CHAPTER XXXVI

Tuesday, December 3–
Friday, December 13, 1776

. . . OUR PRIVATE SOLDIERS IN YOUR HANDS,
ARE TREATED IN A MANNER SHOCKING TO HUMANITY,
AND THAT MANY OF THEM MUST HAVE PERISHED THRO'
HUNGER, HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE CHARITABLE
CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE INHABITANTS.
–GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON COMPLAINING
TO BRITISH GENERAL WILLIAM HOWE

LADY SEYMOUR WAS STRUCK BY A FEVER whilst visiting up in Greenwich. She had to be carried to her chamber, her skin the color of an old beeswax candle. Doctor Dastuge came to bleed her so that her bodily humors would go back into balance.

When the bleeding was over, Madam saw the doctor to the door. I was dusting the grandfather clock in the front hall.

"Good sir," Madam said in a low voice. "I wonder . . . I believe our aunt would recover faster at our estate in Charleston. She could sit in the sun for hours and breathe the healthful air. Don't you agree?"

The doctor's bushy eyebrows flew up in alarm. "South Carolina is hundreds of miles from here–over bad roads. Lady Seymour would be dead by Philadelphia."

Which was likely Madam's intention, I thought.

The doctor pulled on his gloves and picked up his bag. "I doubt she'll be well enough to travel until spring. I will call again tomorrow." He tipped his hat. "Good day, Madam."

Lady Seymour's bell rang upstairs as the door closed behind him. Madam squeezed her lips together so tight I thought she had bit them off.

"Girl," she spat. "Go see what she wants."

By supper it had been decided that I would tend Lady Seymour whilst she was bedridden. The master used his connections in the British high command to secure extra firewood for the house, declaring that his aunt's bedchamber be kept as warm as the month of June. The heat of the room helped to bake out the fever in Lady Seymour's blood and ease her cough. 'Twas warm enough that I could go about in stocking feet which was a comfort for my shoes had taken to pinching my toes something wicked.

As she recovered, the Lady took to reading all of the newspapers printed in the city. Whenever she dropped off to sleep, I would steal as many sentences as I could. Thusly I followed the progress of the war, what was left of it. The flame of independence was sputtering and expected to burn out any day. The rebels had run out of ammunition, soldiers, and money. Mayor Matthews, him who plotted to kill General Washington, escaped from the rebel prison and returned to New York in triumph. The American Congress, frightened by the marching British, fled Philadelphia and ran to Baltimore. Newport, in my home state of Rhode Island, fell to the British too.

When I read that last bit of news I was stunned. I had not

spared a thought for Rhode Island for months.

'Twas several days before I could again sneak up to the Bridewell, toting sausages, crusts, and cheese rinds. The guard stole a few of the sausages and gave me only a few moments to conversate. It mattered not. Curzon was not feeling up to much talk. I sat on the stone floor and checked the hole in his leg. It was hot but free of yellow pus.

Conditions in the prison had eased some. Folk in town had donated enough blankets that there was one to be shared between every two or three men. The British promised each prisoner would receive two pounds of pork and hardtack biscuit every week. They did not announce that the pork was often spoiled, nor that the men had to eat it raw for there was no fire to cook it over.

For my next visit I saved my own helping of mince pie. I filled the bucket with potato scraps and mutton fat, and put the pie on top. The guard took the pie, as I had hoped.

"I loves a good mince pie," he said as he unlocked the door to the prison, pie crumbs spilling from his mouth. Frozen bodies were stacked in the hall waiting to be buried in the pits. The clothes had been taken from the bodies to keep the living soldiers warmer. I kept my eyes on the ground out of modesty.

Curzon was still not in the mood for conversating, not even a little bit. I thought he looked feverish but when I went to feel his forehead, he pushed my hand away. The men snickered at that. I took my empty bucket and left.

Snow fell all that night.

Lady Seymour prepared an errand list for me the next afternoon. She had spent the morning gazing into the fire and had not taken any food. I made bold and suggested that

she eat a biscuit with honey, for her own good.

"You need strength to get through the winter," I added.

She set down her pen, picked up her teacup, and sipped the hot cinnamon water. "I thought it pleased you when I left so much on my plate."

"Ma'am?"

"The more I leave behind, the more there is for you to take to the prison." She studied me so close I thought she could see my thoughts. "That is where you've been taking the table scraps, isn't it?"

My head bobbed once, like a puppet's.

"Am I to assume you know someone confined there?"

I found my voice. "Yes, ma'am."

She sipped again and looked at me over the rim of her teacup. "It is honorable to help a friend in need."

"How did you know?" I blurted out.

She folded the sheet of paper on the table. "These are the items I would like you to fetch for me. Purchase the ink and newspaper at Rivington's, but not the books. He overcharges. Go to that shop near the baker on Hanover Square. Elihu said they haven't closed."

I bobbed once and took the paper. "Please, ma'am," I tried again. "How did you know?"

