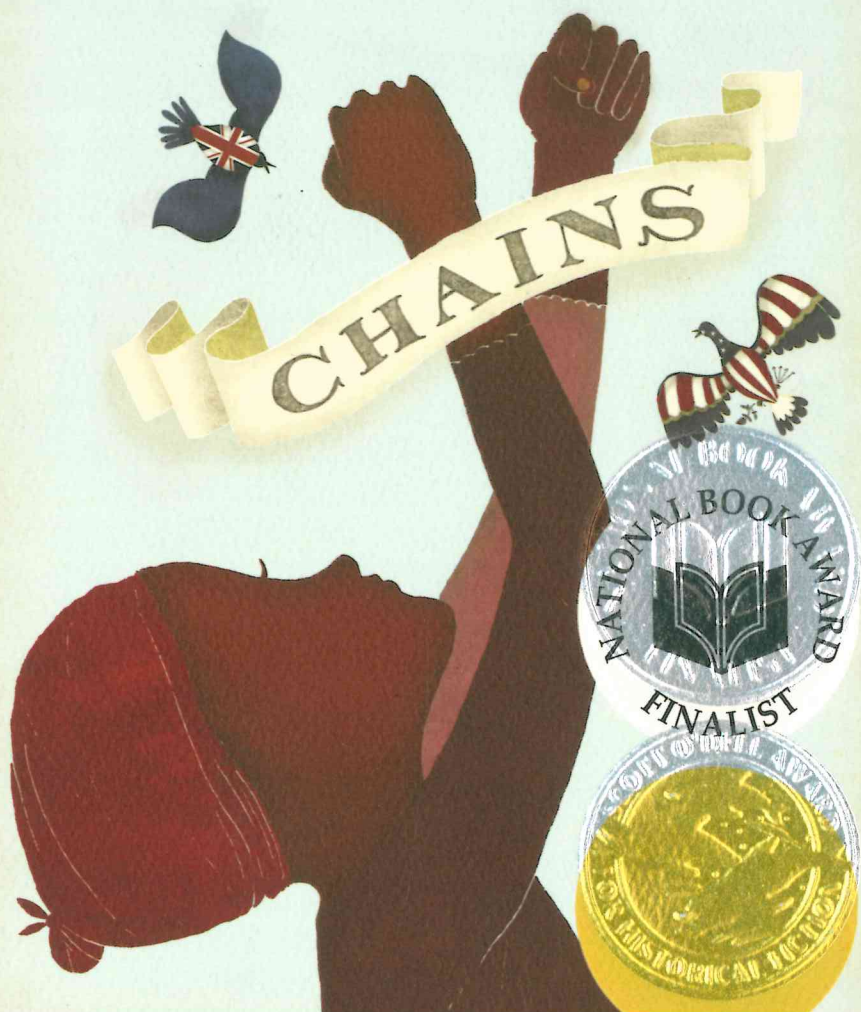




# LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

Author of *Speak* and *Fever 1793*



*Laurie Halse Anderson*

# HAINS

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SEEDS OF AMERICA  
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0820 OFF

ABIGAIL ADAMS

once described her husband, JOHN, as

*him whom my Heart esteems*

*above all earthly things.*

I UNDERSTAND THAT FEELING.

That's why this book is dedicated

*to my beloved husband,*

SCOT.



## *Part I*


## CHAPTER I

---

*Monday, May 27, 1776*

YOUTH IS THE SEED TIME OF GOOD HABITS,  
AS WELL IN NATIONS AS IN INDIVIDUALS.

—THOMAS PAINE, *COMMON SENSE*

HE BEST TIME TO TALK TO GHOSTS is just before the sun comes up. That's when they can hear us true, Momma said. That's when ghosts can answer us.

The eastern sky was peach colored, but a handful of lazy stars still blinked in the west. It was almost time.

"May I run ahead, sir?" I asked.

Pastor Weeks sat at the front of his squeaky wagon with Old Ben next to him, the mules' reins loose in his hands. The pine coffin that held Miss Mary Finch—wearing her best dress, with her hair washed clean and combed—bounced in the back when the wagon wheels hit a rut. My sister, Ruth, sat next to the coffin. Ruth was too big to carry, plus the pastor knew about her peculiar manner of being, so it was the wagon for her and the road for me.

Old Ben looked to the east and gave me a little nod. He knew a few things about ghosts, too.

Pastor Weeks turned around to talk to Mr. Robert Finch, who rode his horse a few lengths behind the wagon.

"The child wants to run ahead," Pastor explained to him. "She has kin buried there. Do you give leave for a quick visit?"

Mr. Robert's mouth tightened like a rope pulled taut. He had showed up a few weeks earlier to visit Miss Mary Finch, his aunt and only living relation. He looked around her tidy farm, listened to her ragged, wet cough, and moved in. Miss Mary wasn't even cold on her deathbed when he helped himself to the coins in her strongbox. He hurried along her burying, too, most improper. He didn't care that the neighbors would want to come around with cakes and platters of cold meat, and drink ale to the rememory of Miss Mary Finch of Tew, Rhode Island. He had to get on with things, he said.

I stole a look backward. Mr. Robert Finch was filled up with trouble from his dirty boots to the brim of his scraggly hat.

"Please, sir," I said.

"Go then," he said. "But don't tarry. I've much business today."

I ran as fast as I could.

I hurried past the stone fence that surrounded the white graveyard, to the split-rail fence that marked our ground, and stopped outside the gate to pick a handful of chilly violets, wet with dew. The morning mist twisted and hung low over the field. No ghosts yet, just ash trees and maples lined up in a mournful row.

I entered.

Momma was buried in the back, her feet to the east, her head to the west. Someday I would pay the stone carver for

a proper marker with her name on it: *Dinab, wife of Cuffe, mother of Isabel and Ruth*. For now, there was a wooden cross and a gray rock the size of a dinner plate lying flat on the ground in front of it.

We had buried her the year before, when the first roses bloomed.

"Smallpox is tricky," Miss Mary Finch said to me when Momma died. "There's no telling who it'll take." The pox had left Ruth and me with scars like tiny stars scattered on our skin. It took Momma home to Our Maker.

I looked back at the road. Old Ben had slowed the mules to give me time. I knelt down and set the violets on the grave. "It's here, Momma," I whispered. "The day you promised. But I need your help. Can you please cross back over for just a little bit?"

I stared without blinking at the mist, looking for the curve of her back or the silhouette of her head wrapped in a pretty kerchief. A small flock of robins swooped out of the maple trees.

"I don't have much time," I told the grass-covered grave. "Where do you want us to go? What should we do?"

The mist swirled between the tall grass and the low-hanging branches. Two black butterflies danced through a cloud of bugs and disappeared. Chickadees and barn swallows called overhead.

"Whoa." Old Ben stopped the wagon next to the open hole near the iron fence, then climbed down and walked to where Nehemiah the gravedigger was waiting. The two men reached for the coffin.

"Please, Momma," I whispered urgently. "I need your help." I squinted into the ash grove, where the mist was heaviest.

No ghosts. Nothing.

I'd been making like this for near a year. No matter what I said, or where the sun and the moon and the stars hung, Momma never answered. Maybe she was angry because I'd buried her wrong. I'd heard stories of old country burials with singers and dancers, but I wasn't sure what to do, so we just dug a hole and said a passel of prayers. Maybe Momma's ghost was lost and wandering because I didn't send her home the right way.

The men set Miss Mary's coffin on the ground. Mr. Robert got off his horse and said something I couldn't hear. Ruth stayed in the wagon, her bare feet curled up under her skirt and her thumb in her mouth.

I reached in the pocket under my apron and took out the oatcake. It was in two pieces, with honey smeared between them. The smell made my stomach rumble, but I didn't dare nibble. I picked up the flat rock in front of the cross and set the offering in the hollow under it. Then I put the rock back and sat still, my eyes closed tight to keep the tears inside my head where they belonged.

I could smell the honey that had dripped on my hands, the damp ground under me, and the salt of the ocean. I could hear cows mooing in a far pasture and bees buzzing in a nearby clover patch.

*If she would just say my name, just once . . .*

"Girl!" Mr. Robert shouted. "You there, girl!"

I sniffed, opened my eyes, and wiped my face on my sleeve. The sun had popped up in the east like a cork and was burning through the morning mist. The ghosts had all gone to ground. I wouldn't see her today, either.

He grabbed my arm and pulled me roughly to my feet. "I told you to move," Mr. Robert snarled at me.

"Apologies, sir," I said, wincing with pain.

He released me with a shove and pointed to the cemetery where they buried white people. "Go pray for her that owned you, girl."

## CHAPTER II

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*Monday, May 27, 1776*

I, YOUNG IN LIFE, BY SEEMING CRUEL FATE  
WAS SNATCH'D FROM AFRIC'S FANCYIED HAPPY SEAT: . . .  
. . . THAT FROM A FATHER SEIZ'D HIS BABE BELOV'D:  
SUCH, SUCH MY CASE. AND CAN I THEN BUT PRAY  
OTHERS MAY NEVER FEEL TYRANNIC SWAY?  
—PHILLIS WHEATLEY, "TO THE RIGHT  
HONOURABLE WILLIAM, EARL OF DARTMOUTH"

MEN," WE SAID TOGETHER.

Pastor Weeks closed his Bible, and the funeral was over.

Nehemiah drove his shovel into the mound of dirt and pitched some into the open grave. The earth rattled and bounced on the coffin lid. Old Ben put on his hat and walked toward the mule team. Mr. Robert reached for coins to pay the pastor. Ruth drew a line in the dust with her toe.

My belly flipped with worry. I was breathing hard as if I'd run all the way to the village and back. This was the moment we'd been waiting for, the one that Momma promised would come. It was up to me to take care of things, to find a place for us. I had to be bold.

I stood up proper, the way I had been taught—chin up, eyes down—took Ruth by the hand, and walked over to the men.

"Pardon me, Pastor Weeks, sir," I said. "May I ask you something?"

He set his hat on his head. "Certainly, Isabel."

I held Ruth's hand tighter. "Where do you think we should go?"

"What do you mean, child?"

"I know I'll find work, but I can't figure where to sleep, me and Ruth. I thought you might know a place."

Pastor Weeks frowned. "I don't understand what you're saying, Isabel. You're to return with Mr. Robert here. You and your sister belong to him now."

I spoke slowly, saying the words I had practiced in my head since Miss Mary Finch took her last breath, the words that would change everything. "Ruth and me are free, Pastor. Miss Finch freed us in her will. Momma, too, if she had lived. It was done up legal, on paper with wax seals."

Mr. Robert snorted. "That's enough out of you, girl. Time for us to be on the road to Newport."

"Was there a will?" Pastor Weeks asked him.

"She didn't need one," Mr. Robert replied. "I was Aunt Mary's only relative."

I planted my feet firmly in the dirt and fought to keep my voice polite and proper. "I saw the will, sir. After the lawyer wrote it, Miss Mary had me read it out loud on account of her eyes being bad."

"Slaves don't read," Mr. Robert said. "I should beat you for lying, girl."

Pastor Weeks held up his hand. "It's true. Your aunt had some odd notions. She taught the child herself. I disapproved, of course. Only leads to trouble."

I spoke up again. "We're to be freed, sir. The lawyer,



Mr. Cornell, he'll tell you. Ruth and me, we're going to get work and a place of our own to sleep."

"That's enough." Mr. Robert narrowed his eyes at me.

"But Mr. Cornell—" I started.

"Shut your mouth!" he snapped.

The pastor cleared his throat. "Perhaps we should inquire . . ."

"Where is this Cornell?" Mr. Robert demanded. "Newport?"

