothy felt her heart quicken with the ancient miracle, and her senses revolt from the opulent trappings of the scene about her. She lifted her eyes and gazed through the round-arched window on the south side of the chapel, directly opposite the governor's pew. Through the small panes she could see only a panel of wide clean blackness pricked with stars. If living souls could leave their bodies, she thought, she would choose for her soul to rise and go out and merge with that soft clean blackness now; she felt sure that she would find peace rather than chaos in taking such holy communion with the spirits of old night.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshipped Him."

Suddenly she felt herself groping through the darkness toward that other young girl, no older or wiser than she, who sat in a stable with a child in her arms nearly eighteen hundred years ago.

No man will ever know how Mary felt, she thought. No matter how wise and reverend a man may be, he will never know that. And women—if they knew something of it once, as they marry men and bear men's children—they forget. But any young girl—if her spirit kneels on a sacred night like this one, and if she is virgin as Mary was, and opens her heart to let the knowledge come in—I think it might be allowed to her to know a part. I wonder how she felt when the Angel first came down and said, "Blessed art thou among women . . . behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bear a son." She was exalted, surely; dissolved out of herself, to be a part of the wind and sky and stars, and the whole of time. No more Anne's daughter or Joseph's wife, but all freshly created by God, herself a newborn thing. But since I am flesh, if it happened to me, I should be afraid. I think she was afraid, too.

She felt Lydia's quick tug at her gown and scrambled grudgingly to her feet to recite the Apostles' Creed with the rest of the congregation.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost . . . the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

She knelt as the others knelt, but she did not join in the prayer, wishing her spirit could be loosed again as it had been a few moments before; free to grope toward holy Mary's, or at least to wander over the white hills in the starry dark. Then the service was ended, and all through the chapel the worshippers were getting to their feet and donning their cloaks, drifting toward the outer doorways in little groups that stopped to chat with one another.

Frances Wentworth rose with determined grace from the carved mahogany chair she had been sitting on and belched delicately into a lace handkerchief. She lifted her eyes to those of her husband who stood tall beside her, and half-turned toward him as he held out her mantle banded with silvery fur. In her last

month now, she wore a gown of deep purple velvet, hung straight from a white lace yoke and revealing no outline of her body. Her face, still fresh and fair, showed an occasional reddened vein upon it, and her eyes seemed to be set further forward in their sockets than formerly. In spite of these tiny blemishes and a discontented droop to her mouth, she looked well. Hugh, Dorothy noticed, had already given his arm to Lydia.

"Are you certain, Frances," the governor was asking, "that you feel able to attend the dancing at Little Harbor? It is some two miles off and a cold night." Frances nestled her pointed chin into her fur collar and uttered a small petulant sound. Then she answered with some vehemence.

"I shall start for there, even if I fall in labor by the new cemetery. It would serve Mrs. Pat right to have me deliver on her best brocade sofa."

John Wentworth laughed shortly. "I think it would discomfort you more than it would Patty," he answered. "Well, if you insist, we had better be going."

Dorothy followed the others out of the church and into Chapel Street where coaches and liveried servants waited for Portsmouth's aristocracy, the men whose warehouses overflowed with "W. I. Goods"—West Indian sugar, molasses, and rum. As Henry and Rafe helped the ladies into the dark heavy vehicle with the governor's crest painted on its side, she noticed that the footman wore his French horn slung from its leather strap.

"Are you going to make music for us tonight, Henry?" she asked.

"Aye, Miss," and he nodded proudly. "Colonel Michael himself come by this morning and commanded me."

Frances Wentworth paused in the act of climbing into the coach and turned around. "Henry, you do not take commands from Colonel Michael Wentworth. You will not play for his slattern's pleasure. I forbid it."

Her husband intervened from where he stood with Hugh, close by, the men ready to mount their horses.

"Fie, Frances!" he said glibly. "Of course Henry will play." He smiled reassuringly into the stricken face of the footman. "You will be able to point out to everyone how Madame Michael cannot so much as have a few friends in for a night of dancing unless you loan her your servants to forward the affair."

Frances bit her lip. Then she laughed and climbed heavily into the waiting vehicle. "Ah, my governor," she murmured, "how well you know me!"

Dorothy was glad that the other women did not seem inclined to conversation. She preferred to lean back in her corner and gaze out into the night. Rafe and Henry mounted to the box, and the coach wheeled off through the deserted streets of Portsmouth. Past nine o'clock it was, a sharp winter evening, with the shops dark, but most of the houses and taverns lighted; too cold for folk to linger in gossip on windy corners or run unnecessary errands

about the town. Hard-packed snow lay underfoot, and feathery drifts clung to the window ledges; high over North Church steeple the bright stars shone.

Friday night, thought Dorothy, but it did not seem to her that Red Dan MacMurray would be riding in from Londonderry over all the miles of crusted snow. Nevertheless, she had slipped away to the Deer Tavern that morning and left a little note there telling him where she expected to be. Thinking of Red Dan, she suddenly remembered his cousin, and looked at Lydia. Lydia's stately head was lifted, a black velvet kerchief drawn across her bright hair, her lovely face as expressionless as a closed door. "Lyddy, what will you do with my brother?" Dorothy wanted to ask. "Will you break his heart for him? Perhaps you will break your own, too."

They trundled through the Hay Market and out of town, along the edge of Minister Haven's pasture where a new graveyard was starting to grow, fittingly enough, around the foot of a gallows tree. As they passed the grim wooden shaft rising blackly from the white hillside, the governor's lady gave a harsh laugh.

"Holy Mary was lucky she bore her son in Bethlehem. When virgins go with child in New Hampshire, we hang them by the neck until they die."

Dorothy shrank back, a sick feeling of revulsion within her, and Lydia's temper flared out.

"You do wrong to mention the Virgin in such connection," she cried. "I hope God will have mercy on Ruth Blay's soul, and I know your husband felt the same. He reprieved her, but the sheriff—oh, it is a shameful story! I am sorry you should mention it. Things had better be forgotten when they're past help."

"What is the story, Lyddy?" asked Dorothy, curious in spite of herself. "Who was Ruth Blay?"

It was Frances who answered. Her whole manner had changed, her voice had fallen very low, and her gray-green eyes stared into the night.

"It happened the year before I married John. I was still Mrs. Atkinson then. The court condemned a poor foolish girl from South Hampton for concealing the birth of her bastard child and sentenced her to death. My father-in-law was one of the justices, I remember, and he repented afterward. I used to hear him walking the floor of his chamber in the night—though perhaps it was not for that. His son lay dying. He had plenty of griefs to trouble himself about."

How flat and cold Frances' words sounded when she spoke of her dead husband, thought Dorothy. She did not believe Frances had ever walked the floor. The governor's wife kept on.

"In any case, her friends contended the child was stillborn and she blameless of its death, though guilty of giving infamous birth. But while John studied on the evidence, Sheriff Packer hanged her out of hand—so he could

get home to his dinner, was the excuse he made for such unseemly haste in the affair. He was hanged himself in effigy that night by the townsfolk. A pity it was in effigy and not in the flesh, my governor said. You are right, Lydia. I should not have made profane mention of the Virgin. I, too, hope God's mercy attends Ruth Blay."

For a moment all was silence inside the governor's coach. Then Frances spoke again. "What happened to Ruth could happen to any woman—to one of us, perchance," she whispered. Her voice was not the voice of Governor Wentworth's lady. It was very thin and small.

The road crooked and ran seaward down a hill through a wood of leafless trees. Far to the left Dorothy could see two clusters of lights that marked the British men-of-war riding on the black water of the river, *Scarborough* and *Canceaux*. They had arrived in the Piscataqua soon after the Castle fell, and in the interests of King George and his royal governor, John Wentworth, their guns commanded the town. Suddenly Frances spoke again, her tone once more petulant and complaining, full of injured pride.

"You know, of course, that Pat holds her party each year on Christmas Eve. It has been her custom ever since old Benning plucked her from amongst the swill buckets and made her his bride. But this year she delays it by two weeks—until tonight."

"Why 'tis the last of the twelve days of Christmas," said Dorothy in surprise. "We would think—at home in Yorkshire—that to celebrate tonight would be no uncommon thing."

At home in Yorkshire, she thought, seeing in her mind the red-roofed villages, the fertile plains of Holderness laid at the foot of the chalk hills, and the headlands beyond Bridlington Bay, dark-gray and pearly white. She saw the small old manor house with its mullioned windows and clustered chimneys, the house where she was born, and wondered if she would ever see it again in this life.

"She delayed it!" cried the governor's wife venemously, her fine eyes flashing, catching the lantern light that sifted through the cracks in the back of the coachman's box ahead. "She knew I would be that much nearer my time! That I would be the less able to come here! But she shall see! I may not tread a measure, but as I am the first lady of this province, I will attend and look on."

Presently the coach jerked to a halt, and Dorothy heard the voices of the servants conversing with each other, heard the thud of their boots as they leaped to the frozen ground. Peering forth she saw an irregular pattern of lighted windows, a vast shadowy mass of roofs and chimneys that made her think of a haunted house in a gothic fairy tale. Tall trees reared up here and there, and banks of ice-coated shrubs clustered about its snowy lawns that sloped down to the blackness of the flooding tidewater.

The coach door opened, and John Wentworth thrust his head and shoulders inside. “Did you survive the journey, Frances? I see Hall Jackson’s coach is here, so you will be well-attended if you are brought to bed on Patty’s new brocade.”

Laughing, his wife put out her hand to him so that he could help her from the coach. “I have abandoned the whole idea,” she jested. “Patty is nothing but a dowager married to a rake, with no heir save a daughter. Having better prospects, I can be generous. I—”

Dorothy lost the end of the lady’s little speech as her husband handed her out on the trampled snow. Hugh appeared next, to squire both Lydia and his sister, and together the governor’s party walked up the pathway shoveled between the snow drifts to the wide front door. The yard around was full of coaches, more arriving every minute, and the hall, when they stepped inside, seemed to contain all the richly-coated men and flower-hued women who had been in Queen’s Chapel. But there were others quite as bravely dressed who had not been there, and as Governor John Wentworth looked around him, he lifted an eyebrow now and then, seeing the faces of men who had stood against him in the late insurrection which, he assured his family, had happily been put down. Dorothy, caught between the two couples as they paused just inside the doorway, unable to progress further through the crowd, could only remain there silent and listen to all that was said.

“Isn’t that John Langdon ahead of us there in the dark blue coat?” asked Frances. “Wait till he turns around.”

Her husband swore a small oath. “Yes, that’s Jack. Buys a bigger wig every year, now he’s climbing higher in the world. Swears to a great love for Homer, which he can’t read—except as Englished by Mr. Pope.”

“I wonder that Michael tolerates him here,” murmured Frances. “Didn’t he think to marry Pat and her fortune himself at one time?”

“Oh half the town thought to marry Pat,” laughed the governor. “If Michael refused to consort with her castoff suitors, he’d be a lonely man—which he knows well.”

“You are the tallest of us, Hugh,” said Lydia gaily. “Look over folks’ heads, and tell us whom else besides Jack Langdon you see.”

Dorothy watched her brother anxiously as he smiled down into the young widow’s eyes.

“Very well. I shall tell you—so far as I know. Like the graveyard at Queen’s Chapel, here a Wentworth, there an Atkinson, a Sherburne or a Jaffrey. I see Hall Jackson and his wife, and Dr. Cutter and his wife, and old Captain Moffat. I see our governor’s father, Mark Hunking, and his lady. Daniel Rindge, Judge Atkinson, and old Hunking Wentworth. I do not see Tom Pickering, or Samuel Cutts, or Major Tash, or Colonel Sullivan. There’s a

dark heavy man with fierce eyes and a beautiful frightened-looking lady I never saw before."

"Where?" cried Frances, her gaze following as he pointed at a couple moving toward them. "Why that's Lettice and Wyseman Claggett! I did not know they were in town. They have moved their family into the country—Litchfield, I think, or some such outlandish place. He was the King's attorney and argued the case against Ruth Blay. He is rumored to be the worst husband in the province . . . throws mud on Lettice's clean floors and puts vinegar in the cream pitcher. A loathsome man! They say he beats her. Lettice, my dear, how wonderful to see you again! And Wyseman! Charming as ever." And she tapped his velvet-clad shoulder with her fan. "I vow, I shall get my Johnny to take up land on the Merrimack, it agrees so well with you!"

They moved away before the Claggetts had time to answer, Frances chattering busily to her own little group, her well-trained voice never carrying beyond it.

"Oh there's Jane Livermore, Rector Brown's daughter. She has a longer nose than her father had. Dorothy, did anyone ever tell you that on my wedding day, just after he had married me to John, our saintly pastor fell on the chapel steps and broke his arm? Some say it was God's judgment on him for hallowing an infamous union."

"Arthur Brown was a good man, and now he's dead, God rest him," said the governor. "Come! Here's a rift in the crowd. Let us present ourselves to the fair Pat. Guard our rear, Hugh, and herd us forward."

Madame Michael Wentworth had chosen to receive her guests that night in a parlor up a short flight of stairs, close to the great Council Chamber where her first husband, old Benning, had been wont to administer the affairs of the province. She stood in front of a blazing fire reflected in mirrors skillfully placed between the portraits on the walls, her dress a polonaise of corn-colored silk and her hair piled high. Following the governor and his wife through the throng of earlier arrivals, Dorothy found herself curtseying to a woman who was neither the great beauty that romantic gossip had pictured her, nor the crude vixen of Frances' jealous railings. She saw instead a pleasant ruddy face, broad hips and bosom, and a gracious gesture made with a moist plump hand.

"Miss Dorothy Giffard," her hostess repeated somewhat vaguely after the governor's introduction and immediately turned halfway round. "La, Mrs. Wentworth," she chided Frances, "how your belly sags! Do you intend a litter? God's mercy, but you're puffing! Best find a corner and sit down."

Frances' eyes narrowed and lines curved suddenly about her mouth. "Not till my host has greeted me," she retorted smoothly. "Where is your good husband, Mrs. Wentworth? 'Tis most singular he stands not beside you to receive. But perchance I should not ask. He is out walking with one of the

maids, no doubt, or o'ertaken with too much drink, or unwilling to leave the gaming table till he wins back his week's allowance."

A slow flush mottled Patty's clear skin.

"You can tell where Michael is if you listen," she answered bluntly. "He is in the Council Chamber, making music that our guests may dance." She turned her back deliberately on Frances and spoke to the governor. "Oh Johnny! I guess you got trouble in your own dish now, from what I hear. You deserve it for cheating me."

John Wentworth smiled back and answered lightly, but Dorothy knew him well enough to recognize the controlled quality of his voice, to hear beneath it the stirring anger. "If I have trouble, I am blissfully unaware thereof. And I did not cheat you, Patty. When I regranted lands that had been my uncle's, it was according to law, since he had not improved them as he was bound to do. My action was approved in England by the Committee on Plantation Affairs."

Listening for the music her hostess had spoken of, Dorothy found that she could hear it indeed, the strains of a quadrille audible whenever the door opened to admit a new inflow of guests. Henry's French horn she heard, a spinet, a violin.

"Johnny," Frances was saying, "Hugh and Lydia, I know, are eager to join in the dancing. I think I shall rest for a while—" she pointed to a delicately carved loveseat upholstered in white and gold damask, and flashed him a wicked little smile. "Oh, there is Sally and Woodbury Langdon!"

Dorothy followed her glance and saw a dignified, well-established-looking man in a wine-colored coat with a slim vivacious woman leaning on his arm. Frances waved to them. "John," she said, "I want to speak to Sally."

John frowned. "I do not see the necessity," he told her. "Her husband denounced me in committee, I understand. I believe he was privy to those outrageous doings at the Castle. Moreover—! Good evening, sir. Good evening, Mrs. Langdon."

He could not help himself now, for they had come forward in response to Frances' gesture of invitation.

"Good evening, Your Excellency," replied Woodbury Langdon coolly, his bow stiff and formal. "We had a fine view of the lights on His Majesty's warships as we drove down the Little Harbor Road—a threatening sight to many. Do they mean to winter here in our river?"

"I trust not," answered John Wentworth, his voice equally cool. "They will remain only so long as there is threat of disorder in the province."

Langdon chuckled. "There be disorders," he agreed cheerfully, "so far afield as Cheshire and Hillsborough. Folks are uncertain, sir, and that's the truth of it."

"They have no need for uncertainty," said the governor sternly. "Let them

turn a deaf ear to Boston and the Congress, bring back the powder they stole, and yield up the thieves to condign punishment. Peace I shall maintain, and good government in this province. They may rely upon it."

"What punishment deem you condign for the thieves?" inquired Langdon.

"I shall have their commissions, for one thing. As you know, I have published abroad that it is all men's duty to apprehend them. How much further I shall proceed—"

Patty Wentworth's somewhat shrill voice interrupted them. "La, sirs, stop your quarreling," she chided. "Here's a gentleman wishes to be presented to Miss Dorothy."

Hearing her own name, Dorothy turned around, and stared. Beside her hostess stood the young curate from Boston who had filled the empty pulpit of Queen's Chapel during the Christmas season. He was smiling at her, bending forward. Too surprised to catch his name, she smiled back timidly, then hesitated and turned to Frances. The governor's lady interrupted her chat with Sally Langdon and waved airily.

"Be off to the dancing with the other young folk! Hugh and Lydia are already ahead of you. Now you have found a partner, it seems. I am sure he will prove a respectable one."

She favored the visiting cleric with a smile of such utter radiance that his pale skin flushed, showing the ghosts of childhood freckles, not visible a moment before. He cleared his throat.

"Unfortunately, Miss Dorothy, I cannot offer myself as a partner, since dancing is an art I have never cultivated. I thought perhaps you might care to listen to the music with me."

Acquiescing, she took his arm and they walked out of Patty Wentworth's parlor in the direction of the mellow sounds that poured through the wide, open door of the Council Chamber.

The high-ceiled room was full of couples moving in stately measure over the closely jointed boards of the smooth white floor. On the left stood the fireplace, with elegantly carved antique mantel above the roaring flames within. In opposite corners were two gun racks equipped with twelve muskets each, their long barrels wound in evergreen and decked with twigs full of pigeon berries. I must tell Dan about holly, when I see him, Dorothy reminded herself. Christmas holly! I do not believe holly grows in America.

A plump dark-haired girl was seated at the spinet, Henry standing on one side of her, and on the other, Colonel Michael of the English Wentworths, handsome and worn, caressing his violin. As the newcomers passed him he laid down his instrument and mopped his brow with a crimson silk handkerchief. "Sacré," he muttered. "This is hotter work than the fighting at Fontenoy!"

Dorothy's escort led her to a window seat, and she caught one glimpse of the dark sloping lawn outside the panes, the crooked branches of a low-crotched apple tree. Then he settled her deftly among the cushions and sat down at her side.

"I hope you will not think it precipitous of me to seek your acquaintance as I have," he began, with the same calm assurance he had lately displayed at the altarside, "but during the service tonight I could not help watching you. There was true exaltation in your face, more glowing than any candle—"

Dorothy had been searching for Hugh and Lydia among the dancers that thronged the Council Chamber, and now she saw them, treading the slow graceful measures of a minuet. They seemed oblivious of everything in the world except each other. She shivered, hoping that no evil would come to them, or to anyone else she cared for. This had been a queer, lost, lonely evening for her, she thought. Always in the midst of folk, and yet always by herself alone.

She gave up trying to listen to her companion, but he did not seem to notice, for his confident voice flowed easily on. He was telling her how much finer and more splendid Portsmouth society appeared to him than he had ever thought it could be; the women, how much more fair. Now and then, she observed, men on the dance floor smiled at her when their partners were faced the other way about. Now and then an unknown lad in a fine coat, but more brash than mannerly, would approach and seek to lead her forth, but she smiled and motioned them away. Minute by minute she felt increasingly uncomfortable. And strangely enough, it did not seem to be the fault of anything in the hot, noisy, crowded room, but some disturbing force from outside, as if eyes were watching her; angry, brooding eyes, behind her in the dark.

And then suddenly she knew. Dan! Dan was there, there in the very grounds of Little Harbor! He had found her note and followed her. She knew, as surely as if she had seen his proud red head or heard his voice. She rose to her feet, tottering a little, put out her hand.

"I am sorry," she murmured. "Smoke from the fire has drifted into my throat till it chokes me. I feel faint and ill."

Her escort rose with her, all solicitude. She took one look at his face, and it seemed to be swimming vaguely in a sea of candlelight. She did not think she would know it if she were ever to see it again.

"Let me fetch you a cup of wine," he urged her. "I noticed flagons at the buffet as we came in."

She managed to smile. "No, I wish to lie down. I am sure there will be a maidservant in the hall who can direct me to some retiring place. It has been very kind of you—I have enjoyed—"

She could be patient and courteous no longer. She lifted her skirts and fled out of the Council Chamber, past the small lighted parlors where some were playing cards and some were drinking wine. Luckily she met no one save for three servants bringing up trays of roasted apples and chestnuts from the kitchen. At the outer door she paused, uncertain, feeling that she had doubtless come on a fool's errand, and wondering where she had left her cloak. Well, she could not risk going back for it now. She lifted the heavy iron latch and swung open the great door, letting herself out into the night.

All around the yard stood the coaches, silent and empty, for the Colonel's men servants had freed the horses and led them away to the cellar stables below. After a moment she recognized the Wentworth coach, ran quickly to it, and pulled out the small fur laprobe Frances had held across her knees on the journey from town. Wrapped in this, she felt warm and secure again, ready to move cautiously forward in the starlight looking for Dan.

At a safe distance from the lighted windows, she began to circle the sprawling mansion, through clumps of twiggy lilac trees tufted with snow. Once she tried timidly to give the call of the whippoorwill. Red Dan had tried to teach her how, many times, but she had never quite seemed to learn. Her lips formed only a tired little hissing sound, like a serpent weary of its life, and she laughed aloud at the ridiculousness of it, of all animal sounds on the lips of men. But there was a tenderness in her laughter, too, tenderness for all grown lads who never quite give over small-boy play.

Perhaps he had heard her muffled footfalls on the snow; perhaps he had heard her laughter. In any case, "Dolly," he said.

He was standing under the crooked apple tree that grew past the windows of the Council Chamber. He had taken off his fur cap, and the light from the candelabras shone out on his ruddy hair, on his sober young face that held for her none of its usual signs of welcome. She ran forward and flung herself upon him.

"Oh Dan! Dan! I hoped you would come, and then I thought you would not! And then I felt you here in the darkness staring at me so. You were staring at me—were you not—through the window?"

"Yes." He curved his arms about her, firmly, tenderly, but without eagerness or passion. "I climbed the tree a way, to see better. I was watching you."

"I knew. I could feel eyes watching me—your eyes. You are angry with me, Dan."

"Not angry," he muttered, drawing back from her a little and looking down into her face, his eyes full of such sadness that she cried out.

"Something is wrong! Is there trouble at home? Your grandmother? Or Black Dan?"

"No. No trouble. Graunie's lively as a cricket. Dan—he took his snowshoes and went off Cohos way, getting the towns to sign the Association. Right after he got back from the Castle."

"Oh I remember. He came to our garden that night, came and quarreled with Lydia. He told her he was going to ride inland to help hide away the powder."

"Yes. He did that. 'Tis stowed away now, safe, where the King's party cannot find it. Hid all over Great Bay country and beyond—Kingston, Epping, Poplin, Exeter, o' course. Part of it's said to be buried under the pulpit in Durham meeting house, which myself, I doubt. We even got some in Londonderry that Dan brought home."

The unhappy look had gone from his face a little as he talked of matters outside themselves, and Dorothy hated to set his thoughts back a moment, but she knew that she must, lest an estrangement grow up unexplained between them.

"Dan," she said, "you are not yourself tonight. Tell me the cause of it."

He looked downward and shifted his heavily booted feet in the snow.

"Think we can find a warm place to talk in, Dolly?" he asked. "I never been down here on Old Governor's property before."

"Neither have I," she told him.

He took her arm and she kept very close to him as they started to walk about the great house in the lonely starlight, hearing now and then a burst of music from the Council Chamber.

"Dan," she said, after they had gone a little way, pointing to a low nail-studded door ahead of them, "there is an entrance to the house, and a dark window beside it. Shall we try the latch and see where it leads to?"

"No harm, I guess," he muttered. In a moment they were pushing open the small door.

What they had come on seemed to be a pantry or larder behind the kitchen, for on its far side stood another door with wide cracks of light around it, where rich mingled smells of cooking seeped through. They could hear the chatter of servants, the creak and sizzle of the spit, and the roar of a huge bake fire just beyond the wall. Dan stepped to the inner door and drew the wooden bolt across. Then he turned back to Dorothy.

"Storeroom," he murmured, holding her hand and drawing her with him as he prowled through the tiny chamber in the dim light. "I can smell smoked meat and butternuts drying—potatoes, turnips—something earthy. This way—come this way, here's apples, Dolly."

He lowered himself carefully to the uneven floor, leaning his back and shoulders against a heap of sacks from which came the tartest, sweetest scent of russet autumn. He pulled her down beside him, across his lap and into his

arms. “Come here, and I will tell you my trouble.”

But once he was holding her, he seemed in no haste to speak. Instead he let the fur robe drop away from her, caressing her hair, her face, her mouth. Never, she thought, had he behaved so boldly, but never had she responded so completely, so ardently before.

“Dolly,” he said finally, as they lay there warm and close and still, “two things come to me tonight. The first, whilst I was watching you through the window there. I saw you with all the rich lads about, hovering like bees to a lilac bloom—all o’ them after the same thing the bees go after, I guess—the sweetness, deep inside. It come to me then, more strongly, what I always knowed—that you wasna’ for such as I. That I better stir my stumps and get back up country where I belong. When I heard your laugh, I was about to do that very thing.”

She nestled closer against him, where he lay with his back against the sacks of sweet stored fruit. “I am glad I laughed, Danny,” she whispered. “What was the second thing that came to you?”

“Why the second thing was this,” he said. There was an exultant note in his voice, and her caressing fingers felt a pulse start to beat in his throat. “I heard you laugh, and I saw you standing in the snow there. Left all those rich lads you had, to look for me. It come to me then, Dolly, Dolly, that I must ha’ been slow.”

She laughed uncertainly.

“But I won’t be, no more. I learned my lesson when I saw you with them other lads. Dolly—you left them—and you came—to me—”

Suddenly he pulled the green silk of her bodice aside, and Dorothy could see her own flesh gleam whitely in the gray light that seeped into the little room. Before he buried his face in that whiteness, it was the last thing she saw. The last thing she heard was the rising rhythm of his breath and her own, and the far off strains of Michael’s violin hailing the white Epiphany.

11.
THE YOUNG PRINCE

When Lydia opened her eyes on the black dark of that January morning, her first awareness was of the intense cold. It seemed to lie all about her like ice water, no matter how much she writhed and twisted, trying to escape from it. Thumpings and scrapings sounded overhead in the servants' attic, which meant they were astir, preparing to go downstairs to the kitchen and begin the day's work. The embers of last night's fire glowed brightly on the hearth, but it did not light up the mantel clock, and she had no idea of the hour, except that it must be early. If only she had more covers, she thought, she would burrow deeper into the featherbed and try to fall asleep again. It would not be difficult. She and Hugh had played ombre with the governor and his wife till past one o'clock the night before, since Frances, burning with energy, had refused to go to bed herself or let anyone else go. Two weeks had passed since the night they drove down to Little Harbor to keep the Epiphany. Two weeks more remained before the date Dr. Hall Jackson had predicted for the birth of the child.

Lying there shivering, needing another blanket but loathe to rise and fetch it, Lydia heard the door across the hall swing open, a quick step, and then a knock on her own chamber door.

"Lyddy!" called John Wentworth clearing his throat huskily, and then again, "Lyddy!"

There was a tenseness in his voice that communicated itself, and Lydia felt her shoulders stiffen and a tremor go through her body. She started upright on her pillow, flinging the quilts aside, careless of the cold.

"Yes! Yes, I am awake. What is it?" But she knew in her heart it could be only one thing.

Again he cleared his throat. "Frances thinks—it has begun," he said. "Prue is with her already. She did not tell me to wake you—but I thought there might be need."

"I will dress at once, John," she called back, but he did not answer her, and she heard his footsteps going away toward Hugh's room, knocking on that other door.

By the time she had scrambled into a warm wool dress as gray as the bleak rift of dawn appearing beyond the windows, he had come back.

"Lyddy," he called again, "will you go to the kitchen and see that Hugh is provided with breakfast. I want him to take the coach to Boston to fetch my

mother-in-law."

Hastily thrusting the last tortoise-shell comb through her curls and pulling a white apron from the orderly pile in the top of the rosewood chest, she ran out to the governor.

Face to face they stood in the light of the flaring sconces, and she wondered if she looked as white and tense as he did. After a moment he laughed shakily.

"You will think me a fool for being so distraught," he muttered apologetically, "It is only—that on these occasions we have fared so ill before."

She put her hand on his arm and smiled at him with a cheerfulness she did not quite feel.

"Men are always distraught at times like this and no wonder. But I think we have good reason to hope all will go well. Dr. Jackson was very much pleased with her state when he visited yesterday."

The governor frowned as she mentioned Hall Jackson. He turned silently and went into his wife's chamber, closing the door behind him. Lydia caught a glimpse of Frances, sitting propped up with pillows in the great bed, and Prue, who had assisted a midwife in her youth in her own country, bending over her with a cup and spoon. Probably they thought it was too early yet to send for the doctor.

Downstairs in the kitchen she found Abby, the cross-grained cook, berating the frightened young housemaids, Rachael and Nan.

"What'll you do?" Abby demanded, standing in front of the old black bake hearth, with her hands on her fat hips. "You'll go on with your work as you would on any other day, my pretties. Did you think 'twould help matters to wring your hands and weep whenever my lady has a pain?"

"Do not scold them, Abby," said Lydia with a smile intended to take the sting out of her chiding, "for not being so old and settled as we are. Will you run upstairs, Rachael, tap on Mrs. Wentworth's door, and ask Prue if they require anything—broth or cordial, perhaps. You might dare to remind His Excellency that we will be happy to send up his breakfast."

Rachael clumped off in her heavy country shoes and Nan stared helplessly after her, looking as if she, too, would be comforted at having some simple definite errand to perform. They were green girls Frances had brought back from Wolfeborough the previous fall, stout and willing, but often perplexed, and unused to the niceties of city life. Lydia ordered her to go to the stables and call Rafe and Henry to come to breakfast at once, since they would surely be accompanying Hugh. Then she busied herself in preparing the young man's tray.

He was seated in a low chair by the dining room window when she brought

the tea and porridge and hot cakes; his gray eyes still cloudy with sleep, his blond hair ill-combed and wispy, but his face lighting with a smile for her.

"Ah, Lydia," he said, coming forward to take the tray from her hands. " 'Twas indeed the shortest night I ever spent. It seems as if I was dealing and counting but an hour ago."

They sat down at the table and she filled a plate for each of them, poured two cups of tea. "You can nap in the coach," she suggested, "the whole way to Boston, if it pleases you. I think there will be little rest for us here today. Frances tells me her earlier labors have not been long—oh I wish it were over for her. I hate to think of her lying there in pain."