Her gaze returned to the logs in the hearth. "Take care how you go, Isabel. Many people think it is a fine and Christian thing to help the prisoners. I do not think my niece is one of them."

"Yes, ma'am," I whispered.

It started to snow whilst I was in Rivington's. The wind blew the snow direct into my face as I crossed the square, and I was grateful to step into the shelter of the stationer's

store for 'twas warm and dry inside, near peaceful, if such a word can be used to describe a shop.

A jelly-bellied officer with thick spectacles was purchasing a tall stack of books from the man behind the counter. They were deep in their talk and appeared not to notice me. I took a slow turn around the shop, admiring the shelves heavy with books, business forms, proclamations from Parliament and General Howe, slates, thick paper, quills, and sealing wax.

The books called to me. My fingers itched to touch them. It had been months since I dug into the story of Robinson Crusoe.

I glanced toward the counter. The men were arguing friendly-like about a fellow named Hume. They both had their faces planted in the same pamphlet. When I trod on a squeaky board, they did not even look up.

I reached up to a bookshelf and flipped my way through the books standing at attention. The titles were near as long as books themselves: *Treatise on the Propagation of Sheep, the Manufacture of Wool, and the Cultivation and Manufacture of Flax*, by John Wily, or *Cato Major, Or His Discourse of Old-Age: With Explanatory Notes*, by M. T. Cicero, or *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, by Phillis Wheatley, and countless tracts containing sermons and advice.

My fingers backed up.

Momma told me about Miss Wheatley. She was kidnapped in Africa, sold in Boston, and wrote fancy poetry that smart people liked. She had visited London in England. She had been an enslaved girl but was a free woman.

I took the slim book off the shelf and opened the cover. I had never read a poem. What if I lacked the skill? What if I were caught?

Might as well throw myself in the river.

Bang!

The closing door startled me so I near dropped the volume. I quickly set it back on the shelf and approached the counter.

"Can I help you?" asked the young man who stood behind it.

"Yes, please, sir." I handed him the list. "From the Lady Seymour."

"I hear she's been poorly," he said as he looked over the list.

"Yessir, but she is strong enough to sit by the fire now and has a powerful urge to read."

He nodded. "She's a good customer. I am glad she's on the mend."

He quickly assembled everything on the list–*The Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, *History of the Roman Republic, Volume One*, and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*–and pulled out a large sheet of paper to wrap them in.

As he worked the scissors, he paused. "You knew that boy, didn't you?"

"Pardon me?"

He continued cutting. "Bellingham's boy, red hat. Quick talker." He creased the paper with his finger. "He brought you here once, in May. Pointed to you out the window. Convinced me to hand over two fresh-baked rolls. Told me you were like to die from hunger if I didn't help."

He smiled at the memory.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said. "I didn't mean to take your food."

He pulled off a length of twine. "You didn't. One of the advantages of courting the baker's daughter is all the bread a man can eat."

He had not yet commented on my looking at the books. I feared he might try and trip me up, get me to say something

I ought not, but saw no other choice than to be polite. "I hope your lady is well, sir," I said.

He concentrated on tying a bow. "So do I. She fled with her father to a village in Pennsylvania. Place called Hatboro. They make hats there. Clever, don't you think?"

He tried to smile, but his eyes were downcast and melancholy.

"Perhaps 'tis safer there," I said.

"Aye," he said, finishing the bow, "with plenty of young men eager to protect her. But that's a tale for another day."

He kept the package in his hands, lost in thought.

"Master Lockton will settle his aunt's account at the end of the week," I said.

"Oh, aye." He gave me the package and waited as I settled it in my basket. "I hear tell you're one of them who feeds the lads in the Bridewell."

A sizzling log in the hearth popped suddenly and I jumped. "Not me, sir. Begging pardon, but someone is mistaken."

He crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head. "That there mark on your face makes you hard to forget, lass."

The heat from the hearth filled the room and made it hard to breathe. My eyes darted to the windows and I fought the urge to run. It felt like all of New York was watching me.

He leaned forward, put his elbows on the counter, and lowered his voice tho' we were the only people in the shop. "You tell them boys in the jail to hang on. There's plenty of us out here trying to help."

"Sir?"

He removed a slim volume from under the counter. "This is for you. Don't let your mistress see it."

"I cannot read, sir," I lied.

He snorted once as he quickly wrapped the book. "Of course you can't." He pushed the package to my side of the counter. "All who love liberty should commit the words to heart."

"I can't take it," I started. "I cannot pay—"

"I only have a few left and those I should burn," he said with a wave of his hand. "Read it. Pass it on. And keep feeding the lads."

I bobbed once and hid the parcel in my pocket under my apron. As soon as I could stand close enough to a fire, I'd get rid of it. The last thing I needed was more trouble on account of independence.

"Yes, sir," I said, hurrying for the door. "Thank you, sir."