"He left for Boston before the blockade," the pastor said. "Took his papers with him."

"The girl is lying, then," Mr. Robert said. "She knows the lawyer is absent and her cause cannot be proved. The sooner I'm rid of her, the better."

"It's the truth," I blurted out. Ruth looked up at me anxiously and gripped my hand tighter.

"I said, silence!" Mr. Robert yelled.

"Isabel, remember your place." Pastor Weeks fumbled with the latch on his Bible. "You and your sister belong to Mr. Robert now. He'll be a good master to you."

My insides went cold, like I'd swallowed water straight from a deep, dark well. This couldn't be happening. "Couldn't you send a message to Boston, seeking Mr. Cornell?"

"The matter is settled." Mr. Robert pulled on his gloves. "If I might borrow your wagon and man for the drive to Newport, Pastor, I'd be grateful. These girls should bring a decent price at auction."

"You're selling us?" The words flew out of my mouth before I could weigh them.

"Hush, Isabel," Pastor Weeks cautioned.

The cold inside me snaked down to my feet and up around my neck. I shivered in the warm spring sunshine. Ruth bent

down and picked up a shiny pebble. What if we were split up? Who would take care of her?

I fought back the tears. "Pastor Weeks, please, sir."

Mr. Robert knocked the dust from his hat. "They should go quick. Your wagon will be back by nightfall."

The minister placed the Bible in his leather satchel and pulled it up over his shoulder. He studied the ground, his hands, Mr. Robert's horse, and the clouds. He did not look at me. "You'll be wanting to bring their shoes and blankets," he finally said. "They'll fetch a better price that way."

"True enough."

"I'll have a word with Ben. Explain matters."

Pastor Weeks walked toward his own slave, keeping a hand on the satchel so it didn't bump against his side.

My heart wanted to force my feet to run, but I couldn't feel them, couldn't feel my hands, nor my arms, nor any part of myself. I had froze solid, sticking to the dirt. We were sold once before, back when Ruth was a tiny baby, not even baptized yet. They sold all of us from the plantation when old Mister Malbone run up his debts too high. His bankers wanted their pounds of flesh. Our flesh.

One by one they dragged us forward, and a man shouted out prices to the crowd of likely buyers and baby Ruth cried, and Momma shook like the last leaf on a tree, and Poppa . . . and Poppa, he didn't want them to bust up our family like we were sheep or hogs. "I am a man," he shouted, and he was Momma's husband and our father, and baby Ruth, she cried and cried, and I thought Momma would shatter like a bowl when it falls off a table. Poppa fought like a lion when they came for him, the strongest lion, roaring; it took five of them with hickory clubs, and then Momma fainted, and I caught baby Ruth just in time and there was lion's blood

on the ground mixed with the dust like the very earth was bleeding, and we left there, we three in Miss Mary Finch's wagon, and everything in the whole world was froze in ice for near two years after that.

I opened my mouth to roar, but not a sound escaped. I could not even mewl like a kitten.


## CHAPTER III

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*Monday, May 27, 1776*

RUN-AWAY FROM THE SUBSCRIBER, LIVING AT  
NO. 110, WATER-STREET, NEAR THE NEW SLIP.  
A NEGRO GIRL NAMED POLL, ABOUT 13 YEARS OF AGE,  
VERY BLACK, MARKED WITH THE SMALL-POX, AND HAD  
ON WHEN SHE WENT AWAY A RED CLOTH PETTICOAT, AND  
A LIGHT BLUE SHORT GOWN, HOME MADE. WHOEVER WILL  
TAKE UP AND SECURE THE SAID GIRL SO THAT THE OWNER  
MAY GET HER, SHALL BE HANDSOMELY REWARDED.

—NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT  
IN THE *ROYAL GAZETTE* (NEW YORK)

HE SNAKE TOOK US TO MISS MARY'S  
house to collect our blankets and too-small shoes but nothing  
else. We couldn't take Momma's shells, nor Ruth's baby doll  
made of flannel bits and calico, nor the wooden bowl Poppa  
made for me. Nothing belonged to us.

As I folded the blankets, Mr. Robert went out to the  
privy. There was no point in grabbing Ruth and running.  
He had a horse and a gun, and we were known to all. I  
looked around our small room, searching for a tiny piece of  
home I could hide in my pocket.

What to take?

*Seeds.*

On the hearth stood the jar of flower seeds that Momma

had collected, seeds she never had a chance to put into the ground. I didn't know what they'd grow into. I didn't know if they'd grow at all. It was fanciful notion, but I uncorked the jar, snatched a handful, and buried it deep in my pocket just as the privy door creaked open.

As the wagon drove us away, Ruth turned to see the little house disappear. I pulled her into my lap and stared straight ahead, afraid that if I looked back, I might break.

By midday we were in Newport, following Mr. Robert up the steps of Sullivan's Tavern. I had never been inside a tavern before. It was a large room, twice as big as Miss Mary's house, with two wide fireplaces, one on each of the far walls. The room was crowded with tables and chairs and as many people as church on Easter Sunday, except church was never cloudy with tobacco smoke nor the smell of roast beef.

Most of the customers were men, and a few had their wives with them. Some seemed like regular country folk, but others wore rich clothes not useful for muck shoveling. They made haste tucking into their dinners, playing cards, paging newspapers, and arguing loud about the British soldiers and their navy and taxes and a war.

Ruth didn't like the noise and covered her ears with her hands. I pulled her toward me and patted her on the back. Ruth was simpleminded and prone to fits, which spooked ignorant folk. Noise could bring them on, as well as a state of nervous excitement. She was in the middle of both.

As I patted, her eyes grew wide at the sight of a thick slice of buttered bread perched near the edge of a table. We hadn't eaten all day, and there had been little food the day

before, what with Miss Mary dying. I snatched her hand away as she reached for it.

"Soon," I whispered.

Mr. Robert pointed to a spot in the corner. "Stand there," he ordered.

A woman burst through the kitchen door carrying a tray heavy with food. She was a big woman, twice the size of my mother, with milky skin and freckles. She looked familiar and caused me to search my remembrance.

"We'll have Jenny fatten up the British navy and make their ships sink to the bottom of the sea!" yelled a red-faced man.

The big woman, Jenny, laughed as she set a bowl in front of the man. The proprietor called her over to join us. She frowned as she approached, giving Ruth and me a quick once-over while tucking a stray curl under her cap.

"These are the girls," Mr. Robert explained.

"It don't matter," the proprietor said as he put his hand on Jenny's back. "We don't hold with slaves being auctioned on our front steps. Won't stand for it, in fact."

"I thought this was a business establishment," Mr. Robert said. "Are you opposed to earning your percentage?"

"You want to listen to my Bill, mister," Jenny said. "Advertise in the paper, that's what we do around here."

"I don't have time for that. These are fine girls, they'll go quickly. Give me half an hour's time on your front steps, and we both walk away with heavier pockets."

Jenny's husband pulled out a rag and wiped his hands on it. "Auctions of people ain't seemly. Why don't you just talk quiet-like to folks? Or leave a notice tacked up, that's proper."

"I recall an auction not twenty yards from here," Mr. Robert said. "One of Brown's ships brought up a load

of rum and slaves from the islands. They must have sold thirty-five, forty people in two hours' time."

"Rhode Island don't import slaves, not for two years now," Jenny said.

"All the more reason why folks want to buy what I have to sell. I want this done quickly. I have other business to tend to."

"Is that our problem, Bill?" Jenny asked her husband. "He says that like it's our problem."

"Ease off, Jenny," Bill said. "The girls look hungry. Why don't you take them to the kitchen?"

Jenny looked like she had plenty more to say to Mr. Robert, but she gave Ruth and me a quick glance and said, "Follow me."

Mr. Robert grabbed my shoulder. "They've already eaten."

"No charge," Jenny said evenly. "I like feeding children."

"Oh." Mr. Robert released me. "Well then, that's different."

Jenny closed the kitchen door behind her and motioned for Ruth and me to sit at the table in the middle of the room. A cauldron of stew hung above the fire in the hearth, and two fresh pies were cooling by the window.

"Eat first," she said. "Then talk."

She cut us slices of brown bread and ham and poured us both big mugs of cider. Ruth gulped hers down quick and held out her mug for more. Jenny smiled and refilled it. I made short work of the food, keeping one eye on the door in case Mr. Robert walked in. The back door to the kitchen was wide open to let in the breeze. Should I grab Ruth's hand and try to escape?

Jenny read my mind. "No sense in running." She shook her head from side to side. "He'd find you right away."

I scowled at my bread and took another bite.

"I'd help you if I could," she said. "It'd be the least I could do for Dinah."

I wasn't sure I had heard her right. "Pardon me, ma'am?"

"You're Dinah's girl. Knew you when you walked in the door."

"You knew my mother?"

Jenny stirred the cauldron of stew. "Your mother and your father both. I held you when you were just a day old. I heard she passed away last year. My condolences."

She cut two pieces from the apple pie and gave them to Ruth and me. "I was indentured when I was your age. Old Mister Malbone had five of us from Ireland, along with near thirty slaves. Worked us all just as hard, but after seven years, I could walk away, thank the Lord. Dinah was real friendly to me when I first got there, helped me get used to a new place, and people ordering me around."

"I thought I knew you," I said.

She smiled warmly and snatched a piece of apple from the pie plate. "You always were the best rememberer I ever saw. We used to make a game of it. Tell you a line to memorize, or a song. Didn't matter how much time passed, you'd have the whole thing in your mouth. Made your parents proud."

A serving girl came through the door and the talk stopped. Once Jenny had loaded up her tray and sent her back out, she sat down next to me. "How did you come to be with that man?" she asked. "I thought you were at Miss Finch's place."

I quickly explained the dizzy events of the last two days.



"There's no telling what happened to the lawyer," Jenny said when I was finished. "Boston is a terrible confusion—first the King's army, and now Washington's."

"What should I do?" I asked. The words came out louder than they should have.

Jenny gently covered my mouth with her hand. "Shhh," she warned. "You got to use your head."

I grabbed her hand. "Could you take us? Please? You knew Momma . . ."

She slowly pulled her hand from mine, shaking her head. "I'm sorry, Isabel. I dare not."

"But—"

Bill opened the door and poked his head in. "He wants the girls. Best to hurry."

A thin woman stood next to Mr. Robert. Her plum-colored gown was crisp and well sewn, and expensive lace trailed from the small cap on her head. She was perhaps five and forty years, with pale eyebrows and small eyes like apple seeds. A fading yellow bruise circled her right wrist like a bracelet.

She looked us over quickly. "Sisters?"

"Two for the price of one," Mr. Robert said. "Hardest-working girls you'll ever own."

"What's wrong with them?" the woman asked bluntly. "Why such a cheap price?"

Mr. Robert's snake smile widened. "My haste is your good fortune, madam. These girls were the servants of my late aunt, whose passing I mourn deeply. I must quickly conclude the matters of her estate. The recent unrest, you know."

A man joined the woman, his eyes suspicious and flinty. He wore a red silk waistcoat under a snuff-colored coat with silver buttons, a starched linen shirt, and black breeches. The buckles on his boots were as big as my fists. "And what side do you take in the current situation, sir?" he asked. "Are you for the King or do you support rebellion?"

Conversation at nearby tables stopped as people listened in.

"I pledge myself to our rightful sovereign, the King, sir," Mr. Robert said. "Washington and his rabble may have taken Boston, but that's the last thing they'll take."

The stranger gave a little bow and introduced himself. "Elihu Lockton, at your service, sir. This is my wife, Anne."

Mr. Robert bowed politely in return, ignoring the muttering at the table behind him. "May I offer you both some sup and drink that we might be better acquainted?"