Lydia glanced up from the tea service expecting to meet the eyes of her companion, but he had turned his head aside, and did not look at her. Instead he put his napkin to his lips and gave a slight cough.

Oh I have offended him, she thought. He thinks I am coarse and indelicate to intrude such remarks on a gentleman's breakfast time! But it was only out of my concern for her. I thought he would feel the same as I.

And then she knew she had imagined it all, for he turned to her again with a grave smile.

"I trust Madame Wentworth, Frances' mother, will not take overly long to prepare. I hope she will be in as great haste as I to return to Portsmouth."

The light in his deep eyes and the low caressing tone of his voice left her in no doubt about the reason for his haste to return. Lydia flushed and looked down, studying the pattern of creamy bubbles on the surface of her porridge, flicking it here and there with her spoon.

"Will it not confuse us all when she comes, and there are two Madame Wentworths about, since John's mother up in Daniel Street will hardly stay away?"

He had opened a safe subject now, free of any possibilities for embarrassment, and Lydia found herself eating her breakfast, speaking naturally again.

"Oh no. I feared it would fall out so at the time of the wedding, but they solved it simply enough. After all, it could be done in only one way, since they are both Elizabeths, too. The one, we call Madame Samuel, and the other, Madame Mark Hunking, from their husband's names."

"Wentworth, Wentworth, wherever I go it is the same," he said, reaching for the syrup pitcher to sweeten his porridge. "Is it established custom or merely chance that they marry so often among their kin?"

"I do not know," she told him honestly. "I have sometimes thought there might be a strange attraction of the blood for those of its own kind. Mr. Atkinson, Frances' first husband, was her cousin, too, and she had other cousin-suitors in Boston, it seems. There have been many for Frances—but

there has always been only Frances for John."

Hugh's forehead wrinkled in a slight frown. Perhaps he had burned his mouth with the steaming tea. She was about to ask him if that were the case, when the governor strode into the room. He was whistling a light tune and his eyes shone.

"I am glad I caught you, Hugh," he said. "Frances has changed her mind. She wishes you to delay a little. It goes so well and quickly with her that she thinks if you bide till afternoon you can carry her mother word of the outcome. I have sent Rachael to call the doctor. Lyddy, will you go up to her now. Tell her I want to take a pipe and a cup of coffee, but I shall not stay long away from her side."

Lydia did not know why she tiptoed as she entered the familiar rose-colored room with a blazing fire and candles, and the blinds closed to shut out the gray day. Frances was certainly awake, leaning against her pillows, her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright with excitement. Except that she wore only a night rail and her hair flowing on her shoulders, she looked more ready to lead a ball than to face the rack of childbirth. But face it she must. It was as Dan MacMurray had said once, all men are born of women the same way. Lydia felt the tears spring to her eyes when she thought of Dan. She wondered how long it would be before the memory of him ceased to hurt her so. For she had told him that their last quarrel would indeed be the last; that she did not look to see him again in Portsmouth, or in any other town, for that matter. And he had started to reply in quick anger, then broken off his speech in the middle, and laughed at her, and stalked away. He had gone back to Jessie, she supposed; Jessie who did not bandy words, but took a man into her bed with no formalities at all.

Frances raised an impatient hand to beckon her forward and called to dismiss the housemaid who crouched, gaunt and watchful, on a brocaded chair at the far side of the room.

"Prue, be gone! I wish to talk with Lydia. This is a dull business, and I should like the relief of a little sprightly conversation."

Prue rose, slowly and disapprovingly, and edged through the doorway into the hall, looking back over her shoulder.

"Ye'll wish I was by, Mistress, when the pains come back on ye," she said.

"No doubt," admitted Frances with a grimace, "But at least, get yourself out of here and let me enjoy the interval. Ah, Lyddy." And her voice took on a different tone, half-gay, half-pleading, vibrant with a tense unnatural sort of charm. "How go things below stairs? Is my governor concerned for me? Is he eager to see his son? I know it will be a son, Lydia."

Lydia went over and perched on the mahogany bedstairs. "Of course he is concerned, Frances," she said. "We all are. We have sent for Dr. Jackson. Is

there anything we can do to ease you while he is on the way?"

Frances laughed, shrilly and with abandon. "To ease me? Yes! You can send to Little Harbor for that fat cow, Mrs. Patty! I want to see her face when Hall Jackson reaches down—and holds up my son! New Hampshire's next governor!"

Deep in some misty corner of her mind, Lydia could hear her Puritan forbears crying for humility and caution, reminding her that man's affairs too often turn out ill, and we must expect it should be so. It was her duty to prepare Frances for disappointment without alarming her. She spoke uncertainly. "And if it is a daughter?" she asked, fixing her eyes on a framed silhouette of Queen Charlotte that hung on the opposite wall.

Frances tensed and her eyes blazed angrily. "Why if it is a girl—then the pitcher must go to the well again. She may delay me by nine months, but she cannot delay me forever. I shall—"

Suddenly she drew back stiffly, one shoulder raised, her fingers crooked like the gray-white talons of some fierce pouncing bird. Drops of sweat burst out on her forehead, her body writhed, and her face became a distorted mask of pain. She closed her eyes, opened her mouth wide, and gave a long shrill wail.

"Owwwwwww—"

Faint and far away, somewhere at the rear of the house, Bugler wailed in answer. At the cry of the dog, Lydia giggled hysterically, horrified at herself, able, after a moment, to stop. Frances shrieked again.

When the pain had ebbed she sank back on the pillows, exhausted, her face the color of clay. It took a moment of struggling before her cracked lips would form speech.

"Damn you!" she cried weakly to Lydia. "Laugh at me! Laugh well! You will not do it long! Dance and oogle the young men. You will do well enough for them when they cannot have me! Cling to Hugh Giffard! Cling like the vine to an arbor wall! Put your tendrils round his neck and hold. But I can tear them away! Wait till I am well, Miss; light and slim, and out on the dance floor with my jewels shining! We will see then how long he will look at you!"

Lydia sprang to her feet and drew back from the silken bed, stammering in confusion and horror. Frances could not have known what she had been saying. She must have been maddened by the pain. Just then the governor burst into the room and ran straight to his wife.

"Frances! I heard you scream! Oh my dear! I have cursed Hall Jackson for a Son of Liberty and no friend of mine, but he's on the stairs now, and if he can help you, he can have the whole province if he wants it! Oh my dear, my dear!"

Lydia shrank back against the window hangings, clutching at their rich velvet unnoticed by husband and wife or by the dignified gentleman in

cinnamon-colored coat and breeches who strode through the doorway. Hall Jackson was certainly handsome, with a merry smile and crisp curling hair. His glance moved swiftly about the room, taking note of everything, ignoring everything except his patient.

"Good day, Mrs. Wentworth," he said easily, "I have long had a feeling you would be taken in labor this Friday, since our house is full of Boston guests, and my wife intends a dinner party. Come, let us see how you do."

He pulled away the petal-colored satins and ran his cool skillful fingers over the white body beneath. John Wentworth shut his eyes and clenched his fingers. Frances moaned. Lydia clung to the window draperies, looking on, quite purged of her silly laughter, wanting to cry.

Swiftly the doctor finished his examination and rearranged the bed linen. Frances looked up at him, free from pain now, her smile a little coy and coaxing.

"Doctor," she asked, all sweetly wistful, "you must know—are there not ways to hasten the matter? I have heard there are drugs or instruments sometimes used in Boston."

His face was all grave sympathy for the beautiful woman appealing to him, but he answered her abruptly.

"There are, but I shall not use them. I would not injure you, madame. Pray trust me to manage this business as I see fit. I know your pelvis as well as I know my own." Again his glance swept the room, and he spoke to Lydia. "You! Are you in attendance here?"

Lydia stumbled forward. Frances turned toward her with a mocking smile. The doctor held out his silver watch shaped like a small turnip.

"Can you read the dial?" he asked condescendingly.

"Yes—I—I can tell time," faltered Lydia. Most women, she knew, would be assured and competent in such a common household crisis, but she had never given birth herself, or seen it happen before.

"Good," he answered. "Sit here with your mistress and mark the time of her pains, which should be advancing now. When they occur at intervals of one minute," he indicated the spacing on the face of the watch, "call me. I shall be in the kitchen taking tea with the servants."

The governor started forward then, a dull flush reddening on his cheek bones. "You are welcome at my own table, sir," he announced formally. "Shall I have a repast laid for you in the dining room? Or will you take coffee with me in the library?"

Hall Jackson ignored him. "I shall be in the kitchen with the servants," he repeated. He made a graceful bow and walked out of the chamber.

John Wentworth stared after him. Then he turned blankly and looked at his wife. She twisted a little and giggled.

"He was saying, 'No thank you. I will not break bread with a Tory, even if he be the governor of this province.' Do you not think that was what he was saying, John? Oh—oh—John hold me! Here comes the pain!"

Crouching nearby with the watch in her hand, Lydia felt her own vitals contract as the anguished governor bent over his wife. It was as if a huge hand reached inside her body's wall, caught up all that it contained and twisted it, trying to wrench it free. She wondered feverishly if Frances felt the same, or if her agony was nothing like that at all.

And far away, at the back of the house, whenever Frances cried out, Bugler gave a stricken howl in answer to her.

Then the pain ebbed once more, and the governor's wife lay back drained and panting.

"Do you want some brandy?" asked John Wentworth in a rasping voice that sounded nothing like his own.

Frances smiled weakly, her gaiety somewhat dimmed, but irrepressible still.

"Why I have a passionate longing for brandy—which my stomach does not share. 'Twould reject it, I think. Johnny, will you send Lyd away. She looks ready to swoon, and I will do it myself, if there is to be any swooning here. Tell her to quiet that dog and send us Prue."

The governor reached out and took Hall Jackson's silver watch in his tense fingers.

"Do as Frances wishes, Lyddy," he told her. "You heard what she said?"

"Yes, Yes, I heard. I will go and see to Bugler and tell Prue she is needed." She crept toward the door.

"Lyddy," called Frances, lifting her head and tossing back her dark hair from her forehead beaded with sweat, "do not go far away. You shall be the first to bathe my son!"

In the lower hallway Lydia met John Wentworth's mother, Madame Mark Hunking, who had apparently just stepped through the front door. A rich man's wife and a rich man's daughter, she bore herself with the easy self-confidence of the old aristocracy. Sweeping along in her blue velvet gown striped with gold, she had her foot on the bottom stair before she noticed Lydia, face to face with her, on the way down. She drew back a little, lifted her eyebrows and spoke tartly, but with some concern.

"Have you been with Mrs. Wentworth?" she demanded. "No one sent for me, but 'tis kitchen gossip all over Portsmouth that she's been brought to bed. I came to inquire about it."

Something about the calm face and unhurried tones of the older woman comforted Lydia and enabled her to draw again from the roots that fed her own being, the roots that struck down into the earth, from the old dead who lay

therein, who had lived out their own crises long ago. Her own mother, she thought, like Madame Mark Hunking, had known days of birth and days of death as well, and come out on the other side of them, able to present a calm face to younger women knowing trouble in their turn.

"Yes, she is in labor," said Lydia quietly. "It was just before daylight when His Excellency woke the household. He is with her now, and I am on my way to send up a more experienced maid. Dr. Jackson is in the kitchen."

"Ah yes," sniffed Madame Mark Hunking, "a fit place for him. Why John does not insist that she employ Dr. Cutter, I cannot see, but he humors her in all. I hope she will manage this time successfully. Her constant miscarriages are very distressing to my son, worse even than her flirtatious ways. Well, I shall go to her and see how she progresses with the business. Will you have a tea tray sent there."

She swept past Lydia, gliding up the staircase as if she moved on a magic carpet. Lydia went slowly toward the kitchen and met Dorothy coming out of the library. Dorothy has grown much lovelier lately, she thought. Not that her eyes had changed in color or her features in lineament, but she had developed a strange glowing beauty, as if she walked with a light inside, not a feverish will-o-the-wisp, but a holy candle; and her feet scarcely seemed to touch the earth at all. But now she was troubled and unsure, her soft hair falling untidily and her bodice hooked awry.

"Oh Lyddy," she cried, running forward and catching Lydia by the arm, "I know what is happening, and I am frightened. I have never been in a house of birth before. When my sisters-in-law were in childbed they always sent me away."

Lydia looked down at the girl and took her hand as reassuringly as she was able. She must not admit that this crisis was as new to her as it was to Dorothy. She must seem as old and comforting to this child as Madame Mark Hunking had seemed to her, no matter how ill-prepared for the task she knew herself to be.

"It is not easy, Dorothy," she said. "Children do not come into this world easily, but with God's mercy they are soon here. There is a task for everyone of us today, and I think it would be well if you were to see to Bugler. Do you know where he is? His howling disturbs Frances, and he must be taken away."

"Oh yes," Dorothy's troubled face lighted with pleasure that she could be of help. "He is hiding under the kitchen table. He goes almost frantic when he hears her cry out. He thinks she is being attacked, perhaps, and wants to summon aid. What shall I do with Bugler?"

"Take his leash and lead him out. Along the waterfront, or down Pleasant Street. No further than the Spring Market—not so far as the Deer Tavern."

"Oh Lyddy, you know I would not do that—run away to the Deer when

Frances needs me. In any case, Danny will not be there. He has gone far up the country to join—his cousin."

Lydia hesitated, wanting to ask after Black Dan, refusing to allow herself the indulgence. Finally she opened her mouth, not quite sure what she was going to say. But just then another cry rang through the upper hall, and the old beagle bayed deeply in the kitchen.

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When Lydia brought clean wine-glasses to the library in the late afternoon, a blood-red sunset was reflected from the waters of the South Mill Pond, and all through the governor's garden the beech and spruce trees cast long blue shadows on the snow. John Wentworth sprawled in a deep chair, lines of exhaustion graven on his face, but a proud light in his eyes. "He will do to pull up stumps at Wentworth House," he said in ringing tones, "A fine lad!"

"He might be a young prince, by the way the guns are going," answered Hugh with a smile almost as wide as the governor's. And indeed, the deep boom of cannon sounded again and again from the direction of the river where lay His Majesty's warships, *Scarborough* and *Canceaux*.

"I told them to show their colors and fire a salute when the news was brought to them," said the governor, "but I did not tell them to keep it up for an hour or more. God send we may never hear them shooting across Piscataqua for any other reason. I wish they would be still now. Lyddy, do you think they will keep my wife from sleep?"

"I do not think anything could keep her from sleep." Lydia smiled as she filled their glasses. "Unless it might be her own great happiness. She has had an exhausting day."

"So have all of us," murmured John Wentworth, "if not in the same degree. Lyddy, pour some wine for yourself and sit down."

Lydia knew she should go back to the kitchen where all the servants save Prue, even Henry and Rafe, were at work preparing rich cakes and caudles for the guests who would be thronging the governor's house throughout the next week to celebrate the birth of his son. But she did as she was told and settled herself on a green plush footstool close to the blazing fire. Her face half-turned from the men, she gazed into the tawny flames. What a strange thing Frances had said to her that morning! "Cling to Hugh Giffard . . . cling like the vine to an arbor wall . . . wait till I am well . . . we will see then how long he will look at you!" It must have been the meaningless ramblings of delirium. She could explain it in no other way. She sipped her wine slowly, half-aware of the men's talk.

"As you know," the governor was saying, "They shall lose their

commissions for their part in robbing the Castle, John Sullivan, Jack Langdon, and Nat Folsom. They are no more to be 'Colonel' and 'Major,' but only 'Mister' now. It is true the citizens of Portsmouth have sworn to defend my life if it be threatened, and to uphold orderly government. But nevertheless, Hugh, the rebellion grows in this province every day. The militia are drilling on every village green. They are still supplying aid and comfort to Boston. And I hear they have summoned their renegade Congress to meet next week in Exeter. May God block his roads with snow so that its members cannot travel there!"

Hugh stirred uneasily in his chair and took a long swallow of wine. Then he said, "Can you not take some measures to heal the breach with them, sir?"

The governor frowned and shook his head. "The time for healing measures is gone. Nothing will restrain them now save a show of force."

Oh, Johnny Wentworth, thought Lydia, it was not thus you used to govern!

"And I shall move to arrange for that," he went on. "You will carry a letter when you ride tomorrow to fetch Madame Samuel."

"Not tonight, sir?" asked Hugh quickly.

"No. The need for haste has passed, and I wish to ponder this evening on how I will address myself to General Gage. I shall ask him for two regiments of British troops to be sent to Portsmouth."

He set down his glass on the mahogany tea table at his elbow and stood up. "I need stronger weapons now," he said, with a faint smile, "now that I must protect the heritage of my son." The smile broadened, and the deep-struck lines in his forehead smoothed out. "Forgive me," he said, "if I tiptoe above for another look at him. Six years ago I bought that cradle. It has lain empty for long." He walked out of the room, leaving Hugh and Lydia.

After a moment the young man rose, and she thought he intended to pour himself another glass of wine, but instead he dropped down beside her on the rug. There they sat together, not speaking, gazing into the fire. Finally he said, "It is not often that we are alone, Lydia."

She smiled down at him. "No. We are members of a busy household, and with the young prince to care for, I, at least, shall be busier still."

"That is not a good life for a woman, is it? Ordering another woman's house, tending another woman's child?"

She felt a quick stir in her blood, her face grew hot, and she began to twist her hands in her lap.

She did not look at him, but she gave him an honest answer. "No. It is not a good life."

"You know, of course, that I have no right to make any sort of love to you, Lydia? No right at all. I cannot maintain a house such as this, and I cannot ask you to live in a hovel with me."

"Would you—would you want to live with me in a hovel? I am more used

to them than you are, surely." What was the matter with her? Why should she feel such exultation in her heart?

"Do you mean," he asked in a taut voice, "That you—that you might consider—that you could possibly care for me? That much? In that way?"

Her voice was so faint she could hardly hear it herself. "I—I think I might," she was telling him. "Not now. Not for a long time, perhaps. There has been another until now—but I think I might."

"Are you speaking of your husband, Lydia?" he asked quickly.

"No. Not of him. There was another—before him, and again since. But we have too many differences, and we cannot reconcile them. I shall never see him any more."

She watched the lights and shadows cast on his face by the leaping flames, and wondered if this was truly the face she wanted to see beside her all the days of her life; across the table when they broke bread, smiling down at her when they walked abroad in the streets of the town, on the pillow when she blew out the candle at night.

He spoke to her gently. "Then if you have forgotten him and put him behind you, perhaps I can convince you that you should turn to me." He put his hand out and spread it over hers, not so much to caress her as to seal a promise. "Will you give me leave to try, Lydia?"

"Yes," she murmured faintly. "You may have leave."

They heard John Wentworth's footsteps descending the stairs. Lydia scrambled to her feet. "I must attend the young prince," she said, and went hastily from the room, but the singing in her heart was not a lullaby.

12.
ON THE LAST BLACK NIGHT OF MARCH

Certainly no one could call Hugh Giffard a laggard in love, once he had made up his mind. During the next few weeks, Lydia felt herself often wondering if the English springs were quite as mild and pallid as she had imagined them to be. Not that he attempted to contrive passionate interludes in dark corners. He was, on the other hand, very much the public swain, always at her side throughout the festivities that honored the birth of the governor's son, filling her wine glass, turning her music when she obliged at the spinet, squiring her whenever she walked abroad. Moreover, he spoke to the governor and asked for his blessing on their marriage. John Wentworth sent for her then to join them in the library, pledged the couple's health in his finest brandy, and promised to consult with his father and uncles about setting the bridegroom forward in the world.

"It would present no difficulties in usual times," he told them, frowning into his glass and lifting his eyes to smile quizzically at the pair before him. "Once he was settled in the shipping trade, any able young man could grow rich in Portsmouth in a few years, if he was discreet and bore himself well. But now—!"

He stood up and began to pace the thick turkey carpet. "The times are so awry that it seems I had best prepare to fight on my front doorstep to defend my own house, with what few of my friends I can gather round me. Well, if it comes to that—I am not afraid!"

Trouble darkened the faces of the two men, and Lydia could feel their trouble reflected in her own heart, for she knew affairs in the province, that spring of 1775, had gone but ill for the King's party. General Gage had refused to send the troops John Wentworth finally asked for, saying he could not spare a single man if he were to hold unruly Boston. The governor had postponed the Assembly until May, by which time, he hoped, some of its more rebellious members would be in jail for the part they had taken in the attack on the Castle. But that upstart group which cried itself abroad as the Provincial Congress, had met in Exeter and was hammering up the framework of what their governor—whom they ignored—called a "harsh, aggressive, outlaw government."

"However, in the matter of this marriage," concluded John Wentworth, "as I have said, I give you my blessing. Will you accomplish the business quickly, while I am still able to endow you a little further, before the rebels have quite undone me?"

He smiled at Lydia and waited for her reply. She hesitated, not wishing to protest that Hugh had moved forward faster than she had given him any right to do, still unable to acquiesce and say, "Your Excellency, I have chosen May," or "Your Excellency, I have chosen April."

Hugh replied easily, saving her the trouble. "Lyddy has not given me her yes, but since I will take no other answer, I consider we have settled the matter. But you, sir, are too apprehensive of your position. You will not be undone. You have been much loved by the people of this province."

"Yes, Hugh, I have been," said the governor. "And I trust I shall be so again, once this madness for 'liberty' has passed by." He rose abruptly and left them. And they had little heart to proceed as lovers, though they sat together there, engaged in awkward, embarrassed conversation for the rest of the evening.

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In mid-March the governor's son was christened with elaborate ceremonies; "Charles Mary," after Lord and Lady Rockingham. It seemed to Lydia that the whole town declared truce for a while, and Whig and Tory drank together, forgetting their politics, all of them eager to hail the new heir to an old family, the fresh green twig on the ancient well-loved tree. And before new quarrels could come on and tempers flare out again, John Wentworth rode north to Wolfeborough to see how the winter had used his great country holdings, and plan the summer activities of his servants there; the rose arbor to be built near the waterside, and the stumpage to be replaced by corn and hay. He took his aide with him, instructing Frances to follow after in her coach as soon as the frost was out of the ground and the roads fit to travel. Under her mother's careful nursing she had recovered quickly, and soon after the christening Madame Samuel brought her visit to a triumphant close and boarded the Flying Stage Coach for Boston, leaving Madame Mark Hunking undisputed to grandmother the young prince.

March was a rainy month that year, with cold sea fogs drifting up the Piscataqua and hard rain beating on the roofs all night, gray day following gray day. Lydia taught her school girls French—"*Ouvrez la porte*," "*Voici la fenêtre*," "*Très bien*," and "*S'il vous plaît*." She went wary of Dorothy now, embarrassed in the company of one who stood so close to her and knew so much of her affairs, and the girl herself seemed to prefer to walk apart, keeping

her own silences. Together they watched Frances nurse her son, and then return him to his cradle and hurry off to the seamstress who was making her four new dresses: silks as sheer as cobwebs and delicate sprigged muslin colored like apple blossoms, soft pink and creamy white. Frances was blooming herself, radiant as a springtime tree, her body slender again save for her bosom; and the fuller curves that motherhood had brought to it were no bad thing, she told Lydia complacently, standing naked in front of her looking glass. Perhaps she had forgotten those words that burst from her mouth during the sweat and anguish of labor. "Wait till I am well, Miss! We will see how long Hugh Giffard will look at you!" Perhaps she had spoken them in some strange delirium, herself quite unaware. In any case, she had merely shrugged her shoulders when she heard of Lydia's expected betrothal.

"A handsome lad," she had commented with a small taunting smile, "and of good family, John says, but without a shilling to his name. Your friend in Londonderry had at least a flax field and a few acres of white pine."

"I do not marry for shillings and white pine," Lydia had retorted, but Charles Mary cried out then, and they had spoken no more of the matter; not at that moment, nor in the dull gray days after the men had gone.

And then one day, almost before she had time to think whether she missed him or no, Hugh came riding in just at noon. He was on his way to Boston, he said, and could not tarry, save for a meal and an hour or so of talk. He and Frances and Lydia sat for a long time at the dinner table over tiny Venetian glasses full of brandy, Dorothy having slipped away upstairs to take her turn at rocking the cradle that was seldom still.

"Why does my governor send you to Boston, sir?" asked Frances lightly, turning her glass round and round in her fingers and lifting it, barely touching her lips to the fiery liquid within.

"More for news than aught else, I think," answered Hugh with the same lightness. "I have letters to General Gage, of course. I believe His Excellency is urging again that the troops be sent here. I had the effrontery to tell him I thought it was a mistake."

"Hugh," said Frances, putting down her glass and leaning forward, the laughter quite gone from her gray-green eyes and her arching brows drawn to a sober line, "sometimes I wonder how you stand in all this. You are an Englishman, born and bred so, but too often, it seems to me, you argue the cause of our Portsmouth neighbors against John."

She might not have been there, Lydia thought, for all the attention they paid her. They were oblivious of everything except themselves. Their speech was public speech, dealing with the affairs of nations, and yet there was a throbbing intimate tone about it, revealing that they did not speak as public figures, but as a woman and a man. Better not try to fathom that, Lydia

decided. If she understood their words, she had enough to do.

"Sometimes I wonder myself how I stand in it," he answered, his gray eyes dark and troubled. "Sometimes in the night I cannot sleep, and I toss in the bed and ask myself over and over how it can be that in America I think more like the Americans and less like John. And John was born an American, but his thinking grows every day more English, just as a disease grows on a man. Less and less he understands the men he grew up with here in Portsmouth, and more and more he talks like the Tory squires at home, who have no understanding or love for America—only a tremendous confidence that they can and should rule it. Why it happens so with John, I cannot tell. But for myself, it makes me think of something my father said—"

Frances was watching him intently. She poured more brandy into his empty glass. Then she leaned forward, her elbows on the table, her pointed chin in her soft hands. "What," she asked him, "did your father say?"

"Why, he was speaking of our family. We were Norman, you know, and came into England with the great duke. We came as conquerors, but it was England who conquered us in the end, my father said. We took on too many of the Saxon ways ever to go home to France again, and be as we were. I wonder if America has conquered me, for it seems that whenever these men about here take exception to the acts of Parliament and the King, I feel that according to all justice and law and the freedom God gives a man when he makes him a man, they are right!"

Frances looked at him sideways through her long dark lashes. Then she rose from the table and caught up her skirts daintily, ready to depart.

"Well, at least in one way you are conquered by America. You have yielded to the charms of our women so far that you have chosen an American wife—?" She put it as a question. An edge had come in her voice, Lydia noticed, and a harsh glint into her eye.

Hugh stood up, too, a dark red flush on his cheek bones. "Yes, I have," he said simply, and stood there looking straight before him, both hands lying on the tablecloth, the knuckles clenched and white; not smiling at Lydia, as she thought he might have done. "I have indeed chosen so."

Frances laughed mockingly and without humor. "In that case, I shall leave you to your courting, sir. You will find some customs of England are no differently observed in America. Lyddy, I shall look for you to join me upstairs in about an hour."

She tripped lightly from the room with the clicking of high heels and the scent of roses. Hugh muttered something Lydia could not catch and quickly swallowed the brandy remaining in his glass. She stood silent, gazing miserably out of the window into Pleasant Street, watching Tom Pickering trudge by in the thick rain, wondering if Hugh really understood Tom

Pickering, not caring much whether he did or no.

Hugh coughed, cleared his throat, and then spoke to her, his tone a little rough and his voice unsteady.

"Lydia, I want to talk to you. Shall we go into the library?"

"I think we might," she answered him shyly. "There is a fire there, and it will be warmer than the drawing room. Do you wish for more brandy?"

He shook his head. "No. I must ride off soon, and I would not go befogged with liquor."

They crossed the hall into the comfortable book-lined room looking out on the dank garden with its dripping trees and fog rising like smoke from the reedy surface of the millpond at the far edge. Hugh pulled two low carved chairs to the blazing fire, and they sat down.

He had said he meant to talk, but it was a long time before he did so. Instead he seemed quite to forget her presence, staring into the fire like a man alone. She waited, hearing the rain beat all around the house in the sharp spring wind, the crackle of twigs on the hearth, and far away in an upstairs chamber, the child's faint cry. She stirred uneasily. Frances had given her an hour, but that did not mean Frances would not be sending for her soon. And between herself and Hugh there was still so much unsaid.

Just as she had despaired of it, he finally spoke. "Lydia, one of the letters in my pocket commends me to General Gage. His Excellency suggests that I could prove myself useful to His Majesty's cause if I were provided with a post in Boston. It would, no doubt, carry enough wages for me to marry. But I am not sure that I wish to be useful to His Majesty's cause. What would you have me do in the matter?"

Like a two-edged knife she felt the thought cut through her mind, straight to the heart beneath. Dan MacMurray would never have asked her what to do in any matter. Dan MacMurray would always have known. Known what he wanted to do, and done it. But did that make him the better man? In any case, it was the thing about him that had hurt her so. And yet—and yet, did she consider herself any better served, now that a man revealed his weakness to her, shared with her his indecision?

"Why you must do as you think best, Hugh," she answered, feeling somehow older and wiser than he, and ashamed of feeling so, aware of the falseness and the condescension of it. "You surely know—"

He reached forward, seized the tongs, and poked impatiently at the fire.

"Damn your aloofness, Lydia! Though at times I have loved you for it, and I would not have you different than you are. When I decide this matter, you know, I decide for the two of us. If I go to the general's service in Boston, we will marry, and you will live much the same as the wives of the English officers there. Could you be happy, living so, when all over the country men

are taking their guns down for war, and your husband will soon be fighting against the men of your own flesh and blood, the men you grew up with?"

Something wiser and surer than herself was rising up in her to make answer to him. Something that had been in her mother and grandmother, she thought, the old knowledge that is in all women.

"If I take you for my husband," she told him steadily, "I will be happy with you whatever side you are on. But I have not said yet that I will take you so."

He sat there looking at her, his face dark and frowning. Then suddenly his eyes lighted up, his handsome mouth curved in a smile, and he leaned forward.

"Oh, but you will, Lyddy," he said. "You are telling me, that whatever choice I make, you will abide by it. That for me you would abandon—"

"I am telling you nothing of the kind," she cried. "I only said—!"

He reached out and took her two hands. She did not draw back. The singing of the fire seemed to go through her whole body. In a moment, she knew, she would be close in his arms, close, and close, and warm—! But she must not allow it. She must refuse his love while she could, for there would be a moment, she knew, when she could no longer refuse—and that moment was near. She twisted her wrists in his grasp, trying to wrench away.

"Miss Lyddy," said Prue's disapproving voice in the doorway, "her ladyship wants you above stairs. Now!"

Swiftly they drew apart, and Lydia stumbled to her feet. He rose, too, his features arranging themselves in a formal smile. Then he took her hand again and pressed it gently.

"Good-bye, Lydia," he said. "I must be off for Boston, and since John wished me to bring him news of the Merrimack Valley, I shall return to Wolfeborough by a different way. But you and Frances will be coming north soon. The hard rains have melted the frost from the ground, and the roads will be passable once the mud is dry. Until then—"

"What will you do with the letter to General Gage?" she asked, not meeting his gaze, her throat stiff and the blood burning her cheeks, the rest of her all a-chill.