He raised his finger to his lips in a last warning. "Shhhhhh!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

Saturday, December 14–Monday, December 23, 1776

THE DISTRESS OF THE PRISONERS CANNOT BE COMMUNICATED IN WORDS. TWENTY OR THIRTY DIE EVERY DAY; THEY LIE IN HEAPS UNBURIED; WHAT NUMBERS OF MY COUNTRYMEN HAVE DIED BY COLD AND HUNGER, PERISHED FOR WANT OF THE COMMON NECESSARIES OF LIFE! I HAVE SEEN IT! THIS, SIR, IS THE BOASTED BRITISH CLEMENCY!
–LETTER WRITTEN FROM NEW YORK DESCRIBING PRISONERS CAPTURED AT FORT WASHINGTON

LADY SEYMOUR REGAINED HER strength by the day. I was no longer allowed to spend warm hours in her bedchamber. She took her breakfast and dinner alone but joined the rest of the company for supper each night. Madam was saddened by her husband's aunt's return to health.

The next week passed in a kitchenstorm of flour and sugar, for Christmas was fast approaching. Madam's list of required delicacies was endless: gingerbread, pies of brandied peaches and preserved cherries and mincemeat, macaroons, blancmange, Jordan almonds, sugar candy, as many kinds of cake as there were fingers on both hands. I was the dogsbody in charge of keeping the oven stoked with wood and the

ashes cleared out, fetching forgotten ingredients from the market, and beating eggs, ten at a time, till my arm was near to fall off.

Two of the soldierwives got into a terrible squabble the day the woodpile froze. Hannah told Mary it was her turn to fetch home the buckets from the Tea Water Pump and Mary said, no, 'twas Hannah's turn. Back and forth they went, the words getting hotter as their tempers grew shorter.

"I went yesterday," Mary said loudly as she poured boiling water into a basin. "You know that for a fact because you told me my nose was the color of a cherry when I came in."

Hannah shook her head as she scrubbed the floor. "No, no, no, that was two days ago. Yesterday I slipped on the ice and fell on my backside. Near broke my tailbone, I did. Could barely come up the steps this morning."

"Yer a lying codface, you are," Mary said.

Hannah threw the brush in the bucket and water splashed on the floor. "Who you calling a liar?"

Sarah, the bosslady, came through the door just as Mary rounded the table, her hands balled up into fists. Sarah was getting close to her time and had a bit of a temper herself. She slammed the door so hard the whole house shook. "Shut yer gobs!" she shouted. "I'll report the pair of you to the colonel if you don't straighten up. There'll be no more brawling or caterwauling in this kitchen."

"But–," they both said.

Sarah leveled such a glare at the pair of them I thought their hair would catch fire. And I suddenly saw a way clear to my own purposes.

"Begging pardon, Miss Sarah, ma'am," I said meekly.

"What do you want?" she said, her eyes still on the other women.

"I can fetch the tea water," I volunteered.

Mary shook her head back and forth. "Oh, no, she won't. She'll tarry at the shops to get out of her own chores. Make one of the men do it, I say."

"I'm the first one awake to build up the fires," I explained. "The shops are still closed then. I'll dash up to the pump and be back before the sun comes up."

Sarah gave me a suspicious look. "Why would you take on extra work, special with it being so cold and dark in the morning?"

"I was raised in the country, miss. Too much time inside makes me feel poorly. I like walking in the fresh air, even if it is cold."

'Twas mostly a lie, but the Tea Water Pump was right close to the prison. Fetching water would give me a chance to check on Curzon every day.

Hannah picked up her scrub brush and knelt on the floor again. "Let her go, I say. Saves us the trouble of freezing our tails off." She dipped the brush in the bucket. "Don't know what possessed me to follow my Jimmy to this godforsaken colony."

The next morning found me headed up island long before the sun rose. When I knocked on the guardhouse door of the prison, it was opened by a soldier I'd never seen before, a short man with black hair, sky blue eyes, and a scowl.

"You can't come in," he said after I explained my errand. "Regulations been changed."

"Tell her 'bout the windows," called another soldier warming himself by the fire.

"The regulations permit civilians to deliver food and sundry provisions."

"But not firewood," added the man at the hearth, yawning.

"But not firewood," repeated the first man. "There will be regular patrols round the perimeter of the building to ensure that civilians do not tarry overlong in conversation with the prisoners."

"And we'll be checking on the grub you give 'em," said his companion.

"Guards will inspect all civilian donations," the first man said formally. "If you deliver contraband items, you will be imprisoned yourself."

I shivered once. "Are scones and jam contraband?"

"Not yet."

Back outside, I walked around the front of the building, trying to figure where Curzon's cell lay. Some prisoners were already awake, their hands and arms wrapped in rags sticking through the bars of the window.

Curzon's cell lay to the back of the building. I rounded the corner and stopped. This was where the burial pits were dug. The pits were just a little smaller than the cells, dug down the height of a grown man. One of them had already been filled with bodies and covered again with dark mud. Two lay open and empty, sprinkled with snow like sugar on a cake. I did not know how many bodies would fit in each.