They all sat, and Jenny swooped over to take their orders. Ruth and I stood with our backs against the wall as Mr. Robert and the Locktons ate and drank. I watched them close. The husband was a head taller and twice the girth of most men. His shoulders rounded forward and his neck seemed to pain him, for he often reached up to rub it. He said he was a merchant with business in Boston, New York, and Charleston, and complained about how much the Boston uprising cost him.

His missus sipped Jenny's chowder, shuddered at the taste, and reached for her mug of small beer. She stole glances at us from time to time. I could not figure what kind of mistress she would be. In truth, I was struggling to think straight. The air in the tavern had grown heavy, and the weight of the day pressed against my head.

When the men took out their pipes and lit their tobacco,

Ruth sneezed, and the company all turned and considered us.

"Well, then," Lockton said, pushing back from the table to give his belly some room. "The wife is looking for a serving wench."

Missus Lockton crooked a finger at us. "Come here, girls."

I took Ruth by the hand and stepped within reach. Missus Lockton studied our hands and arms, looked at our feet, and made us take off our kerchiefs to look in our hair for nits.

"Can you cook?" she finally asked me.

"Not much, ma'am," I admitted.

"Just as well," she said. "I don't need another cook. What do you do?"

I put my arm around Ruth. "We can scrub your house clean, care for cows and pigs, work your garden, and carry just about anything."

"My aunt trained them up herself," Mr. Robert added. "And they come with blankets and shoes."

Lockton sighed. "Why not wait, Anne, and procure another indentured girl in New York?"

His wife sat back as Jenny arrived with coffee. "Indentured servants complain all the time and steal us blind at the first opportunity. I'll never hire another."

Jenny set the tray on the table so hard the cups rattled in their saucers.

Lockton reached for a plate of apple pie. "Are you sure we need two? These are uncertain times, dear."

Missus regarded Ruth. "This one looks simple. Is she addlepat?"

Ruth gave a shy smile.

I spoke before Mr. Robert could open his mouth. "She's

a good simple, ma'am. Does what she's told. In truth, she's a harder worker than me. Give her a broom and tell her to sweep, and you'll be able to eat off your floor."

Jenny poured a cup of coffee and set it in front of the missus, spilling a little on the table.

"She's prettier than you," Missus said. "And she knows how to hold her tongue." She turned to her husband. "The little one might be an amusement in the parlor. The big one could help Becky with the firewood and housekeeping."

Jenny pressed her lips tight together and poured coffee for Lockton and for Mr. Robert.

Missus bent close to Ruth's face. "I do not brook foolishness," she said.

Ruth shook her head from side to side. "No foolin'," she said.

The missus cocked her head to one side and stared at me. "And you. You are to address me as Madam. I expect obedience at all times. Insolence will not be tolerated, not one bit. And you will curb your tendency to talk."

"Yes, ma'am, M-Madam," I stuttered.

"What say you, Anne?" Lockton said. "We sail with the tide."

"I want these girls, husband," Madam said. "It is Providence that put them in our path."

"How much do you want for them?" Lockton asked.

Mr. Robert named his price. Our price. Two for one, us being sold like bolts of faded cloth or chipped porridge bowls.

"Wait," Jenny announced loudly. "I'll . . . I'll take them."

The table froze. A person like Jenny did not speak to folks like the Locktons or Mr. Robert, not in that manner.

Lockton stared at her as if she had grown a second head. "I beg your pardon."

Jenny set the kettle on the table, stood straight, and wiped her palms on her skirt. "I want them two girls. I need the help. We'll pay cash."

"Keep to your kitchen, woman." Madam Lockton's words came out sharp and loud.

*Did she change her mind? Will she really take us?*

Work in the tavern wouldn't be bad, maybe, and Jenny would be kind to Ruth. I could ask around about Lawyer Cornell's papers. When we found Miss Mary's will, I'd work extra to pay Jenny back for the money we cost her, fair and square. Ruth and me would stay together, and we'd stay here, close to Momma.

*Please, God, please, God.*

"Leave us," Lockton said to Jenny. "And send your husband over."

Jenny ignored him. "It'll take us a couple of days to get your money together," she said to Mr. Robert. "We'll give you free lodging in the meantime."

Mr. Robert's eyes darted between the two bidders. Ruth yawned. I crossed my fingers behind my back. *Please, God, please, God, please, God, please.*

Madam Lockton flicked crumbs to the floor with her handkerchief. "Dear husband," she said. "These girls are a bargain at double the price. With your permission, might we increase our offer twofold?"

Lockton picked at his teeth. "As long as we can conclude this business quickly."

Madam stared at Jenny. "Can you top the offer?"

Jenny wiped her hands on her apron, silent.

"Well?" Madam Lockton demanded.

Jenny shook her head. "I cannot pay more." She bobbed a little curtsy. "My husband will tally your account." She hurried for the kitchen door.

Mr. Robert chuckled and reached for his pie. "Well, then. We had a little auction here, after all."

"Such impudence is disturbing," Lockton said. "This is why we need the King's soldiers to return." He pulled out a small sack and counted out the coins to pay for us. "I thank you, sir, for the meal and the transaction. You may deliver the girls to the *Hartsborn*, if you please. Come now, Anne."

Madam Lockton stood and the men stood with her. "Good day to you, sir."

"Safe voyage, ma'am," Mr. Robert replied.

As the Locktons made their way through the crowded room, Mr. Robert dropped the heavy coins into a worn velvet bag. The thudding sound they made as they fell to the bottom reminded me of clods of dirt raining down on a fresh coffin.

Ruth put her arm around my waist and leaned against me.

## CHAPTER IV

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*Monday, May 27-  
Wednesday, May 29, 1776*

WHAT A FINE AFFAIR IT WOULD BE  
IF WE COULD FLIT ACROSS THE ATLANTIC AS THEY SAY  
THE ANGELS DO FROM PLANET TO PLANET.  
—LETTER FROM JOHN ADAMS TO HIS WIFE, ABIGAIL

**I**T TOOK TWO NIGHTS AND TWO DAYS for the *Hartsborn* to sail from Newport to the city of New York. Ruth and me were housed below the packet-boat's deck with six sheep, a pen of hogs, three families from Scotland, and fifty casks of dried cod. At the far end of the hold were crates of goods stamped LOCKTON & FOOTE and casks of rum with the same marking.

I spent most of the voyage bent double over a puke bucket, bringing up every scrap of food and swallow of brackish water I choked down. Ruth stood on a box looking out of a porthole, counting seagulls and waves in a whisper that could barely be heard over the creaking of the hull.

The seas calmed late on the second night, and I was able to walk a bit. Ruth was sound asleep in our hammock, thumb in her mouth. The hatchway to the deck was open and tempting. I climbed up the ladder slowly. The few sailors on watch saw me but didn't say a word.

The fat moon lit the water like a lantern over a looking glass. A clean, cold breeze blew from the north, pushing the ship so fast across the sea we seemed to fly. I sat on a crate facing the back end of the ship and hugged my knees to my chest. A mist of salty spray hung in the air.

The coastline of Rhode Island had long disappeared into darkness. I could not see where we came from or where we were going. Maybe the ship would spring a leak and sink. Maybe we would be blown off course and land in a country without New York or people who bought and sold children.

Maybe the wind would blow us in circles until the end of our days.

I wiped the mist from my face.

Momma said that ghosts couldn't move over water. That's why kidnapped Africans got trapped in the Americas. When Poppa was stolen from Guinea, he said the ancestors howled and raged and sent a thunderstorm to turn the ship back around, but it was too late. The ghosts couldn't cross the water to help him so he had to make his own way in a strange place, sometimes with an iron collar around his neck. All of Momma's people had been stolen too, and taken to Jamaica where she was born. Then she got sold to Rhode Island, and the ghosts of her parents couldn't follow and protect her neither.

They kept moving us over the water, stealing us away from our ghosts and our ancestors, who cried salty rivers into the sand. That's where Momma was now, wailing at the water's edge, while her girls were pulled out of sight under white sails that cracked in the wind.



## CHAPTER V


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*Wednesday, May 29, 1776*

THE INHABITANTS [OF NEW YORK] ARE IN GENERAL BRISK AND LIVELY. . . . IT RATHER HURTS THE EUROPEAN EYE TO SEE SO MANY SLAVES UPON THE STREETS . . .

THERE ARE COMPUTED BETWEEN TWENTY-SIX AND THIRTY THOUSAND INHABITANTS . . . THE SLAVES MAKES AT LEAST A FIFTH PART OF THE NUMBER.

-LETTER WRITTEN BY PATRICK M'ROBERT,  
A SCOTSMAN VISITING NEW YORK

 THE HARTSHORN DOCKED IN NEW YORK the next morning, just after a sailor brought down some old biscuits for our breakfast. I picked out the worms and tossed them through the porthole, then gave the biscuits to Ruth.

Madam Lockton's voice rose above the shouting sailors. "Bring those girls up," she said.

A fellow missing most of his teeth stuck his head down the hatchway and waved us over to the ladder. We climbed up, shading our eyes against the bright light of day. Men of all types and colors swarmed the deck, carrying casks and chests down the gangplank, scurrying up the rigging to tend to the sails, unloading gear, loading gear, and making me feel very small and in the way.

Ruth stood at my side and stared so hard, her thumb fell out of her mouth.

The ship was tied up at a long dock, one of many that jutted into the river. The sun sparkled off the water so strong I had to shade my eyes. Tall houses of brick and stone faced us, with rows upon rows of windows looking down at the street. They reached higher than the oldest trees back home. There were smaller buildings, too, all crowded shoulder to shoulder, with no room for a feather to pass betwixt them.

We had arrived soon after a heavy rain. Soldiers splashed through the glittering puddles, toting wood, emptying wagons, carrying buckets hither and fro, and standing about on corners conversating with each other. Some wore uniforms and carried long muskets. Others, in homespun clothes, dragged fence posts to a barricade.

There were ordinary people, too; maids with baskets over their arms moving into and out of the shops and cart men pushing their barrows over the cobblestones, calling out to each other and yelling at the dogs in their way. The working people were dressed muchly as we did out in the country, but there were a few gentry who stuck out of the crowd like peacocks wandering in the chicken pen. Some of the working folk were black. In truth, I had never seen so many of us in one place, not even at burials.

A wagon drawn by two thick-necked horses stopped just beyond the end of the dock. Not far behind it came a beautiful carriage drawn by two pale gold stallions and driven by a stout man in livery with a three-cornered hat on his head. He clucked to the horses to walk on until he stopped behind the first wagon.

The toothless sailor approached us again and pointed down to the dock where the crates and casks stamped LOCKTON & FOOTE were being stacked. "That's where you belong. Don't wander off or one of them soldiers will shoot you dead."

He laughed as he walked down the swaying plank. We followed with tiny steps, Ruth's hand in mine. As I stepped onto the solid dock, I stumbled.

"There you are!" exclaimed Madam Lockton, coming around the stack of crates. "Be careful with that," she said to two deckhands carrying a fine walnut chest. "That goes on the back of the carriage, not to the warehouse."

The men nodded and carried the chest toward the beautiful carriage with the golden horses at the end of the dock.

"Pretty horses," Ruth said.

A soldier at the end of the dock picked up his musket and stopped the two men carrying the walnut chest. There was a brief argument, then the sailors returned, still carrying their burden.

"What is this?" Madam asked as they set the chest at her feet. "I told you to put that on the carriage."

"Beggin' your pardon, ma'am," the sailor said, "but them fellas say all cargo has to be inspected at the wharf before it enters the city. Order of some committee what's in charge here."