"Why it may be that I will lose it," he replied airily, as if she were showing too much concern over an unimportant thing. "It may be missing from my pocket even now. On the other hand—"

Prue snorted. Lydia turned, caught up her trailing skirts, and fled into the hall. She met the governor's lady on the stairway coming down. The candles were lighted though it was only mid-afternoon, and they cast a soft glow over the beautiful face, the changing sea-colored eyes, and the jeweled combs in the dark hair. Frances stood aside to let her pass, proudly aware of all her own charms, the deep curve of her bosom in its sheath of tawny silk, the provocativeness of her rose-red mouth. Lydia felt suddenly as ugly as Prue and

as old as Madame Mark Hunking, of no account in the world of men and women any more. Her mistress smiled and motioned for her to go above.

"Dorothy is feeling ill and has gone to lie down," she said, in her tone a quick eagerness that Lydia could see no reason for, "and I must speak to Abby about supper, for John's father and mother and the Dr. Cutters will be here. And I must speed Hugh on his way. Have you taken leave of him, Lydia?"

"Yes," said Lydia, "we have taken our leave."

She climbed wearily upstairs and went into the rose-hung chamber. For a little while she sat there, rocking the cradle gently with one hand, thoughts drifting in and out of her mind like smoke, but none of their outlines clear and plain. What was Hugh going to do in Boston, she wondered, and what did she wish him to do? Would she find herself standing by the altar soon, just as she had stood with David? Vowing herself again to another man, while Dan MacMurray still went free as the March wind, lying where he chose and with whom he would, making no vows at all? And yet, she wondered in her heart, in spite of his stubborn denial, if he were not as irrevocably bound as she.

The child stirred a little, and gave a sigh of utter contentment and sleep. Lydia bent over him, and just then she heard a disturbance in the hall below. Voices lifted in a confused babel. The front door creaked open and slammed shut. Hurrying to the window and pulling the draperies aside, she saw Hugh stride quickly away. His cocked hat was pulled down and his cloak drawn tight about him. He hurried into the governor's stable and emerged a moment later, mounted, spurring his horse down Pleasant Street. Holding his shoulders stiff, not looking backward, he rode away in the black rain. Downstairs the angry voices of quarreling women rose to such a pitch she could not ignore them, and she stepped into the hall and leaned over the fluted balustrade, the better to hear and see.

Dorothy Giffard and Frances Wentworth stood just outside the library door, all their soft pliant femininity gone from them, and all their gracious breeding. They were the eternal fishwives, blazing-eyed and shrill.

"You shall not do it," cried Dorothy. "You shall keep your evil caresses for your husband who can honestly receive them, and leave my brother alone!"

"You will mind your own affairs, you little wanton!" snapped the governor's lady. "I have taken you in and cherished you, and you go creeping through my house to spy upon me!"

"I have crept nowhere, and I have not spied," retorted the girl, her voice keyed lower now, and with a chill in it, harsh lines marring her gentle face. "I walked openly down your stairs to say farewell to my brother, and I saw—I saw—oh, the unspeakable thing—!"

Frances' voice had changed, too. Honey and sweet oil dripped in the words it spoke.

"Unspeakable! You saw me kissing your brother good-bye. A chaste salute, indeed. He is an admirable young man, of whom my husband and I are both fond."

"Kissing my brother! Indeed, that was not all I saw! I saw you lean upon him with that great swollen breast of yours that should be suckling its child. I saw your head on his shoulder, and your lips in his neck, and where your prying fingers went—!"

Lydia felt sick. She clung to the balustrade. But she could not close her eyes and ears. She could not draw herself away.

"You take advantage," Dorothy went on, growing always more calm, but none the less scornful, "of his loneliness, and the hotness of his young manhood, and of Lyddy being what she is, so cold and slow—"

Frances laughed harshly. "Lyddy! He should know better. The river'll take fire and burn from here to Bloody Point before she warms to a man. She has not the heart for it. A poor mean creature and afraid. Afraid to lose herself in love in a man's arms! Thank God, they can never say that of me!"

Dorothy smiled coldly. "No, they never can say that of you. You are always lost in love of yourself, and you take to a man's arms whenever you can find a pair that will close upon you. But you are wrong about Lyddy, I think. She has been hurt, and she is frozen over now, like a winter brook. But with some one who is patient—with my brother, perhaps—she will come to springtime again."

"So your brother is patient," cried Frances mockingly. "That is indeed news to me. I had never observed him so."

"Fanny," said Dorothy soberly, her voice so quiet now that Lydia had to strain her shocked ears to hear it, but the lift of her slim shoulders as firm as if she were a stone woman cut out of her native crags on Flamborough Head; to New Hampshire granite in noways inferior at all, "I say to you now, you will leave my brother alone. You may say it is none of my affair, that I am not my brother's keeper, and you are right. But I cannot stand by and see you destroy him, only for the one reason—that you may pride yourself on what you have done! It is a game and an idle jest for you, but it could mean the end of the world for him, if it were known. I warn you to let him be."

Frances laughed, a sharp tinkling laugh like a cascade of icicles plunging from the house eaves in a thaw.

"And if I do not heed your warning?"

"Why then," persisted Dorothy, "I shall go to your husband. I shall tell him what you do, and bid him restrain you."

Frances' face reddened. She clenched her hands and drew back her elbows; her face and throat and body seemed to swell with utter rage. It was she who looked old and ugly now. Lydia, watching her, felt white and empty and

virginal and young.

"You will go to my husband! You will tell him what I do, and bid him restrain me! Will you also tell him that you carry within your body the bastard child of God knows whom?"

Lydia caught her breath and sank down on the floor, peering between the rungs of the balustrade. Dorothy's face had whitened, but she gave no ground.

"It is not your affair nor your husband's that I carry a child in my body. But how did you know? I myself am scarcely sure."

Frances' rage had turned cold and scornful, rising higher as she sensed her own power. "I know by the way you shun your breakfast, my lady. By the way I hear you retching in the mornings, and pacing the floor sleepless at night. By your mouth's mind for candied ginger that sends you down to the markets in Queen Street every day. Moreover, I have had Prue keep watch upon your linen, and that tells the tale. Had you known the father, you doubtless would have arranged with him and had the banns cried before you were thus far gone. One month is it? More than that, surely; two or three. Or perhaps it is some married man, some pious citizen here in Portsmouth, who has lusted too far for young flesh, and now abandons you to hide behind his wife's petticoat. Perhaps—"

"It was at Epiphany," said Dorothy simply. "And I know my child's father. He has no other wife, and I know that he will marry me, but he is far up the province now, and I can wait for his return. You cannot frighten me by calling me common and vile."

"Far up the province, is he? Likely away to Canada, and unlikely to return. What will your darling brother say when I tell him—oh so reluctantly and with a tear in my eye—that I had to forbid you my house since you were soon to be proclaimed in all Portsmouth as a dockside whore—you, Dorothy Giffard, whose family came with the great duke!"

"You—you would tell my brother that?"

"Before I would have you tell my husband what you think to tell of me."

For one moment Dorothy faltered, her shoulders drooped, and she gazed with frightened eyes this way and that. Frances was quick to press the advantage home.

"In my husband's absence," she announced, her manner now thoughtful, almost dreamy, its sharp edges blurred away, but the terrible cold anger still lying underneath, "I think I shall send for Wyseman Claggett to advise me. It was due to his pleading that the court condemned Ruth Blay. Bastardy is not an easy sin to atone for in New Hampshire, you will find."

"But Ruth Blay was charged with killing her child," cried Dorothy. "I would never do the like with mine. And what can Wyseman Claggett do to me, when it has not yet come to birth?"

"He will find a way," smiled Frances coldly, "for the court to punish your sin. We have a term in this province you may not yet have heard. We say a man is 'Claggetted' when Wyseman has dealt with him—harshly, but no doubt well. Of course,"—and she shrugged her white shoulders rising from her low-cut gown—"if you wish to take yourself away from here, you can avoid—"

"I will go," said Dorothy, firm again, her gray eyes shining in her pale drawn face. "I have seen Wyseman Claggett, and rather than be Claggetted, I will go. I had thought to save my brother from you, but I cannot do that. Perhaps Lyddy can. But now it is my child who matters more. Will you allow me to take my belongings with me?"

"Take what you can carry away. I shall not send porters and a carriage with you," said Frances, triumph glinting in her eyes and ringing in her voice. "I do not want your rags and battered trinkets. Go to the streets, or where you will. I shall not hound you—so long as you stay away from me and mine."

"Thank you, my lady, for your charity," said Dorothy. She turned and walked swiftly up the stairs. Lydia met her at the top.

"Dorothy," she cried, oblivious of the governor's wife listening to them from the hall below. "I heard it all. Where are you going, Dorothy?"

Dorothy put her finger to her lips. "Hush," she said. "Do not bring blame upon yourself. I shall find shelter somewhere, Lyddy."

Before they realized it, Frances stood beside them. Her voice was cool and impersonal now, like that of a mistress giving her servants their orders.

"Lydia," she said, "I heard you confess that you had been eavesdropping. What a nest of serpents my household has turned out to be! Well, I bear no ill will to either of you. You had better go with Dorothy when she leaves here tonight, and see her safe to whatever refuge she can find for herself. I hear they keep a stews in Fleet Street near the prison where you would doubtless both be welcome. But come back and let me know her circumstances whenever she has established them. My husband may comment on her absence. Her brother will also enquire. It might not sound well in their ears if I had to say that I let her go into the street penniless, so I will give you money—"

"I have money," said Lydia quickly, her own voice rising as her temper rose. This was no longer Dorothy's quarrel, but her own. "Do not talk to me of a stews in Fleet Street! You would know better how to behave there than I. You would betray your own husband and fling yourself at my affianced one! You—!"

"There was little need of flinging," sneered Frances. "He has always been mine since the day I first looked upon him. I am in his blood, and mine he will remain—"

"You lie! He has asked me to marry him! Has he ever asked marriage of you, ever lamented that you are already wed—ever—?"

Frances smiled condescendingly, her speech now delicate and cool.

"Hardly asked marriage. He would not have the effrontery for that. It is enough for him to be my courtier, to pick up my handkerchief and carry my cloak, and lead out Bugler when we walk abroad. That is more to him than lying in bed with you could ever be."

"But he held me in his arms and asked me in marriage—"

Frances' face still wore the sculptured smile. "That I will not deny, but consider the timing of his proposal. I was withdrawn from him into the eclipse of childbed. It was only while I lay swollen and defiled with my pregnancy that he turned to you; only during the time that I no longer sought to draw him with the crook of a finger and the flash of an eyelid. But now the sun shines forth, and I am myself again. I warned you well of this. Go or stay, as you please. He will have no more yearnings after you."

She swept past them into her splendid chamber with her young son asleep in it and shut the door.

Half an hour later Lydia and Dorothy, each carrying as much of her goods as could be bundled into a wide shawl, hesitated in the street, the wet rain falling into their eyes and hair. Behind them stood John Wentworth's great lighted house with all the shutters closed, the front door irrevocably locked by Prue who had let them out with no farewells, the usual scowl on her ugly equine face.

"Dolly," said Lydia brokenly, "I am sorry for all that has happened. Does Red Dan know?"

Dorothy shook her head. "Oh course he does not know, or we would be married fast by now. It is only till he comes back from the north country that I am in this plight. Well, my lady has gotten rid of both of us, it seems, and there is none to stand in the way now, of whatever evil she may intend. Lyddy, let us go for tonight and take a room at the Deer, and while we are abed there, we can talk about what to do."

But once they were lying close together between the coarse sheets, high under the eaves of the old alehouse, with only the thickness of weathered shingles between their heads and the drumming rain, they did not talk at all. They lay exhausted, speechless, staring at the dark. After they had lain there so long that Lydia thought her companion must have gone to sleep, the girl finally spoke.

"Lyddy," she said tensely, "I am frightened. Frances said she would not hound me, but can we be sure of her word? Do you trust her, Lyddy?"

Lydia suddenly remembered Sarah Davenport at the Wolfe Tavern, how she had cautioned her not to trust the governor's wife. "I don't know what they think of her to the eastward, but it's little enough we think of her here," Sarah had said. She thought, too, of the words of old Ma'am Hooper, the witch

woman. “You’ll get more than you bargain for, in New Hampshire, but it won’t be a gentleman.” And perhaps she did not have Hugh, after all. As she thought back over it, there had been many little signs all along the way, that his mind was turning toward the governor’s wife. Many times when the mention of her name had afflicted him with sudden silence, embarrassment, and tension.

“I have always trusted her until now,” she answered honestly, “but, of course, I shall not do so any longer. I have trusted your brother, too, Dolly. But was he not concerned in the business as much as she?”

“No, he was not!” cried Dorothy quickly. “I know he was drawn to her beauty. Last summer I knew that, and I worried for him. But then she was with child, her husband’s child—oh nobody doubts it is her husband’s child! She is not utterly vile! And you came, and I could see him turning to you—”

“But this leave-taking of theirs in the hall that brought all the trouble down?”

“Lydia, I swear it. Hugh stood there wooden as the stair rail, and she fawned and fawned, and finally flung herself upon him. He put his hands under her elbows as if he meant to thrust her away, but—!”

Dorothy broke off her speech and stirred restlessly on the cornhusk mattress. Then she said, “Do you know of any man alive who would thrust Frances Wentworth away from him?”

“No,” said Lydia wretchedly. “I know of no man who would do that.”

“What I am frightened of,” went on Dorothy in a calmer tone, “is that she will send Wyseman Claggett to search for me. I have heard that in this barbarous country folk are still whipped at the town pump.”

“Yes,” said Lydia. “Not often nowadays, but I have known it to be done.”

“She is angry with me because I will not let her make sport of my brother,” went on Dorothy, “vengefully angry. It was in her face. I think I had better be gone out of Portsmouth, but I am afraid you have already befriended me too far. I will not ask you to go.”

“Of course I shall go with you, till I am sure that you are well provided for and safe. But where will you go?”

“Do you need to ask, Lyddy?” Dorothy smiled, a tiny dimple that Lydia had never noticed before appearing in her right cheek. “Why, where could I go? Is there more than the one place? I shall go to Londonderry and wait there for Dan.”

“You will go to Londonderry? But how will you get there? Where will you stay? You have no friends in that town.”

“We can hire horses, at Stoodley’s, and there is a tavern there—if Dan’s grandmother will not let me stay in her house. But perhaps—perhaps you do not want to go to Londonderry, Lydia. Perhaps you do not want to meet any

more with Black Dan."

"I am not afraid of Black Dan," said Lydia slowly. "Perhaps it is well that I see him again, that I make very sure of myself before Hugh and I—!"

Dorothy nodded. "I understand, Lyddy, and I think it is very wise of you—and very fair."

I wonder if she knows I am lying, thought Lydia, for her whole world had turned bright suddenly, there in the darkness, at the thought of Dan. And then a pang of bitter envy wracked her heart. What would it be like if she were the one who carried Dan MacMurray's child on this journey, not Red Dan's but that other one; if she could ride proudly, sure of his love, sure that he would recognize her claim?

"We will start as soon as it is light," said Dorothy almost happily. "Oh Lyddy, perhaps it is good that Frances flew at me as she did, and things have fallen out in this way. Now I shall be a married woman before my brother can know. That was all that troubled me these past weeks, though I should have worried, no doubt, for my sin."

"There is not so much talk of sin as there used to be," said Lydia, "for freer behavior has come into fashion now." She was growing drowsy. She felt peace and happiness stirring in her as they had ever since Dorothy had told her where she meant to go.

"The folk I know in England do not talk of it at all," answered Dorothy, "nor is it much mentioned in Queen's Chapel. But the servant girls worry lest they be tempted to it, and so do folk I overhear in the street sometimes. I am told that Mr. Haven at the South Meeting House preaches against it loud and long. But it comes to me that I called this a barbarous country, and I must not speak of it so, for it is Dan's country, and it will be mine now, and our children's after us. I feel so sleepy—Lyddy—I—!"

But Lydia ceased to hear her after that. Huddled together in the attic chamber of the old alehouse, they slept, exhausted, while the last black night of March went over, and the sky back of the North Church steeple grew red with the first faint light of the shining April day.

13.
A NEW WAY O' THINGS

"Come in, Jock! I got no business for ye, but I'm always glad to see ye scrievin' up my path. Will ye take a wee drap? The bottle's no empty yet, and Daniel's on his way to the store."

Nance MacMurray leaned from the doorway of the weathered, black old farmhouse that stood tall and foursquare at the front and slanted away till the eaves nearly touched the ground behind. She peered upward into the face of the gaunt man with shaggy white hair, and put out her wrinkled hand and smiled. Nance was a tiny woman well up in years, but she bore herself trimly, and the red strands still shone in her graying hair.

"Bless ye, lass," exclaimed Jock Alexander, the wheelwright, "I'll no refuse your offer, nor the chance to warm myself whilst I drink it down. 'Tis a raw day for spring. Fifty-five year since we shipped out o' Belfast, but I canna' get used to the chill o' this country, where the snows o' one winter's scarce gone from the woods before there's another like to fall!"

Nance held the door open and ushered him into the clean scrubbed kitchen with a kettle steaming on its crane above the fire.

"Aye, the peach trees would be a-bloom in Ulster now," she said, and glanced quickly out of the window at the bleak hillside covered with yellow grass and last year's dead leaves. "But dinna' think o' that, Jock. Long ago we set out faces to a new way o' things, and we mustna' look back."

The old man sank heavily down on a bench by the fire, and Nance stood on tiptoe to reach down the whiskey bottle from the top shelf of an oak dresser across the room.

"It's been a day o' braw bright sun," she said. "I had linen out on the bleaching green till the lasses brought it in an hour ago when clouds come across the sky."

"Aye," he muttered, taking the glass she handed him and drinking deeply. " 'Twas spitting rain as I come by the Common Field. I'll warm my old bones a bit and then get on to the tavern afore supper. Did ye say ye've no custom for me? I've a wee flax wheel behind my saddle, its parts bound together like faggots. But I could set it up for ye."

Nance smiled and held up her hand. "Listen," she said.

Once their talk had ceased they could hear the low hum of foot-treadled spinning wheels from the south room that faced West Running Brook. Now and then a girl's voice spoke inaudible words and another made it a laughing answer, but the clack of the wheels did not slacken. The wheelwright's ears were well attuned to such music, and after a moment of judicial listening he announced, "Ye got six flax wheels a-going there. By the sound, I can tell. Ye've hired another lassie since I was by this way."

Nance nodded brightly. "Aye. Janet Moor, the orphan's bound herself to me. Selectmen approved the doing o' it. They knew I would use her well. I ha' gi'en her the hickory wheel that belonged to my son's wife, Jean."

Jock took another generous swallow of whiskey. "God used ye ill in your family, Nance," he rumbled. "So many took by death so soon."

Nance smiled, but her old voice quavered as she answered him. "Five I lost," she said slowly, though he knew the names as well as she. "My gude-man gone when we was scarce ten years wed, then both my lads and their wives. But my Dans, I got. I canna' complain o' the Lord, since they be spared to me."

"True, ye've your Dans left," mused Jock. "Good lads, if not o'er gleg to settle themselves in the ways o' Londonderry that they was born to. Och, I suppose there's naught wrong wi' young men wanting to see more o' the world than their neighbor's flax fields. Which one o' them did ye say has gone to the store? I thought they was both from home, traveling the province somewhere."

"And indeed they were. But the one come home last week, and t' other's expected soon."

"Home last week? Which, did ye say?"

"Why, Daniel. I told ye."

"They both be that."

"Aye, baptized so. But 'tis strange how things fell out when God was a-putting my lads together."

"I always thought he made a fair piece o' work."

Nance' eyes grew bright with pleasure at his compliment. "That he did, and I be ever ready to praise the Lord for my grandsons. They are no made ill. But one lad has wild red hair and a cleft to his chin, and a gleam that looks like devilment in his eye. Ye'd expect him to be running the whole time after the lasses, wasting his money and getting himself bitch-fou in the taverns, maybe. But he isna' that way. He's a braw sober steady lad, and if he will na' sit at the loom like other men, he strikes a rare bargain when he takes our linen to the Bank. He's got powerful arms to wield the flax brake, and all the business o' hackling and swingling he knows. 'Tis now I who depend on his counsel, and 'tis he will run the farm after me."

Jock nodded, and she refilled his glass. "And t' other lad?" he inquired.

"Now he I told ye of, I call Daniel," she continued, "because he is wise and steady always, like a Daniel come to judgment. But my other grandson, wi' his dark hair and craggy face and his quiet look that could well befit a parson—he's all for the wrestling, and the shooting matches and ranging through the woods wi' his musket day on day. Worse, when he goes to the Bank, 'tis said, he's no unknown at the taprooms and the gaming table. He be kind to me, and oft he brings me gifties that I know took the last shilling in his pocket. He knows the way o' running lines and laying boundaries, and he's cut marks on the face o' this province that'll be here still when all we folk been grave dust a long time. But he's na' learned the first lesson o' manhood, I tell him, that a body canna' always have his own way. So I think o' him as Danny—my wee lad."

Jock grinned and held out his glass. Eyeing him sharply she filled it again, though not quite as full as before. He drank, and his grin widened. He shook his head and spat across the bearskin rug into the fire.

"Aw, Nance," he chafed her, "ye may think o' Black Dan MacMurray as a 'wee lad,' but there's none else in the town would agree wi' ye. He be only and all too much a man. So ye say he's na' home yet but expected?"

"Aye, 'tis for that Daniel has gone to the store to fetch whiskey to make him welcome, since we'd none left save what ye're drinking now. Both my Dans has been on province business, urging folk to sign the Association, and helping the far towns to ready the militia in case o' need."

The grin left Jock's face. "I been about the province myself," he said. "Traveling as a peddler wi' my wheels, there canna' a deer crop the buds from an apple tree wi'out, soon or late, I know. I tell ye, Nance, we be a-going to have trouble in this country. Take New Hampshire now: King's government sits in Portsmouth and tells us one thing. Province government sits in Exeter and tells us contrary way. Folk can't live in a mingle-mangle. They must choose and follow one o' the twain."

"I think we in Londonderry ha' chosen," said Nance quietly. "We had no love for the English since the old wars at home in Ireland. I think if our lads were called on, they would take down their guns from the kitchen wall and go right smartly to fight—but it wouldna' be for the King. I hear there be some twenty Tories on the farms o' the English Range—but not we."

"England's no used ye so ill, Nance. Ye got one o' the exempt farms. Ye pay no land tax here."

She lifted her head proudly. "Aye, we hold the grant in the name o' Dan's father—Dan, my gude-man, I'm speaking of—and he fought at the siege against Tyrconnell, near died at the Slaughter Gate, so his lands was declared tax free forever. 'Tis honored still."

"Wonder what Exeter government would think o' that, now? It might cost

ye pounds and shillings if whole country comes out against the King. God knows I'm no Tory, lass." He gazed out of the window at the long fields sloping down to the brook that wound through the valley, then turned to face her again. "But ha' ye thought, if we go under a new government, we go under a new way in all things, and we canna' tell how 'twill be. Think, Nance! Would ye jump blind into a frog pond in the dark? 'Tis no our Scotch-Irish way."

He set down his empty glass on the white pine floor and climbed laboriously to his feet.

She looked him squarely in the eye. "Jock," she said, "I be naught but an old woman, and I dinna' go much abroad nor understand the ways o' governments and kings. But my Dans ha' said they will go wi' the Congress and the Exeter men: that they will stand against King George no using us as he should." Her old face crinkled in a smile. "And that they say so is enough for me. I dinna' care what it cost. If they told me to jump blind into a frog pond in the dark, that I would no hesitate to do!"

He laughed and slapped his thigh. "And ye'd strike safe and dry on a bed o' rushes, sure, lass! Someways ye be like your uncle, Willy Humphrey. I mind him well. Remember the old crone who stood on the docks o' Belfast and shouted after the boat as we was leaving? 'May God's blessings go wi' all o' ye except Willy Humphrey! An' he can take care o' himself!' "

"Aye," said Nance, "I ha' remembered often, and I ha' thought, too, that Danny has more o' my uncle in him than Daniel has. Danny can take care o' himself—"

They were moving slowly toward the kitchen door. "So Black Dan's coming home," he said. "Well, the flesh is calling to him, I dinna' doubt."

Nance sighed. "I suppose ye mean Jessie?" she murmured resignedly.

"He still go there?" asked Jock, watching her keenly.

She nodded. "Gabble has it so. I'd ne'er know from him. I wish he would set his mind to a pure lass he could marry with. I wish that Daniel would. What wi' a houseful o' spinning girls, and the weaving, and the bleaching, the dairy, and the work o' the farm to be o'erseen, we need young wives here."

She stepped through the doorway with him, into the chill of the April afternoon. A raw wind swayed the budding boughs in the apple orchard and shook the thicket of young oaks and hazels across the cart track that wound between fieldstone walls, up the hill to the church and the tavern. Jock's big sorrel horse was cropping among the dead grasses at the roadside, and she could see a parcel tied behind the saddle, no doubt the wee spinning wheel.

"Good-bye, Jock," she said, "if ye meet my Danny anywheres as ye journey the province, tell him we be waiting for him at home."

Jock mounted the sorrel and lifted the reins, ready to ride away. "Dinna'

mean to travel further than home to Bedford, this trip," he told her. "I be coming from Haverhill and only stopped by for the pleasure o' gabbing wi' ye, Nance. There's not many left as sailed here on the *Robert* like we."

"Fewer every year," said Nance, smiling up at him. "When a body's old, 'tis fitting they should go, and I'd no mind, if only my Dans would settle themselves in the world. I was a lassie, the time ye're speaking of, unwed and prinking the whole time before the glass. And ye were younger than I, Jock. I remember the sailor who let ye smoke his pipe and how woeful sick ye were."

Jock smiled wryly. "I'll no forget it, lass. Though I live to be older than Adam, I'll never forget. Sure I think I prayed to die for nigh twenty minutes there, hanging o'erside." He slapped the reins on the neck of the sorrel. "But I be sicker now at what's like to come about in this country. Farewell to ye. Think some more about my wee spinning wheel."

After he had ridden up the hill, Nance stood alone in the dooryard, letting the brisk wind whip her skirts about her and loosen her neat hair. She liked to stand so, looking at the fields her father and her husband had cleared, at all the wide farms and meadows of Londonderry stretching beyond. How thick the oaks and hazels had grown along West Running Brook in the early days when the men had built the first rough cabins and cleared the Common Field! The first farms had been granted here, two rows of narrow hundred-and-twenty-acre home-lots facing each other across the little stream. Children were born and grew and new settlers came, and many folk had moved away from the old Double Range, but the MacMurrays kept to their first holdings still, having always prospered there. The broad beautiful English Range, the Aiken Range, and the High Range had tempted some, and others had gone wider afield to form other towns, in Bedford, in Antrim, in Peterborough, even further west than that.

Placidly Nance surveyed her little world all colored with the lights and shadows of the uncertain spring weather. Faint powdery gold seemed to be waking under the grayness now, and any day could brighten all the landscape with fresh shoots of green. Looking up the hill she saw in the foreground a grove of tall white pines, and above it the slender spire of Mr. Davidson's meeting house. The schoolhouse was there, she knew, and the graveyard, and Colonel Holland's tavern. And beyond that, down the slope to the westward, stood the mills on Beaver River, the blacksmith's shop, and the cabinetmaker's. Daniel should be passing there by now, she thought, on his way home from Pinkerton's store.

She turned backward to her own house, pleased with the soundness and the spaciousness of it, knowing that its roof had no chinks to let in the starlight and the rain, that it was comfortable and well garnished within. Little enough they had brought with them that April day more than half a century gone, when they

had trudged up the woods path from Haverhill driving a few oxen and cattle, the pack horses loaded with axes, hammers, shovels, saws, hoes and plows, seed corn and potatoes, molasses, meal and tea, blankets, and pots and pans. That was all they had besides the clothes they wore. Nance smiled to herself as she remembered it. She had gone to a new way o' things then, and not been afraid. But then she had been a spry eighteen. Could she face more changes now at seventy-three?

"I can, if my Dans will it," she murmured half-aloud, "and I dinna' care what it cost!" Her words sounded defiantly in her ears a moment, then the wind blew them away.

The hired men were coming in from the fields now, penning the sheep in their stone fold against the wolves that still sometimes came out of the forest; driving the cattle home. They would see to the milking and all things in the great barn, she knew, but she went herself to the weaving shed to make sure that the door was latched tight, lest it swing open and rain drift in on the loom her grandsons would not tend, on the flax brake and the swingling block, the hacklers and rufflers, cleaned and in good condition, ready for the season's work. She supposed they would have to hire a weaver again this year, or put out their thread to other looms, as was often done.

She crossed the worn turf between the shed and the farmhouse and entered the kitchen by the back door. Rusty streaks of sunset fell across the sky behind her, but even as she stepped into the warm room, she heard the spatter of raindrops against the windowpane. "Time I went to see to the lasses," she told herself. "They be able and nigh ready to leave now. Each o' 'em knows when she has her two skeins spun she can take her twelve-pence and go home. Och, if 'twas not a sin in this province now, I'd have me a cup o' tea—"

She heard a light knock on the front door.

The room had grown suddenly dark as the storm descended outside, and Nance lit a candle before she went to see who her visitor might be, but she did not carry it with her into the drafty hallway, she left it burning on the kitchen table. Lifting the iron latch, she pulled the heavy door open and peered out. Two young women stood there, huddled in the driving rain. They carried shawl-wrapped bundles, and wore scarves bound across their hair. Gypsies, was her first thought, and then she remembered she had not seen a gypsy since she left Ireland years ago. She opened the door wider and stood away from it.

"Come in," she said, "no matter what your business be, ye canna' tell it to me all dripping wi' rain."

They stepped into the hall and stood there, at the foot of the steep stairway, gazing at her. Nance looked them up and down. They are frightened, she thought, and their clothes are no country wear. After a moment she asked, "Was ye traveling afoot and lost your way? Or is it shelter ye seek? A night's

lodging maybe? 'Twas not Nance MacMurray ye came to see?"

"Yes," said the smaller one, with a timid smile. "We came to see Nance MacMurray."

They looked so miserable she could not find it in her heart to keep them standing there. "Come into the kitchen," she said a little gruffly. "I canna' give ye tea, but I've a brew o' goldenrod and blackberry leaves tastes little worse. 'Twill take the chill out o' ye."

"We would be grateful," said the taller girl with a smile. She was the older of the two, Nance noticed. Why did she have this strange feeling that there was something familiar about both of them?

She seated her guests at the kitchen table, and poured hot water over the powdered leaves that must serve for the forbidden beverage, brought it to them in steaming cups. Then she too sat down. Their business was evidently something they found hard telling, and she wanted to put them at their ease as much as she might. They were decent bodies, she could tell, and not here for any ill purpose. From their fine silk dresses it would not seem that they sought employment at spinning.

"Ha' ye journied far?" she asked, smiling faintly at them.

"We came from Portsmouth," said the older one, sipping her drink, the soft color of rose petals rising into her pale cheeks, her deep eyes smiling back at the old farm woman.

Och, thought Nance, she be bonny fair, nay, more than that, she be a beauty. But there's all a man would want in the other, the little one.