I shivered again and pulled my cloak tight, then turned my back to the graves and counted the windows, *two, three, four,* until I came to the window I hoped led to Curzon's cell. The eastern sky had brightened enough for me to see all around, but the inside of the prison was dark.

I stepped up to the building. The bottom of the window was just above the top of my head. I stood on tiptoe and stretched my hands up to the bars. "Hello?" I called in a hushed voice. "Curzon? Anyone?"

The nasty fellow who had tried to steal my bucket on my first visit, Dibdin, leaned his face against the bars. He had a blanket around his shoulders and Curzon's hat upon his head. "Won't let you in no more, eh?"

"They changed the rules. Can you fetch my brother, please? Sir?"

"He's sleepin'."

I wanted to pull the bars apart, snatch the hat from his head, and thrash him with my fists and shoes, but that was impossible. I forced honey into my voice, and a humble tone. "Well, then, may I please speak to your sergeant?"

"Sarge is dead." He turned his head and spat. "I'm in charge now. I'll take the victuals you brought."

I started to reach into the bucket to hand the scones through the bars, but stopped. "How do I know my brother's not dead, too? Wake him up, please."

Dibdin opened his mouth but closed it without a word. His hunger was stronger than his temper, it seemed. He turned to someone in the cell. "Get the black boy over here."

A moment later, Curzon appeared at the window. He was shaking so badly he could barely stand, his eyes half-closed, teeth chattering. He had no blanket around him and there were puke stains on the front of his shirt. His gold earring was missing, too.

"Curzon! Curzon!" I hissed. "What ails you? What can I do?"

He did not hear me, or could not. He was insensible of his own name and where he was.

Dibdin joined Curzon at the window. "Terrible, ain't it, how fevers and pox tear through this place?"

There was hollow laughter in the cell.

"Give him his hat back," I said. "And a blanket. Is he getting his rations?"

He did not answer me. That was an answer in itself. The prison was not a place of shared hardship anymore; it was a hole of desperation.

"You bloody beast," I swore. "How dare you let him starve?" The words flew out of my mouth without pause.

"Who are you to reprimand me, girl?" he snarled, putting his face up to the bars. His breath stank of rotting teeth, and snot pooled at the edge of his nostrils. "He's a slave. He will not be treated same as free men." He wiped his nose with the back of his hand. "But you can remedy that," he said. "With ease."

I tried to keep my voice steady. "How so?"

Curzon was seized by a fit of coughing so violent I feared his ribs would crack. He choked on his spittle and fought for breath, then finally relaxed back into his stupor, leaning against the window.

Dibdin glanced back at the other men in the cell before continuing. "Our Captain Morse is on parole, lodged at the Golden Hill Tavern, we hear. Go there, tell him the men have fever and pox. One of our lads, Bridgebane, has a father in Piscataway with money and influence. If the captain can get word to him, Bridgebane's father could arrange for a proper physician to attend us here."

Curzon coughed again and moaned. Sweat glistened on his forehead.

"And the doctor would see to my brother," I said.

Dibdin hesitated, then gave a nod. "Aye."

"And he gets a blanket and food."

Dibdin said something to a man I couldn't see. A blanket appeared on Curzon's shoulders. Curzon clutched it around himself.

"And his hat." My voice was ice.

Dibdin removed the hat and placed it on Curzon's head. "Lay him down," he instructed. "On the rushes, not the bare floor."

Someone helped Curzon away from the window.

I had no choice.

I handed the jam-covered burnt scones up to the window. Dibdin stuck the first one in his mouth, then passed the others to the men who suddenly crowded the window.

"If he dies, you'll not see me again," I warned.

"Understood," he said.

I found Captain Morse carrying out rubbish for the tavern keeper. He was a well-fed man wearing the brown coat trimmed with white that signified he was a prisoner of war. There was a big gap between his front teeth, but they looked clean enough.

He joined me in the shadows of the alley and listened as I quickly explained my mission.

"I'll try to get word to Bridgebane's family tonight. It is against all the laws of war to treat prisoners so badly." He paced angrily. "How often can you stop here?"

"Every morning."

"Good. Tell Dibdin I'll see what I can do to ease their suffering, though I fear it will not be enough."

"My brother is among the prisoners," I said. "He's ill. Can you . . . ?"

"Can I see to it that he is given his share of whatever Bridgebane provides? I surely will. Your brother was calm and brave during the final battle. He's a true soldier."

The crow of a rooster interrupted him. The sun was fighting through the leaden clouds.

I picked up the buckets. "I have to hurry."

He nodded. "Thank you for your help . . . my apologies, but I do not know your name."

"I am called Sal."

"Do you carry a last name as well, Sal?"

I hesitated. According to Madam, my surname was Lockton, but it tasted foul in my mouth. I shook my head.

He smiled. "Just Sal, then. Good day to you, Just Sal."

Lucky for me the overcast morn caused the other servants to sleep past their normal time. By the time Hannah and Mary staggered up from the cellar, I had the porridge bubbling and the tea steeping.