"Inspected?" She lifted her chin. "Those are my personal belongings. They will not be inspected by anyone. I do not permit it."

Master Lockton had been half following the turn of events while supervising the unloading. As his wife's voice rose, he hurried to join her.

"Now dear," he said. "I told you there would be some inconveniences. We must be accommodating. Look, there's Charles. He'll straighten this out."

A second wagon had pulled up next to the first. A round, short man rolled off it and bustled up to the Locktons.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the round man. "You shouldn't have come back."

"Lower your voice, Charles," Lockton said. "Where are the men I instructed you to bring?"

The round man pulled a handkerchief out of his waistcoat pocket and wiped his face. "Washington's men took them all to work on the blasted fortifications. Oh, double-blast. Look there: Bellingham."

An official-looking man in a somber black coat had stepped out of a building across the street and was striding toward our little group, walking stick in hand. He was followed by a thin fellow carrying a book near as big as Ruth. Behind him walked a slave boy about my height, whose arms were weighted down with a wooden contraption and a small case with a rope handle. The boy wore a floppy red hat, his shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbow, the blue breeches of a sailor, and a pair of dusty boots.

"Bellingham is eager to arrest you," Charles quietly told Master Lockton. "I told you it was still unsafe. You should have waited."

"Anne." Lockton fixed his eyes intently on his wife. "Do not fail me."

She gave a little nod.

"You have a plan?" Charles asked.

"Everything is in order," Lockton said.

"Elihu Lockton!" Bellingham called, waving his walking stick. "Come join us, friend." Three more soldiers appeared and lined up a few paces behind him.

"Smile, everyone," Lockton commanded through clenched teeth. "Pretend to be happy rebels."

The Locktons and Charles walked to the land end of the dock. Ruth and me followed a few steps behind, little mice trailing behind dogs that were fixing to fight.

The boy in the red hat set down the case and fiddled

with the strange wooden thing. It was actually two strange wooden things: a folding desk and a small stool. After he set up both of them, the thin fellow laid the book on the desk, opened it to a blank page, and perched on the rickety stool. The boy opened the case and took out a bottle of ink and a quill, which he set next to the book. He closed and latched the case, then stepped back and put his hands behind his back, eyes ahead like he was a soldier too.

"Good day, Charles." Bellingham inclined his head toward Madam. "Missus Lockton."

Ruth started to raise her hand to wave at the man, but I grabbed it and held it down.

"Mister Bellingham," Madam replied. "How fares your good wife?"

"Happy that summer is nearly here. You know how she hates the cold."

"Please tell Lorna I shall call on her as soon as we are settled," Madam said.

"Very good," Bellingham said. "We thought you were in London, Elihu."

"London? Never!" exclaimed Lockton. "England offers us nothing but taxes, stamps, and bloodshed."

"How odd. Word from Boston is that you still lick the King's boots."

Madam drew in her breath sharply but said nothing.

"Why do you insult me, sir?" Lockton replied.

"We are at war, sir," Bellingham said in a voice that all could hear. Several of the dockworkers put down their burdens and stood up straight. "Insults are the least of my concern. I'm more worried about the British invasion."

Lockton shrugged. "I am a merchant with cargo to sell. Search my crates. If you wish, search the entire ship. You

won't find the British fleet, I promise you. Those yellow-bellied cowards have sailed for Canada."

Bellingham took two steps and stood a fingertip away from Lockton. He lowered his voice. "I don't have time for your games. The Committee of Safety suspects you a Tory, in cahoots with Governor Tryon. You've come home to fight us who strive for freedom and liberty."

All work on the ship stopped. The air had suddenly grown warm. I glanced sideways. The soldiers guarding the crates had picked up their guns. The clerk at the desk was the only one who seemed unrattled. He opened the ink bottle, dipped his pen, and scratched something across a blank page. I caught the boy behind the clerk sparing a quick look at Ruth and me. His eyes were dark gray, the color of the sea during a storm.

"'Freedom and liberty' has many meanings," Lockton finally said. "Am I free to return to my home? Shall I be at liberty from the improper meddling of your Committee?"

Bellingham held his position a moment longer, then he took one long step back. "Search the cargo," he commanded the soldiers, who laid down their weapons and picked up crowbars.

"Very well," Lockton said. "Am I under arrest?"

"Not until I find something," said Bellingham.

"Then I'm leaving. My wife is exhausted and needs me to accompany her home. Charles will stay and supervise."

The round man sputtered twice but didn't say a word.

"Enjoy your homecoming," Bellingham said. "It may be short."

The soldiers had started to go through the crates and call out the contents, the clerk writing down the details in his big book.

Lockton motioned with his elbow again. "Come, dear," he said firmly.

Madam refused to move. "We cannot leave without my chest."

"Now, wife," he said. "It will be sent along."

"It travels with me," Madam said crisply. "Mister Bellingham!"

Bellingham, bent over the clerk's inventory book, looked up. "Ma'am?"

"Does your battle for liberty entitle you to search through the private linens of a lady?"

The dock fell silent again. It was one thing for a gentleman to threaten another with arrest. The topic of a lady's linens was delicate.

Bellingham cleared his throat and stood up straight. "Well, ah, the rules . . ."

"Do I gather, sir, from your hesitation, that you are unsure of the etiquette involved? Perhaps you lack the proper authority." She carefully set herself on the walnut chest in question.

"Oh, no, Anne, please," Lockton groaned. "Do not do this, my dear."

Madam ignored him. "I demand that Mr. Bellingham write to his Congress in Philadelphia. If they give permission for common soldiers to rifle through my personal goods, then I will surrender. Until that letter arrives, I shan't move. I shall guard my dignity day and night."

Charles shifted nervously from foot to foot. Lockton pinched the space where his nose met his forehead. The soldiers studied the tips of their boots. Bellingham muttered something impolite, and the boy standing behind the clerk fought hard not to smile.

My own lips twitched. A woman defending her

underclothes from a battalion of soldiers was comical. I didn't dare laugh, of course.

But Ruth did. She giggled, a sound like a small silver bell. A bell tolling disaster.

Madam Lockton flew off the chest and pointed her finger at us. "Which one of you made that noise?" Her face flushed with rage, her eyes darting back and forth between us.

"I did, ma'am," I quickly lied. The smile on Ruth's face faded as she figured that something bad was unfolding.

*Craaack!* Lightning struck from a blue sky; Madam slapped my face so hard it near threw me to the ground. The sound echoed off the stone-faced buildings. Ruth grabbed at my skirts and helped me stand straight again. She was confused but kept her mouth closed, thank heavens.

My cheek burned, but I fought back the hot tears and tried to swallow the lump in my throat. No one had ever slapped my face like that, not once in my whole life. *Better me than Ruth, better me than Ruth.*

Madam sat back on the wooden chest and looked calmly at her husband, as if nothing had happened. The soldiers all went about their business, one of them whistling. The only person who looked my way was the boy in the red hat. He kept his features froze in a mask, but he swallowed hard.

Lockton shrugged. "You see, Bellingham? I don't have time for your war. I have enough battles in my own household."

Bellingham sighed and waved at the soldier closest to where Madam sat. "You there. Carry the lady's belongings to her carriage."

He did not mention me. I was already forgotten, dismissed, though the outline of her palm and fingers still burned on my skin. For an instant, I saw myself pushing her off the



dock into the water below, but I blinked twice and the vision vanished. I took Ruth by the hand.

Madam rose gracefully. "Thank you, Mr. Bellingham."

Lockton offered his arm again to his wife, and this time, she took it. Bellingham lifted his hat as they passed. Ruth and me trailed close behind.

As we approached the carriage, the driver jumped down and opened the door. Lockton helped his wife as she stepped up and settled on the padded seat. "Well done, my dear," he murmured. "Well done, indeed."

Madam blushed. "'Twas all your doing." She smoothed her skirts. "Put the little girl up with the driver."

"What about the older one?"

She leaned forward to stare at me, standing just behind the master. "Send that one to fetch us some clean water. I doubt Becky has had word of our arrival yet."

Lockton looked puzzled. "How will she know where to find the pump? Or how to get home, for that matter?"

"Charles will find someone to assist her."

"I'll take her, sir."

Lockton turned around. The boy had removed his red hat and bowed politely. "I'm Curzon, sir. Mister Bellingham's boy. My master needs me to fetch new quills up Vandewater Street. I could show your girl the way."

The driver and the soldier had finished strapping the walnut chest to the back of the carriage. The driver spoke gently to Ruth and took her by the hand to meet the horses. She giggled and went eagerly.

Lockton studied the boy, then looked over to Bellingham, who was inspecting one of the opened crates with a nervous Charles by his side.

"Excellent idea," said Madam.

"You know where our house is?" Lockton asked Curzon.

"One of the proudest in our city, sir," the boy answered as he put his hat back on his head. With him standing this close, I could see the gold ring in his right ear, like a pirate's, and a long, thin scar that ran along the left side of his chin. "South side of Wall Street, just past Smith."

Lockton grunted and glared at me. "Be quick about your business, no dawdling, understand?"

I curtsied, bewildered at the speed of it all. Yesterday I had been aboard a ship. The day before that, sold in a tavern. The day before that, I woke up in my own bed and watched an old woman die. My belly ached again, as if I were still at sea and the waves were throwing me off balance.

"Well?" Lockton demanded.

"Yes, sir," I whispered.

He looked at his wife. "This one might be simple too." He climbed into the carriage, closed the door, and rapped at the ceiling with his knuckles. "Go, driver."

The carriage rolled away, Ruth sitting up straight, with a big grin, the golden horses tossing their manes, hooves flashing in the sunshine. She waved to me as they drove away.

I bent down, dipped my fingers in a puddle, and scrubbed the spot where that woman hit me.


## CHAPTER VI

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*Wednesday, May 29, 1776*

WE ARE TOLD, THAT THE SUBJECTION OF AMERICANS MAY  
TEND TO THE DIMINUTION OF OUR OWN LIBERTIES; . . .  
HOW IS IT THAT WE HEAR THE LOUDEST YELPS FOR LIBERTY  
AMONG THE DRIVERS OF NEGROES?

—ENGLISH AUTHOR SAMUEL JOHNSON IN HIS POLITICAL  
PAMPHLET, *TAXATION NO TYRANNY*

HIS WAY," THE BOY SAID AS THE  
carriage turned the corner. He headed away from the  
waterfront quick, without looking back. I picked up my  
skirts and ran after him.

"Please, slow down," I called.

He pushed ahead. I tried to follow. We hurried past the  
biggest houses I had ever seen, past shops and taverns and  
manufactories, past city folk walking like their shoes were  
on fire. But I could not move fast enough, and I was losing  
sight of him in the crowd.

"You best slow down!" I called. Folks about me muttered  
and frowned. The boy stopped in front of a tavern and  
waited, his mouth twisted in irritation.

I trotted up to him so angry that steam came off the top  
of my head. "You offer to help, then you abandon me." The  
words spilled out of my mouth. "Where are we going? And

why did she send me to buy water? Don't people here know about digging wells?"

He waited for a moment, then said, "You ask a lot of questions."

"You give dull-witted answers," I shot back.

"Country girls are slow-moving, vexing creatures," he said.

"You're the vexatious one," I said. "Running off and leaving me like that."

We stood glaring at each other, him with his arms crossed over his chest, me trying to catch my breath. Inside the tavern, a woman argued with a man about a leaking cask of beer. On the street corner, an army officer yelled orders at four soldiers building a barricade out of logs, large stones, and barrows full of dirt.

My heart finally slowed, my brow cooled off, and I wanted to give myself a nasty pinch. *Fool*. I should have kept my temper. Now he would truly leave and I would be lost in this horrible place, and there was no telling what Madam Lockton might do to Ruth in my absence.