"I ha' heard," she said, "o' the pomps and vanities, the ceremonies and nick-nackets o' that little world o' Portsmouth. But I never been there. My husband took me to Exeter once when I was a young woman. I remember the buttonwood trees by the bridge, and the tall ships building in the river. I remember the cedar swamps and the sandy plains o' Kingston on the way. But I forget all else o' that journey."

Again she smiled at them. "Are ye no ready yet to tell me your business, lasses?" she asked.

The pair looked at each other. Then the smaller one spoke falteringly: "You are—I think—they told us at the tavern this was the way to come. We left our horses there for the drivers to return. We—"

Surprise overtook Nance too quickly for her to conceal it. "Ye sent your horses home!" she cried. "Then ye mean to stay in Londonderry?"

"Yes," said the small girl firmly, "we mean to stay. Graunie! You are Dan MacMurray's graunie, are you not?"

I should ha' known, thought Nance, settling back with a sigh. I should ha' known that Jessie wouldna' do for him in all. I should ha' known there'd be trouble wi' a lass.

She answered as evenly as she could. “Yes, I be Dan MacMurray’s graunie. Speak out plain? Has Black Dan injured ye? Do ye want money, or do ye think to get his name and his ring?”

The girl looked startled. Then a warm smile lighted her face, and Nance saw that she was lovely, too. She gave a merry little laugh.

“Graunie, you have mistaken me,” she said. “I want a ring and a name. But it is Red Dan’s I want. I know he will give them to me. Has he never told you he had a sweetheart at the Bank? A sweetheart named Dorothy?”

Nance felt her heart suddenly lighten, but she spoke cautiously. “I ha’ heard o’ Dorothy,” she said. “He hasna’ spoken straight out to me,”—and she smiled a little more warmly—“but he and his cousin sit at this very table sometimes, and talk to each other as if I werena’ here. They speak no ill o’ any woman, but they are no very guarded in what they say.”

Dorothy smiled back. The taller girl was silently drinking the makeshift tea.

“Will you tell me what he said of me? And do they talk, too, of Lydia March? This is Lydia.”

“Aye,” said Nance dryly, “I ha’ heard words spoken o’ Lyddy March, too.”

Lydia flushed and tightened her slender fingers on the tea cup handle. She did not lift her eyes.

“Seems I heard talk there was courting going on amongst the four o’ ye from time to time, but I heard no mention o’ marriage banns that I remember.”

Now Dorothy’s face reddened. Her eyes filled, and she swallowed as if it hurt her.

Nance went on, a little more gently. “So ye ha’ courted wi’ my lads, the both o’ ye. But what desperate business brings ye over the muddy roads all the way from the Bank to the backwoods o’ Londonderry? Could ye not wait till they sought ye out, as ’tis the custom for maids to do?”

Dorothy put her head down on the table and began to cry, and Nance’s quick heart repented of her outspokenness. While she was studying how to mend the situation, Lydia March lifted her head, looked her hostess straight in the eye and spoke, not sharply, but with a certain cool pride.

“No, Madame MacMurray, we could not wait, and we are not maids, neither of us. I am a widow, but I am betrothed to marry Dorothy’s brother, and you may keep your lads for all of me. But Dorothy’s case is different. She and Red Dan have loved each other deep and true, and she carries his child. We lived in the governor’s house, she as a guest and I as a servant there, but when Madame Wentworth discovered this matter I just told you of, she turned us out. We will be on our way, if you will tell us where to find Red Dan.”

“Sit where ye are five minutes longer, and I’ve no doubt he’ll come walking in the door. He’s but gone to Pinkerton’s store after whiskey,” said

Nance woodenly. She was o'er used, she thought, to the ways o' sinful young men, and she could not be as distressed thereat as a Christian woman ought. But Daniel, the wise, the steadfast! She had never suspected aught like this could come from him. But if the tale was an honest one, Daniel must indeed love this lass, and she must not suffer unkindness in his house. "Dry your eyes, child," she said. "If he loves ye deep and true, he'll no want to find ye crying here."

Somehow Nance believed this Lydia March, this lovely widow woman that Black Dan said was a cold stubborn piece and worth no man's while at all. And she had heard Daniel speak with eagerness and a light in his eye about pretty Dolly at the Bank, who came of rich English folk and was surely too good for such as he. And yet—if it were a game—

She rose from the table and brought more tea. Dorothy had lifted her head and was wiping her eyes with the edge of her shawl. Nance handed her a clean linen handkerchief from the dresser drawer. "Daniel's on his way, lass," she said grimly. "And if things be as ye say, ye need have no fear. Ye two will marry, for we'll have no bastard bairns charged to our family. But if ye lie—! When he tells me himself 'tis true, then I'll believe—"

She heard another knock at the front door.

This time it was a heavy knock, and the visitor did not wait for her to admit him. He was a tall thick-shouldered man with devouring black eyes under bushy brows, and a convulsively twitching mouth. His white wig and cocked hat were dripping with rain, and he was wearing a sword, a fashion not often seen in the country nowadays. He strode past the stairway and into the kitchen where he came to a halt and stood gazing sharply around him. His glance played over the two girls like a serpent's flicking tongue.

Lydia gasped, and Dorothy uttered a weak cry that made Nance think of a rabbit in a snare. She set the teapot down on the table and stood facing the intruder.

"Ha," said the man through his nose. "Good day to you, Nance MacMurray."

" 'Tis no good day for me, Wyseman Claggett, when ye walk into my house wi'out my bidding."

The former King's attorney laughed harshly. "Forgive me, Nance. You will be glad I did, when I explain my business here."

Nance noticed that Lydia sat pale and still, her hands lying quietly on the table. Dorothy crouched on her chair, looking ready to faint with terror. She turned back to Wyseman Claggett.

"Explain it then," she said. "There's none stopping ye."

He stood with his back to the fire and ran his long crooked fingers restlessly over the sheath of his sword.

“Last night, Nance,” he said, with a cold smile that made Nance think of sunlight glistening on a hard crust of January snow. “I dined by invitation at the house of His Excellency Governor Wentworth. He was from home, but his delightful wife—there were other guests there, other than myself—.” He hastened to clear himself from all suspicion of being alone with my lady Frances. “His delightful wife was full of the news of a great scandal that burst on her house that afternoon.”

“Great scandals be nothing new in Frances Wentworth’s house,” retorted Nance. “Her ways be known throughout the province.”

Claggett ignored her remark. “It seems she had been harboring a young English girl in her house, a girl of gentle birth, only to have the wench prove with child by God knows whom. Her own handmaiden was somewhat involved in the affair. She was forced to dismiss both of them. I reproved her for letting them off so easily. They should have been lodged in jail, charged as a public nuisance if nothing worse. I am sure I could find a law that would provide for their punishment. I have made it the first purpose of my life to search out laws of this kind. We cannot have such abominations loose in the province. Portsmouth must be protected—”

“If ye’re speaking o’ these lasses, sir, they be gone from Portsmouth, and no more trouble to it. Canna’ ye leave them be. Did ye follow them here?”

Pacing back and forth, his strides easy rather than nervous, he continued his story. The rain tapped at the windowpanes, and the wind sighed through the dark pine grove above them on the hill. Nance put more wood on the fire and trimmed the candle-wick. She wished that Daniel would come. The girls kept their glances down and spoke no word.

“I thought about the story after I had retired to my chamber at Stoodley’s tavern,” went on Wyseman Claggett, “and next morning as I breakfasted in the taproom, I happened to look out of the window, and saw this pair hire horses and ride away. I surmised that they were the creatures Frances had spoken of. When I enquired of the hostler where they were bound for, he told me their destination was Londonderry. A happy coincidence, since I myself was on the way to my estate in Litchfield, the next town westward on the Dunstable Path. I vowed I would overtake them and have them cast into jail, but business delayed me in Exeter, and they reached Colonel Holland’s ahead of me. I learned from him, however, that they had asked the way to your house, and I think I know the reason. You have grandsons, Nancy!”

He smiled at her, the evil crooked smile of a cruel man with no winsomeness about it.

“I ha’ grandsons, yes,” snapped Nance. She had heard it said that he beat his wife, and she hated him for it. Besides, she had known of other ill dealings carried out in his name. “But what be that to ye, Wyseman Claggett?”

"Nancy," he continued, with an air of abused patience, "here in this small and godly town you are unused to the lustful pleasures that run rife at the Bank, and the lures that are set there for young men. Ye know nothing of Jezebel, Nancy; nothing of the Whore of Babylon! But perhaps your grandsons are less innocent than you are. I put it to you that these young women have chosen your lads to hide behind. That they will falsely accuse these gullible young men in order to cover their own shame."

Nance shrugged. "Wait till Daniel gets here," she said, "and he'll talk wi' ye."

"Unfortunately I cannot wait." Claggett was frowning. "I must get home to Litchfield. I make it my practice to arrive before Lettice expects me, in order to catch her in wrong doing if I can. But I am prepared to remove this evil from your house. I will not leave you at the mercy of these wretches from Portsmouth. I have three men outside, and it is arranged for them to take the women to Stephen Holland's and lock them in the cellar there, till they can be conveyed back to the Bank to answer charges I shall bring against them."

Nance looked at the black-browed attorney, his lips drawn back in an animal smile, his hands caressing his sword. Then she looked at the two girls who sat there stiff and white-faced, like wooden carvings incapable of emotion. And quick as that she made up her mind which side of this quarrel she was on. They might ha' lied to her, but they were human still. And Claggett was not human. He was the snarling lynx, and the wildcat still a-prowl in the woods, still carrying off young lambs unless they were penned up tight.

"Well, I let ye tell your pretty story, sir," she answered smoothly. "Wasna' no fault wi' it, except it were all a lie. If Madame Wentworth has trouble wi' her maids, my heart is sore for her indeed. But that has naught to do wi' these lasses here. They be honest women, come to my house at my invitation, for the younger o' them is to be married to my grandson. Now leave off worrying us and get home to your wife, poor lady."

His face darkened, and he hesitated.

"Nancy," he said, "you know I cannot take them from your house by force, more's the pity. Did the word of such an act go back to Johnny Wentworth, it would cost whatever honors still remain to me. But I trusted in your virtue and good sense. I trusted in your judgment, and your love for your young men. Your duty is to hand these women over, that we may shut them away from all society. Sleeping on a damp floor riddled with earthworms will cool their hot blood. I have always fought that strict virtue be maintained in this province. I appeal to you, as you love your grandsons, Nancy."

Nance felt herself bristling. I must look like a banty hen, she thought. Aloud she said, "Aye, Johnny Wentworth may be a Tory, but he'll no stand for

injustice and the abusement o' women in his province. And as for ye—ye'll strive for virtue in all ways, except to practice it yourself. And further, ye got no business here. If ye dinna' leave my house, I'll ring the cowbell for the hired men and ha' ye thrown out o' it. Head-first into West Running Brook, maybe!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "You're a fool, Nancy MacMurray," he told her.

"What ye are sir, I'd na' say," she retorted. "I wouldna' soil my mouth wi' the utterance o' it."

He muttered under his breath and turned away with an ill grace. At that moment Red Dan MacMurray opened the back door and strode into the room. "I got the whiskey, Graunie," he began, "and the sugar, and molasses, and cinnamon ye wanted—" He broke off, startled, as his glance swept over the group in the familiar kitchen. He hesitated, then went straight to Dorothy. She did not rise or speak, but put her hands up and clung to him.

"How—how did ye come here? I dinna' see—! Does Mrs. Wentworth or your brother know—?"

"The wench is with child, Dan," said Wyseman Claggett crudely. "She seeks to lay the blame on you." He smiled triumphantly at Nance.

Dan's gray eyes widened, and his grandmother, who knew him so well, could see incredulity in them, and the uncertainty, and then a quick exultant joy even more quickly veiled. His tanned face whitened a little. Then he gained control of himself and stared imperturbably back at Wyseman Claggett.

"And why not?" he said. "Whom else would she lay it on? We be promised man and wife." He set his hand reassuringly on Dorothy's quivering shoulder. "And if so be we anticipated, 'tis nothing has never been done in New Hampshire before, and will be again, in spite o' all ye can do, Wyseman Claggett. Come to our wedding, sir. When the lads make sport and run for the bottle, maybe ye'll be first there."

"Ha! Wedding!" sneered Claggett. "Do you think Mr. Davidson will marry such a couple already fast in sin?"

Red Dan MacMurray gazed calmly back. "I think he would," he said slowly, "But 'tis more than likely his wife will na' let him. She has the name o' being more holy than God, has Mrs. Davidson. No, I think likely we will go to Mr. Flagg in Chester. He'll perform an off-hand marriage for the asking. 'Flagg marriages' be common about here. He has special powers from Governor Wentworth."

Claggett turned away, defeated. "Whenever I seek to improve the behavior of this province," he complained, "I am thwarted to John Wentworth everywhere. Ah well, he will not be granting special powers long. Nay, he will find his own powers slipping from him till he be a private man at last, no better

than other men."

Red Dan had been looking tenderly at Dorothy's bent head, but now he looked straight into the eyes of the man of law. "Ye said a true word there, sir," he remarked quietly, "if ye've said no other here tonight."

"Ha!" snorted Claggett, striding through the doorway, out into the rain, where his disappointed henchmen still waited for the dainty-fleshed prisoners they had hoped to carry away.

"Lyddy March," said Nance quickly, "come into my spinning room wi' me. The lasses will ha' gone by now, lacking their wages, we were in such a mingle-mangle here."

She caught Lydia's arm and led her from the kitchen, still talking. "But ye can see the wee flax wheels, and I'll show ye our piles o' striped linen, weighed, and stamped, and sealed, and ready for the Bank." She closed the kitchen door behind them. They left the lovers all alone with their new way of things, in the homely room, silent except for the crackling of the fire, the sighing trees outside, and the steady drumming of the rain.

14.
THEY GO FOR THE HONEY

Spring came suddenly to Londonderry that year. One morning when Lydia rose and looked out of her chamber window, the fields that sloped down to West Running Brook lay gray and lifeless, the trees stood up like bundles of faggots that would never again put forth shoots of living green. It was a warm morning, Lydia noticed, with a hot bright sun. And by noonday unsuspected leaf buds swelled and burst open; the dooryards and meadows and unplowed hillsides were all awash with a gentle flood of green and gold. Graunie and the spinners tumbled out vast heaps of linen skeins, some to be washed repeatedly in the brook, and others to be bleached in bucking tubs of ashes and hot water that Red Dan had helped them to set up in the kitchen.

She had been three weeks in Dan MacMurray's house, and Black Dan, expected every day, had not come home. She had little excuse for remaining longer, and the time had come for her to go, but she lingered still. Dorothy had no more need of her protection, for Dorothy was all lawfully married, secure and happy again. Lydia and Graunie had ridden to the nearby village of Chester with the lovers, where Mr. Flagg, genially and asking no questions, had joined them with the blessing of the church. Graunie confided to Lydia on the way home that she had always hoped her grandsons would have fine weddings, true Londonderry fashion, with toasts drunk and muskets going off, but she had received the new bride with a simple whole-heartedness and given her the flax wheel that had belonged to her Daniel's dead mother, Jean. She knew she could buy another wheel for Janet the bound girl, she said, when her old friend Jock Alexander of Bedford came by.

And after supper, at the twilight of that first warm day, when old Nance and her grandson had gone to the barn loft to prepare the flaxseed for sowing, Dorothy and Lydia sat on the front doorstone, and watched the stars come out in the purple sky, and the white mists rise along the winding brook. Thus private and alone, they spoke together of their affairs for the first time since they had come to this house, frightened, and ashamed, and cowering in the rain.

"I have thought much about you, Lyddy," said Dorothy, sitting with her arms wrapped around her bent knees, her small pointed face lifted like a flower

opening to the air of the mild night. “And though we are together everyday, I get no chance to talk with you at all, for Dan or Graunie are always by.”

“And I have thought about you, Dorothy,” answered Lydia, smiling gently at the younger girl. “I do not need to ask you if you are happy here. I can see that you are.”

“Yes, I am happy,” said Dorothy softly. “I shall live all my life here with Dan, and I shall learn all the things Graunie knows, how to spin, and weave, and mind the farm. She has promised to teach me. It is not like the life I was brought up to. I need not speak French or play on the spinet here. But I would not go back to Portsmouth, and I can never go back to England. Hugh told me we could never go back. Lyddy, are you going to forgive Hugh?” She looked intently into the eyes of her friend. Lydia faced her honestly.

“I have been thinking much about it,” she said, “and it is not a matter of forgiving him. Perhaps his mind is not all made up, and he still has a choice to make. I would have him free to do so. If he truly wishes to marry me, he will find out where I am and seek me there.”

“Then—you are never going back to Frances’ house—back to the Bank?”

“No.”

She could still see Frances’ beautiful face twisted and ugly as she denounced Dorothy. She felt she had excused and forgiven Frances Wentworth for the last time. But she wished her no harm—only to keep away.

She said no more, and Dorothy did not question the statement. Instead, she asked another thing.

“Then—do you mean to wait here, Lyddy? Wait till Black Dan comes home? It is not that you are unwelcome. I would be happy to have you stay with us all the rest of our lives. But, if he comes, and you two should quarrel again, you would not be happy so. Dan has wondered, and Graunie has been asking me.”

Lydia bit her lip. “So they talk to you about me?” she asked. She could not be surprised nor angry. It was a natural thing for them to do, but she felt unaccountable hurt.

“But they say nothing bad, Lyddy!” cried Dorothy, sensing her distress. “Graunie only asked me once, did you think to learn the spinning too. And Dan, when we are alone at night, we do not speak of much except ourselves—and the coming one.” She smiled gently. “But last night he asked me if your waiting here so long meant that all was well again between you and his cousin. I think he hoped that it was, for he is fond of you, Lyddy.”

“No, I am not going to wait for Dan, and Graunie need not buy a spinning wheel for me,” answered Lydia firmly. “I have a house of my own, and I think I shall go to it now. Anyone wanting to find me can seek me there. It is on Crane Neck Hill in the west parish of Newbury. You will give them this

word."

Dorothy sighed and looked at the lights pricking out in the farmhouse windows across the brook valley.

"I think that is a good choice, Lyddy, though I shall miss you. Will you come here for my lying-in? I am sure Graunie will be wise in such matters, and she says there is a skilled midwife who lives just beyond the church green, but when I remember how Frances cried out, I think I should like to have you by."

"Of course I will come," said Lydia quickly. "If 'twas got at Epiphany, it will be born about the time the leaves turn. I shall plan to come to you then, wherever I may be."

They sat silent for a few moments, watching the fog creep up through the budding alders that fringed the brook. Then Dorothy spoke again. "I have only one unhappiness left," she said, "and it is that my brother no doubt thinks ill of me. He must have met with Frances by now, and heard all she has to tell. So Dan and I have talked the matter round all sides, and he has promised to ride to the Bank tomorrow, for surely John will be back from Wolfeborough now; it was so long ago he went away. Dan will see Hugh, and tell him we are married, and ask him to forgive. Do you want to send aught to him, Lyddy—or to Frances? A note or word of mouth? You can trust Dan."

"No," said Lydia, "not to Hugh or to Frances. There is no one at the Bank to whom I want to send a word."

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The next day was warm and sunny, too, and Dorothy kissed her husband after an early breakfast and watched him ride up the hill to turn east on the Dunstable Path. Lydia watched him, too, wondering what sort of welcome he would find in Portsmouth. After he was gone, and the day turned even brighter and hotter, though with a springtime softness about it, they went to join Graunie in the spinning room. It was a long low apartment with rough-hewn walls and casement windows, open now for coolness, and the six young women bent to their work, moving their feet steadily on the treadles and guiding the flax strands with their fingers. When Graunie saw the newcomers enter, she called to Dorothy and showed her how to wet her fingertips in the small bone cup of water hung on the side of the wheel.

" 'Twill keep the thread from roughing and cleaving to your fingers, child," she said. "Will ye spell Janet for a while now, and take your turn?" So Dorothy sat down at the wheel, for an hour of awkward and determined spinning.

Lydia wandered into the kitchen, saw the sink was piled with pots and pans, and began to scour them. She had slept well after her talk last night with Dorothy, better than she had slept yet while under the roof of Dan

MacMurray's house. That, she knew, was because she had made up her own mind, and for once, common sense seemed to follow the same course as her native instinct. She would go to her own house, and those who had aught to say to her could come to her there.

As she scraped the last trace of soot from the legs of the black iron kettle, Graunie came out of her own small chamber that lay between the spinning room and the kitchen. She had a booklet in her hand, unbound, made of heavy sheets of brown paper stitched together. She spread it out on the long oak table where they were wont to eat their meals.

"Lyddy," she said, "will ye cast your eyes over this now, and tell me what ye think on 't? All the ways o' linen-making, from the day they sow the flaxseed, through the hackling and the swingling and the bleaching, the spinning and the weaving, too, I know. I have na' set to the loom myself for years, but I'm no too old, and this summer I mean again to try. As I told ye, all these things I know, but I dinna' know Portsmouth fashion."

Lydia went to the table and bent over the worn little book.

"Daniel fetches much of our linen to the Bank," continued Graunie, "for they pay him good prices. But we have merchants from Haverhill and Newburyport, from as far off as Salem even, who come here sometimes for Wednesday market or November fair. One o' them left me this wee book o' patterns. Our weaving is mostly the white or tow; the striped or the checked, barred wi' red and blue. But I want to make a coverlet for Daniel's wife. Look at these now, and see what ye think would please her."

They turned the pages carefully, considering the intricate pen-and-ink working charts for "Rose in Bloom," "Troy's Beauty," "Primroses and Diamonds," "Chariot Wheels and Church Windows." When they had leafed through and considered the lot, Graunie asked hopefully, "Do ye think one o' these would please the lass?"

"I think she would be pleased with any of them, Graunie," said Lydia, smiling into the eager wrinkled face with its bright eyes, "but I think she would like better the simple white-and-blue-barred stuff that is common here. She is ready to forget Portsmouth. All she wants is to learn the Londonderry way of things."

Graunie sat down at the table and motioned Lydia to a nearby chair.

"Lyddy March," she said, "I'll no ask ye your own business. Ye came here wi' my grandson's wife, and ye're welcome to stay as long as ye will."

"I am going, Graunie. Going to my own house; tomorrow, maybe—"

Graunie went on as if Lydia had not spoken.

"But there are things about the lassie I would like to know. Things I canna' ask her myself; things that if I did, perhaps she couldna' say."

Lydia clenched her hands, hidden beneath the edge of the table where

Graunie could not see. Was she going to ask about the winter's secret wooing, why Dorothy had yielded and allowed herself to be got with child, why her friends at the Bank had not given her better care? But the question was not at all of that, when it came.

Suddenly the old woman put her hands on her gaunt hips and asked bluntly, "Do ye know what her life was like in the old country beyond the sea, and why she came here?"

"I know a little of it," said Lydia, relieved. "Her family was an old one, settled in Yorkshire, with more sons than land. So she and her youngest brother went out to make their way in the world. He had a friend in America, Governor Johnny Wentworth; and it was to Johnny's house they came."

Nance MacMurray frowned. "Aye, I ha' heard o' such," she said. "I ha' heard o' beggars in fine clothes before."

"They did not beg," cried Lydia hotly. "Dorothy's brother serves as the governor's aide. It is a position of trust, and he serves faithfully and well. He takes his wages and pays his debts, like any other man."

Graunie lifted her eyebrows. "And 'tis him ye mean to marry?" she asked.

"You said you would not ask me my business," retorted Lydia, not angry, but not knowing exactly what to say.

The old face crinkled in a smile, and the corners of the mouth lifted.

"Why that I did, lass, and I'll hold by it. But o' Dolly now? I dinna' mean to speak unkind about her. What I seek to know is this: has she known always such a splendid way o' things that she'll no be happy wi' us here? Comfort we have, and plenty, but 'tis all humble and plain."

"You need not fret about that, Graunie," Lydia reassured her. "She loves Dan, and she wants to live as his wife, in his house and country, and in his own way. You will have to help her. For there is so much that she does not know, and she is so very young."

The old woman did not answer immediately. Glancing at her quickly, Lydia saw that she was staring out of the window across the green farms and the stone walls between her own homestead and the Common Field. A mist clouded her bright old eyes, and when she spoke, it was of something far away.

"I, too, like her, come from the old country when I was a lass—"

Lydia heard a door open and close. Dorothy stepped out of the spinning room and halted just behind Graunie, who kept on talking like a woman in a dream.

"There's few left alive who come here from Aghadowey like I did. Jock sailed by the same ship, but his folk was out of Errigal. I can remember the long thrifty hawthorn hedges, and the white gates, and the thatched cottages wi' their gable ends turned to the street. I remember the great houses wi' turrets, and the curving lanes, and the tall chimney by the bleaching green.

Lizard Manor was fine, and the towers o' the church was fine. But there was many poor."

Dorothy moved closer to old Nance, a wrapt look on her face, as if she, too, were looking backward overseas.

"We would ha' stayed there always, but first there was the drougth, and then there was the sheep rot, and then there was the smallpox and winter fevers, and the great landlords putting all our farms to sheep!"

Dorothy touched her shoulder. "I had to come away, too," she said softly. "But we must not look back, Graunie. Only forward, to the coming time—and him—my child, I speak of."

Nance sat up, startled out of her reverie, the veiled look gone from her eyes, her voice brisk and keen. "Y're right lass, not to look backward, as I, my own self, said to Jock not long ago. But ye been listening to me? Listening to an old woman like me?"

"Of course I have been listening," said Dorothy, "and I hope you will tell me more. My son will inherit my memories, but he must inherit yours, too. He must know as much as he can of the world Dan's people came out of, just as he must know about mine."

She pulled up a stool in front of her husband's grandmother, and sat down. "Tell me more about how you left Aghadowey and came here, Graunie," she said, "I want to know it all."

"Oh, it was all so different here," burst out Graunie, on her tongue the quick impatience of fifty years ago, the annoyance of being a stranger in a strange land. "Different even to the victuals folk set out on the board. Our chief dish was potatoes, and the English who settled round us swore by pumpkins and thought potatoes was a poison. We put barley in our pot liquor, and 'twas beans went into theirs. Our men drank whiskey, and theirs was all for ale and beer—"

Dorothy listened with eager sympathy in her eyes. Nobody but herself knew how many outlandish customs she had found in this country. Lydia looked at them for a moment and then walked out of the kitchen into the morning sunshine. Nothing had ever seemed outlandish to her, but then, she had come from no further off than the Bank, she was not born overseas. And Dan MacMurray's grandmother was not talking to her now, she thought bitterly, telling her things she would need to know. She was telling her story to the woman privileged to pass it on to a younger Dan.

She wandered out of the dooryard uncertain, thinking at first that she would go up the road to the church and the tavern. Pinkerton's store was too far off, but perhaps she could find a tiny shop in somebody's front parlor where she could make a purchase that would provide an excuse for slipping away. But then she remembered she had vowed that tomorrow she would

travel back to Newbury, and always in her mind she had known that there was one thing she would have to do before she left this place, one person she must see. The pilgrimage was one that could only be made in vulgar shamelessness, that could only wring her heart, and no good could come thereof. But it was as inevitable as birth pangs were inevitable to her in whose womb a child already lay.

"Well, I do not suppose I shall die of it," said Lydia to herself, "And all my life I shall wonder—if I do not go—!"

She hesitated under the lilac tree by Nance MacMurray's front door. Then she went to the south side of the house and called through the windows of the spinning room, "Janet, oh Janet! Come here to me!"

Little freckled Janet, her gaunt elbows sticking through her torn sleeves, looked up from her flax wheel and ran to answer Lydia's call. She came to the open casement.

"Janet," said Lydia, "can you tell me the way to Jessie Guptill's house?"

Janet drew her brows together and her lips curled. "Robby Guptill's wife ye mean? They got no proper house. Robby dinna' stay sober nor out o' the woods long enough to build one. They got a cabin at the swamp edge below the high pine hill."

"Can you tell me how to get there, Janet?"

" 'Tisna' a far piece o'walking. Ye follow West Running Brook till it ebbs out in a plain o' marsh grass and joins Beaver River. When the brook bank turns to mud and bog holes and ye canna' tread it more, turn leftward where the pines begin. There at the edge o' the tall trees is her cabin. There'll be dirty-faced bairns round the door."

Janet's nose lifted as if she smelled the cow barn strong, but only a smell of new-turned earth with the sun on it seasoned the air. Lydia thanked her and went quickly down the hill.

At the foot of the Double Range the brook foamed over the stones, its water swollen with thawing snow from back in the woods, and the recent rains of spring. Here and there lay quiet pools full of soaking flax skeins, and the alders dipped and swayed above. Feathered wings flickered and were gone and birds called to each other from lone oaks and hazel thickets, but not the whippoorwill. Lydia followed the brook, crossing the bottom of one long narrow home-lot after another. The weathered farmhouses were set up on the hillsides, a little back from the water, and men were plowing the high garden patches behind them, preparing the ground for potatoes, a crop almost as important as flax to the Londonderry folk. Now and then a woman peered from a doorway or a child stopped to watch her, but not too curiously. The path along the brook was hard-beaten by many feet; it was plainly a common thoroughfare. How many times, she thought, Black Dan MacMurray must have

trod this path hastening to Jessie who did not bandy words, Jessie who made him welcome in the immemorial way!

She passed the last farm where the slope leveled off into the plain of coarse grass Janet had told her of, last year's grass now, yellowish, stiff, and dry. Pushing her way between the osiers and swaying willow catkins, she sank once to her shoe tops in the mud. Then, just before the brook disappeared in the grassy sedge on its way to slip secretly into the broader stream beyond, she came on a causeway of flat stones that led her back to firm ground. Ahead of her lay a little clearing at the foot of a steep pine-covered hill. She did not see the hut at first, so crude and shaggy it was, built of unpeeled logs and half-hidden in scraggly trees, its roof crazy and sagging, one broken window stuffed with a man's stained shirt. In its doorway crouched a woman who sat, her hands idle in her lap, and watched a group of children playing round her.

Lydia stopped just where the sedge grass thinned out and the brown sweet carpet of pine needles began. There she stood, looking at Jessie Guptill.

Jessie sat in a little patch of sunlight that fell across her thick black hair. When she lifted her head to call to the children, Lydia could see that she had a full curving throat rising whitely from her drab shawl; but if she wanted to see any more she would have to go closer, much closer, and to do this she would need an excuse. Before she could think of one, Jessie caught her unaware.

She rose suddenly, waving the children back, and strode toward Lydia. She moved with a heavy grace and unhurried purpose, like that of a large forest animal advancing on a prey that could in noways escape. Lydia stood still at the edge of the swamp, with the two streams seeping through the grass behind her, and waited as calmly as she could for whatever blow might fall.

Jessie drew near to her and then stopped a few paces off, her arms folded across her generous breast, surveying the intruder. Her face was certainly not beautiful, nor was it ugly, with broad flat planes, high cheekbones, a wide mouth, and rather opaque dark eyes. She stared placidly, and then she spoke.

"Take a good look, Lyddy March," she said, "if that be what ye come here for."

Lydia gasped. "How—how did you know?"

Jessie laughed, and her laugh was surprisingly rich and sweet, nor was her tone hostile, merely self-assured.