I could not eat nor drink a thing for my belly was tied up with fear. My thoughts chased round and round my brainpan. I could not visit the prison daily. I was sure to be caught and punished. But I had to visit the prison daily. Curzon's life depended on it. But someone would see me and was sure to remember the mark on my face. Word would get back to Madam, and she would tell Colonel Hawkins and he would set someone to follow me and Captain Morse would be flogged for passing on messages and the prisoners in Curzon's cell would all be hung and buried in the pit.

When I thought what they might do to me, I ran to the necessary and had me a good puking. But the next day, I made my way up there again—food for the prisoners, water for the Locktons, and every once in a while, a message to the gap-toothed man in the brown coat at the Golden Hill Tavern.

A few nights later, there was a terrible hullabaloo between Madam and the master when he announced at supper that

he was planning to travel on the next ship to London. He would carry messages to Parliament, conduct his own business, and likely return to New York by the summer.

Madam was not pleased. First she argued that he ought not go, then she argued yes, he should go, and he should take her with him. When he refused, she threw a goblet in the fireplace and carried on so loudly that the Master and Colonel Hawkins finally called for the carriage and left for a tavern.

Madam dosed herself with strong wine after that and went to bed.

That night the temperatures fell so far below freezing that the biggest fire could not keep away the chill. I moved my pallet as close to the hearth as I dared and sat with all my clothes, my cloak, and my blanket wrapped around me. 'Twas so cold, I could not sleep. General Washington and his men were holed up in Morristown. Folks said they were in desperate need of stockings and food. I could scarce credit how hungry men with frozen feet could win a war. They were fools to even try.

I waited as the clock first chimed eleven times, then twelve, watching the firelight and trying not to ponder. When I got up to add wood to the fire, my feet wandered themselves to the pantry, and my hands pulled the loose board there. Under the board were some sheets of newsprint I had saved, the lead piece from the statue of King George, my seeds, and the book given me by the stationer. I carried the book to my warm pallet and quietly untied the twine and removed the paper wrapping.

I opened the cover. A fellow named Thomas Paine wrote the little book. He called it *Common Sense.*

Momma always said that common sense was far from common, that's why it was so special when you found it.

The first sentence in the book did not seem to contain any.

"Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness . . ."

It took four readings to figure out the meaning, which I took to be that the life of folks is different than the world what rules over them. Paine sure did dance a long time with the notion before he said it.

I closed the book and longed for Robinson Crusoe, still stranded in the study where Colonel Hawkins was asleep. I dared not rescue him.

I opened the book again and attacked the next sentence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Tuesday, December 24–Wednesday, December 25, 1776

CHRISTMAS IS COME, HANG ON THE POT,
LET SPITS TURN ROUND, AND OVENS BE HOT;
BEEF, PORK, AND POULTRY, NOW PROVIDE
TO FEAST THY NEIGHBORS AT THIS TIDE;
THEN WASH ALL DOWN WITH GOOD WINE AND BEER,
AND SO WITH MIRTH CONCLUDE THE YEAR.
—*ROYAL VIRGINIA ALMANAC*

I SPENT THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS fighting a holly bush with a pair of scissors. Madam required its twigs and berries for her decorating schemes. My morning dash to the prison, pump, and tavern had gone wonderful fast. There were no new messages to pass from Curzon's companions to Captain Morse, and the doctor secured by the rich Bridgebane family had delivered potions and bleedings to all, as promised. Curzon was spending most of his days sleeping, but he was not dead.

And it was Christmas Eve day.

The holly bits were tied with pine branches and set on the sills of the street-facing windows. Glass bowls of red berries were set on small tables in the drawing room, library, and

the front parlor. Madam had two soldiers hang a ball of mistletoe in the front hall. This provided great merriment amongst the men and some blushing on the part of their wives.

I had never seen a house decorated with tree branches to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus, but it did pretty up the place. The best was when Madam told us to hang dried rosemary throughout; that cut right through the lingering stench of boots and belchings.

In keeping with tradition, I was to have Christmas Day free from work. I pondered hard on what I should do with so many hours for myself. Christmas at home had meant eating Momma's bread pudding with maple syrup and nutmeg, and reading the Gospel of Matthew out loud whilst Ruth played in Momma's lap. I was miles away from celebrating like that. I tried to bury the remembery, but it kept floating to the top of my mind like a cork in a stormy sea, and foolish tears spilled over.

I finally decided to treat myself to a long stroll through all of New York: from the waterfront north to Chambers Street, and a side-to-side wander from the East River to the North River, which some had taken to calling the Hudson. For one day, my legs would be my own, not at the beck and call of others.

On Christmas morning, Lady Seymour presented me with a new pair of black leather shoes that did not pinch any of my toes. Madam gave the soldierwives each a coin. She gave me nothing.

When we returned home from the service at St. Paul's Chapel, Madam explained that my day off would begin

as soon as I had finished serving the midday meal. Sarah had cooked it in advance: a sirloin of beef, smoked ham, onion pie, and a plum pudding for dessert. Master and Madam both filled up on the onion pie and hardly touched the fresh-baked bread. Lady Seymour ate enough for an undersized mouse.