Apologies did not come natural to me, but I had no choice. "I am sorry I spoke so rudely."

"Hmm," he said. "I am sorry I caused you a fright, Country."

"Thank you. And my name is Isabel, not Country."

"Apologies again, Miss Country Isabel," he said with a smile. "I should have explained before. We're headed up to what folks call the Tea Water Pump. Rich people get their water from there 'cause it tastes the best. But first I must deliver a message for my master. Stay here."

He ducked inside a stationer's shop briefly and came out carrying a small parcel wrapped in brown paper and two

fresh rolls, steaming hot, with butter oozing from their middles.

"Follow this a' way."

We walked the length of an alley to a small courtyard. Someone had planted a garden there, and the first plants had come up: peas, cabbage, and pennyroyal. Curzon handed me a roll and pointed to a tree stump. "Figured you'd want to set and eat a bite."

"I have no money," I said. "I can't take this."

"It cost me nothing," he said. "The baker's daughter likes the lad who works the press. She brings him extra breads and pies. Go ahead, eat."

Half of my roll disappeared in one bite. It was the first decent food I'd had since Jenny's kitchen. Curzon watched me without saying a word. When I licked the butter off my fingers, he gave me his roll.

"I et a large breakfast," he said.

My pride wanted to turn it down, but my belly was stronger. The second roll vanished as quick as the first.

"Thank you," I said when I finished. "I'm beholden to you for that. Can we go now? I need to get back to my sister."

He set his package on the tree stump. "The littler one is your sister? That's why you took the blow meant for her, isn't it?"

A breeze ran through the courtyard, fluttering the leaves of the young pea plants and blowing cool across my cheek where Madam struck me. "She needs watching over."

He nodded. "How long have you been with the Locktons?"

"Three days."

Curzon listened carefully as I told how Madam and her husband bought us. "Lockton is a dirty Loyalist," he said when I finished.

"Loyalist or rebel, I don't care." I stood up from the stump and brushed the back of my skirt clean. "Can we go?"

He nodded, picked up his package, and led me out of the alley. "You feel beholden to Lockton?"

"Pardon?"

"He's going to feed you and your sister, give you a place to sleep. He can order you sold, beat, or hung, if the mood takes him. That could make a person feel a kind of loyalty."

I stopped, considering this. "Someday I'll find that lawyer and Miss Mary's will and that'll free us. Until then, we need to eat, work, and stay together. So yes, I guess I'm loyal to Lockton."

The words tasted bitter. Being loyal to the one who owned me gave me prickly thoughts, like burrs trapped in my shift, pressing into my skin with every step.

We paused at a corner while a soldier drove a cart filled with barrels down the street. After we crossed, Curzon spoke so quiet I had to lean in to catch his words. "You might be better served if you placed your loyalty with us."

"Who is 'us'?"

"My master and those he serves, the rebels, the Congress. We're fighting for freedom from people like Lockton."

"I'm just fighting for me and Ruth. You can keep your rebellion. How much longer till this pump?"

He stopped beside a barricade. The brim of his hat cast his face in shadow. "You might hear things. At the Lockton house."

"What kinds of things?"

"Useful things. Things that might help you get to that lawyer and your freedom."

I frowned. "I don't like riddles. Talk plain."

"New York is a ball tossed between the Loyalists and

Patriots," he said, scratching at the scar on his face. "Right now the Patriots hold it."

"So?"

"Lockton has returned to hurt our cause."

"Why don't they arrest him?"

"It's not that simple. Plenty of folks hereabouts haven't decided which side they favor. One day they cheer General Washington, the next day they toast the King. Putting Lockton in jail could turn them against us."

He started walking again, nattering on and on about plots and conspiracies and battle plans and secrets, but truth be told, my mind drifted. I cared not a fig for politics nor soldiers. I was worried about my sister, and my cheek still hurt.

"Will you help us or not?"

He stared at me intent as I tried to figure his meaning. It slowly dawned.

"You want me to be a spy?" I asked. "Are you funny in the head? Do you know what they would do to me?"

"Shhh," he warned. "Keep your voice down. You just have to listen and alert me if you hear anything important. You won't be in any danger."

"You are a crazy fool. How do you know I won't tell Master Lockton you sought me out?"

"Wouldn't matter if you did. He knows he's under suspicion. Might do you some good, bring you favor in his eyes if you told him. But it would be a mistake. Lockton won't reward you. The Patriots can."

"Reward?"

"Colonel Regan is the officer in charge. He could send you back to Rhode Island, maybe, help you find that lawyer and his papers."

I pondered this. Was he lying? Could I trust this strange boy, filled with war and secrets? What would Momma do?

I shook my head. "It's too dangerous. I'll have enough to do with chores and watching Ruth and keeping out of Madam's way."

"All you have to do is to listen for talk of the King's troops."

"See, there you go again, proving you're a fool. They won't say anything in front of me."

"You are a small black girl, Country," he said bitterly. "You are a slave, not a person. They'll say things in front of you they won't say in front of the white servants. 'Cause you don't count to them. It happens all the time to me."

There was truth in his words, hard truth, a hammer striking stone.

"If you hear something, come to Bellingham's house in the night, across from where your ship docked this morning. I sleep in the shed room. Tap on the window and I'll awake."

I touched my cheek. I couldn't. I shouldn't.

"I can't," I said. "I promised Momma I would take care of Ruth. Now can we please go?"



## CHAPTER VII

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*Wednesday, May 29, 1776*

I HIRED A GIRL TO CLEAN [THE HOUSE], IT HAD A CART LOAD OF DIRT IN IT . . . ONE OF THE CHAMBERS WAS USED TO KEEP POULTRY IN, AN OTHER SEA COAL, AND AN OTHER SALT. YOU MAY CONCEIVE HOW IT LOOK'D. THE HOUSE IS SO EXCEEDING DAMP BEING SHUT UP, THAT THE FLOORS ARE MILDEWD, THE SEALING FALLING DOWN, AND THE PAPER MOULDY AND FALLING FROM THE WALLS.  
—LETTER FROM ABIGAIL ADAMS TO HER HUSBAND, JOHN

IT WAS NEAR A MILE FROM THE TEA WATER Pump back down the island to the Lockton house, a long journey carrying heavy buckets that stretched my arms into sore ribbons:

I forgot the pain when Curzon stopped, pointed, and said, "There 'tis."

The house was made of blocks of cream-colored stone and was wider from side to side than Jenny's tavern. I tilted my head up and counted: four floors, each with big windows facing the street. There were balcony railings on the roof. There were even windows peeking out at foot-level, cellar windows, which meant five stories in one house.

A curtain moved.

"Make haste," Curzon said. "If you value your life, don't use the front door."

The sun caught the ring in his ear and blazed as he tipped his hat to me.

I hurried through the side gate. The mansion was twice as long as it was wide. A large plot stretched behind it with a cistern, a privy, a poor excuse for a garden, and at the far end, a carriage house and small stable.

"You there!"

I turned around. A tiny woman wearing a green calico skirt, a nut-brown bodice, and a dingy shift stood in the open door to the kitchen. She tossed a pan of dirty water onto the flagstones and pushed a strand of graying hair out of her eyes with the back of her hand.

"What's your business here?" she demanded.

"I'm Isabel. I'm the . . . Master Lockton brought us from Newport."

The anger drained out of her face. "You're the new girl gone for the water. Lord help us. Did you get lost?"

"I don't think so. Curzon—"

"Funny little boy, ring in his ear?" She shook her head. "That's Bellingham's boy. You stay away from him. Bring in that water. We've a world of work to do."

Her name was Becky Berry, ". . . though it'll be mud if I don't pull this house together in a flash," she said as she poured the fresh water into a pot and swung it over the kitchen fire. She barely stopped talking long enough to draw a breath. "Eight months! They vanish to Boston for eight months and then show up with no warning and wanting tea. Tea! I could get tarred and feathered for brewing tea," she muttered.

She turned around. Her face marked her as being of middle years, dotted with freckles and pox scars. Her chin was narrow and pointed like a shovel, and her smile was missing several teeth. "The rules here is simple: do what Madam says. You know where the Tea Water Pump is; you'll go up there every day. You'll go with me to market

when I need you to. Don't go north of Chambers Street, or wandering off past Mulberry, less Madam writes you a pass. You don't want folks thinking you're trying to run. That don't work here. You been a housemaid before?"

I shook my head. "We lived on a farm. Pardon me, ma'am, Miss Becky, but can you tell me where my sister is?"

"Your what?" Her eyebrows went up. "Ooohhh . . . that little girl."

I nodded. "Ruth."

"She's slow, ain't she?"

I didn't dare explain until I figured what kind of person Becky was. "She's good-natured."

Becky walked into a pantry crowded with shelves of crockery. "Not going to cause me trouble?"

"Never," I lied. "Where is she, please, ma'am?"

Becky came out carrying a tarnished silver teapot and a stack of china cups and plates.

"Madam Lockton told me to give the little one a bath and feed her." She went back to the pantry and shouted a little so I could hear her. "She's in the privy. Your sister, I mean, not the madam."

I let out a long breath and stepped toward the door.

Becky came back carrying a small chest. "Where do you think you're going?"

"To fetch Ruth."

"Oh, no, you are not," Becky said. "Madam wants her outside peeling potatoes. You're to work in here."

"But . . ."

Through the window, I watched Ruth leave the privy and walk straight to a bench. She hopped up on it, pulled a potato from the sack next to her, and started peeling with a small knife, her feet kicking in the air under the bench. She

looked like a little bird on a twig. I relaxed some; she was safe and happy enough.

Becky brushed at the cobwebs clinging to her skirt. "But nothing. If Madam sees you idling and jawing out there, there'll be the devil to pay." She paused. "She can be a harsh mistress to slaves."

I waited for her to say more, but she shook her head once and handed me a broom.

"Me, I see things different." She picked up a pile of rags and a jar. "You do what you're told and we'll get along fine. Now follow me and pay attention."

Becky led me down a narrow corridor to the front entry hall, where a grand staircase curled upward. A tall grandfather clock sat at the foot of the stairs, pecking away at the hour as if a crow trapped inside were trying to break loose. The walnut linen chest that Madam had fussed over at the dock was set in front of the clock.

Opposite the chest was the door that led to the street. Two other doors with tarnished brass pulls faced the hall. Becky pointed to the door on the right. "That there's the master's library. You don't step foot in it without permission. He don't like his things touched."

"A library with books?"

"And maps and papers all in a jumble. It's a wonder he can find anything." She opened the door on the left and entered, me at her heels. "This is the good parlor, where I'll serve the tea. The drawing room is upstairs. We'll clean up there later. Open them windows."

The room was crowded with furniture draped with cloth. The air was thick and stale. I pulled aside the heavy drapes

and stretched on my toes to push up the window. The sills were dusty and the corners were spun thick with spiderwebs studded with dead flies. I went to open the next window as Becky laid out a rag on each sill.

"Wipe down the windows and sweep the floor before you uncover the furniture," she said.

The second window was stubborn. I pushed as hard as I could until it suddenly flew up and I near lost my balance. Becky grabbed me before I tumbled outside.

"Easy on," she said as I regained my balance. "You're no good to me with a cracked head."

Three soldiers wearing homespun shirts and carrying muskets walked past the window, laughing loudly.

"I wish they'd all go home," Becky muttered. "Soldiers is a nuisance."

"You don't like the rebels?" I asked.

Becky put a finger to her lips and pulled me away from the window. "Listen to me good. Them that feeds us"—she pointed upstairs—"they're Loyalists, Tories. That means we're Tories, too, understand?"