"Ye been in Nance MacMurray's house near three weeks. Londonderry's not such a wide town strangers'll pass unnoticed here. The spinning lasses talk. I heard all about ye when I went to Pinkerton's store. I'd heard o' ye before from Dan."

Lydia found she had no words. She gazed miserably past Jessie at the romping children. True, their clothes were ragged, and they were not overclean, but they laughed and called gaily to each other; even in the presence

of a stranger, their behavior open and unafraid. No timid or sullen brood was growing up in Jessie Guptill's house, and she thought the better of Jessie for that. She suddenly remembered the sad frightened face of Wyseman Claggett's young daughter in her fine dress.

"Ye dinna' know what to say, do ye, Lyddy March?" observed Jessie, with something like pity in her voice. "If I was ye, standing there where I no belonged and was noways welcome, I wouldna' know what to say either."

Wracking her wits, Lydia finally found a lie that might sound plausible.

"I'm sorry, Jessie," she said tensely, her voice sounding strange and tight in her own ears. "I do not wish to intrude upon you. Nance MacMurray sent me to ask if you had seen Black Dan."

Jessie stared back imperturbably. "Ye lie, Lyddy March," she said. "Nance MacMurray wouldna' wipe her shoes on me. She wouldna' send to me if she were dying. Ye come o' yourself to look at me, to see what I've got for Dan that ye've no got. Think it's likely I'll tell ye?"

"No," said Lydia, her anger rising, "I don't suppose you'd as much as tell me the time of day. But you are right. I wanted to look at you. One look will be enough, I guess."

Jessie laughed her beautiful laugh again.

"Now ye're honest, and that's what I like. Now I'll tell ye more than the time o' day. One thing ye want to know. I'll tell ye where's Black Dan."

"Where is he? You mean—you know that? How?"

"Why he come to my door last night, but he dinna' stop wi' me. He was all in a mingle-mangle, and he says, 'I come to tell ye good-bye, Jess. I come to tell ye there's no more between us, and I be through!' "

"He—he came to you and said that?" Lydia felt her heart grow light and soft, like a cloud drifting over the spring sky.

Jess brushed a dead leaf from her hair and smiled broadly. "Aye, he's said that a-many times before. I canna' keep count how many. He never meant it, none o' them other times, and he doesna' mean it now. I can wait till he feels different."

"But he came here—to Londonderry—and he did not go to his own house, to see Graunie or his cousin, when he's been away so long?"

"No, I told ye he was busier than the devil in a gale o' wind. Gave me the backside o' his tongue, and then he was off. Said he was going to the Bank."

"The Bank! Did he say why?" asked Lydia.

"Oh dinna' think he was going after you, thinking ye was there. 'Twas about some province business. He'd come from the south, not upcountry as we thought he were. Been down in Massachusetts. Seems there's trouble broke out down there. Shooting trouble!"

"Shooting trouble?" cried Lydia.

Jess nodded. “Something like that,” she said. “I dinna’ pay it much mind. I’ll no fash myself about shooting in Massachusetts, for I got enough to do here. They say ’tis a poor hen that canna’ scratch for one chick, but I got to scratch for five.” She waved her hand toward the children.

Just then a small very dirty boy in a torn blue shirt came pounding around the corner of the cabin. “Mither!” he cried shrilly. “Mither! Come see what me and Jamie’s found! Come look!” He ran and threw his arms around her soft thick body.

“Hush your clack, lad, and leave me be,” she urged good-naturedly, shoving him gently from her.

“But Mither,” he cried, hoarse and red-faced, his blue eyes bulging, “it’s a bear! We seen a bear in the bee tree!”

Jessie turned and ran swiftly to the cabin. Not quite knowing why, except that she did not wish to be left alone with a wild beast near, Lydia followed at a little distance. Ahead of her, Jessie lumbered through the open door and emerged a moment later carrying an old flintlock.

“Quiet, bairns, and dinna’ rile him,” she ordered, following the children around the corner of the cabin and into the woods behind it. Lydia trailed after them, skirting a heap of refuse, old corn cobs, fish heads, a broken dish, the rib cage of a dead rabbit. She felt not quite afraid, but uneasy, anxious to see if Jessie would really shoot, as she seemed threatening to do.

In a patch of thick rushes at the edge of the swamp she lost sight of the little group for a moment, and then she heard Jessie’s laugh. Turning in the direction from which it came, she saw that they had halted and stood together, facing a tall chestnut tree. The tree was dead, she knew, not merely in its leafless season, for ugly whitish-gray fungus growths sprouted here and there from its trunk. At the foot of the chestnut tree, his head and forequarters thrust into a hollow just above its roots, crouched a small black bear, no bigger than a collie pup.

When she came close to the group, Jessie was still laughing. “He will na’ hurt us, my bairns,” she said. “He be after the honey. That be all. Watch him dig for it. See how lean he be after sleeping in a cave o’ the hill all winter. When he pulls the comb from the hollow, he’ll use his wee paws like hands, the same as ye.” Her voice was full of tenderness for the young wild thing.

“We like honey, too,” said the blue-eyed boy. “Canna’ we have some o’ the honey, Mither? Will the bear eat it all?”

“Ye can have what’s left when he’s gone,” said Jess, leaning her fine arms on the flintlock, watching the busy animal.

“We all like honey,” cried a tiny girl with red-gold hair. “Me an’ Jamie, an’ Cathie, an’ Tom, an’ Joe!” She stopped and smiled slyly up at her mother with an old wise look on her elfin face. “Danny likes honey, too,” she said.

"Yes," said Jess, beaming down at her cheerfully, "Danny likes honey, too. Man and beast! They all go for the honey, it seems."

Perhaps it was instinct or a footfall behind her that made her turn sharply round, there in the sunny clearing, in the mild blue April day.

"What?" she demanded. "Lyddy March! Be you still here?"

"Yes," said Lydia quietly. "I am still here, but I'm going now. I think you've told me what I want to know."

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She felt very sure and proud of herself when she walked away from Jessie, but as she struggled homeward through the swamp grass and alder thickets, the glow of revelation left her. It had come in a sudden flash while she stood watching the plain-faced slattern with her deep rich laughter, her tenderness and serene inward strength, that she herself, in order to win Dan, need only show him that there were similar depths and richness in her own nature. But then she began to doubt that she possessed these attributes. Was she, Lydia, like the hollow tree where no bird nested? Was she like the empty crock on the cupboard shelf, that should have held honey, but with no honey there?

She was halfway across the farms of the Double Range before she noticed the stillness that lay on them. The farmers were gone from the fields and the children from the dooryards. The doors stood open, too, as if folk had fled away in haste; here a plow abandoned in the furrow, there a basket of freshly washed clothes spilled over on the grass, as if the housewife had been surprised while spreading them to dry. Was it an Indian raid, she wondered. But no, the fierce Indians who molested folk had been gone from Rockingham County for a long time.

She reached the MacMurray farmhouse without meeting anyone along the way, her curiosity and uneasiness growing ever more strong. There was no one in the kitchen or the parlor. She flung open the door of the spinning room, but the flax wheels stood silent and motionless, one of them overturned, showing that the lasses must have been in haste when they fled away.

Lydia stood alone in the middle of the empty room. "Dolly!" she cried, "oh, Dolly! Dolly! Graun!"

No human voice answered her, only the crows calling across the plowed land. And then she heard the drum!

Hollow, insistent, its throbbing sounded, far up the hill, beyond the white-pine grove, where the church and tavern stood. Lydia did not call any more. She hurried herself that way.

North of the Double Range, the First Church of Londonderry stood near the crest of a long ridge, facing westward over the quiet farms and meadows

with Beaver River meandering through, and misty blue mountains heaped on the far sky beyond.

The old graves lay beside it, and small frame houses clustered round; Holland's tavern, the schoolhouse, a store or two. The broad green in the heart of the village was thronged with men and women, and when she arrived there, Lydia was breathless, her face hot, and her heart pounding from her hasty journey up the hill.

She paused a moment near the steps of the church to recover herself, and gazed round for Dorothy and Graunie or anyone she knew. Looking closer she saw that the women were gathered in little groups about the edge of the green, while the men had drawn to the center and taken the formation she recognized as that of a trainband on muster day. They stood in their rough smocks and breeches just as they had come from the fields, but they had their muskets with them. She remembered suddenly how Red Dan had carelessly mentioned once that the militia officers advised every man to turn out with his musket when he heard the beat of the drum.

She began to pick her way among the little groups of frightened-faced, intent farm women in shawls and aprons, still hunting for Dorothy and Graunie. The men stood too thick for her to see any leader at their head, but she heard a gruff voice bellowing names as from a company roll.

"Hugh Montgomery! Peter Christie! Solomon Collins! Asa Senter! Ebenezer McIlvaine! James Nesmith! Daniel MacMurray—!"

Hugh, and Peter, and Solomon, and the others had all answered when their names were called. But no one answered for Dan.

"Daniel MacMurray!" called the gruff voice a second time.

Then somebody in the midst of the group shouted back, "They be not here! Not neither Dan!"

"Jonathan Holmes, Peter Jenkins! John Livingstone!" the voice resumed.

She saw Dorothy at last, and Graunie, and the spinning maids, all together under a red-bud maple tree at the side of the high road winding through.

"Oh Dolly," she cried, running toward them, "what has happened? Is it an Indian raid? Why are folk gathered here?"

Dorothy reached out and caught her by both hands. Dorothy's flesh was cold. "Lyddy," she said, "wherever have you been?"

"I? I went for a walk by the brook. Tell me what has happened!" And then, remembering Jessie's words, "There's been trouble in Massachusetts, I hear."

"Yes. There has been a great battle fought. In towns called Lexington and Concord. I never heard of them before. The English soldiers marched out from Boston and shot down some Americans there. A rider came all the way here to tell us the news. It is feared there will be more fighting, so the men of this province are assembling to go."

Then Graunie spoke, her eyes hard and bright as they fastened on Lydia, seeming to bore her through.

"Ye say ye heard there was trouble in Massachusetts? I wonder where ye heard it, and if ye heard aught o' my grandson, he who is called Black Dan? Gabble has it that he was in town last night, wi' first word o' what the rider brought today. He dinna' go to his own house, but folks saw him passing through."

"William Clyde! James Gilmore! Stephen Chase!" called the unseen officer at the head of the green.

Lydia felt too stricken and frightened to lie. The men had taken their guns down, just as Hugh Giffard had feared they would. War and death were in the air. It was no time for saving pretense now.

"Yes," she said faintly, looking off over the green meadows of Beaver River, not meeting Graun's eye, "I heard of Black Dan. I met with Jessie Guptill. Last night he went to her."

"Ah. So ye met wi' Jessie? What else did she tell ye? What o' my grandson?"

"She said he was in great haste to get to the Bank on province business," answered Lydia miserably.

"Ah!" cried the old woman again, but this time with a long sighing breath of relief. "Now God he thankit! Then both my Dans are gone to the Bank! They'll be safe there!"

"Of course they will be safe," said Dorothy soothingly. "Nothing so very ill can ever befall, Graunie, if we believe and pray."

The drum began to beat in a marching rhythm, and Lydia heard the squeal of a fife. In a straggling column the Londonderry men began to march away from the trampled green, hesitating between the Dunstable Path and the Haverhill Road. What a small pitiful raggle-taggle army they were, she thought, equipped with little but courage, not even certain where to go. She remembered that she was going home. She turned to Nance MacMurray and reminded her of that fact, and asked for the loan of a horse.

Nance, sure now that her grandsons were not going off to be shot at in Massachusetts, replied with her usual calm: "Ye can have a horse and welcome, Lyddy. But are ye no afraid to ride through the country when 'tis so upset, to travel nigher to Boston. There's no telling what them English rapscallions will do!"

"No, I am not afraid," said Lydia. "Boston is a good many miles off from Newbury. And I, more than ever now—now that trouble threatens everywhere, and it seems the war men have been talking about is likely to come down—I want the walls of my own house around me."

"Aye," said Graun, understandingly. "There's no better medicine for a

woman than that. Come, Dolly, we be going home to our own house, too."

15.
THE IPSWICH FRIGHT

It was dark when Lydia crossed the river at Haverhill ferry and rode the last few miles down the Merrimack to Crane Neck Hill. She had a long wait in Haverhill in the interminable blue spring dusk, for a disastrous fire had but lately swept that hard-scrabble frontier town, and more than half the houses lay in ruins, still black and smoking. Homeless folk roamed bewildered through the crooked streets, and to add to the confusion, the troops from New Hampshire were pouring in, headed for Cambridge where the assembling army was ordered to rendezvous. Once she boarded the ferry, only to be thrust ashore again in deference to some sixty red-faced puffing volunteers who insisted they had run the whole twenty-seven miles from Nottingham. And after the Nottingham men were ferried across, the Exeter men arrived, one hundred and eight of them, partially armed with the muskets John Wentworth had provided for the Exeter Cadets, his crack troop there, that he had reviewed and feted, and deemed always available for his need. But the muskets would serve another need now, and be trained on other officers of the King.

As the Exeter men marched past her down to the waterside, Lydia sat on an overturned keg by the back door of a river-front tavern, hoping that her turn would come next, and wondering how much of a commotion she would find when she got home to Crane Neck Hill. And then, to her surprise, she saw a familiar red head and easy-swinging shoulders in the crowd. It was Red Dan MacMurray.

"Oh Dan!" she called to him, "Red Dan!"

He stepped out of the straggling column. "Lyddy!" he cried. "I thought you was home in Londonderry."

"I thought you had gone to the Bank," she answered him.

He grinned ruefully. "I started for there. But when I got to Exeter, I heard the news. The men was ready to march. I had no time to turn back and go with our lads. I figured I better get where the fighting was, quick as I could. 'Tis likely we be all needed there."

"I am not surprised that you feel so, but it would frighten Dolly and Graun. They think you are safe in Portsmouth."

"Better they think so. Dinna' tell them the difference, if you go home."

"I am going to Newbury—to my own house there."

"Aye. Dolly said you was thinking o' doing that."

"But tell me"—she found that she could put her question with no shame or embarrassment now that there was no place for false modesty in this troubled time "—have you seen Black Dan?"

He opened his eyes wider and then narrowed them. "Dan? No. Is he back from the north country? He come to the house after I left, maybe."

"He was seen in Londonderry last night. Jessie Guptill said he left for the Bank."

"Must ha' gone ahead o' me then. Likely he got there. Well, good-bye, Lyddy. They're shoving off."

He sprinted down the hill and leaped aboard a loaded scow, one of the fleet of small boats pressed into service to handle the unwonted traffic. Lydia watched him go, head and shoulders back, as the scow moved out on the gray turbulent stream, watched the last rays of the sunset strike his tanned forehead and ruddy hair. She wondered when she would see Red Dan again.

She crossed the river finally and continued her journey through the green and troubled countryside. Everywhere little groups of anxious women peered from dooryards, and old men and boys crouched on the steps of the roadside taverns, seeking news from every rider who happened by.

Her own house, just below the crest of the hill, stood square and brown and tenantless, its odd-shaped hit-or-miss casement windows looking forth like empty eyes upon the dark. The fields around it had been plowed, she noticed, but no one had bothered to trim last year's dead stalks from her flower beds, or tie up the woodbine by the kitchen door. Before she went inside she stood on the doorstone, the crude iron key in her hand, and gazed around her at the familiar countryside under the rising moon. Crane Neck Hill reared up high over the circling farms and villages, and below her their lighted windows shone forth all over the landscape, like stars set in the earth. Here and there a church steeple glinted whitely in the moonlight, and to seaward lay the misty darkness of the salt marshes, blending into the deeper darkness of the offshore tides. This peaceful upland corner of Essex County had looked much the same when David brought her here on their marriage night. The soft wind had sighed in the old elms then, and lights and shadows had flickered eerily over the new-clipped lawn. They had lain together that night as lovers who had inherited all time. She had never thought then, that on another night not too many years away, she would be coming back to this empty shuttered house alone.

Before she went inside she led Nance MacMurray's chestnut mare to the barn, pumped fresh water for her, and shook down a few forkfuls of dusty hay. Then, wondering just how haunted her house would be, she opened the kitchen

door. But no ghosts came forth to meet her, only a smell of mustiness; and when she went to the chimney corner for candle and tinder box, a cobweb brushed her face, and instead of feeling lonely and anguished, she felt like scurrying for the broom.

Later she walked from one room to another, taking account of every familiar thing; the bow-backed chairs with flag seats that David's father had bought for his own bride; the candlestand inlaid with ivory that David's counting-house friends had given them on their wedding day; the locked cabinet of silver and pewterware that David's mother had brought from her family mansion in Salem's Essex Street. Everything in the house had been David's, and nothing was hers at all, only the everyday linens she had hemmed and a looking glass framed in a mahogany wreath that had been a gift to her from the pupils whom she taught in school. But hers or David's, it was all one, and did not matter now.

Not feeling hungry, but knowing that for her stomach's sake she ought to take a little food if she could find any, she rummaged in the kitchen cupboard till she came on a tightly covered tin that held oatmeal, wrenched it open, and set it to boil over a small fire that she kindled on the wide hearth. Then she sat down and tried to think back over all that had happened to her that day.

"They go for the honey!"

"There has been a battle—!"

"I figured I better get where the fighting is."

Any one of those sayings had enough of moment in it to fill a whole day's time, a whole night with thoughts afterward. Too much had happened, she decided, so much that she could not absorb it and make it a part of herself. She felt flat and empty, rather as if nothing had happened at all.

When a knock came on the kitchen door she was surprised at first, but even as she went to open it, she realized that her lighted window must have told the neighboring farm wives she was at home—she or some stranger who had no business to be there—and in either case they would come to see. Her visitors proved to be Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, a comely matron from the spacious homestead at the very top of the hill, and her sixteen-year-old daughter Sarah, slim and vivid, halfway between a tom-boy and a belle.

"Lydia!" cried Mrs. Elizabeth, putting out both hands in a gesture of welcome, "when I saw the lights I knew who 'twas. I said to Jim, 'Lyddy March has got back from New Hampshire.' I only hope you find everything as you left it, for we've kept a sharp eye on the place ourselves, and Seth and Abner March ride over from the Port every week to see to things. I doubted any strangers would break in. My, but it's good to have you back home!"

"Come in," said Lydia, her heart warmed by this neighborly greeting. "I am sorry there seems to be nothing in the house I can offer you but oatmeal—"

Sarah smiled and put a willow basket on the table.

"Oh we've had our supper," Elizabeth went on. "We been baking all day, like everybody else on Crane Neck—victuals to send to the men at Cambridge. So when we decided you must have come home, I told Sarah to pack up a loaf of brown bread and some cold chicken and a mincemeat pie. That'll hold you from starvation overnight, I guess. I hope you mean to stay here now, Lydia, and not go gadding off again."

Lydia smiled and went to take the boiling oatmeal off the fire. "I do not know," she said, "what I mean to do."

Elizabeth shook her head and pursed her mouth. "Well, I don't know that any of us can be too sure nowadays. I suppose you heard about it up in New Hampshire, about what's going on? I seen there's beacons lit all over the hills on their side o' the Merrimack."

Lydia went to the window. And indeed, half a dozen points of orange light flared up on the ridge of dark hills tumbled against the northern sky.

"Yes," she said. "We heard about it up there. It made no difference to me. I had long been planning to come home. But all my way here I was hampered by troops marching. I heard at Haverhill ferry that more than twelve hundred New Hampshire men have gone."

"I don't know how many went from here," said Elizabeth. "But there's few left, I can tell you that. News come at midnight, and folks all went down to the training ground by the Bradford Road. Parson Toppan stood up on an oxcart and give the men his blessing. By sunrise they was all gone. We women folk started cooking right after, and we been cooking ever since. My ovens is full now. We got to send foodstuffs after the men."

"I will cook, too," answered Lydia, "as soon as I can gather some supplies. But tell me, Elizabeth, how—how bad is it? Were there many killed? Is it still going on?"

"We don't know," said Elizabeth, shaking her head and blinking her eyes rapidly. "Some says there was nigh fifty dead, and the roads all slick with blood; that we fought them all the way from Lexington to Concord, then turn around and back to Boston again. Some say—"

"But, Mother," interrupted Sarah, "all day I asked, and nobody will tell me. What are they fighting about—is it the tea again?"

"What? Why listen, child, no she-thing will ever know what men are fighting for. Why they disagree and quarrel, yes; but why they take down their guns and start shooting each other, we'll never understand. Seems like nothing should ever get bad enough to call for that. Don't you agree, Lydia?"

"I think you are right, Elizabeth. And yet—where I have been living, in the governor's house so close to it all—I have seen it come on, the way you see a storm beating over Plum Island as it comes from the sea. I think the real reason

for it is because England acts like a father who does not realize his son has grown into a man."

Elizabeth shook her head. "That's real smart talk, Lyddy. You must ha' heard it, for I doubt if you thought of it yourself. Was that something Governor Johnny Wentworth said?"

"No," answered Lydia smiling at the unlikeliness of the idea. "I doubt if Johnny Wentworth would talk like that."

"Well, whether or not we know why they're fighting, fighting they are, and we've got to see they're fed. You got two bake ovens," she motioned toward the great hearth with the tiny fire dwindling in the middle of it, "so if you want to help, the rest of Crane Neck will be grateful. I'll send my son Samuel down tomorrow morning to chop your firewood, and have him bring some spare crocks of mincemeat to start you off with. Come Sarah, we must go home. It's a pleasure to have you back, Lyddy, and I hope you'll stay a long time—at least till the wars is over and the country straightened out maybe."

Closing the door behind them, Lydia went to the table and nibbled a chicken wing, tried to force down the lukewarm oatmeal. Before she had finished it, utter weariness overcame her, and she went into the parlor and stretched herself out on the wide sofa. She would not go tonight to the bed where she and David had lain.

*

She was awake again at sunrise, lighting a fire to heat her red-lidded bake ovens, but as it turned out, no food was cooked in her house that day. For Parson Toppan arrived even before Sam Smith with the mincemeat, bade her welcome back to the West Parish, and advised her that she could be useful at the meeting house, where a group of women had gathered to scrape lint and roll bandages. So she rode across the fields on her borrowed chestnut mare, and worked all day cutting up linen, wishing that she had some of the webs and bolts piled thriftily away in Nance MacMurray's loom room, waiting till Red Dan could take them to the Bank, or for November fair when the Haverhill merchants came.

All day reports kept coming in of the fighting around Boston. Some said the battle was over and the Americans had lost. Some said they had won. And according to some it was not decided yet but still going on. The whole matter remained darkly hidden, and nobody knew the truth of it. Deep uneasiness and underlying panic prevailed everywhere. The women gathered at the meeting house kept their tongues busy as well as their fingers, but they talked as women will, less of the dreadful crisis facing their country than of the small social manifestations thereof. Of the Tory ladies, for instance, who thought to

give a tea party in Salem, but as they gathered around a pot of the forbidden beverage, a maddened bull lunged suddenly through the window, bearing its frame on his shoulders, wrecking the tea table and scattering the terrified guests, who swore henceforth they would drink only herb concoctions like the rest of the neighborhood.

"Even dumb creatures exert themselves," commented Parson Toppan piously, "in action opposing those who would enslave this free country."

Lydia kept on cutting and winding the long strips of linen, but her thoughts went back to Frances Wentworth, who had shrugged her graceful shoulders, and lifted her porcelain teacup, and said she had no quarrel with the East India Company. She wondered how matters went in the governor's mansion now. John Wentworth had once sent fifteen New Hampshire men to Boston to serve the British, but now twelve hundred New Hampshire men had gone there at their own desire to put the British down. What would their governor say to such rebellious behavior? She thought of Frances, and she thought of Hugh. Of Frances and Hugh together. Would Hugh come to find her in Newbury, she wondered. Or would Black Dan MacMurray come? Perhaps no one would come at all.

At sunset she left the meeting house, having promised Parson Toppan that she would ride round about the parish that night with saddlebags and see what she could gather together to be sent to Cambridge by oxcart the next day; beef, pork, ham, flour, any edibles that would not quickly decay or mould. As she rode up Crane Neck Hill, thinking to have a bit of supper in her own house before she started out, she met Sarah Smith riding toward her on a big white plow horse. Sarah's hair had come unbound and was streaming backward; her mouth looked grim and her eyes frightened, and she pulled on the reins and leaned from the saddle as they met.

"Oh Lyddy," she cried, "did you see the rider? Did he come your way? Did you believe what he said?"

The two girls halted their beasts and stopped to confer, there in the twilight, in the middle of the narrow road.

"There was a man from Danvers came by the meeting house an hour ago," answered Lydia. "He boasted that three hundred and thirty-one men had gone from there to Cambridge. Was it he you meant?"

"No! Oh no! I do not know where this one came from. He rode up waving his hat, as I was drawing water at the well. He shouted, 'The British regulars are coming! They have landed at Plum Island and got to Artichoke Bridge! They are cutting and slashing all before them!' Then he rode on."

"Do you think it likely?" asked Lydia, startled in spite of herself. "What did your father say to the story?"

"Father thinks it is probably a false rumor, such as fly about in times like

these. But he has ridden out to gather what few men are left in the town. He says they will go in a body toward Artichoke River and defend us if need be. He says it is well for me to warn people, but not to alarm or frighten them."

Sarah rode off as fast as the ambling beast would travel, and Lydia sat there on the chestnut's back, looking up at the first pale stars, and round her at the budding trees, and northward across the Merrimack to the hills of New Hampshire. She had the uneasy impulse to flee that way along the Bradford Road. And then she thought she would go to her own house and lock and bar it, take down David's gun, and wait for whatever might befall. Finally she laughed at herself. Suppose the British did come! What could they do but run up the King's colors and proclaim the town was theirs; maybe steal a few cattle and foodstuffs, burn a house or two, maybe? There could not be a battle here, for there were not enough men left in town to fight one. No, she decided, she would go about her evening's task just as she had planned, and if the British did not come and the tale turned out to be all a lie, she would have a good store of provisions to send to the troops at Cambridge tomorrow.

But she soon discovered her task was impossible. No use to rap on farmhouse doors seeking hams and flour, for the farmhouses were empty, their owners fleeing in willy-nilly panic across the countryside. Wherever Lydia went, as she made her rounds of the West Parish, she found terror had struck. The rider had kept on after he left the Smith farm, giving further details of the menace threatening them from the seacoast towns. The British, he said, had first come ashore at Ipswich and marched shooting through the town. He himself had ridden over twenty dead bodies there. They had crossed Old Town Bridge and were sacking the Port. Others had come ashore at Plum Island. The two columns had united and were marching swiftly inland. He had come to warn the West Parish, since it lay directly in their path. Now he was off to warn the Haverhill men. He advised them to hide their valuables and flee.

Most of Lydia's neighbors were quick to take his advice. Some hid their money in hollow trees and lowered their silver into wells for safekeeping. Many, like Uncle Vun Bartlett, loaded their families into oxcarts and hauled them away down forest trails, disappearing into the evergreen thickets in the soft April dusk. Widow Adams ordered her horses harnessed to the chaise and left standing at the front door, while she huddled in an armchair, wrapped in a coverlet, and ready to take flight. One corpulent old man swore he was too fat for such capers, and he waited in his own front doorway with his musket, saying he meant to stay there and give the devils hell, but others left town, headed for the neighboring towns of Haverhill, Hampton, and Salisbury. Then suddenly it seemed that everyone had gone who was going, and quiet settled down. No child cried and no dog barked. Old Hannah Eastman's neighbors wrapped her in a blanket and concealed her in a stone wall far from their

houses, lest her heavy asthmatic breathing reveal where she lay. The young lads climbed into the treetops, provisioned with loaves of bread, hunks of salt pork and rusty queen's arms that had not been fired in twenty years and likely would not fire now, thus prepared to keep sentinel-watch all night.

Lydia listened for the sound of gunfire towards Artichoke Bridge, but no gunfire came. Perhaps James Smith and his men had gone on to the Port. Perhaps they were waiting to ambush the advancing British. And then into her mind flashed what she was sure must be the truth of the matter. They were all dead! Slain silently by the British swords while the British crept on the town! What was that rustle there in the springing ferns and new grass? That shadow under the lilac tree by Mr. Little's long red barn? It was then that the panic finally reached her, and her growing uneasiness gave way to fright. She turned back towards Crane Neck Hill, urging the mare headlong.

And then a squat figure like a sack of meal slung on the back of a mangy old horse barred her way. She reined the chestnut backward, just in time to avoid a collision.

The figure gave a loud but not unmusical laugh. "Well! So 'tis you, Widow March! Back from the eastward, I see!"

It was Ma'am Hooper, the witch woman from the Port. For a moment it seemed to Lydia that the creature had risen out of the ground with the evening mist and had no business to be there. Then her panic lessened, and her mind cleared, and she decided that Ma'am Hooper must be fleeing inland like everybody else, for they were still on the Bradford Road.

"Have the British taken the Port, ma'am?" she asked. "Is it laid in ruins like Ipswich? Are they coming this way?"

"I have not seen any British," said the trained, well-modulated voice that fitted so ill with the shapeless body and filthy satins. "I have heard much about them, however."

"You mean—they are still expected to strike any moment?"

"Mr. Carey opened town meeting with prayer," continued Ma'am Hooper, as if Lydia had not spoken, "when a disordered individual rushed among us shouting, 'Turn out! Turn out for God's sake! Or you will all be killed! The regulars are coming! They are cutting and slashing all before them! They have landed at Ipswich and now are at Old Town Bridge!' "

"He told us they had landed at Plum Island and had crossed the Artichoke," interrupted Lydia.

"Aye, and no doubt if he gets to Portsmouth he will tell them the British have landed in Hampton River and have slashed their way to Rye. He moves his story forward as he moves, and he has much success with it. Tee hee!"

She laughed eerily, and her language slipped into the crude vernacular she used whenever she wanted to pose as a witch woman. "I ha' ridden out to see

what big fools folk will make o' themselves on such occasion. Why would ye believe it, mistress, one woman wrapped her child in a blanket and ran four miles with it, only to find she had not seized her child at all, but the cat! Hee hee! So much for the Port! They be all in flight when no man pursueth. I come to see how big fools there be in the west o' Newbury."

She slapped her horse with the reins and started to pass Lydia. In the open road, as they drew abreast, she leaned sideways in her saddle. "By the way, Mrs. Lydia, did ye get more than ye was expecting in New Hampshire?"

"No, Ma'am Hooper," murmured Lydia, uncertain and shaken. "I came back from New Hampshire empty-handed. I did not get anything there at all."

Ma'am Hooper clucked to her mangy horse. "Go home then," she said. "Perchance ye'll find it waiting for ye on your own doorstone. What's ours is waiting for us there—more often than we know." Laughing crazily, she rode off down the Bradford Road.

And still no gunfire came from Artichoke River way. But James Smith and his volunteers did not return. Lydia rode homeward, not so frightened now, but still distraught and of two minds, wondering whether or no she should take a shovel and go into the cornfield to bury David's mother's silverware.