I et porridge and beef for my Christmas dinner, a right curious combination but a tasty one.

As I cleared away the table, Madam informed me that my day off would begin after I brought in wood and washed up the dishes. Lady Seymour fired off a cannonblast of a glare at her, but Madam pretended not to notice, and the master kept his face planted in his newspaper. There had been heat rising between the two women for days. Madam was prepared to row the aunt to Charleston to get rid of her.

After the meal, the master went to order the carriage to take them to some admiral's house for eggnog. Lady Seymour said she was going to rest and required nothing of me. As the lady limped to her chamber and the master disappeared down the stairs, I picked up the tray that held the last of the dishes. Madam poured herself another cup of tea.

"One moment, girl," she said.

I paused. "Yes, ma'am?"

Madam said nothing while she stirred the sugar into her tea. She sipped, wrinkled her nose, added another spoonful, stirred, then sipped again. She set the teacup in the saucer and examined the walnut tarts on the plate before her.

I stood like a statue holding the tray. Would she take away the rest of my day? Force me to wash the table linens or starch the master's shirts?

Madam gave her tea another stir. "You have been idling around the Bridewell prison."

My heart stopped.

She picked up a tart, considered its scorched bottom, and returned it to the plate. "My husband's aunt says that you visit the prison at her direction, bringing tablescraps not good enough for pigs. She declared that forgiving and caring for the enemy is doing the Lord's work."

My heart started up again, racing so fast I thought it might escape my body.

Madam picked up a second tart and scratched off the scorched bits with her knife before taking a bite. She chewed, sipped more tea, and swallowed. "My husband's aunt is a blithering idiot who has completely lost her wits. You should have told me of her requests at once."

She finally looked at me, her eyes cold as frozen coins. "You represent this house, girl. Your visits could put us under suspicion of having rebel tendencies. I will be not ruined by you, be it through innocence, as Aunt proclaims, or insolence, which I suspect. I forbid you to go to the prison."

My arms shook from the weight of the tray as well as her words. She could do anything: order me to the stocks, another branding, or a public whipping of hundreds of lashes. She could beat me herself. She could sell me as she had done Ruth, only place me with the cruelest master, who'd work me to death in days.

A pearl of sweat trickled down my cheek.

Madam finished the tart and wiped the corners of her mouth with her fingertip. "While my husband's aunt lives here, my hands are tied." She reached for another tart. "But she'll be soon gone, one way or another, and Elihu will be in England." She popped the entire tart into her mouth, chewed, then licked her fingers.

"That is the day you should fear, girl."

After the carriage left and dishes were washed and Lady Seymour was sound asleep, I started my free day, still trembling from Madam's threat. How could I get word to Curzon that I couldn't bring food any longer? Would Dibdin let him starve if I stopped being his messenger? What if I ignored Madam's rule and continued to visit the Bridewell?

I walked block after block pondering. I walked past the ropeworks and the brewery, to the orchards on the east side, silent under the snow. I walked past houses that had letters "G R," *George Rex*, carved into the front door, property stolen in the name of the King.

Like Madam had carved her letters into my soul, burned the mark into my skin.

She can do anything. I can do nothing.

The ashes of sadness and the buzzing bees of my melancholy all spun a storm inside of me, and I walked and walked until my new shoes rubbed blisters all over my feet and the blisters popped. I took off the shoes and walked in the snow. Once my feet were froze enough, the blisters didn't hurt.

As the sun ran for the west, rowdy songs started up in the taverns and groggeries. I found myself on the shore of the North River, just above the Battery. Empty rowboats were tied up to a wharf. As the tide pulled out to the ocean, they bobbed and bumped against each other. A few lights twinkled across the water in faraway New Jersey. I thought of all the ancestors waiting at the water's edge for their stolen children to come home. Waiting and waiting and waiting . . .

A thought surfaced through my ashes.

She cannot chain my soul.

Yes, she could hurt me. She'd already done so. But what was one more beating? A flogging, even? I would bleed, or not.

Scar, or not. Live, or not. But she could no longer harm Ruth, and she could not hurt my soul, not unless I gave it to her.

This was a new notion to me and a curious one.

A group of soldiers singing loud as they could swayed down the street, very muddy in drink. I hid in the shadows until they were gone, then headed back to Wall Street. I passed several houses filled with Christmas carols: "Joy to the World" and "I Saw Three Ships" and "The First Noel." A fat candle glowed on a parlor windowsill of a house on a corner, set there to guide someone home.

The Locktons and Lady Seymour were all retired for the night by the time I returned. The house was still empty of soldiers and their wives. I built up the fire in the hearth, set my shoes and damp stockings to dry in front of it, and rubbed a calendula salve on my blisters.

Christmas, Momma's voice reminded. *Keep Christmas.*

For the second time on the very same day, tears threatened. I rubbed them away and vowed not to cry again. 'Twas a nuisance.