"Yes, ma'am." I nodded. "But . . ." I hesitated, not sure if I was allowed to ask questions. "Master Lockton claimed he was a Patriot on the docks."

Becky fought to open the final window. A cool breeze flowed through the room and stirred the dust. "He was faking to protect his skin. Some folks switch back and forth. One day they're for the King, the next, it's all 'liberty and freedom, huzzah!' A tribe of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, that's what you'll find in New York. But you know what never changes?"

I shook my head. "No, what?"

"Madam wants lemon cakes with her tea. She is terrible

fond of cakes, is Madam. Lady Clarissa Seymour is coming to hear all the news from Boston."

"A lady? A royal lady?"

Becky laughed. "Close enough. She's the master's aunt; she's rich and old, and owns land in three countries. The master hopes to inherit the lot when she dies, so they treat her like the Queen herself. To her face, at least."

The grandfather clock in the hall bonged loudly, four times, startling us both.


"Wretched clock," Becky muttered. "I'm off to the baker. Finish sweeping in here, and dusting. After that, polish the teapot and bring in the firewood. Don't stop moving, whatever you do."

## CHAPTER VIII

---

*Wednesday, May 29-  
Thursday, June 6, 1776*

. . . WE HAVE IN COMMON WITH ALL OTHER MEN  
A NATUREL RIGHT TO OUR FREEDOMS WITHOUT  
BEING DEPRIV'D OF THEM BY OUR FELLOW MEN. . . .  
WE WERE UNJUSTLY DRAGGED BY THE CRUEL HAND  
OF POWER FROM OUR DEAREST FRIENDS AND SUM OF US  
STOLEN . . . AND BROUGHT HITHER TO BE MADE SLAVES FOR  
LIFE IN A CHRISTIAN LAND THUS ARE WE DEPRIVED  
OF EVERY THING THAT HATH A TENDENCY TO MAKE  
LIFE EVEN TOLERABLE . . .  
-PETITION FOR FREEDOM FROM A GROUP OF SLAVES  
TO MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR THOMAS GAGE,  
HIS MAJESTY'S COUNCIL, AND THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES, 25 MAY 1774

 THE DAYS STARTED EARLY IN THE Lockton kitchen. Since Becky lived in a boardinghouse on Oliver Street, it fell to me to wake first and build up the fire. She did the proper cooking, and I did near everything else, like washing pots and plates and beating eggs till my arms fell off for Madam's almond jumbles and plum cakes with icing. If not in the kitchen, I was removing colonies of spiders, polishing tables and chairs, or sweeping up a mountain of dust. I saved the cobwebs, twisting them around a rag and storing them by our pallet in the cellar.

Cobwebs were handy when a person had a bloody cut.

Madam complained every time she saw me: I left a streak of wax on the tabletop. I tracked in mud. I faced a china dog toward the door after I dusted it, which would cause the family's luck to run out. At the end of every scolding, I cast down my eyes and said, "Yes, Madam."

I kept careful track of her the same way as I used to mind the neighbor's bull when I took the milk cows out to pasture. She had not hit me again, but always seemed on the edge of it.

Mostly Madam slept late, wrote letters, and picked out melodies on a badly tuned spinet. A few times, she and her husband conversated fast and quiet about Mr. Washington and when the King's ships would arrive for the invasion. They argued fierce on Thursday night. Lockton shouted and called Madam rude names before storming out of the house, the front door crashing behind him.

I vowed not to cross neither of them.

Madam went to bed early that night, so we did too. Ruth snuggled next to me and fell asleep quick. I lay awake, praying hard but gaining little comfort.

I was lost. I knew that we were in the cellar of a house on Wall Street, owned by the Locktons, in the city of New York, but it was like looking at a knot, knowing it was a knot, but not knowing how to untie it. I had no map for this life.

I lay awake and stared into the darkness.

Madam called for tea in her bedchamber the next morning and sent for Ruth, who was pumping the butter churn with vigor.

"Why would she need Ruth?" I asked as I wiped my sister's hands and face with a damp rag.



"Why does she do anything?" Becky asked. "I'm to climb to the attic to fetch the cast-off clothing in an old trunk. Maybe she'll set the little one to rip out the stitches so the dressmaker can use the fabric. This best be the last of the day's fanciful notions. My knees don't like all this upping and downing of the stairs."

Ruth stayed in Madam's chamber for hours. I spilled the fireplace ashes on the kitchen floor, then kicked over the bucket of wash water I brought in to clean up the mess. I stubbed my toe and near cut off my finger whilst peeling an old, tough turnip.

When I could stand it no more, I snuck out of the kitchen and tiptoed down the hall. I could hear the sound of Madam's voice from the bottom of the stairs, but not the words she was saying. I wanted to march up there and tell Ruth to come back and finish the butter.

I did not. I forced myself to work.

Becky took a tray of cookies and a pot of tea upstairs late in the afternoon. I pounced when she returned to the kitchen.

"Is Ruth well? Why does Madam keep her?"

Becky chose her words with care. "Madam has taken a liking to your Ruth, on account of her being so tiny and quiet." She sat at the kitchen table. "She means to use her for a personal maid."

"Pardon me?"

"Most of Madam's friends have a slave to split wood and carry chamber pots, like you. If Madam has a slave dressed in finery, well that makes her more of a lady. Ruth can fan her when she's hot, or stir the fire when she's cold."

I forgot myself and sat down across from Becky. "She's making Ruth into a curiosity?"

Becky nodded. "Aye, that's a good word for it."

I went cold with anger, then hot, then cold again. It wasn't right. It wasn't right for one body to own another or pull strings to make them jump. Why was Madam allowed to hit me or to treat Ruth like a toy?

"Take care," Becky warned, pointing to my lap.

I looked down. My hands were clenched into fists so tight the cords that held my bones together could be seen. I released them.

Becky leaned across the table and spoke quiet. "I don't imagine you like this much. Can't say I blame you. But don't lose your head. Madam is not afraid to beat her slaves."

I rubbed my palms together. "Do they own more than us?"

"Half a dozen down to the Charleston place, none up in Boston. Never been to the Carolinas, so I don't know how they get along. But you need to calm yourself and heed what I am about to tell you."

"Yes, ma'am," I said stiffly.

"Two, three years ago, there was another girl here, slave like you. She talked back. Madam called her surly and took to beating her regular-like. One day she beat her with a fireplace poker."

"Did she die?"

"No, but her arm broke and didn't heal right. It withered and hung useless, so Madam sold her."

I could not hold the hot words in my mouth any longer. "She best not come after me with a poker. Or hurt Ruth."

Becky leaned back and studied on me a bit. "You ain't never going to say something like that again, not in my kitchen. I get paid decent here, and I won't let some girl like you get in the way of that. Wearing pretty dresses ain't

going to hurt the little one, so wipe that look off your face and fetch me some more wood."

After that, Ruth's every waking moment was spent with Madam. Though we worked in the same house and slept under the same blanket, we had little time to talk. Ruth was permitted to sleep until the sun rose, went to bed when Madam retired, and rarely had to work in the kitchen or garden.

I lay awake every night, heart filled with dread, recalling the dangerous offer made by the boy in the floppy red hat.


## CHAPTER IX

---

*Thursday, June 6, 1776*

... HUNDREDS IN THIS [NEW YORK] COLONY  
ARE ACTIVE AGAINST US AND SUCH IS THE WEAKNESS  
OF THE GOVERNMENT, (IF IT CAN DESERVE THE NAME)  
THAT THE TORIES OPENLY PROFESS THEIR SENTIMENTS  
IN FAVOUR OF THE ENEMY, AND LIVE UNPUNISHED.

—LETTER OF WILLIAM TUDOR,  
WASHINGTON'S CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER, TO JOHN ADAMS

 WAS STUCK ON THE BACK STEPS with a pile of dull knives and a whetstone. It was a dreary job. First, spit on the stone. Next, hold the knife at the proper angle and circle it against the stone; ten to the left, ten to the right, until the blade was sharp enough to slice through a joint of beef like it was warm butter.

As I sharpened, I imagined using the knife to cut through the ropes that tied us to New York. I'd slice through the ocean, and Ruth and me would walk on the sand all the way home. *Ten circles to the left . . .*

Ruth was abovestairs, standing by whilst Madam prepared herself for company. The master was locked in his library. Becky was somewhere in the crowd watching General Washington parade down Broadway with five regiments of soldiers. The sounds of beating drums and whistling fifes,

and the cries of "Huzzah! Huzzah!" blew toward me over the rooftops.

I pushed everything out of my mind, save my task. *Ten circles to the right . . .*

Becky came back from the parade an hour later, overflowing with stories. She nattered on about the spectacle whilst assembling the tea things for Madam and Lady Seymour, who had come again to call. I pretended to listen. Truth be told, I didn't notice when she left carrying the tray.

*Ten circles to the left, ten circles to the right, all make the blade sharp and mighty. Ten circles to the left, ten to the right . . .*

Becky called for me twice before I heard her proper. Her voice was high and tight. ". . . I said to hurry! You want to get me put on the street? Madam wants you in the parlor."

The knife near slipped from my hands. "Is it Ruth?"

"No, the Lady Seymour wants to see you. And the master just arrived with gentlemen friends all calling for food and drink. Hurry!"

I washed up in the cold water bucket, quickly pinned on a clean apron, checked my kerchief was on proper and followed Becky to the parlor. She rapped lightly on the door and pushed it open. "The new girl, ma'am," she said, setting a plate of fresh-baked strawberry tarts on the table.

"Show her in," Madam said.

Becky waved at me to enter.

Madam and an older woman sat at the table, but my eyes were drawn behind them, to my sister, dressed up as Madam's pretty pet in a bleached linen shift, a navy-blue brocade short gown, and a full skirt patterned with lilacs. When she saw me, she clenched her hands together and bit

her lower lip. Her eyes were red and swollen with crying.

My belly went funny and my mind raced. Why had she been crying? Was she sick? Scared? Did Madam hurt her?

Becky poked me gently in the back. This was not the time for questions.

I quickly dropped into a curtsy, bowing my head. When I stood up, the older woman, the lady aunt with all the money, gave me a shadow of a smile. She was smaller than Madam and wore a silk gown the color of a mourning dove and gray lace gloves. Her hair was curled high and powdered snow white. A necklace set with black stones shone from her neck. There were deep lines at the corners of her eyes and around her mouth, but I couldn't tell if they were from laughing or from crying.

She turned in her chair and looked at Ruth, then back at me. "And these two girls are the sisters?" she asked.

Madam reached for a tart. "That's what the man said."

The older woman sipped her tea. "What is your name, girl?" she asked me.

"Isabel, ma'am," I said. "Isabel Finch."

"Ridiculous name," Madam said. She opened her fan and waved it in front of her face. "You are called Sal Lockton now. It's more suitable."

I forced myself to breathe in slow and regular instead of telling her that my name was not her affair. "Yes, ma'am."

She glanced at my feet. "And you must wear your shoes. This is a house, not a barn."

Ruth stepped out of her corner. "Isabel."

Madam snapped the fan shut and rapped it against the edge of the table, startling us all. "What did I tell you about silence?" she said roughly.

Ruth raised one shaking finger to her mouth and said, "Shh."

"Precisely." Madam set the fan in her lap and reached for a piece of sugar with silver tongs. When she plopped it in the cup, the tea overflowed into the saucer.

Ruth stood there like a carved statue, her finger still held to her lips. I took another breath, slower than the first, and tried not to think on the newly sharpened knives on the kitchen steps. Lady Seymour curled her fingers around the teacup, her gaze marking first Madam, then Ruth, then me. She said nothing.