As she rode through the gap in the stone wall and rounded the quince bush by the corner of her house, she saw a shadowy figure seated in front of her door, leaning against the paneled oak. It was a man with a musket across his knee. At first she thought it must be a British soldier, and she was ready to turn about, as silently as she could, and flee for the Smith farm or the meeting house, for any place in which people were gathered together, and she would not have to face the enemy alone. But then it seemed to her that the figure had a familiar look. Nor was it menacing—not even tense and watchful. A lilac tree grew by the parlor window, and she got down from her saddle, and started to creep forward in the shadow of it. At that moment the moon sailed out of a drift of fleecy cloud, casting a pale-gold light all over Crane Neck Hill. Lydia saw that the man on her doorstone was Black Dan MacMurray, and that he was asleep.

She stepped boldly forward, feeling all unsure and tremulous within. As she drew close to him he stirred, and muttered, and opened his eyes. Then he saw her and sat up, yawning. She could only stand there and stare, and think how much she loved him: the tousled dark hair, and the deep, smiling gray eyes, and the proudly lifted chin; the inward Dan that dwelt behind them, that would always draw the inward Lydia to him, no matter what mocking words his mouth uttered, no matter how many times he shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

She could not have spoken to him then to save her life. They looked at each other for a long moment. Then it was Dan who spoke.

"God's sake, Lyddy March, where you been? I hunted all over hell and part o' Rockingham!"

He leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees, careless and easy, unaware, perhaps, of the troops massing at Cambridge or the British streaming north from Ipswich through the night.

"I was at your own house, but you did not come there," she answered hastily. He remained silent, and she went on. "Why were you looking for me?"

"Sit down, Lyddy," said Black Dan, but he did not reach up and grasp her by the wrists and pull her to him, as he would once have done. He made no move to touch her, but he patted the worn doorstone at his side, and she seated herself there.

"I was looking for you to tell you I be done fooling now. Since I saw men killed, it come to me that I got no time for fooling any more. I went and said good-bye to Jess, and then I give in our banns to Mr. Davidson, but after all o' that, 'twas somewhat unsettling when I got to the Bank and could in noways find my bride."

Lydia felt as if all the stars had swung together, the stars of heaven overhead, and the starlike lamps on the farms below Crane Neck Hill. Everything had suddenly swung round to its rightful place in the universe. She was fulfilled and complete, as she had never been before, not even when David took her to him with all a young man's love and ardor for his wife. This was not happiness. This was a greater thing. It did not need the final sacrament of the flesh to make her and Dan MacMurray one, and yet, she found herself shaken with longing for that sacrament.

"I went to Portsmouth," he continued, "and walked up and knocked on the governor's front door. A woman come out who looked like a cross mare—"

"That was Prue," breathed Lydia.

"Didn't think 'twas my lady Wentworth," said Dan with a grin. "Anyways, she told me you was gone from there. Where to, she didn't know. I asked around some of the taverns, and then it come to me you might ha' gone back to Massachusetts. I thought it was worth a try."

He paused, and looked deeply into her eyes, his own eyes reflecting the moon. "So here I am, Lyddy. I found my way by asking, and a lass I met in the lane told me you was somewheres about the parish and would soon be home. That's all I got to tell. You been to my house, you say?"

"Oh Dan," she cried, clasping her hands in her lap so she would not reach out to offer the first caress, "you have not told me all! I want to know where you saw men killed. Were you—you were not at the Concord Fight?"

"Aye," said Dan grimly, "I was at Concord Fight."

"What were you doing there?"

"Driving a dung-cart," he answered, the harsh lines of his face dissolving

in a smile.

"You were doing what?"

"What I told you. Driving a dung cart. At least, it looked like a dung cart. Smelt so, too. When I come out o' the north where I been all winter, I went to Exeter to report to Colonel Folsom. He told me to go to Kingston and drive an oxcart loaded with powder to the main stores in Concord. I started out, and I had got pretty nigh there just about the time the guns began to go. Didn't take me long to turn into a farmyard and borrow a few forkfuls o' cover for that load o' mine, so no sparks could fall amongst the powder kegs. Everybody'd give me a wide berth, and nobody'd question me. I drove on then, like I was supposed to do."

"But were you—were you in the fighting, Dan?"

"Not at the bridge, I wasn't, but I followed along with my gun behind the stone wall later, driving the bastards out o' town the way they come. Feel that, Lyddy! Here in the dark you canna' see it, but you can feel." He lifted her hand in his and laid her fingers on his sleeve, near the shoulder of his homespun coat.

"That's blood, Lyddy. Blood o' a man who fought 'long side o' me. They shot him clean through the eye, like you'd drill a squirrel so's not to mark his pelt none."

She tried to imagine a stiffness under her fingers, but all she could feel was the warmth of his flesh and the hardness of his muscles, the steady beat of his own blood and life.

"When I see him lie dying on the grass there, under the shagbark tree back o' the stone wall—then I—well, things has looked a different way to me ever since then, Lyddy."

"You mean—you were afraid—? No, not that. You would never be afraid. You thought now war had come, you might be killed in battle, too?"

"No, I thought none o' that. Redcoat isn't born yet that will kill me. Sounds like I be boasting, but I'm not. It's a knowledge I got in my heart somehow. No, what I thought was this: I canna' be my own man any more, now the war's come on. I must serve in the ranks with the other lads, for the good o' all. For a time, I canna' have my own way."

She was silent, trying to take in his whole meaning.

"It'll be hard," he sighed, "hard. But it has to be, if we want a free country, and none o' us would want aught else. When they meddled wi' the tea trade, I didn't care too much, long's there was cider and whiskey left. But gunpowder. How the hell can a man live in America without that!"

"Then—you are going to Cambridge with the rest of the men?" she finally asked. "Red Dan has gone."

"What's that? Oh, o' course. I figured he'd be in Cambridge by now. Yes, I

be going there next. But first—I wanted to see things was all set straight between me and you."

There was no question in his voice, but his eyes held a question, so she answered it. "If you have asked Mr. Davidson to put up our banns, you have set things the way I always wanted them."

He gave her a look that made her catch her breath and turn her eyes away. Then he spoke teasingly. "I'm glad o' that, Lyddy. Didn't know but what you'd set up for a Tory wi' Johnny Wentworth and his redcoat lad."

"No," she said. "I am through with Johnny Wentworth and the redcoats now."

"Well, I'm no through with them, I be just starting in. I'm going to help hand them a licking, me and a few other New Hampshire men." He grinned. " 'Course we won't scorn the help o' Massachusetts, or any other colonies that wants to have a share. But now we settled that, tell me how you come to Londonderry. Did Graun make you welcome, like I'd had her do if I was home?"

And so she told him almost all of the story, except for Dorothy's private reason that had brought the thing about. He would likely learn it in Cambridge from Red Dan.

When she had finished he sat silent for a few moments, staring at the moonlit apple orchard below them on the sloping hill. Then he stood up and shouldered his musket.

"Good-bye, Lyddy," he said. "I took longer than I should, looking for you. The boys from Londonderry will miss me from amongst 'em. I be off now."

She stood looking at him, shaken and disappointed, unable to comprehend.

"But Dan! Do not go away now! You are not going now! You will stay here tonight. Here in my own house there is none to know or care but we. And we are betrothed. Oh Dan, you always wanted—so much—before. I am ready to make you welcome in Jessie's way now. That was what you wanted, you said."

He looked her up and down for a long moment. Then he reached over and brushed her forehead with his taut young mouth.

"I dinna' want you now in Jessie's way, lass—not any more. Mr. Davidson'll cry the banns next Sunday. Two Sundays more, and then I'll come back and fetch you home wit' me. You can bake a cake for then, and sew your wedding gown."

As he stepped away from her and stood there in the moonlight, leaning on his musket, she saw a hardness in his face, a restraint, and a scorn for the care-free indulging self he remembered as well as she did. She saw the stern harsh self-denying Scottish faces of the old men who worshipped righteously in Londonderry's Presbyterian Church. She remembered that he came of the

same stock and was schooled and trained the same as they.

"And until that time—I'll no dishonor my wife!" said Black Dan MacMurray.

Then his face softened in a smile. "Good-bye, Lyddy," he said. "O' all the women I've known, I never wanted one for bride except you." He blew a kiss to her and strode rapidly down the hill.

She stood there after he had gone, dismay and tension slowly fading, and a quiet, exultant peace took possession of her heart. Victim of his perverseness still, she understood that perverseness, and willingly yielded to it; found it no longer an annoyance, but an endearing thing, sweet and acceptable to her because it was so deeply a part of Dan. Perhaps she, too, had learned Graun's first lesson of manhood, that a body cannot always have its own way.

Her musing was interrupted by the sound of footsteps along the highway, the voices of men talking together in the night. Perhaps it was James Smith coming home. Hastily catching up her skirts, she ran across the damp grass and leaned over the stone wall. Sure enough, her neighbor and his sons were striding homeward, their muskets still at their sides.

"Where are the British?" she called to them. Dan had not mentioned the threatened attack, but then he had come from the opposite direction, and probably had not heard what was going on. And she had forgotten it completely, so long as he was there.

"The British are in Boston, where they been all the time, to my way o' thinking," growled James Smith. "We never saw hide nor hair of 'em. Couldn't find an honest man who had, either, though we walked way to the Port and home by the lower road. Whatever happened might ha' been a fright to Ipswich, but 'twas dwindled out to naught by the time it got here."

They passed by, on their way up the hill, and Lydia turned backward to her house, where she must sleep as Dan MacMurray's undishonored bride for three weeks more.

16.
THE RED-HOT ROOF OF BURNING HELL

The fields were one shimmering mass of buttercups and daisies, and a soft breeze stirred in the elm boughs that hot June morning, as Hugh Giffard rode up Crane Neck Hill. He should look for a square brown house below the crest, the old woman had told him, with a stone wall and a quince bush; and sure enough, there it was, with a thin drift of smoke rising from its chimney and linen drying on the grass. He smiled to think of Lydia, competent and housewifely always, waking at dawn to kindle the fire and carry water from the well. But then he grew sober, remembering that the reason for his visit here was nothing to call forth a smile. This was worse, he thought, than facing the guns at the Castle when he had marched to the attack that winter afternoon, with Dan MacMurray's musket held uncomfortably close to his spine. But resolutely, as became a descendant of one who had landed with the great duke at Pevensey, he turned his horse through the gap in the wall, dismounted, and knocked on the door.

He waited a long moment, never doubting that the house was occupied, for he could hear footsteps that finally moved toward him. Then the door opened.

"I'm sorry. I had my hands in the bread dough," said Lydia. "I—!" Her voice broke off, and she stood there looking at him, a towel in her moist hands, and a thin white dust of flour on the skirt of her pewter-colored gown.

"I, too, am sorry if I surprised you, but I had no way to let you know I was coming. Only this morning did I find out where you were. May I come in, Lydia?"

"Of course," she breathed, stepping backward into the kitchen and pointing him to a chair, sitting down herself. "Have you had your breakfast, Hugh?"

He sat down, forcing himself to look at her. "Yes," he answered, "at the Wolfe Tavern where I stayed last night. I was on my way from Boston, and I made enquiries. A thick-set old woman in a dirty dress told me where you were."

"Before that—you did not know? You have not seen Dorothy—or her husband?"

He studied his own frowning face in a looking glass on the opposite wall.

"No, I have not seen them. Young MacMurray came to Portsmouth once,

looking for me." He had wondered often if this red-haired youngster was any kin to the MacMurray he had so briefly known, but he did not think to put the question to Lydia. He continued his story. "The lad—for he was hardly more than that—had joined the rebels at Cambridge, but as you know, those who were so eager to go there at first have for the most part disbanded and drifted away. He came home, but he meant to return to them as soon as he had visited his wife and explained matters to me. Unfortunately I was in Exeter when he sought me. We had just returned from Wolfeborough in haste after we had news of the battle. But he told John what he had to say."

"What did he tell John?"

"Little enough of what must have happened, I think. He said that Frances had quarreled with Dorothy, and my sister had fled to him. They had been intending marriage for a long time, and now that it is accomplished he swears he will prove a good husband to her. I hope he keeps his word."

He noticed that his face in the mirror had managed a wan smile.

"Oh, he will be a good husband to her, Hugh, and they are so very fond. I do not think she will miss her fine gowns and fashionable life. I think she loves him enough to be willing to live in his way."

"I trust you are right, Lydia. I mean to ride to his farm and talk with her, as soon as the province is quiet and John has less need of me. Do you know the man?"

"Yes," said Lydia. "I have known him for a long time." She was not looking at her visitor. Her fingers played with the ruffles on the loopings of her gown.

"I am glad of that," he said, "for if he had been a worthless scoundrel, I am sure you would have stood in her way. Well, if what she wants is a Scotch-Irish farmer from the backwoods of New Hampshire, I can only bow my head and give her my blessing, but I admit it is a shock to me."

"The past few weeks have been a shocking time for all of us," said Lydia, still not meeting his eye.

He stirred uneasily on the rush-bottomed chair. He kept on speaking because he had to—if matters were ever to be set right.

"I know. Concord Fight, you mean; the province rising on every side. But how did you come to leave Portsmouth, Lydia? When Frances joined us at Wolfeborough she never mentioned anything amiss. And later, when we came back to Portsmouth and you were not there, she would only tell me that you had grown tired of her service and gone away."

"I went with Dorothy," Lydia told him. "I rode with her to Londonderry and saw her married. Then—about the time of the battle—I came here."

Hugh smiled suddenly. "Were you at the Ipswich Fright?" he asked. "Folk are calling it that for a jest now, but it has a sober side as well. Half Essex

County fled into New Hampshire at a mere word! What a ridiculous and cowardly display! I had thought better of American courage. It is hard to understand."

Her temper flared up, and for some reason he felt glad, glad that the old quick-tongued Lydia had returned. So far their meeting had been but a spiritless affair.

"When you call it ridiculous and cowardly," she upbraided him, "you forget there was hardly anyone left in Essex but women and children and old men! The others had gone where the fighting was, as fast as they could. Scarce a cowardly thing to do! And there may have been British about. We do not know yet what caused the alarm."

"I heard in Boston," he told her, "that a few British soldiers had gone into the country a little way, looking for beef cattle to help feed the troops. Some ill-balanced person saw them, and the word traveled like fire."

His voice died away, and they sat silent for a few moments. He hesitated, like a man about to plunge into an icy stream, then he leaned toward her and began.

"You went from Portsmouth, Lydia, and left no word for me. And when I would take you in my arms, I get no encouragement thereto. Something has come between us. I want to know—is it an insurmountable thing?"

"You—you wish it were not?" she asked, looking at him with surprisingly clear and direct eyes.

He was silent. Then finally, "Yes," he said.

She smiled faintly. "I think you mean, 'yes and no.' "

"Lydia!" he cried, startled into honesty. "How could you tell that?"

"Then you do mean, 'yes and no'? What I said is true?"

He groaned. "I can never explain it, Lydia."

"You do not have to explain," she told him, careful no longer. "Listen, and I will tell you a little of what Frances did not tell. I know what you were about there—after you had said good-bye to me, your promised wife. Dorothy saw Frances—with you."

He clenched his hands and swallowed, feeling almost sick with the shame and anguish in his heart.

"So—you know of that?" he murmured. "You know of that, God pity me!"

She kept on relentlessly, but not with anger or reproach. "Yes, I know of that. Dorothy told me. She is loyal, and she says you were not at fault; that it was Frances' doing. Was it, Hugh?"

He could lie to her, he thought; lie in either direction, cast all the blame on the governor's wife, or take it to himself. But he wanted desperately to be absolved and healed, and he could not achieve it with a lie. He put his head down. "Help me, Lydia," he said.

"I will if I can, Hugh," she answered patiently. "If you will tell me what you want of me—"

There was a note of quiet sympathy in her voice that suddenly caused him to abandon all his defenses, to put into harsh and bitter words the thing that he had come there to tell.

"I want your forgiveness, Lydia. I cannot hope for more than that from you now. I honor you for your virtue, for your cool pride and integrity. You are all that a man could hope for in his wife. I admire your beauty—I thought I loved it—all through those winter months when she kept to her chamber, hidden away, I thought I loved you then. But when she was restored to health again, and came forth and smiled at me and tapped me with her fan—why then you and all your loveliness—they moved me no more than a painted picture on the wall. That woman is a madness in my blood, and I cannot put it away!"

Lydia drew back a little, but her air of grave composure did not change, and even in the midst of his own shame and anguish, it piqued him that she should remain so calm through his shocking revelation. She must surely, he thought, be suffering the deepest pain, but her voice did not tremble when she spoke, and she seemed blandly oblivious of the great wrong done to her.

"You will have to put that madness away, Hugh," she told him. "You cannot do otherwise. You cannot treat John Wentworth so!"

He groaned again. "That is what frightens me, frightens me most of all! Keeps me sleepless in the night! The fear that I will be tempted—tempted past all my strength, which is little enough when she is by! That I will dishonor John!"

Lydia stood up and came toward him, put her fingers lightly on his sleeve.

"I would not worry, Hugh. I cannot be completely sure of this, but I doubt if Frances would allow such a thing to come to pass. I do not think she would yield herself thus far to any man. I think she would lead him to the last edge of passion, till he reached out for her, sure of her final surrender—and then she would laugh and walk off and leave him there."

"Like a horse who runs well in the field but will not take the hedges?" he asked bitterly, remembering how he had heard English sportsmen speak of certain women so.

"Yes," said Lydia quietly. "I think that is a way to say it. Frances will not take the hedges. But she is dangerous, for her governor may suspect a worse evil than is really there. I think he would kill you, Hugh, if he really believed you had dishonored him."

"My God, Lydia! But I find myself trailing the woman like a little dog! She has me in irons! How can I get myself free?"

"You must leave Portsmouth, Hugh. Leave the governor's service and go. Dorothy is provided for, and you must have friends in Boston, you have been

so many times there."

He lifted his head and looked at her, feeling hope waken in his heart. "I—I—that would be the answer—if I could do that." And then he felt the jaws of the trap closing about him once more. "But affairs are so disordered in the province that I cannot leave John."

"I think you make an excuse," said Lydia. "If things are disordered there, tell me how."

He leaned his head against the back of the chair and closed his eyes. "Ever since Concord Fight, things have gone worse. There are new men in power, and they pay no attention to John. They have forced him to adjourn the Assembly, but it now comes together again in the rebel stronghold at Exeter. I think they plan to send food and money to the camps around Boston and, of course, more troops. Then, a fortnight back, armed men overran all Portsmouth. They poured in from the country and trained guns on His Majesty's ship, the *Scarborough*, because its captain—one Barclay—had been seizing their boats, sending their corn and pork and flour to the British in Boston, likewise impressing their seamen. Tom Pickering fired openly at a boat full of British sailors when they tried to come ashore by Long Wharf. John interceded, and the business quieted down, but not before he himself was most savagely threatened. Some men swore they would drag him from his house and lodge him in Exeter jail. John, all this while, was urging wisdom and candor and moderation, trying to hold his government together in the name of the King, and having ill luck, it seemed to me."

Talking of another man's troubles seemed to soothe him, to lessen his own woe. She listened without comment, and he kept on.

"He has a few friends remaining to him—Colonel Jack Fenton, for one, has come down from Plymouth to sit in their Congress and may speak to some purpose there. But most of Portsmouth supports the agitation against the King. Mr. Haven of the South Church sits up all night making bullets, and Dr. Cutter has sent a chest of medicines to the New Hampshire troops who have gone into camp at Medford, I hear."

"Yes," murmured Lydia, "they are at Medford." He could not understand her fleeting smile.

"Surely John Wentworth knows his own business well enough," he continued, frowning again into the glass. "But I cannot agree with him that he serves his province best when he serves his King. Do you know, Lydia," he found himself so far recovered that he could smile at her, "once when I was a lad, I heard the Marquis of Rockingham say, 'Englishmen are Englishmen still. Ferrying them over the Atlantic does not change their natures.' But I swear, it has changed mine."

"Why do you swear that?" she asked, bewilderment in her voice.

"Why, because I find I cannot think as Englishmen think where America is concerned. To me, they are two countries and two peoples. I cannot see why one should feel itself appointed by God to coerce the other and keep it down, why you should exist only to serve our need. But eighteen months ago when I came here, I saw it plain."

"What do you think John should do?"

Hugh flung out his hands in a wide gesture. "Would you think me a madman, Lydia, if I said I thought he ought to stand by his own—his New Hampshire men, I mean—and get himself down to Medford and lead them against the King's troops? If he and Jack Fenton and Colonel Michael Wentworth would leave off being Tories, they could rally the regiments; set aside the present command, Folsom and that yokel, Stark—"

"If you really think, Hugh," said Lydia, the mocking note in her voice too plain for him to miss, "that New Hampshire men would trade John Stark for John Wentworth, you are thinking like an Englishman still."

"I never heard of John Stark till the last six weeks," he retorted, "and now his name's on everyone's tongue for a great hero. But I cannot find out what he ever did in his life except kill a few Indians and run a sawmill by the Merrimack."

"Yes," said Lydia sweetly. "You might say that was all he had ever done in his life. But some men have done even less, they tell me."

Sudden anger shook him at the taunt, and he felt the hot blood rising in his head and face.

"I will admit that so far I have accomplished very little, Lydia."

Again she replied with the unnatural calmness, the unnatural patience. What satisfactions had her new poise come from, he wondered uneasily.

"You are still young, and there is much that needs doing nowadays. You can do much to help us, here in America, if you no longer think like an Englishman."

He gazed through the open door at a carefully tended rosebush shaken by a little wind, dropping its scarlet petals on the grass—scarlet, the color of blood, and British uniforms, and Frances Wentworth's new satin gown. He turned back to Lydia, all in pewter gray. He had thought he knew her, but every moment her behavior grew more puzzling to him. He was suddenly tired, and defeated, unable to reach out to her any more. He stood up.

"I must go, Lydia. Back to Portsmouth to see if I can order my affairs as you advise. I was talking yesterday with General Gage—John sent me to ask him for troops which he refused to send—and I think he is well disposed toward me. I know you must be angry that I have been so faithless to you, wronged you so deeply—though it was something I could not help. But when it has all blown past—when my blood is cooled and I am in my right senses

again—will you make me welcome if I come back?"

She had drawn herself up proudly, he thought, but the light in her eyes was not pride, not mirth, nor happiness, but some deeper thing. "No, I am not angry, Hugh. And it is I who have been the faithless one. I can never make you welcome any more."

"Why not, Lydia?" he cried. "If you are not angry—if you understand about Frances—? What has happened to you?"

"Only—only such as happens to most women—if God is good to them."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I am betrothed, Hugh, to the man I most love in all the world, the man who loves me."

He stood there stunned, groping for words. She waited a moment and then went on, her voice low and soft, her whole face shining.

"I loved him before I was ever married, and then when I was a widow and came back to Portsmouth, I loved him again. I thought our ways would never agree, and I told you so. I was only mistaken, I did not lie. You will forget Frances, and forget me, and find a woman who is better than either of us, perhaps; better for you."

He took a step toward the door. "Is he a man I have met with, Lydia?"

"I do not know. It is unlikely, I think. He is with the troops at Medford now, delayed there because so many have left that he feels he should not go. But he means to marry me, as soon as Stark will give him a pass to come home. He did not live at the Bank. He is a Londonderry man."

"His name?"

"Dan MacMurray. Black Dan. Dorothy married his cousin of the same name, whose hair is red."

"I have met Black Dan MacMurray," said Hugh wearily, eager only to be gone, to ride alone through the daisy fields and try to put his shattered world together in some sounder way. "I had his musket to my back once. I am not so sure I cannot feel it there now. Good-bye, Lydia. When the old woman in the tavern told me how to get here, she said I might as well spare my horse, that the journey would be little good to me."

He went out, shutting the door behind him, plucking a handful of petals from the scarlet rosebush as he strode by. It surprised him to find them still crushed in his hand when he reached the foot of the hill.

*

The warm bright day clouded over by mid-afternoon, and a gentle rain began to fall, turning all the landscape to one color, a misty gray-green. Hugh rode steadily eastward, past the farms and steepled villages, shunning the

taverns and taking no refreshment himself, letting his horse drink from whatever brooks meandered by. The more he thought about it, the more he thought Black Dan MacMurray had done him a certain favor, though he could not help but be envious of Dan. He had known when he went to Lydia this time that it was only a half-man he had to offer. All that was good and wise and honorable in him turned toward her—but so much of his nature turned so strongly a different way. At least, he need not feel that he had left her forlorn and grieving. Dan MacMurray could make her heart quicken and her face light up as he had never been able to do. It had cost her no heartaches to renounce him, having Dan.

She had given him good advice, and he meant to take it, oh he surely meant to take it, but as he drew nearer to Portsmouth he could think of nothing but the governor's wife—how she would be waiting there, seated at the tea table, or descending the staircase, or playing a gay tune on the spinet, her white throat rising provocatively from her scarlet dress. The breath caught in his own throat as he thought of Frances Wentworth. He spurred his horse and gripped the stout leather edge of his saddle, and swore that he would persist in his wretched folly no longer, that he would indeed go away.

The streets of Portsmouth seemed unusually deserted as he rode through them, a half-hour before supper time. Surely the thin rain and early twilight should not have driven folk indoors, but he saw nobody in Market Square except two old women with wicker fish baskets and a drunken sailor trying to make his way from Stoodley's to the Marquis of Rockingham. He had not gone very far down Pleasant Street, however, before he began to meet little groups of townspeople straggling along—women, for the most part, the few men amongst them carrying their muskets and striding rapidly ahead. Was a house afire on Pickering Neck, he wondered. Or maybe the marines from the *Scarborough* were causing some kind of quarrel along the shore. As he drew nearer to John Wentworth's house, the crowd thickened, and when he reached Samuel Livermore's, they stood in a confused jumble, completely blocking the highway. Ahead of him he heard shouting, yells, taunts, a cheer or two.

By God, he thought, it looks as if they were all gathered in front of Johnny's house. I had better see if I can get there by a back way. Hoping that none of the intent and muttering throng had noticed him, he turned his horse sharply through the Livermore yard, into the sodden garden, past the rose arbor. Where the trim flower beds ran down toward the South Mill Pond, he found a gate into the next garden, and from that to the next, and so, following a crooked path close to the waterside, he finally dismounted at the rear of John Wentworth's house and put his hand to the latch of the terrace door. It opened easily, admitting him to the wide hall where he hesitated, listening in utter dismay to the shouts and hoots that came from Pleasant Street, wondering

where John and Frances were.

"Bring out Fenton!" called a rough voice, and half a dozen others took up the cry. "Tar and feathers for Fenton! For Tory Johnny, too!"

Then Frances called to him from the library. "Hugh, we have missed you! Come here and tell me why you have been so long away."

He strode into the small pleasant room with a fire burning on the hearth to take off the chill of the damp night. Frances sat in a low chair where the candlelight fell upon her, a bowl of creamy white blossoms in a silver bowl on the nearby table and a book in her hand. The old beagle, frail and lame now, slept in a basket at her feet. Gracefully she rose and put the book down, and stood there, smiling up into Hugh's eyes.

"I have been reading the poems of Mr. Pope," she said. "Not that I seek to set up for a woman of letters, but I find certain underlinings in the book that my husband has put there. Would not any wife be curious to scan them and try to discover what they mean?"

"Hang Jack Fenton! Hang Tory Johnny!" howled the mob at the front door.

"I own I am more curious about something else at this moment," he told her, looking at the flowers, at the fire, anywhere, except into her face. "What is the meaning of this uproar in the street, and where is His Excellency?"

Her eyes seemed to grow darker and more wide, her pale skin a little more pale.

"The uproar means that Rome is burning—our own Rome, that is—Johnny's holy city that he thought he had built so well. I cannot fiddle, but at least, I can read the poems of Mr. Pope."

"Frances," he pleaded, "either tell me where John is, or make this matter more clear to me."

"Poor Hugh," she murmured, a note of quick sympathy in her voice, "I have confused you, I know, but that is because I am so confused myself, because we all are. All but my governor, of course. I am always so timid, and he is so resolute. He would not hesitate to ride over the tops of the trees on Moose Mountain, while I tremble when passing along a road cut at the foot of it!"

"We are a long way from Moose Mountain, my lady," he said, "and that shouting in the street is very near. What has so angered these men, and what do they think to do?"

She sighed and sank back in the cushioned chair. "Oh it is all the fault of the wretched Assembly at Exeter! They refused this morning to seat Jack Fenton, saying he had come from a new town illegally sanctioned by John. They hate Jack because he advised his neighbors to stay at home and attend to their plowing instead of turning out after Concord Fight. The poor man withdrew and was on his way to take refuge aboard the *Scarborough* when the

mob gathered like a thunderstorm on a July day. I do not think he dares to leave our house now."

"Where is he? Hid in the attic or—?"

"No, he is in the parlor. He and Thomas Macdonough and John."

"I had better go to them," he said. "Put a man each side, both armed with swords, and he could make a run for it."

She was silent for a few moments, then she said, "Whom do you think they mean, Hugh, when they say, 'Hang Tory John'?"

"Why, Fenton," he answered quickly. "Tory John Fenton! You yourself have told me that."

"Yes, they want him. But I think they mean someone else. I think they want Tory John Wentworth, too."

The old dog stirred in his basket, snored hoarsely for a moment and then lay still.

Frances drew close to her husband's friend and lifted her face up. "I told you Rome was burning, Hugh," she said. "Listen! Can you not hear the fiddles play?"

Hugh indeed heard the fiddles. He caught her to him, holding her warm vibrant body, lost in the wonder of her mouth, the fragrance of her hair.

Behind them Thomas Macdonough, the governor's secretary, cleared his throat.

"My lady," he began awkwardly. "My lady—"

Frances slipped out of Hugh's arms as he quickly dropped them from about her. She gave Macdonough a long slow look, veiling it suddenly with her eyelashes. The man's face reddened and he looked out of the window into the rainy twilight. He spoke gruffly.

"My lady, His Excellency bids me advise you to pack such clothing as you will need for yourself and the child, to have the servants ready. He thinks it will be more prudent if we take shelter in the Castle—at least, for tonight."

Frances smiled engagingly at the outraged secretary. "Go back and tell my governor that my packing was done three days ago. I have feared such a crisis would come to pass. But I will see that the servants are ready whenever he cares to leave. Thank you, Thomas, for delivering his message." With a graceful curtsy she swept from the room.

Hugh could feel the scorn in Macdonough's eyes. He did not need to see it to know that it was there. He kept his head turned the other way. Macdonough cleared his throat again.

"Is Gage sending us troops?" he asked stiffly.

"No," said Hugh. "He says he is sore pressed himself, and wants to know why Johnny made things worse for him by letting loose twelve hundred New Hampshire men to besiege him there."

Macdonough shrugged. “I doubt that troops could save us now,” he said. “Will you come in and give your unhappy news to His Excellency?”

He turned on his heel and strode toward the east parlor, and Hugh followed, knowing there was nothing else he could do, wondering if Macdonough would denounce him before John.

No fire burned here, and only one candle. The shutters were closed at the windows, and heavy brocade curtains drawn across, a feeble enough barrier from the unseen mob outside. John Wentworth paced the floor, his face grim and worried. Jack Fenton sat in a deep armchair, leaning tensely forward, his fingers playing with his sword.

“There is only one thing I can do, Johnny,” he was saying. “If I surrender myself, they will take their sport with me, and while they are thus occupied, you can get Frances and the child away to safety. You would do the same for Elizabeth and my son.”