I found myself studying the loaf of bread on the table. A sharp knife showed up in my hand and the loaf was soon cut into fat slices. A chipped crockery bowl appeared from the pantry, alongside the butter and eggs and milk and the sugar loaf and the nutmeg grater and the small amber flask.

I baked me a maple syrup bread pudding in the Rhode Island style.

While it cooked, I cleaned myself up good and proper. I thought about stealing a piece of Madam's rose-scented soap, but that would have made me smell like her. I preferred to smell like strong lye. I washed my arms and legs and the

back of my neck and my ears and my face and I dried myself with a soft, clean rag. I frowned as I stepped back into my clothes. I'd grown some and they didn't fit proper. I'd let out the seams of the bodice as much as I could and taken out the hem of the skirt. Much more growing and I'd look a right scandal.

But I wouldn't think on that now. I was trying to make a Christmas.

I pulled on my dry stockings and stepped into my new shoes even though they rubbed fierce on the popped blisters. I put the bowl of bread pudding into a basket, tied on my cloak, and wound up my hands in rags to keep the frost from biting.

I walked out the back door. It was not yet midnight, so in truth, 'twas still the day I could call my own. I set my path westward to the burned-over district, to Canvastown.

The line where September's fire had stopped was sharp cut. First a house with no damage, next a house still bearing black streaks of soot and smoke, then a field of ruin, with makeshift hovels crafted from tent, brick, and scorched timbers. Rats nibbled on frozen garbage heaps. The smell of the fire still lingered, tainted with the smell of filth and decay.

But in the bleakness, there were spots of hope. A wreath was stuck on the front of a tent. Children's clothes hung from a clothesline, stiff with ice, but still sweet-looking. A butter churn stood watch over a neat stack of fresh-split wood. Smoke swirled slow from the top of a chimney, dipped at the roof line, then rose up to the stars.

I lifted my face to the sky and for the first time in much too long, I prayed. I prayed as hard as I could, without words or shapes or fancy talking. I just prayed. When I was done, I felt cleaner than I had after my bath.

I walked on until I found a hut built against a lone brick

wall. From inside came sounds of a family, the poppa's low rumble, the momma's bright laugh, and giggling children who had been allowed to stay up much too late and who did not want to fall asleep.

I greeted them through the piece of canvas that served as their front door. The hovel fell silent, then the canvas was pushed aside and the father stepped out, a musket in his hand. His wife came right behind him, though he told her to stay inside.

It took some convincing to explain my mission, but I spoke polite and firm and held out the bread pudding, and the children snuck out in their nightclothes and just about dove into the bowl. The mother took the basket and said "Thank you" and then "Thank you, again," and then "Thank you most, most kindly," and they went back inside.

I hummed a carol as I walked away, finally feeling at peace.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Thursday, December 26–Tuesday, December 31, 1776

IN THE ARMY AT PRESENT, MERIT IS MEASURED ONLY BY RANK. THOSE WHO ARE HIGH IN RANK ARE CLEVER FELLOWS. THE LOW ARE SMALL FOLKS—AND THOSE WHO HAVE NONE AT ALL, LIKE US, ARE POOR DEVILS—WE ARE NOBODYS. WE HAVE NOTHING.
—SAMUEL TENNY WRITING TO HIS FRIEND PETER TURNER, ABOUT HIS FRUSTRATION WITH THE PRIVILEGES OF OFFICERS

TWO DAYS LATER SARAH HAD ME go with her to the fish market. Her back was hurting her fierce, and I was to carry the cod and halibut needed for a fish chowder. The market was crowded with folk whose cupboards had been cleaned out by the Christmas feasting, and Sarah muttered rude things. Her growing discomfort had put her in a constant temper.

The cod was easy enough to purchase, but stall after stall turned up no halibut. Sarah insisted that haddock or catfish would not do, so we marched on. The air was thick with the cries of the stall owners promising the juiciest fish, the freshest fish, and fish fit for the King himself.

Before dawn I had made the trip to the Tea Water Pump, but I had not dared visit the prison or Captain Morse's tavern. I

was still confuddled about what to do. My thoughts wandered. I did not realize that Sarah had moved ahead of me in the crowd until a great shout went up. An oyster seller's cart had overturned in front of the carp stall, and the two men were hollering at each other. The crowd halted and I had no place to turn. Sarah's white cloth cap bobbed away in the distance as I looked for a path out of the crowd, but bodies pushed in from all sides to watch the two men arguing.

When a hand grabbed my arm, I gasped.

"Apologies, Just Sal," Captain Morse said as he released me. His eyes were tired, but his cheeks were flushed.

My mouth gaped open like that of a fish breathing its last. I shook my head. He couldn't talk to me in view of all! There was no mistaking what he was, dressed in that brown-and-white coat. I turned first one way, then the other, but bodies were packed around me tight as could be.

Morse kept his eyes on the arguing men but leaned his face close enough to mine that I could hear him whisper, "We must talk."

Sarah had realized I was no longer with her. Her cap stopped, then slowly started back toward us. Her husband was a British gunner. If she saw me talking to a rebel officer . . .