"Would you like Sal to serve you and Lady Seymour while I wait on the gentlemen?" Becky asked.

"Absolutely not. Show her the library and make sure the men are fed. And bring fresh tea. This has already gone cold."

We curtsied and left the parlor. Ruth's sad eyes followed me to the door.

*Ten circles to the left, ten circles to the right,  
all make the blade sharp and mighty.*

Back in the kitchen, Becky took a large silver tray off a high shelf in the pantry. "Hold this." She loaded the tray with plates of cold sliced tongue, cheddar cheese, brown bread, and a bowl of pickles. I could not stop thinking about the way Ruth had jumped when Madam shouted, nor the tears in her eyes.

Becky took down a second tray and set upon it four goblets, two bottles of claret wine, and a crock of mustard. She swung the kettle back over the fire to heat up more water, picked up the tray with the wine, and said, "Hop to."

I followed her to the front of the house. "But, what about my shoes?"

"The master won't notice long as he gets his grub." Becky

balanced the edge of the tray on her hip and knocked on the door on the right side of the front hall. When a deep voice answered, she opened it.

Lockton looked up as we entered. "Oh, good. Sustenance," he said, pushing aside a stack of newspapers to clear off the desk.

The room was the same size and shape as the parlor, but two of the walls had bookcases built into them. A large painting of horses jumping over a high hedge hung on the third wall. A thin layer of dust lay over everything. The front windows were open, bringing in fresh air and noise from the street; carts rolling over the cobblestones and church bells in the distance mingled with the voices of the four men who sat around the enormous desk.

One man looked poorer than the others; the cuffs of his coat were frayed and his hands were stained with ink. Next to him sat a man with suspicious gray eyes and a liver-colored coat with a double row of gold buttons fastened over a large pudding-belly. The third man wore something on his head that looked more like a dead possum than a wig, but his coat was crisp and new and the buckles on his shoes gleamed. The fourth was Master Lockton, looking like a cat who had just swallowed the last bite of a juicy mouse.

Becky set her tray on a sideboard. I held mine as she poured the wine and served the gentlemen. Then she had me hold the food tray so that she could serve the tongue and cheese. Talk halted as the men started in on their meal.

"Becky!" Madam called from across the hall.

"Go see to her," Lockton told Becky. "The girl can stay here. Does she know where the wine is?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

Becky and Lockton both stared at me. I had spoken out of



turn. My job was to be silent and follow orders. Ruth had already learned that. *Sbbbbbb* . . .

"Keep the wine flowing and the plates full," Lockton said. "My friends eat more at my table than their own."

As Becky left, Goldbuttons drained his wine, then raised his goblet. I hurried to pour him another, and topped off the drinks of the other men. Lockton gave me a curt nod when I was finished. "Stand over there," he said, pointing to the corner where the two bookshelves met each other.

I gave a wordless curtsy and took my place.

The men dove back into their conversation. "Who has been arrested because of the oath?" demanded Lockton.

"Fools unschooled in the art of fence-sitting," said Goldbuttons.

"Plank-walking, you mean," said Inkstained.

Shabbywig leaned forward and pointed his finger at Inkstained. "Don't you turn the coward on us. Not when we're this close."

"Close?" argued Inkstained. "Do you see His Majesty's ships in the harbor? I don't. I might argue that England has fled and the rebel traitors have won."

"Lower your voices," Lockton said with a scowl. He closed the windows with a loud *bang*, then returned to his seat.

"His Majesty's ships are very close, closer than you know. This rebellion will be smashed like glass under a heavy boot, and the King will be very grateful for our assistance."

The mention of the King caught my ear. I studied the wide boards on the floor and listened with care.

Goldbuttons popped a piece of cheese into his mouth and talked as he chewed. "I sincerely hope you speak the truth, Elihu. These rebel committees are multiplying faster than rabbits in the spring. They've just about ground business to a halt."

"Have they interfered with you directly?" Lockton asked.

"Every waking moment," Goldbuttons said. "The latest bit of nonsense is a Committee to Detect Conspiracies. They've sent the hounds after us, old friend."

"Have you written to Parliament? They need the specifics of our difficulties."

"Parliament is as far away as the moon," complained Inkstained.

As the other men argued about Parliament and letters of protest and counterletters and counter-counterletters, Shabbywig stabbed at the last pieces of tongue on his plate and shoved them into his mouth. He turned in his seat to look at me, held up his plate, and grunted. If I had ever done such a thing, Momma would have switched my behind for having the manners of a pig. Even Miss Mary Finch had asked with a "please" and a "thank you" when Momma served her dinner.

*This is New York*, I reminded myself as I crossed the room and took the plate from his hand. *The rules are different*. I loaded his plate down with the last slices of tongue and set it in front of him before retreating to my corner. *Everything is different*.

My belly growled and grumbled in its cage. The smell of the tongue and mustard and the cheese filled the room and made my mouth water. I had eaten a bowl of corn mush at sunrise and only dumplings at midday. To distract the beast in my gullet, I tried to read the names of the books on the shelves without turning my head. My eyes were as starved for words as the rest of me was for dinner.

It was hard to read from the side like that. I wanted to pull down a book, open it proper, and gobble up page after page. I wanted to stare into the faces of these men and

demand they take me home. I wanted to jump on the horse in the painting and fly over the hills. Most of all, I wanted to grab my sister by the hand and run as fast as we could until the cobblestones disappeared and there was dirt under our feet again.

"Girl," Lockton said. "Bring us more bread, sliced thin. And some of Becky's apricot jam. I've missed the taste of that."

I curtsied and hurried out of the room, leaving the door open a crack so I could easily open it when I came back with my hands full. Across the hall came the quiet conversation of Madam and Lady Seymour. I paused but heard no mention of Ruth.

*Sbbbbbb . . .*

There was fresh bread on the kitchen table, but it took a piece of time to find the crock of jam. I used one of my sharp knives to slice the loaf, set out the slices on a clean plate, and put the plate and jam on a tray. It was taking me too long to finish a simple chore. I feared the master would be angry with me, and I was angry at myself for being afraid.

I was just about to push open the library door with my foot when the master said, "Compliments of His Majesty, gentleman. There's enough money here to bribe half of the rebel army."

I stopped and peered through the crack.

Madam's linen chest, the one that she had fussed about when we arrived, was in the middle of the library floor, the top thrown open. Underskirts and shifts were heaped on the floor beside it. Lockton reached into the chest and pulled out two handfuls of paper currency.

"Huzzah!" said Inkstained as Goldbuttons let out a low whistle.

"Do you have a man ready?" Lockton asked.

"Two," Shabbywig answered. "One will operate out of Corby's Tavern, the other from the Highlander."

"Good." Lockton crossed back to his desk. I could no longer see him, but his words were clear. "Every man willing to switch sides is to be paid five guineas and two hundred acres of land. If he have a wife, an additional hundred acres. Each child of his blood garners another fifty."

"Makes me want to marry the next lady I clap eyes on," Goldbuttons said.

Lockton chuckled.

I gave the door a little push and it swung open. "Sir?" I asked in a hushed tone.

"Enter," Lockton said.

I walked in. The other men did not look my way. I was invisible to them until they needed something.

"Jam," he said with a smile. "Put it right here."

I placed the tray in front of him and took my place again in the corner. The men spread the jam on the bread and drank their wine, discussing politics and war and armies over the stacks of money on my master's desk. The smell of apricots filled the warm room. It put me in mind of the orchards down the road from Miss Mary's place.

I kept my face still as a plaster mask, but inside my brainpan, thoughts chased round and round. By the time the men rose to leave, I knew what I had to do.

## CHAPTER X

---

*Thursday, June 6, 1776*

THE PEOPLE [OF NEW YORK]—WHY THE PEOPLE  
ARE MAGNIFICENT; IN THEIR CARRIAGES, WHICH ARE  
NUMEROUS, IN THEIR HOUSE FURNITURE, WHICH IS FINE,  
IN THEIR PRIDE AND CONCEIT, WHICH ARE INIMITABLE,  
IN THEIR PROFANENESS, WHICH IS INTOLERABLE, IN  
THE WANT OF PRINCIPLE, WHICH IS PREVALENT, AND  
IN THEIR TORYISM, WHICH IS INSUFFERABLE.  
—LETTER FROM PATRIOT COLONEL HENRY KNOX  
TO HIS WIFE, LUCY

LADY SEYMOUR WAS THE FIRST TO leave, followed soon after by the gentlemen in the library. Lockton and Madam retired upstairs, releasing Ruth for the evening and leaving me with the cleaning up. For supper we ate the remainders from the plates of Inkstained and Goldbuttons—cold tongue and brown bread. Ruth ate three bites, then laid her head down on the table.

When Becky left for the night, I held my sister's hand and walked her down the steep stairs. Our bed was a thin mattress stuffed with old corn husks in front of the potato bin. I helped her out of her skirt and removed my own.

Just before I blew out the candle I asked, "Why were you crying in the parlor today, before Becky and me came in? Did Madam hurt you?"

Her eyes puddled with tears, and she shook her head from side to side. "No foolin'."

"Did you play or fuss? Was Madam angry with you? Did she hit you?"

She sniffed and wiped her nose on the sleeves of her shift. "Shhh," she said again.

That wretched woman beat Ruth, I just knew it. She would beat Ruth into total silence if I let her.

I kissed her tears and we knelt to pray. When we finally laid down, my fingers felt along the edge of my blanket, looking for the rip that Momma had sewed up with tiny feather stitches. She wouldn't let anyone hurt her children.

"Where's my baby?" Ruth muttered, half-asleep. She asked this every night.

"That bad man stole your doll baby," I reminded her. "The skinny one who stole us. He took everything."

"Everything?"

I hugged her close. "Almost everything. But I'll get it back. Don't worry. Just go to sleep."

"I can't sleep without my baby." There was a stubborn note in her voice.

"I'll make you another doll, I promise, but not tonight. Want me to sing to you?"

I didn't wait for an answer, but started in on an island lullaby that Momma had loved. Ruth lay quiet, her breath steady and slow. By the time the song was over, she was fast asleep.

I waited a full hour, until the clock struck eleven, then slipped out from under the blanket and put my skirt back on. I did not stuff my feet into my shoes. I'd be faster and quieter without them.

I climbed up the cellar stairs, freezing with every groan of the old wood. *If Madam or Lockton come across me, I'll say I'm on my way to the privy.* They couldn't be angry about that. A body must follow the call of nature, even in the dead of the night.

The kitchen was so dark I walked slowly, my hands feeling in front of me so I wouldn't bump into the table or knock over a pitcher on the sideboard. I paused at the back door. The sound of Lockton's snoring came from above, like faraway thunder. *I'm on my way to the privy,* I reminded myself. *No barm in that.* I carefully opened the door and stepped outside.

The night air was crisp and smelled faintly of salt. I tiptoed down the back steps and flew past the privy and around the side of the house to the gate, which hid in shadows. My heart pounded so loud I felt sure it would wake the entire street.

I had only to open the gate latch and step out.

My hand would not move.

If I opened the gate, I would be a criminal. Slaves were not allowed out after sunset without a pass from a master. Anyone who caught me could take me to the jail. If I opened the gate, a judge could order me flogged. If I opened the gate, there was no telling what punishment Madam would demand.

If I opened the gate, I might die of fright.

I leaned my head against the gate. I could not open the gate, but I had to open the gate. This house was not a safe place. I had to get us out. But there was no way to get out, no way to run away off an island, no way to run with a little girl. The secret of Madam's linen chest was the only key I held.

*Watch over me, Momma.*

I opened the latch, slipped out the gate, and ran.