“I do not like it, Jack!” cried John Wentworth. “You are my friend, and you are a good man, loyal to your country. You should not have to suffer therefor. I will not hand you over to them. Let me go to an upper window and order them once more to disperse.”

“They have a field-piece trained on the house, John,” said Fenton, getting to his feet. “And in this house, you have a wife and son. Good-bye, sir. We shall meet somewhere with all good servants of the King.”

He strode from the room without a backward look. They heard the creak of the hinges as he flung open the front door, then the sudden maddened yelling of the crowd.

John Wentworth stood still, his back to the white carved mantel, his shoulders drooping in defeat.

“I cannot understand it,” he muttered. “They were my friends and neighbors, the men I grew up with. Many of them kin to me. But I wonder, if I were to stand in my front door and call Cousins!’ how many would come a-running now! And I have injured them in no way. I tried to serve them in all things as well as I could. Eight years ago, to this very day, I became their governor, and they cheered me then. But now they turn their guns on me! By God, a man need not betray his country—only let men think that he has, and they will bring down on his head the red-hot roof of burning hell!”

Macdonough had left the room and now came quietly back.

“They are thinning out, Your Excellency,” he said. “Rafe has returned from mingling among them to learn what they mean to do, and he thinks they will not harm Colonel Fenton, but lodge him in Exeter jail. Henry has a boat ready at the foot of the garden whenever you plan to take Madame Wentworth away. Captain Cochran has sent a sloop to meet it below the dam, and all things are arranged so that you can escape privily—but you should be about it

soon."

The governor ran his hand backward through his waving brown hair, then smote his fists together, enraged at his own helplessness. Then he seemed to see his aide for the first time.

"Ah Hugh," he said, "I suppose you got no help in Boston?"

Hugh shook his head. "No," he answered. "You can look for no help from there." Why had he said "you," he wondered, instead of "we"?

John Wentworth let his head sink downward for a moment, his chin resting on the blue silk scarf knotted at his throat. Then he straightened up proudly and squared his shoulders; smote one clenched fist into the other palm.

"By God, Hugh," he said, "I could stay here and shoot it out with them—fight fools in a fool's way! But I'll be damned if I will!"

"Yes, sir?" asked Hugh emptily, not knowing what other response to make.

"Sometimes," the old urbane smile flickered across John Wentworth's mouth, and his eyebrows lifted, " 'tis the greatest bravery to act the coward's part, lad. This is such a time, I think, and God assist me to be that brave."

"You mean—to unbar your door and yield to them? But will you not first send Madame Wentworth and your son away?"

The governor laughed harshly. "We shall all go away," he answered. "Leave them to besiege the empty house their grudging taxes paid for." He flung out his hands in an open gesture. "I cannot fight on from here, Hugh, abandoned by nine-tenths of the province, reviled by its best men. But fight on, I shall. Withdraw to the fort, to the warships, to Boston, even. I am still the governor of New Hampshire, and I shall make at least one stand more. I do not yield. I withdraw, and feint, and move forward again. But for now—" and the shouting without grew ever louder; small stones rattled against the windowpane, "let us away!"

Frances stood waiting for them in the door of the library. She wore a dark hood and cloak, and held her child in her arms, wrapped in a dark shawl. As she opened her mouth to speak to them, her words were drowned out by another burst of shouting from the street. When it died away, she went on as calmly as if no interruption had occurred.

"Are you coming now, John?" she asked her husband. "The maids are already in the boat, with such things as we are likely to need." She smiled at him. "I took as little as I could."

"You are most considerate, Frances," he said formally. "I am going to my chamber now, for one last box of papers that remains there. You need not wait for me."

He strode to the staircase. Frances looked around her, imperious, and with no trace of fear, making sure that nothing she should take was left behind, her swift glance darting toward the parlors, the kitchen, the library. She caught up

her skirts in one hand, holding the baby in her other arm, signaling to Macdonough to lead the way. Then she looked back over her shoulder before she passed out into the dripping fragrance of the rainy summer night.

"Hugh, you will carry Bugler," she said.

Unquestioningly he went into the library and lifted the basket, heavy with the limp weight of the old dog. As he turned to leave the room, his eye caught the book of Mr. Pope's poems, flung down, lying wide open on the chair, and he bent a curious glance upon it, sorry the next moment that he had done so.

Some men to pleasure, some to business take,
But every woman is at heart a rake.

The governor's heavy underscoring had nearly torn the paper through.

17.
LIVE FREE OR DIE

They waited alone in their homes that hot June day, all through New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, and Connecticut, as women have always waited while men's battles were going on. But the state of war was new to their country, that summer of 1775; events moved so quickly and news traveled so slowly, that most of them were not sharply worried, only a little tense, a little uneasy, likely to slight the household chores, to scold the children and call them from play too soon.

Up in Londonderry, young Dolly MacMurray shifted her swelling body, trying to make herself comfortable at the flax wheel, but as the sun climbed high and the day grew ever hotter, her face turned greenish white and drops of sweat burst out on her forehead, running in little rivulets to the corners of her mouth. Finally Graun came—Graun who had two lads at Medford to worry about instead of one—and watched her silently for a few moments, then bade her go and lie on her bed till the heat should break in twilight or sudden rain.

Inside the fortifications looking on Portsmouth Harbor, Frances Wentworth sat in the doorway of the crude wooden hut where she and her household had taken refuge the last three days, and studied the blue sea far out to the horizon. John would not admit it, but already she knew in her heart that his rule was over and his power broken. They would not go back to the hired house in Pleasant Street or the great farm in Wolfeborough. But they must go somewhere. To her mother's in Boston, perhaps, but England would be her own first choice: to England, and to the fine society of John's highly placed friends. Surely they could expect preferment from the Marquis of Rockingham for whom they had named their son. She had heard that Queen Charlotte's ladies were wearing plumes in their hair that year, after the new French fashion. She wondered how she would look with plumes in her hair. She eyed the sea gulls perched on the crumbling stone wall across the yard. She went to find a looking glass.

On Crane Neck Hill Lydia sat mending an old coat of David's that she thought to give to a poor family on the Byfield Road. When she heard thunder she was not surprised at first, but the distant rumbling kept on, and still no rain fell through the leaves of the lilac tree, no cloud came over the face of the bright day. Finally she went to the window, and saw half the parish streaming up the hill.

"I tell ye what 'tis," cried tailor Palmer, a veteran of the old French war, "It's big guns! Cannon! Somewhere there be a battle going on!"

Lydia ran out to join the others, hurrying to the vantage point of the Smith farm at the crest of the hill. The heat of the day grew more intense and the far-off rumbling ever louder. She stood with her frightened and curious neighbors under the cherry trees in Elizabeth Smith's garden. Then somebody noticed a faint blur of smoke on the southern skyline, beyond all the green hills and valleys and little rivers running down to the white beaches of the sea. The blur puffed and swelled and grew to storm-cloud size and darkness.

"Boston's burning," murmured a voice in the throng about her, and soon the cry, "Boston's burning! The British have fired Boston!" was on every mouth. Lydia thought of Dan, and fear rushed through her like a sickness. And still the cannon boomed, and the smoke spread, and the sun blazed down through the cloudless blue day.

*

Dan MacMurray sat at the edge of the millpond on the west side of Charlestown Neck and watched the tide come flooding through the salt grass, almost to the toes of his cowhide boots. He shaded his eyes with his hand and looked across the blue stretch of water to His Majesty's frigate, the *Lively*. Tiny black figures scurried, buglike, about its deck. Must be they were getting ready to let go with another charge of round shot again. Involuntarily he ducked his head and flattened himself in the rank grass smelling of dead shellfish, shoved his knapsack and musket further back to dry ground. A moment later came the expected hoarse roar and the whistle overhead, the draft of air, and a thud beyond him, in the narrow part of the Neck where two regiments waited, confused in their orders, uncertain in which direction to go.

That wasn't round shot! That was a cannon ball! Dan lifted his head first, then climbed gingerly to his feet. The missile, whatever it was, had fallen short, he saw, harmless on the dank ground, spraying mud and water all about the turf where it sank in. He turned to his comrades sprawled on a mossy outcrop of ledge a few yards away. They had been there for more than an hour now, he and the others detached from Captain Scott's company for guard duty: Paul Caldwell of Londonderry, two Caldwell boys from neighboring Windham; the others from over west of the river—John Ha'penny and James Hockley of Peterborough, John Hillsgrove of Temple, Jonas Howe of some place beyond that. Dan could not remember the name. He was glad he didn't have to worry about his cousin who had drawn guard duty four miles back on Winter Hill. "Sure they couldn't send both Dan MacMurray's out! They have to save one o' us for seed," he had jested as he marched away.

Now he grinned and lowered himself to a place by Jonas' side.

"They been shooting at us long enough so's anybody but Britishers would get the range," he said. "But I hope we're cleared out of here before they do."

"So do I," muttered John Caldwell. "I don't care none if Will Scott did tell us to stay here. When Stark takes the regiment by, I aim to tag along."

"Be ye scairt, Johnny?" asked Ha'penny, plucking a sprig of sorrel and chewing it thoughtfully, letting the stem dangle from one corner of his mouth.

"What? Me scairt? No! If I was scairt, I'd ha' cut out for Windham when we got our orders this morning. Or last night when word went round the campfires that if we didn't look sharp and take Charlestown Heights, the British would. It's too late to be scairt now."

"We dinna' like to be shot at when we can no shoot back," said Paul Caldwell, peering into the depths of his powder horn. "Canna' fire a musket on a frigate wi' any success at all. What have you fellows got for your loadings? I hope you be better off than I be."

"We all got the same," said Dan, "two flints, a gill o' powder, and fifteen balls. Got the balls hammered down to size, too."

"Did you get any o' that lead they brought over from Cambridge last night after Prescott's men moved out?" asked Jonas. "They said 'twas melted out o' the organ pipes o' the English church there."

"I dinna' get none o' that," said Dan, "but I got other things in my pouch more than was issued; things that will likely draw blood, though they won't make no religious music the while."

He reached into a small deerskin bag fastened at his belt and pulled out a handful of assorted objects, buckshot, rusty nails, and bits of broken glass; let them dribble back among their fellows again.

"We got more'n enough to make five cartridges to a man," said Sam Caldwell. "I never been in a battle before, but three's enough for me when I go after deer."

"Listen," said James Hockley, "that's a fife and drum! Must be another regiment coming through."

Dan lifted his head and looked around. He could hear the floating batteries down river, the guns booming across the Charles in Boston, but from the far side of the green hill looming in front of them, he could hear no sounds at all. James was right, however. Fifers were playing "Yankee Doodle" out on the Medford road.

"Come on, boys," he said, "let's get over to the highway. Don't seem as if Will Scott would expect us to stay here guarding, when there be them two damn fool regiments, cast like a horse in a slough, unlikely to go ahead or back."

Together they picked up their muskets and knapsacks and joined the

uneasy throng of men crowding along the narrow road that wound over Charlestown Neck, stood at the edge of them waiting, till suddenly a big voice boomed, "Move ahead, boys, or shift to the side and let us go through!"

"That's Major McClary," cried Jonas Howe, tallest of the group, standing on tiptoe, "and Stark's with him, and Captain Dearborn; three abreast, and all the boys coming on!"

Dan looked around him at the two regiments in leaderless disarray and wondered where their colonels were. Poorly equipped outfits, he thought—not because they lacked uniforms, for most of the army, like himself, wore homespun shirts and breeches, except for Stark's new coat of buff and blue. But they were ill-armed, he thought, and carried their weapons unhandily: old queen's arms left over from the Indian wars, light Spanish fusees, and French pieces that looked like their fathers and grandfathers had captured them at Louisburg thirty years ago. Swords some country blacksmith had likely made. Dan smoothed the long barrel of his own musket lovingly. It was a Brown Bess like the British officers carried, smuggled into the Bank especially for him by a friendly merchant there.

The stranded regiments now fell back to the weedy banks at the sides of the narrow road to let the New Hampshire men go through. Dan fixed his eyes on the lean hard face of the colonel, proud that Stark, too, had been born a Londonderry man. "I knowed his mother when she was carrying him," he had heard Graunie say. The colonel moved one step ahead of his nearest officers, holding them at his own deliberate pace to slow their march and keep them fresh for what lay ahead. The very slowness of his progress told Dan what Stark thought of the coming encounter, that it would not be an easy one. But he had already decided that for himself, because of the unexplained silence on the hills of Charlestown where Prescott was supposed to have entrenched his men.

Just then the *Lively* cut loose with another round, answered by a roar from the floating batteries in the Mystic. Caught in the cross fire that raked the narrow Neck, the two faltering regiments fell to the turf and lay there like windrows while the shot went over, all but a handful of wounded scrambling rapidly to their feet again. Stark's men marched steadily forward as if they were off for a barn raising or a husking bee, and Will Scott's little detachment fell into line behind them. Dan MacMurray marched up the green rounded slope of Bunker Hill and looked out over Boston Bay.

Charlestown peninsula, shaped like a curving green pear, hung down between the Charles and the Mystic, covered with fields and pastures and rambling stone walls. Daisies and buttercups bloomed in the deep grass where the hay was not yet cut, and thick thorny blackberry vines lifted a tangle of white flower. Here and there stood a haycock, a barn or a farmhouse on a steep hillside, or a single elm or locust tree. Dan could see the roofs and wharves and

slender steeple of the town itself, far on the southwest curve of the shore facing Boston, but he had expected to see no landscape at all. He had expected to march straight into a sturdy earthworks, for Bunker Hill, the tallest hill, nearest the Neck, was the site chosen for fortification, but the top of Bunker Hill lay green and bare as a polished dome.

A confused throng of men, stragglers or deserters, perhaps, in no military formation, crowded helter-skelter over the slopes of it. A few of them carried heavy intrenching tools as if they meant to begin only now the task that should have been completed in the darkness of last night. And then peering further over the crest, he saw two hills below him; one near the shore, and a taller one behind it crowned with a redoubt. The redoubt was a rough square, enclosed with thick walls of hastily thrown-up earth, flattened on top and a-swarm with men, a fog of brown dust rising all about. It looked incredibly small. It could hold none of the fresh troops moving in. It was full already. He had not expected to fight in the open field, and he was not prepared for it. He gave a gasp of dismay, followed by a low curse.

At his shoulder someone laughed harshly. He turned and saw a tall man in deerskins he had never seen before, but who rapidly made himself known.

"Tom Colbourne o' Captain Moor's company. Don't know how they come to dig up Breed's Hill instead o' Bunker; lower down, and handier-like for the British, that be all. See ye don't like the redoubt any better than the rest o' us. Heard the Colonel say it looks like a damn pound."

The redoubt did indeed look like a shelter for stray animals, except for a projection here and there, and a long breastwork extending toward the east. Between it and the waterside, Dan could make out a slough and what looked like brick kilns with open pools and patches of rank marsh grass scattered here and there. But the end of the peninsula beyond the lowest hill was not the green and brown of natural earth. It was a florid, spreading, spilling scarlet and white.

Tom Colbourne must have noticed the change in his face, for he followed his glance. "Yes, the British landed a while back, after snipping at Prescott's men all morning, and trying to decide whether to come on us or no. Got here not much past noon, and the first thing they did was to sit down and eat their dinner. Got most o' their howitzers and field-pieces stuck in the slough over there."

Dan looked where he pointed, and noticed for the first time the tangled mass of gleaming metal close to the kilns. No shots were falling around Stark's regiment where it paused on the crest of Bunker Hill, but the guns from Boston kept blazing and booming every minute or two. The guns from the circling ships could be heard in the pauses when Boston's guns were still. He could taste gunpowder in his mouth and smell brimstone in the air.

"Be ye afraid?" asked Tom Colbourne, eyeing him keenly.

Dan wet his lips. "Hell," he said, "who wouldn't be? But that don't make no difference now."

"No, that don't make no difference now," Tom Colbourne said.

Up ahead of them the drums beat. "Be still, back there," roared Andrew McClary. "The colonel's got a word!"

Almost unconsciously the ranks shifted and spread apart so that every man among them could see his leader. Colonel Stark turned to face them, his dark hair hanging lank with sweat on his forehead, the collar of his new blue coat unfastened and gaping apart. He looked round for a moment and then spoke in a low penetrating voice that earned to the far reaches of the hill. There was a ring of cold iron in that voice, as if he were hoping to strike cold iron hidden in the heart of every man who heard him.

"We be going down the hill now; to the left, to fortify and hold the rail fence there. There be some eight hundred feet o' fence, and I figure we got near a man for every foot. And to hold one foot o' ground's not so much to do. Don't fire till they be within fifty yards. Pick out the officers. Fire low and aim at the crossing o' their belts. Hit for the handsome coats and the commanders."

He paused a moment and looked, discomforted, toward Dr. McClintock of Greenland, the regimental chaplain, thinking, perhaps, that the minister would expect a spiritual message from him. He stepped back a little and shook a lock of dark hair from his burning blue eyes.

"I'll fight to the last drop o' blood in me. I say it now, and I'll keep a-saying it, so long as I can stand up man alive. By God, I'm going to live free or die!" He paused a moment and then lifted his hand to his forehead in a stiff salute. "Fall in, boys!" he said.

The guns across the Charles boomed steadily, with no pauses now, and Dan took one look at the town of Boston as his regiment formed and started to march down Bunker Hill. Hundreds of shining roofs and steeples, he thought, and all of them covered with folk who had come out to watch the battle as if it were a cock fight, or a wrestling match, or any sporting game. He had never been to Boston and often wanted to go. Someday, after the fighting was over, he would go to Boston, and take *her*, maybe. Buy her a silk dress and a fancy comb for her hair. He thought of a quiet farmhouse and a woman waiting, a woman who smelled of lilac and lavender, a woman with a white skin and a warm sweet mouth. Tom Colbourne prodded him with his musket barrel. On the double quick they trotted down the hill.

The long strip of rail fence ran almost down to the Mystic where the brown-gray tide had already begun to ebb away from the shelving beach. It consisted of upright posts firmly fixed in stones with two rows of split rails laid across, and the New Hampshire men were soon dismantling another fence

and dragging it up, weaving the two together, and stuffing the spaces between with green hay.

"Like to keep my legs covered," said Paul Caldwell at Dan's elbow again. "Don't fear for my head. If they hit that, I'm done. But I don't want my pins shot out from under me."

Then Dan was ordered off to Captain Moor's company, mostly Derryfield men, to carry stones from the pasture walls, extend the rail fence down to the nine-foot bank overhanging the waterside, and take firing position there. Finally, the task done, he found himself crouching, sweaty and thirsty in the hot sun, his coat abandoned somewhere and his shirt hanging open. His tongue hung out of his mouth, and he panted like an old dog. The ends of his fingers were skinned and raw. He rested his musket on the low breastwork of mud and stones, and all around him the Derryfield men rested theirs too, a row of long lean barrels all pointing the same way. Now and then in the pauses between the constant boom of the British bombardment, he could hear the sucking of the tide below the bank, the hum of insects in the deep grass, and the plaintive cry of a bird, bewildered by all the uproar and hidden in the leaves of a nearby apple tree.

He looked up the hill. The Connecticut troops—he could tell them because they had more uniforms than most—were moving into the gap between the earth breastworks and the rail fence. Now, all the way from the Mystic, over Breed's Hill and down towards Charlestown, the Americans would have an entrenched firing line. A tall man with a blue coat and a bald head walked swiftly along the top of the redoubt. It looked a little like Colonel Prescott, but Dan could not be sure. But he was sure of John Stark. Word had gone down the line that the British were forming for the assault, but the New Hampshire colonel walked out unconcernedly a few yards in front of his men. Then he turned and looked back at them, gauging the distance with his eye, walked out a little further, and then looked back again. He planted a stake firmly in the soft turf and hammered it in with the butt of his musket, and addressed his troops.

"There! Don't a man fire till the redcoats come up to that stake! If he does, I'll knock him down," he said.

All along the rail fence went up a cheer, suddenly broken off. The colonel dashed for his own line.

"Here they come," warned Captain Moor. "Keep your heads down and don't fire too soon. Ready all!"

Dan crouched behind a large stone with lichens on it that felt rough as they brushed his cheek. His hand was tense on his musket, as he watched the scarlet and white ranks come on. The British marched in columns to the stirring music of fife and drum, and then spread out in double rows. He could hear heavy

cannonading on the hill.

He narrowed his eyes and sited along his musket barrel. They were almost to the colonel's stake now. He had been taught the distinguishing marks of the British regiments by the veteran soldiers in the camp on Winter Hill, and he could recognize the headdress of the Welsh Fusileers, the insignia of the King's Own. On they came, hesitating imperceptibly, looking around them as if they wondered why the Americans did not fire. A heavy dark officer in fine regalia with much gold strode confidently in their lead.

"That be General Howe," Dan's crouching neighbor muttered, "when he fought on our side at Quebec, I seen him plain."

Prescott's men were firing from the redoubt they had built so desperately in the long night. Dan wished that he could have a drink of water. Rum there was, and plenty, but he did not want rum. In a moment's lull the frightened bird twittered in the apple tree. The redcoats reached the stake.

"Fire!" yelled a hoarse unrecognizable voice with a Yankee twang in it.

All along the rail fence muskets roared and flamed. Dan fixed his eyes on a grenadier, on the small brass matchbox fastened to the man's chest, and let his musket go. The grenadier went down on the grass like a stone into a still pool. Not waiting to see whether or not he got up again, Dan hastily reloaded and rammed the wadding home.

Then the British fired, aimlessly and in a volley; fired too high. Dan felt leaves and twigs from the apple tree fall into his face and hair. His musket was ready and he aimed again for another brass matchbox, and another grenadier fell. He was feeling no fear nor anger now. He was not feeling anything at all. He was only firing and reloading. He was no longer a man, he was a machine of war, performing coldly and methodically, like any other machine.

The grass between the stake and the stone rampart was slippery with blood, covered with dying men who could not die fast enough, who kicked and screamed, and cursed, and called on God and their mothers, and tried to drag themselves away. Like candles touched to a hot plate the companies melted down. Officers fell, and corporals, and leading privates. Men screamed orders, and others tried to obey. But company after company was shattered by the terrible musket fire from the rail fence. At last the attacking columns broke and fled, many flinging away their wigs, their knapsacks, even their muskets in the wild retreat.

A long lull came then in the middle of the hot afternoon, while the British re-formed beyond the brick kilns, and news of their comrades passed from mouth to mouth along the American lines. Prescott's troop had held the redoubt and driven Pigot's center down the hill. Knowlton's Connecticut men stood firm at the middle gap. Hot shots were falling from Boston into Charlestown Square, and it could only be a matter of minutes before the

houses and gardens there would be all aflame. Howe seemed bent on trying to complete the flanking movement, and the heavier blows were again expected to fall on the New Hampshire line, at the rail fence and the stone barricade.

Dan MacMurray loaded his musket grimly and spoke to Captain Moor who had been up the hill to the colonel and now moved down the line.

"Only one thing worries me about this damn fight, captain," said Dan.

"What's that?" asked the captain. He had a quaver in his voice, and Dan could have sworn there was a mist dulling his eyes. Two of the Derryfield men had been wounded, but not badly, and he had examined their injuries before he reported to Stark. This was a different thing. Instead of what had been in his mind, he asked, "Something uncommon happen, sir?"

The captain sighed wearily. "Uncommon, no. Could happen to any man, I guess—any man with a son. While I was with Stark they come and told him some sniper got his boy Caleb—a fine lad, just sixteen."

"Jesus!" muttered Dan. "What did the colonel say?"

"Went on loading his musket. Said the enemy was coming on, and he had no time to talk o' private affairs. He's a better man than I be."

"Better than I be, too," said Dan.

Both men were silent for a moment. Then he said, "I was going to say, sir, what I'm worried about is this: they come on so steady and fast and stupid-like —see 'em lying now, thick as sheep in a fold out there! We got to shoot so many of 'em, my powder's already low. What be we going to do when 'tis all gone?"

Captain Moor's face turned even grimmer. He shook his head and flung out his hands.

"That's got us all worried, lad. Every man-jack, from Stark and Prescott to 'Old Put,' who's trying to rally the men on Bunker Hill back there. We sent to Cambridge for more, but we're all like to run out. If the reserve don't get here in time—" He drew his hand sideways like a blade across his throat and managed a wry grin.

They heard shouted commands up the hill. The British were on the march once more. Once more Howe served up his companies at the rail fence, and the muskets mowed them down like ripe wheat. Once more came shouts and firing as Pigot's men hurled themselves at the redoubt.

His heart heavy with the thought of young Caleb Stark, Dan trained his musket on a grenadier, just as some redcoat officer shrieked orders and a volley let fly.

Too high, thought Dan. They aim too high. I dinna' need to fear 'em none, unless I get in the top of a tree. A body'd think they be after damn squirrels instead—

Suddenly he felt a tremendous blow against his forehead, as if his whole

skull would fly part. Stars wheeled and burst before his eyes, and he seemed to be lifted and borne along, swirled like a leaf in a high gale. “Why—why I never thought it would be—nothing but the dark!” Dan MacMurray said.

18.
THE COLOR OF HIS HAIR

It was Jock Alexander the wheelwright who brought them the news about midday, but the three women in the old farmhouse above West Running Brook had expected ill tidings long before that. Graun sent her spinning girls to their homes and let the flax wheels stand idle, while she tried to keep Dorothy and Lydia busy with simple kitchen tasks. She talked cheerily to them now and then about her girlhood in County Antrim, or the long sea voyage, or the scandalous drunkenness six years back after the church-raising. She even went to a secret recess in the cupboard and pulled out a small hoard of tea and brewed a pot of it, hot and strong.

"This was bought before there was any commandment against it," she told them, "and so I think 'tis no sin to drink it now. I been saving it for a time o' need."

Sipping from the heavy earthenware cup, so different from the delicate china she had been used to in Frances Wentworth's house, Lydia agreed silently that this was such a time. Dorothy managed a wan smile, and said even Dan would forgive them, she thought, and maybe it had been somewhat selfish of the men all along, asking the women to give up tea, while the suggestion that they should give up whiskey and rum was never once heard. They tried to speak naturally and make little jests with one another, but all about them hung the terrible sick fear.

Lydia had ridden all the way from Newbury the night before, under the waning moon. If indeed a great battle was going on, and nobody seemed to doubt that, she felt that she wanted to be in Dan's house with the others who loved Dan. They had been asleep, and she had had to throw pebbles against the windowpane and then tell her news as gently as she could, to Graunie in her peaked nightcap, and Dorothy, tormented by the quickening child. Since then they had waited sleepless, going now and then to lie down, but nerve-wracked, and finding no peace, and swiftly astir again.

And at noonday Jock Alexander came. Graunie saw him first, starting upright from her chair with a smile of welcome on her brown wrinkled face.

"Arrh, 'tis Jock," she cried. "Come again to sell me that wee flax wheel! This time, I'll buy!" She waved her hand toward Dorothy and went to the open

door.

But Jock had no flax wheel in his hand as he came up the dirt path from the road. He was coatless and travel-stained, and Lydia, looking past him, saw that his big sorrel horse drooped wearily, its belly and haunches flecked with white.

Twice the wheelwright cleared his throat before he could speak to them, and then he brought forth every word as if it hurt.

"Nancy, old friend, this'll long be remembered in all o' New England as a black day."

Lydia heard Dorothy gasp, but she did not look at Dorothy. She did not dare to. Graunie took a step backward and gripped the edge of the door.

"Ye got news o' the battle, maybe?" she asked, her tone light and encouraging, her whole body stiff with a deadly calm.

"Aye, Nance, I got news o' the battle. We lost it, and there was a many slain."

"Do ye know who they be?"

He shook his head. "No, I got no names at all."

Dorothy sank limply into a chair. Lydia moved to the window that faced the Common Field. She stood there, her back to the others, but still hearing the old man's voice, only too sharp and plain.

"All our armies went out and took Charlestown Height—which they couldna' hold. They was driven from there wi' much slaughter, late o' yesterday. In Haverhill I heard it—"

He paused, and in the silence Lydia could hear the hum of bees in the lilac bush and smell the warm sweet scent of ripe hay.

Nance waited a moment and then asked sharply, "Be that all ye know?"

He spoke again, choosing his words with clumsy care.

"Aye, that be about all. Except—it fell uncommon heavy on the New Hampshire line. Eleven o' the King's best companies they cut to pieces, I heard. But they fared ill when they stood by to cover i' the retreat."

Again he was silent.

"Ye got no names, ye say?" Nance MacMurray asked again.

Lydia turned from the window and looked at him. He stood there uneasily, twisting his rough wool cap in his hands, shuffling his feet. He knows, she thought. He has more ill news for us, and he cannot bear to tell it, though 'twas for that he came. In the long silence she counted the ticking of the clock, counted to fifteen before he spoke again.

"Well," he said, "one name I got, of a man who was lost, though he no died in battle, and 'twas to tell his widow that I come this way."

"The name was not Dan MacMurray," said Dorothy quickly, and Lydia wondered from what deep inner strength or secret knowledge her confidence came.

He spoke hastily then, reassuring words, with little reassurance in his tone. “No, Dan MacMurray was no the name I had in mind to say. ’Twas Robbie Guptill, I meant. Poor Robbie left home and headed for the camp in the middle o’ yesterday, but he could no pass by the Haverhill taverns wi’ out getting himself bitch-fou, and he fell someway in the river, and was drowned dead ’ere they could fish him out again.”

“You mean—Rob Guptill is dead?” Lydia heard herself ask in a choking voice. “That Jessie is a widow now?”

He looked at her curiously, a question in his sharp old eyes. Then he nodded. “Aye. And ’tis I must tell her so. ’Tis the least I can do for the lass, in spite o’ the talk. Her folk come in the Robert wi’ Nance and me.”

He turned on his heel and walked swiftly back to the road, mounted his horse and headed it toward West Running Brook. They watched him ride away.

Graunie was the first to speak. “Lyddy,” she said, “I know your banns are cried to Danny, and ye be afeared he’ll no want ye now that Jess is free. But we got to find out if the lad be in the land o’ the living or no, before we fash ourselves about that. Dolly and I will sit here quiet, so she’ll no risk her child, and ye must go up to the meeting house and wait, for ’tis likely there the news will come.”

“No,” said Dorothy firmly, climbing to her feet. “I shall go, too. Fetch me my shawl, Lyddy. ’Tis in my bedroom, lying on a chair.”

In the end she had her way, and together the three women made the mile-long journey up the hill. They had expected to find a great throng gathered together, as had happened after Concord Fight when the company marched away, but only a few stragglers stood about the green; women with large families of children gamboling near them, and a knot of old men outside the tavern door. Graunie darted a sharp glance all around her and then walked over to the old men, Dorothy and Lydia following close on.

“Ha’ ye had any word?” she asked, her voice tense with anxiety.

A tall bent russet-faced elder leaned toward her and shook his head. “ ’Tis a sore day for all this country, for the British has dinged us down. There’s been a battle, ye heard?”

“A battle wi’ a many slain,” she repeated, “but naught of who they be.”

“No,” he said. “We got no names at all. Most o’ our folk be in the church now, praying wi’ Mr. Davidson.”