I thought it would be easy. I would run straight to the shed behind Bellingham's house, tap on Curzon's window, tell him the news, and hurry home. It was nighttime, after all, and folks would be asleep.

Not in New York. Not in a city occupied by the Continental army.

At the end of the block there were soldiers on watch in front of City Hall; a dozen or so men standing around a campfire, with more dozing on the ground. One man was trying to read a letter by the firelight, another was roasting a small piece of meat at the end of a stick. Their guns were close to hand. I crept as close as I dared, but there was no way to sneak past them. I swallowed hard and turned around to head east, away from the firelight.

The next corner was dark and lonesome. I turned south, then west again, then was forced north for three blocks by loud soldiers spilling out of taverns. The crowded buildings confuddled me. I tried to be brave like Momma or Queen Esther in the Bible, but I just knew there were hobgoblins awalking in the dark, looking to steal the breath from a girl's body.

I hid when I heard voices and when a horseman galloped down the middle of the street. The horse's hooves sparked off the cobblestones and sounded like a hammer striking a forge. I chased up and down streets and alleys, sticking to the shadows and shying away from the flickering streetlamps. I ran.

Finally the street emptied out onto a wharf. I had reached one of the two rivers that sheltered New York Island, but I couldn't tell if I was looking at the East River or the North. I ventured out farther into the street. Relaxed men told loud



jokes to each other on the waterfront, a tin whistle played, and a small dog yipped. The masts of ships grew thicker to my right. That was my heading.

The shapes of the buildings and the outline of the wharves soon became familiar. There was the dock the *Hartsborn* had tied to, and there was Bellingham's building. I snuck down the alley to the shed window that Curzon described.

This was the end of my quest. I took a deep breath, said a prayer, and rapped on the glass.

Nothing happened.

I started to rap again, then stopped. *What if this is the wrong window, the wrong house? What if the person within thinks me a thief in the night or a murderess? What if—?*

"Country?"

A puzzled voice called to me from the shadows of the back end of a tavern, a few buildings down. Every window in the tavern was lit up, and the air loud with the angry shouts of men deep in argument.

"Are you speaking to me?" I said, trying to keep my voice from shaking.

"What are you doing here?" Curzon stepped out of the shadows and motioned for me to join him.

I dashed toward him, keeping to the edge of the tavern candlelight. "I have news."

"Of Lockton?"

"And more." I quickly told him everything I had seen and heard.

"Is the money still there?" he finally asked.

"A portion," I said. "The gentlemen took some with them, but Lockton placed the rest back in the chest. Then I was sent to fetch more wine. The chest was gone by my return."

He nodded gravely.

"Will this be enough to send us home?" I asked. "Can they get us on a ship tomorrow? I can have Ruth at the docks by sunup."

He raised both of his hands. "Go home and sleep, I'll take your news to Master Bellingham. I expect the Committee will visit Lockton tomorrow. Whatever you do, don't let on that you were the informant."

"Why not?" I asked. "How else can I claim what's mine?"

"The colonel will know who you are and how to find you. Until you hear from him, you're just the new Lockton girl."

"But not for long," I said, trying to sound braver than I felt.

"Not for long," he agreed. "Go home now."

I hesitated. "I don't know how. I got lost coming here."

He chuckled softly. "It's easy enough once you know the way." He gave me the directions.

"Thank you," I said, picking up my skirts. "Thank you for everything."

"Go quick." When I was halfway up the alley, he called after me. "Ho there, Country."

"What?"

"Well done."

## CHAPTER XI

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*Friday, June 7, 1776*

THERE IS NOTHING MORE NECESSARY THAN GOOD  
INTELLIGENCE TO FRUSTRATE A DESIGNING ENEMY,  
& NOTHING REQUIRES GREATER PAINS TO OBTAIN.  
—LETTER OF GEORGE WASHINGTON TO ROBERT MORRIS

**I**T FELT LIKE BECKY SHOOK ME AWAKE  
the moment I fell asleep.

"Make haste, girl," she hissed. "You didn't start the fire.  
Why are you still abed?"

"Haste" was the word of the day. No matter how hard I  
tried, I couldn't catch up. It did not help that Madam was  
in a mood.

"Girl," she said to me as I prepared to sweep the kitchen  
floor, "the bedding needs to be aired."

"Yes, ma'am." I set the broom back in its place and went  
upstairs, where I stripped off the bedding, carried it outside,  
and pegged it to the line. Just as I finished, Madam opened  
the back door.

"Why are you dawdling so?" she yelled. "The floor in  
here is filthy, and the banister needs to be polished. And I  
told you to wear your shoes in my house."

After I squeezed my feet into those small, dreadful shoes,

it was back to the sweeping, and then the polishing of the banister with soft rags and beeswax scented with lemon. When I made it halfway up the stairs, Madam yelled at me for airing the bed linen on a day that threatened rain. At least she did not call for Ruth's company. Becky had set my sister to scrubbing the back steps. Ruth hummed so loudly it put me in mind of a swarm of bees in clover.

As I gathered in the sheets, I watched the gate, waiting for the rebels to arrive to arrest the Locktons and reward me with our liberty. We would be given proper cabins on the ship, I was sure of it. No more riding in the hold with barrels of salt cod. Ruth and me would have a cabin fit for ladies, with bunks and blankets and pillows and three meals every day.

Yes, indeed, that was my future.

"Aren't you done yet?" Becky yelled from the back door. "We have to prepare the drawing room."

I shook away my daydreams.

The drawing room on the second floor wasn't a room where folks sat with paints and colored chalk to draw pictures, like I'd figured. It was another parlor, three times the size of the one downstairs. We removed the sheets covering the furniture. A dozen chairs with needleworked seats were scattered around the room, organized around tables with delicate legs. A low settee stood in front of the fireplace, and a mirror framed in mahogany hung above the mantel, flanked by oil lamps fastened to the walls.

"Why this room has to be prepared is beyond me," Becky muttered as we folded the sheets together. "No staff to speak of, the larder half-empty, the city getting ready to explode, and she wants this turned out and polished. Of all the foolish—"

A loud beating on the front door interrupted her.

"Dash it all!" Becky exclaimed as she clattered down the stairs. "Keep folding!" she called to me.

*Not for love nor money.* I peered out a front window.

The group of men clustered on the front steps did not look like angels, but they could have been in disguise. Four wore the coats, breeches, powdered wigs, and hats of merchants; one had papers tucked under his arm. Six soldiers stood behind them, all wearing uniforms but carrying long metal bars instead of guns.

Becky opened the door and the men filed inside.

I stepped out into the hall and peered down the stairs. The man with the papers under his arm had removed his hat. It was Master Bellingham.

My heart sang.

A door slammed overhead as Madam flew out of her chamber. "What is the meaning of this?"

I pressed myself against the wall so she could rush by me, then followed her down the stairs. The soldiers had split into two groups. Half went into the front parlor, and the other half into Lockton's library. Both groups set to removing the windows, prying them out of their casings with the long bars.

"What are you doing to my windows?" Madam demanded.

Bellingham approached her. "No need to fret, ma'am. We are all called to make sacrifices."

"Sacrifices?" Master Lockton asked as he hurried in. "This is thievery. What right have you to destroy my home?"

There was a horrific crash in the parlor as the hooks that held up the heavy draperies flew off the wall and landed on the floor. Plaster dust swirled.

Bellingham removed the papers under his arm. "You surprise me, Elihu," he said. "I thought a Patriot such as yourself would welcome the chance to contribute to the army."

Beads of sweat stood at the edge of Lockton's wig. "How does that pertain to the ripping down of my house, James?"

Bellingham patted Lockton's shoulder. "We need your lead, friend. For ammunition. Good people throughout the city are donating all the lead they own. The Provincial Congress will compensate you, of course. In due time. I've invoices prepared."

Madam frowned. "How is it possible to turn windows into bullets?"

"The counterweights are made of lead, ma'am," Bellingham explained. "And your drapery pulls."

"This is an outrage," Lockton fumed.

"No, Elihu," Bellingham said. "This is war. Even our churches are making the sacrifice, delivering their bells to be recast as cannon. Surely you do not rate your home above the houses of God?"

The soldiers left the library, deposited the lead weights by the front door, and headed up to the second floor, knocking their shoulders against the paintings of the Lockton ancestors that lined the staircase.

I wanted to shout that they should search for the money in the linen chest. Instead, I shrank against the wall to let them pass.

"They haven't restored the windows to the frames," protested Lockton.

"Where are they going?" Madam asked.

"There are plenty of carpenters who will assist with the windows, if you don't feel up to the task yourself, Elihu," Bellingham said.

"Sir!" shouted a soldier upstairs. "We've found it!"

Bellingham dropped his manners and bounded up the stairs, two at a time. Madam and Lockton followed close on his heels. I trailed behind.

The bedchamber was a large room made small by the four-poster canopy bed that sat as high as a carriage, two massive armoires, and a half-dozen men with red faces. Madam had once again set herself on her walnut linen chest, which sat in front of the hearth.

Why was it up here?

"... of all the insults, of all the assaults on the dignity of a woman," she said to Bellingham, "this, sir, is the lowest, the most base. I shall see to it that every leader in every land knows—"

"Madam," Bellingham said sternly. "If you do not take your person from that chest, I shall order these soldiers to remove you."

"You would not dare," she said.

"Yes, he would, dear," Lockton said. "Please, wife, let these men do their work with no further delay. There is nothing to worry about."

He seemed to hide a message beneath those words, for Madam relaxed some and stood with grace. "If you insist, husband," she said.

"Perhaps you would prefer to go belowstairs," Lockton suggested. "The girl can heat some wine to calm your nerves."

Madam shook her head. "No, dear. I shall remain by your side."

Bellingham gave the sergeant a quick nod. The man knelt in front of the chest and opened the latch.

*Deliverance! They'll arrest them both and reward me mightily. We'll leave this horrid place by sunset.*

One corner of Lockton's mouth turned up in a sly smile as a blushing soldier removed the shifts and undershirts. My heart skipped a beat. Why were dirty linens still in there? Becky gathered all the washing yesterday.

The soldier looked up at Bellingham. "That's all, sir. Clear down to the bottom."

I wanted to shout, *The money is underneath the false bottom!* but pressed my lips together. Bellingham knelt and checked for himself, knocking the wooden sides.

Lockton's grin had spread to both sides of his mouth. "Would you care to inspect all of our clothing, James? Perhaps you'd send a man to root through the potatoes and parsnips in the cellar."

He had hidden the money elsewhere, that's why he was at ease. Bellingham rose to his feet and stood with his hands behind him. Would he turn on me, accuse me of making a false report and expose me to the Locktons?

No. He searched through his papers until he pulled out one that he handed to Lockton.

"You are summoned to the New York Provincial Congress for suspicion of aiding the enemy, Elihu. I am placing you under arrest. These soldiers will escort you."

He nodded his head. Two soldiers grabbed Lockton by his elbows. His smile vanished.

"Wait," Madam said. "You can't arrest him. He's done nothing."

"To the contrary, ma'am," Bellingham snapped. "He has put the lives of thousands in jeopardy."

The men filed by me without another word. Bellingham kept his face straight ahead, but as he passed by, he cut



his eyes at me. They drilled a hole right into my fear of discovery.

There was the clatter of boots on the stair treads, then boots on the marble steps outside, and then the crash of the front door slamming. They were gone.

Madam stared blankly at the empty doorway.

"Ma'am?" I asked quietly.

Her eyes turned to me, then she blinked, as if she suddenly realized who I was and where she stood.

"Don't just stand there, girl. These linens need to be washed. I can't think how Becky missed them. I shall speak to her about her laziness."

And then she fainted.