Lydia turned her head and looked toward the church with its thin pointed steeple going up into the sunlight sky. Through its open windows she heard the low rhythmic murmur of many voices joined in prayer. She looked off across the meadows of Beaver River, dusky with patches of blue flag, to the far hills beyond the Merrimack, and back again to the gray slanted stones in the old

graveyard by the church. Her throat swelled, and her head ached, and she felt sick all through. “If the lad be still in the land o’ the living,” Graun had said. And if he be not, she thought, oh, how can I bear it! Only half-conscious of what she did, she began to pace back and forth in front of the tavern, crying out within herself, “Oh, oh, oh!” It had been this way when she watched David try to flee as the burning roof fell in. It had all happened to her before!

Then she felt Dorothy’s fingers on her arm. She looked down into Dorothy’s pale sweet face and soft eyes.

“Lyddy,” said Dorothy, “they will come back to us. We must believe that they will.”

She bowed her head. “You are right, Dorothy,” she answered. “We must believe.”

Folk were beginning to come out of the church now. Women in linen gowns and decent bonnets, or stained aprons and hastily donned shawls. A few men, children and young girls, but no boy who looked to be above twelve years old. They came out of the church, but they did not leave it, drawing into little groups and hovering close to this one tangible symbol of God’s love for them, the only such symbol that they knew.

The sun had passed mid-heaven by some time now, and the hot golden day was dropping down the sky.

And then, inevitably, the rider came. He was a short thick-set man with a barrel chest and russet hair. He spurred his lean black horse directly to the tavern, leaped down with surprising lightness, and strode inside.

Everyone hastened now from the church, running helter-skelter and crowding at the tavern door. The MacMurray women, not having so far to travel, were able to edge their way across the sill. The messenger stood at the small oak bar and called for whiskey, which was promptly brought to him. He took a long swallow and then gazed broodingly around. He had heavy brows, Lydia noticed, meeting in a perpetual scowl, and for a moment he said no word.

Then a voice, harsh and croaking with anxiety, called out to him, “Did ye come from the battle? Ha’ ye got the names—from there?”

The messenger wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. “Aye,” he said. “I come from the battle. I’ll ne’er forget the names.” He took another swallow of whiskey, and looked once more around, taking care not to meet any man’s eyes. “I be o’ Derryfield—Captain Moor’s company,” he said slowly. “An’ I be on the way to carry news o’ our losses there. The way I heard it, your lads under Reid lost none in the fight at all.”

A long sigh went through the crowd. Then the few men began to cheer. The messenger held up his hand. “But there was some served under other captains—some were wi’ us, below the rail fence where the heaviest charge

came in. Many was lost, and two of 'em, from around here."

He paused, but no one questioned him now. Oh God, thought Lydia, I wish he would never speak. Likely all her neighbors felt the same.

"The one was Paul Caldwell," he announced grimly. "I seen Paul die, an' I was there. He were pierced wi' a musket ball."

Outside in the sunlight a long wailing cry lifted on the hushed air. Lydia had never heard of Paul, but some woman had held him dear, more lives than one had been shattered by the blast of a British musket. But the man had still one other name to say. He opened his mouth. Before his lips moved, Lydia thought she could have counted many times fifteen. And then he spoke.

"And Dan MacMurray," he said.

Lydia clung to the rough pine wall and crouched there, conscious, only too terribly so, but scarce able to think or stand. She felt Dorothy's arms go round her, heard Dorothy's low voice murmuring unintelligibly in her ear. But there was no mistaking Graunie's words, ringing out with the sound of a cracked bell.

"Was it Red Dan or Black Dan? What was the color o' his hair?"

Lydia smelled raw spilled whiskey, she heard the gruff, the cruel, the inexorable voice reply.

"I dinna' know. When I saw him, there wasna' enough o' his head left to tell the color o' his hair."

"Mercy o' God, will none o' ye men folk help me get the lasses out o' here!" she heard Graunie cry. And then the sweet, the blessed darkness drifted down.

*

When she opened her eyes she was lying in the old rope bedstead in Nance MacMurray's house where she had slept the night before. The chamber looked west, and she could see the last red light of sunset dying between the far mountains and the sky. She tried to move, but her body felt stiff and lame, as if she had been beaten and then left outdoors all night in a streaming storm. Slowly she became aware that Dorothy sat beside her, leaning back in a low chair, watching her with anxious eyes. She turned her own anguished eyes on Dorothy. At once the girl bent toward her.

"Oh Lyddy," she said brokenly, "I know how you must feel, and I am sorry for you. As sorry as ever I can be. And sorry for him. He was like a big brother to me—almost as close as Hugh—and so strong and kind. But mostly I cannot help thinking of my Dan. This will be hard for him to bear. I wish he would come home, so I could comfort him."

Then Graunie came into the room. She walked upright, but she tottered and

clung to the door frame. Her face was gray.

"Oh," she said, "ye're awake, Lyddy! Dolly, go and get whiskey and water to revive the lass, while I spell ye by her bed."

Lydia did not want whiskey and water, but she lacked the energy to protest, and Dorothy walked heavily from the room; they could hear her footsteps on the stair. Graunie stooped low over Lydia and spoke.

"Remember, Lyddy," she whispered, "ye're no sure ye've lost him yet. One Dan MacMurray's gone, that we know. But we've no been told the color o' his hair."

Lydia pulled herself upright and sat looking at the old woman.

"It could as well be hers as yours," said Nance. "We can do naught but wait and see." She walked over to the tall oak chest and lighted a candle against the growing dusk.

"Oh Graunie," breathed Lydia, "it must be Red Dan who is living still. Dorothy is so sure. And this—and this—once before this has happened to me."

"Dinna' mean 't has happened now," said the old woman, bitterness dulling her bright eyes. "One o' ye lasses shall rejoice when all's known. But I lost a lad either way. One o' ye—"

A sharp scream rang out in the kitchen below.

Lydia started out of bed and ran for the stairway, but Graunie had gone ahead of her. Half-tumbling over the worn treads, they burst into the kitchen at the same time. Dorothy stood near the hearth, a lighted candle in her hand, both candle and her face the same waxen white. On the bricks at her feet lay a shattered tumbler, and Lydia smelled the rawness of spilled whiskey, and felt her heart come up in her throat as it had in Holland's tavern that afternoon. But Dorothy was looking at the outer door. Slowly Lydia turned her own eyes that way.

Clear and plain, with the pale rose of the twilight sky behind him, she saw Black Dan MacMurray stand silent, gazing at them, two muskets leaning beside him against the door.

Lydia felt suddenly empty, as if all her blood had drained away, as if she were a dead girl who could not speak or move. Graunie drew a sharp breath. It was Dorothy who spoke.

"Are you—a ghost, Dan?" she asked falteringly.

"No. I be no ghost," he said. "I'm sorry, Dolly." Then he stepped forward and caught her as she fell. Lydia watched the candle drop from her hand and sputter out in the little pool of spilled liquor on the floor.

*

Much later, when Dr. Matt Thornton had come and gone, and left drugs to

give Dorothy sleep until her first wild weeping had died away, Black Dan and Lydia sat on the doorstone in the hot summer night. In the meadows the frogs were singing, and a whippoorwill called in the pine woods toward meeting house green, another answered it from beyond the brook. Perhaps it was a whippoorwill, Lydia thought, or perhaps it was the spirit of that other Dan come home.

But the sound struck Black Dan a different way. "Oh God," he said bitterly, "I wish I never had to hear again that damn bird!"

She held his hand tight, knowing no better thing.

"Do you think, Lyddy, she'll want to hear the whole of it? The way it was? Graun's with her now and she'll sleep, Matt said, the night through. But do you think she'll ask me, and want to know?"

"I think she might, Dan. But I think this morning in the tavern that she heard the true matter of it. Heard it in a cruel way—but she felt so sure then that—it was you!"

"Could as well ha' been me," he told her, a little of the tenseness ebbing out of him, launching into the tale that she knew he wanted to tell and thus be rid of it forever, if he could.

"I was detailed to stay in camp. Had to sit there and watch Danny march away. Later they sent for more men to go down into Charlestown for sharpshooters, and I was chosen one. So I was a-sniping there, most o' the time the British was coming on. Jack Fenton's house was the one they put me in—you remember him? He come here and run wi' Governor Johnny, and tried to set himself up for a New Hampshire man."

"Yes," said Lydia, "I remember Jack Fenton." She remembered him sitting in the great house at Wolfeborough, urging John Wentworth to visit his farm near Bunker Hill, promising his New Hampshire friends a warm welcome there. Jack Fenton, she had heard that morning while she waited at the tavern, was now safe in the Exeter jail, and the Wentworths fled away.

Dan kept on talking. "Stayed there and kept sniping till they fired the town."

"Did they burn Boston?" asked Lydia. "We saw the smoke on Crane Neck Hill. We thought it came from there."

"No, never Boston. That be their own nest now, though wi' the help o' God we'll soon have 'em out o' there. 'Twas only Charlestown they fired, but that made smoke enough to be seen to the province bound. Church steeple burned downward from the top, Lyddy, just like a candle alight!"

She made a little sound of wonder, and tightened her fingers on his, felt the answering pressure in return.

"When we had to get out o' there, 'twas every man alone, part o' no command, and I streaked back to Bunker Hill to see what was afoot. I watched

the third charge from there. We fought then hand to hand, but 'twas nothing we could do to stop it, wi' our powder gone. God-damned British swarmed over breastworks and redoubt and all. Come on worse than a spring flood, slaughtering our men. I tell you, Lyddy, I could ha' cried!"

He got up and began to pace to and fro on the worn turf before the door, his face standing out whitely in the gloom of the starless night.

"How did you find Dan?" she asked him.

"Find Dan? Why, when I saw Stark's men fighting wi' clubbed muskets to cover the retreat, I got me down there fast as I could. Men was fleeing up that hill like waves breaking on a shore, and the British coming on behind. First thing I knew, I seen Colonel Stark, and he beckoned me. I knowed him all my life, for he were a Londonderry man. 'Danny,' he says 'I got ill news for you.'

" 'How?' says I.

"He still had some powder left, and he kept on loading and firing while he spoke, real gentle-like, to me. 'Heard my boy Caleb was killed,' he said. 'Just found out it was na' so.'

" 'That's good news, colonel,' I said. 'What news you got for me?'

"He stopped loading then and faced me square. 'Danny,' he said, ' 'fore the battle, I told 'em I meant to live free or die. I think when this fighting's over, there's many will live free, but not your cousin, Dan.'

" 'You mean Danny got it?' asks I.

" 'So I hear,' he said, 'but I was told wrong about my boy, and maybe you be, too. Down to the bottom o' the hill—!' "

"Did you go down to look?"

"Yes, Lyddy, I went down. I'll never look on nothing worse again."

"Did you—what did you do?"

"I buried him," said Dan, "British shooting over me all o' the while, and the lads still a-covering the retreat. I scooped out a hollow o' the turf and piled field stones above. 'Twas better than naught, though it wasna' no true grave. His musket was by him, and I brought it home for his son—if that's what Dolly should bear."

He turned and stood before her, looking into her eyes. "Stand up, Lyddy," he said.

She got to her feet, standing as tall as he. On one level their glances met.

"Lyddy," he said, "I always told you honest out, whatever I had to say."

"Yes, you did, Dan," she answered tremulously. "And I hope you will never change in the way of that."

"I spoke honest before, when I sought you in wanton love and you refused me." His face took on the stern self-righteous look of the Presbyterian elders frowning on a dissolute young man. "Then when we was pledged, and you offered yourself to me, I talked o' honor—then!"

“Yes, Dan,” she answered, wondering what he would say.

“But now—” The harsh look went out of his face, leaving only a vulnerable softness, a reflection of inner pain. “But now, Lyddy, now I suffered one o’ the worst griefs can come to a man. I seen my brother dead—or him that was brother-close all my life. And the notion comes to me—I want to try—if a woman’s body be any comfort now. ’Twill ease all things, ’tis said.”

“If it be any comfort, you shall have it,” she told him.

And like the slimy trail of a crawling serpent the thought wound through her mind, so she spoke it out.

“But Dan—before—before—would it make any difference if I told you Rob Guptill drowned in the Merrimack? That Jess is single and free?”

“Wouldna’ make any difference at all,” he answered, looking straight into her eyes. “Jess may have a hard time raising the young ones, but she can look to herself, and she’ll no want for a man. I told you I be through wi’ Jess. Did you mean what you just said to me?”

“Yes. I meant that.”

He looked around him, up the hill to the tall steeple looming against the dark; down the narrow fields to where West Running Brook murmured unseen in the thick night. He reached out and took her hand.

“ ’Twould no be decent in a house o’ death,” he said. “Come into the woods wi’ me.”

At the tree line he paused a moment, chose a thick clump of hazels and held the boughs aside for her to pass.

“You know what Danny’s last words to me was?” he asked her, “last thing he said?”

She turned. “What did he say?” she asked him gently.

“Marching down off Winter Hill, gay as a lad going to a cock fight, and me cursing foul because I’d drawn camp duty, he said, ‘They couldna’ send both o’ the Dan MacMurrays out at once. Got to keep the one o’ us for seed.’ ”

Before they moved into the sheltering darkness of the wood, Lydia looked back at the old farmhouse with the lighted upper window where an old woman watched alone beside another woman, broken and young. Red Dan MacMurray lay dead in the mud below the rail fence, but he had not died before his end was achieved, before his seed was sown. Then she felt Black Dan’s arms around her and his hard mouth on hers. Now, God willing, he, too, would fare as well.

19.
IF THIS BE TREASON

Brown summer moved across America that year, as it had done in immemorial seasons and would continue to do, so long as there were men alive to observe it—possibly beyond that time. The lush green days of June gave place to the blazing blue of July and August, and after that, September's opalescent mists came drifting down.

Ten miles in the sea off Portsmouth, before His Majesty's colony of New Hampshire, lay a group of rocky islands facing two ways, like any doorstone or portal place. Eastward they looked to England, and westward to the low blue shoreline, white sails homing to Piscataqua, and on clear days, the shining sands of Rye. John Wentworth stood at the craggy top of Star Island, late on an autumn afternoon, and gazed broodingly about him, impervious to the creeping chill that ran before the sunset or the salt wind murmuring through the stunted Balm of Gilead trees, ruffling his hair. Down the hill in the little fishing village of Gosport, clustered the ancient cottages with their sloping roofs, and crooked byways winding haphazard in between.

The seine boats were putting into the cove now, at the day's end, their wide tawny nets drawn from the water, and the scarlet shirts of the fishermen standing out like drops of blood against the background of the pale-gray sea. They made the governor think of British uniforms, but the men who wore them were no longer British. They were shaped from a different clay, and had different thoughts in their heads, and different hearts beating inside. And God knows why, John Wentworth thought! To remain loyal to the land of their forefathers whence all their best good came, seemed such an obvious, and direct, and simple thing to do. He heard the shouts of the children scrambling down to the wharves and narrow beaches, the plaintive low of cattle on the uneven meadows to the south where the bleached rocks fell away. Shrugging his shoulders he turned toward the little church of battered ship timber, lifted the salt-caked iron latch, and stepped inside.

Over his head reached up the low tower where the women were wont to hang lanterns in the thick night to guide their men folk in from the sea. Before him stood the rows of crude benches, empty now, the empty wooden box of the pulpit. He looked around disconsolately, then squared his shoulders and stiffened his mouth. This place would do as well as Queen's Chapel—as great St. Paul's in London, he supposed—for a man whose only purpose was to

retire into a house of God and pray.

Was it better to address himself to heaven humbly on his knees, he wondered, or standing upright, like a man. Before he could answer the question flickering in his mind, he heard a voice, low and insistent, calling to him from the ledges that ran outside the door.

"I come to see John Wentworth! In the town they told me he walked up this way."

The governor turned and strode backward to the threshold of the small worship place. "What is left of John Wentworth is not worth seeing," he said ruefully. And then, "Why, 'tis my road spotter, Dan MacMurray? How did you find me here, Dan, and what did you come about?"

He looked into the familiar craggy face and gray eyes of the Londonderry man, noticed the musket and powder horn, the knot of red cloth on the right shoulder of the coarse tow hunting shirt.

"So you've taken the badge of a sergeant," he said harshly. "Gone into a state of rebellion, like so many addle-pated men!"

"Aye," said Dan. "I be in a state o' rebellion, I guess."

"Was it that," asked the governor shortly, "you came here to see me about?"

"No," replied his visitor. "It was a different thing brought me."

John Wentworth came forth from the church, and the two men stood together, there on the bleak hill with the sea wind whipping round them, the western sun slipping lower every minute, and every little copse and hollow filling swiftly with dark. Wentworth smiled suddenly and put forth his hand.

"You must know, Dan," he said, "there is little I can do for you, however much I should like to reward your faithful service in past time."

"I know, sir," said the newly-made sergeant. "You got no say in New Hampshire any more, and 'tis indeed little you can do for me. But this thing you can."

The governor stared past him at the seine boats sweeping in on the flood tide, heavy with a full catch and hungry men.

"I want to find that hired man o' yours," said Dan MacMurray. "I got business with Hugh Giffard. I asked for him about the Province House in Boston, but they said only you could tell me where he be."

"You want Hugh?" asked Wentworth in surprise. Then his face cleared. "Oh, you carry a message from his sister, no doubt. She ran away from my house to marry your cousin. An odd and preposterous romance! Frances and I never dreamed that the poor foolish girl—"

"I dinna' know how odd it be," replied Dan stiffly, "but 'tis done for all time now. He were killed at the battle o' Charlestown."

The governor's face clouded again. "I'm sorry, Dan," he said. "But

Charlestown was a place he had no business to be—not if he went there in armed rebellion against his King."

Dan stared back imperviously. One eyelash quivered, but he gave no other sign.

"I dinna' come here to argue the point, sir," he said quietly. "If you'd tell me what I asked o' you, I could start home afore dark. I be here in a borrowed boat, and Portsmouth's ten mile away."

"No," said John Wentworth slowly, folding his arms across his dove-colored silk waistcoat. "Before I answer your question, there are many I would like to put to you, Dan."

Dan sighed. He flung himself down on the small patch of dry grass that grew from a cleft in the ancient stone.

"You got no power to make me answer you," he announced. "No power at all. But for the sake o' past time and all the good you done when things was—a different way—answer, I will."

John Wentworth sat down on the flat doorstone of Gosport church.

"First, tell me more of the purpose that brought you here. You say you were at the Province House in Boston. How did you get into Boston when 'tis ringed round with our sentries, and all roads be guarded that enter there?"

"We got our own ring round Boston," said Dan easily, his long brown fingers playing with a tuft of grass. "From Charlestown Neck, clear to Jamaica Plain. New Hampshire lads like me, Massachusetts, south New England, the western riflemen. But you know there be easy passing back and forth. Gage has got to have his firewood and victuals carted in."

The governor nodded. "Yes, I suppose it could be simply arranged by a determined man. So it was only to find Hugh that you journeyed there? Not to gain intelligence of troop movements or affairs within the town?"

"No," said Dan. "It were a private matter I went about."

Looking at the younger man's face, he thought he saw a shadow move across it. Both men sat silent for a moment. Then Dan began to talk very rapidly, a hoarseness in his throat that could have been caused by the chill wind blowing off the sea.

"I was in camp wi' Stark's regiment when my wife come looking for me there. She wanted—"

The governor lifted his eyebrows. "I did not know you were married, Dan."

Dan smiled faintly. "Aye. Married your wife's hired girl, Lyddy March. Always meant to, and seemed like when all things else be so unsettled, now would be the time to get one thing 'stablished, firm and plain."

"You married Lydia! Well, God bless you, sir! Frances, too, will wish you both happiness. I had no idea you and she—! I rather understood that Hugh—! Is it that you are seeking him about?"

Dan smiled more widely. He shook his head and began to pull the haws from a straggling wild rosebush rooted in the dead grass.

"No. My marriage be no business o' his. As I said, my wife come to the camp to find me there. She said Dolly was brought to bed o' a son and like to die. I got leave, and together we rode home."

He paused, but Wentworth did not break the silence. He saw in his mind the face of the young girl, the soft eyes behind the thick lashes, the gently curving mouth. Dorothy had gone down into that woman's inevitable hell of pain, as Frances had gone. But there had been no husband standing by to smooth her brow and clasp her hand. Dorothy, the three months widow, had lain down alone.

Dan's voice sounded a little less strained as he picked up the tale and went on. "When we got to Londonderry, she were better, but very weak still. The child—such a wee thing I never before saw—too early born. We named him Dan."

The governor smiled fleetingly. "Too early to tell if he be red or black. No, I meant no ill. There's both strains in the MacMurray blood, of course."

Dan smiled too. "No," he said, " 'tis no too early to tell. His hair be red indeed, as his daddy's were. The black-headed one will be born later, we think —about next spring."

"Congratulations, Dan," said the governor dryly. "Londonderry's fertile country, it seems."

Dan grinned. "Aye. We got no cause to complain o' the Lord's blessings on us in that." He turned suddenly sober, his long fingers still working nervously with the thorns and grass. "Anyhow, when Dolly could talk wi' me, she asked that I go to her brother and carry the news. To bid him come and see her, if it fell in his way."

John Wentworth bent forward, keenly eyeing the other man.

"She does not think to stay in Londonderry, does she, now that she is husbandless and alone? She should return to her friends—or possibly to England, to make a new match there. Surely Frances and I—!"

Dan shook his head stubbornly. "No. She spoke strong as to that. She said I was to tell her brother she meant to stay in her husband's house and bring up her child in her husband's way."

Again a silence fell between them. Both men gazed out at the heaving leagues of gray sea, at the sunset colors gathering in the sky.

John Wentworth spoke first, reflectively. "I have known few women who loved like that," he said. "If it should happen—if I—God knows how my wife would rear my son!"

"Why, she'd raise him, sir, to be a governor like yourself, for that is your wife's way," replied Dan lightly. "But now you can see why I went to Boston

looking for the Giffard lad, and I was told that none knew o' him but you."

"No," agreed Wentworth, "they will have no further word of him at the Province House—unless perhaps it come with a musket ball through the door."

"I dinna' take your meaning, Governor John."

"Dinna' ye? Then I will make it plain. When the rabble drove me from my house in Portsmouth, I went first to the Castle, and then to the frigate lying in harbor, hoping affairs would mend. But the spirit of licentiousness and violence waxed ever greater in town. Finally the *Scarborough* was ordered to Boston, and we sailed with her, having no choice, thinking to return, hoping that men would soon submit to a rule of wisdom and order again. My household went with me; Macdonough, the servants, my wife and son—Giffard, of course. Once safe in Boston in Frances' mother's house, he sought audience with me and said he had a mind to be gone forever from my service, for private necessities of his own."

Dan looked up sharply. "Where did he want to go?"

The governor continued more slowly, as there rose in his throat the sick dismay that troubled him so often nowadays, confronted as he constantly was, by a seemingly brainsick world he could not understand.

"I told him that if he wished to leave my service, I would commend him to Gage as I had done before, but he requested a different thing. He asked me if I had no friend on the side of the rebels I could commend him to. He said America had conquered him, as England had conquered his French forebears, and he meant to cast his lot in the rebel way."

"By God," said Dan, beaming. "I wouldna' ha' thought it o' that pretty boy. Could be he'll yet turn out a man!"

The governor jumped to his feet and began to pace restlessly to and fro on the ledge beside the church door.

"Could be he'll turn out a Bedlam Tom, for I could see only madness in the way he spoke. He said the Americans were more true English than the Englishmen; more enjoyous of the ancient English liberties in the English way, and more sharp in their defense. He thought them worth fighting to preserve."

"If he be mad," answered Dan, "I seen all Cambridge Common alive wi' men as mad as he."

"George Washington's Great Continental Army, you mean," cried Wentworth scornfully. "A ragged mob come out with clubs and stones against the trained armies of the King! And 'tis mad indeed they are! Dog, frothing mad, and should be shut up before they do themselves and others more harm. Who ever heard of a thousand miles of seacoast, empty except for a few scattered towns, defending itself against three hundred battleships, equipped with well-armed men? Of a country that can scarce support thirty thousand at arms, at war with a great nation that can easily send out one hundred and fifty

thousand or more? Of a country of three million inhabitants fighting against a nation of fifteen million? A country without arms, ammunition, or trade, contending with a nation that enjoys the plenitude of all? A country where every plow jogger and shoe-maker sets up for a statesman—"

"Where'd you send Cousin Giffard?" asked Dan, standing up. "I be going to seek him there. Already I wasted time."

"I sent him to John Adams," snapped Wentworth. "John was at the College in Cambridge with me, and has been my friend ever since then—but I count on no man's friendship now! Wait, Dan! There is more I would know of you before you take yourself away."

"Then speak it out," said Dan.

"When you asked at the Province House, did they direct you here?"

Dan looked him in the eye. "They said you had gone to the Isles o' Shoals," he answered grimly, with the air of turning the knife in the wound of a man who requested that service of him. "They said you had gone there because you wanted to dissolve the Assembly—to prevent it from conducting business of its own, to make one last thrust to save the province for the King. They said you couldna' perform this act except within New Hampshire's bounds, and you dared come no nearer our shores than this place, ten miles in the sea." He looked accusingly at John Wentworth. "Be that right, Governor John?"

Wentworth bowed his head. "Yes, Dan, that is indeed the case," he said. "And so much the worse for our province, God help it now. I have sent Tom Macdonough ashore with my last proclamation. You must have met him on the way."

Dan shrugged his shoulders. "I might have. Seems like sails was flapping all around. I had enough to do to handle my own craft. We MacMurrays ha' ne'er been seafaring men. I guess Portsmouth'll pay little heed to anything you or Macdonough will say. Was that all you wanted o' me?"

"No! Not all! Dan MacMurray, tell me, since no one else will! Why have my own kinsmen, my own townsfolk, the men who were born in New Hampshire where I was born, all turned their backs on me? I am hunted and hounded and reviled! Half an hour after I left the Castle, they had torn apart the walls that sheltered me. I am an outcast, unable to set my foot in my own town and walk the streets unhindered to the house of my father there. What have I done to New Hampshire that its men should use me so? I have been always a faithful servant of the King, and gloried in my work! I have built roads, and set up counties, and helped to found a college. I have outlawed bad money, and traveled the woods and mountains of my province to lay plans for making it greater than any of its twelve sisters are. I have never dipped my hand in the public till, and no man's estate has been diminished by mine!

"Our hemisphere threatens a hurricane! I have striven in vain and almost to death to prevent it! To combat this universal frenzy of unlettered men! I have tried to hold this province together, when it seeks to fly apart, and by God, if they dipped me in tar and feathers, I would rise up to pursue the same course still, because I believe my country's good is best served that way. In the words that knavish lawyer spoke in Virginia ten years back—if this be treason, make the most thereof!"

He flung his head back proudly, and stared straight into the eyes of the tow-clad sergeant of the New Hampshire line.

Dan MacMurray returned the look. His face colored a little, and he chose his words with Scotch canniness and care.

"Yes, it be treason, and you be guilty therein, I think you be guilty o' deep treason, and you would say the same o' me. Each of us be sure in his own heart, and he'll never change. I think—I think I be sorry for you, Governor John."

"Sorry? You? Sorry for me!"

"Aye," said Dan soberly. "Sorry. I think I be sorry for you because you are a gentleman. And gentlemen are no the fashion now."

"Fashion!" sputtered Wentworth. "They are not a fashion! They are an enduring breed, thank God!"

"Well now," said Dan soothingly, "maybe in a few years they'll come on again. But this country's one that can only be taken with the hard work o' back and hands, and 'twill belong to those who take it so. There's more to do than give orders, sitting in Portsmouth on a satin chair."

Dan MacMurray was no longer looking at him, the governor saw. He was looking into the darkening sky behind.

"I heard o' that treason speech o' the Virginia man," he continued thoughtfully. "It had a brave sound, sure, but when I come off Bunker Hill ahead o' the British after I buried Dan, I recalled what sounded to me like a better thing.

"It was a word Stark said to the men before the battle there. 'By God, I'm going to live free or die,' he told them. I thought I never heard no better speech than that come out o' any man. What you got to say to it, Governor John?"

"Live free for what? If men are to live happily and well, they must be restrained for their own good and guided within patterns of orderly intercourse, under a benevolent governor and an illustrious King! Live free or die? The wild beasts on Cropplecrown live like that, but men are not wild beasts, and should not wish to live so. I cannot understand such words at all!"

Dan shook his head and lifted his musket from the ledge where it had lain.

"I dinna' think you would understand it, Johnny. You dinna' understand it because you canna', and 'tis no your fault. But 'tis why New Hampshire men

will never let you come amongst 'em again."

He turned and walked rapidly down the sloping hill to Gosport wharf and the borrowed boat that would take him back to a country that had no place for English gentlemen.

John Wentworth stood alone on the ragged ledges staring westward across the heaving miles of gray sea. On the far edge of it lay the long blue coastline, the country he had been born in, and grown up to rule over; all his heart's love and pride and most selfless ambition centered there. He thought of the silver he had buried in the pine woods under Cropplecrown, and wondered if he would ever dig it up again; of his Narragansett pacer, and his "puritan" horse who would balk and refuse to travel on the Sabbath Day. He thought of his boyhood in his father's great house in Daniel Street, with the wind whistling round the cupola and down the wide chimney, scattering sand across the polished floor; of the day he took his bride in Queen's Chapel, and the day he walked proudly there, to the christening of his son.

He did not trust himself to remember how his father had said, "I'll try to ride out the storm and save what I can for you, Johnny, lad"; of his mother's bleak face when she kissed him good-bye.

After a moment of bitter yearning, he turned again and looked to the clear white eastern sky, the Europe-washing sea. He could not see to England, but he knew the shape of it, from the chalk downs to the Cheviots; loved it, and understood it, and felt at home in it, and knew that he would be welcomed there. Perhaps that was where he should go and set up his shattered life again. Out of the east his fathers had come, more than a century back. Perhaps it was only fitting that into the east again, his son should go. Dan MacMurray's sons, he knew, would not go eastward, would never go back to Antrim again. The time ran west, and they would run with the time. And why should this easy compliance be withheld from him, when it came so easily to Dan? America would forgive him and take him back, he knew, if he would conform to its hatred of conformity, and lift his voice and cheer for the new way.

He stood irresolute and looked long to the westward, then east, and west again.

"Fore God, I cannot do it," he muttered. "I must hold to the truth in my own heart—let them call it treason. I'll commit treason in other places, if I must—but never there!"

America's last English gentleman turned his back forever on America, and strode down its last granite hill. Stars pricked out over the dim shore, but he did not see them. He set his face unflinching to the gray empty leagues of sea.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SHIRLEY BARKER, born in Farmington, New Hampshire, was graduated from the University of New Hampshire and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She received her master's degree in English at Radcliffe and a master of library science degree from Pratt Institute Library School.

Miss Barker's first novel, *Peace, My Daughters*, was published in 1949. This was followed, in 1950, by the Literary Guild Selection, *Rivers Parting*, and, in 1952, by a book of poetry, *A Land and a People*. Her most recent novels were *Fire and the Hammer*, *Tomorrow the New Moon*, *Liza Bowe*, and *Swear By Apollo*, a Literary Guild Selection.

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[The end of *The Last Gentleman* by Shirley Barker]