"Go away," I muttered.

"I have news for my men."

The oyster seller picked up a carp and shook it in the other man's face. The crowd laughed. Sarah plowed toward me.

"I beg you," Morse whispered. "Please."

Soldiers appeared on the edge of the crowd to restore order.

"Come up to the tavern."

"Yes, yes," I told the captain. "I'll come this afternoon. Now go away!"

The crowd melted under the eyes of the armed soldiers. The carp seller was explaining the ruckus to a sergeant while the oyster seller reloaded his cart. Sarah kicked oysters out of her way as she approached.

"Where in the name of all that's holy did you get to?" she asked.

"I was trapped in the crowd," I said. "I called but you could not hear me."

She grunted and handed me a small fish with glassy eyes. "This will have to do. Halibut is rare as hen's teeth today."

I settled it in the basket atop the fat cod and followed Sarah as she headed away from the market. We walked in silence for a few blocks, her concentrating on her huffing and puffing, me trying to figure if I dared go up to the tavern. The sky promised more snow. How long would Dibdin wait before reclaiming Curzon's hat and blanket?

We crossed the street. "Miss Sarah, ma'am?" I asked, sweet as honey.

"What is it?"

I chose my words with care. "Has Madam Lockton said anything about me, in your hearing?"

She tilted her head a bit as she looked at me. "Aye, this morn, matter of fact. Said you wasn't allowed to go to that blasted water pump. Said I should send one of the other girls, even tho' the sun not be up at that time of day, even tho' the streets be covered in ice."

Sarah reached for my elbow as we trod upon a slick patch of cobblestones.

"But I like getting out," I said. "And I don't mind the chore."

We reached a stretch where ashes had been thrown onto

the ice and the going was safer. "I don't answer to her," Sarah said as she released my arm. "I answer to the King's army. I'd be right pleased if you kept fetching the water. Makes my life easier."

She stopped and put her hands on her back, breathing heavily. Her baby belly was so big she could have loaded it in a wheelbarrow and pushed it in front of her. She caught me studying her and gave a quick smile.

"The babe will come soon," she said.

"It'll be a joyous day," I said. "I'll keep getting the water, but . . ."

"But what?"

"Could you please not tell Madam?"

Sarah stretched to one side and winced. "What she don't know won't hurt her. It's not like she's up at that hour anyways."

After the midday meal, I contrived to overturn the pitcher that held the tea water, dumping it on the floor.

"Clumsy dolt," Hannah scolded as I knelt to clean the floor with rags.

"Don't be looking at me to trudge up there and get more for Her High Mightiness," Mary said from her chair by the window. She squinted and sewed another stitch. "I've got to hem these breeches before the light fades."

"I'll run up and fetch it," I said. "Double-time, I promise."

Sarah gave me a good hard stare, sensing she did not have the entire picture before her.

"It's your neck," she finally said. "Mind she don't see you leave."

I near ran up to the Golden Hill Tavern, my raw blisters hurting with every step. Captain Morse was idling on the porch, smoking a pipe. He disappeared inside when he saw me and was waiting in the alley when I reached it.

"Here," he handed me a loaf of bread.

"You made me come up here for this?" I asked.

"Take it to Dibdin," he said, fighting a smile. "There's a note baked inside."

"A note?"

"It contains wondrous news." He looked ready to jump out of his skin. "Washington has beaten them!"

"Sir?"

He clenched his fists and unclenched them. "On Christmas night the general led a surprise attack on Trenton. He beat the Hessians–killed a handful and took more than nine hundred prisoner."

"Are you sure?" I thought someone told him a falsehood. The British officers I knew were confident the American army was fallen apart.

"Positively," he said with a grin.

"But won't that make the British mad?" I asked.

"I truly hope so. I hope the King is so upset he jumps up and down on his crown. This war is not over, not by a long shot."

I handed the bread back. "I'll tell them the news, but I cannot pass a note. That could land me in jail."

He shoved the loaf back at me. "You are a serving girl delivering a tavern loaf to the starving prisoners. You don't know about the note."

"But why is it necessary?"

"The men need to see my signature to know this is truth.

They have endured so much, Sal. Don't deprive them of this chance to celebrate. It will strengthen their spirits."

I pulled up the hood of my cloak to hide my face as I approached the prison. The Commons was filled with drilling soldiers, much more than usual. Their officers barked commands with urgency, the men marched grim faced, swords flapping against their legs, rifles bouncing on their shoulders. Perhaps the captain's news was indeed the truth.

I hurried behind the building to the right window. I stood on tiptoe and squished the loaf through the bars.

Dibdin's face appeared at the window.

"There's a note inside," I whispered. "Tear into it carefully." I ran away before he could answer, willing my feet to move faster.

I had walked a block south when an enormous roar erupted from the prison—hundreds of throats cheering, hooting, hollering; hundreds of hands clapping and feet stomping with joy. The noise was such that folks stopped what they were doing and ran out of doors to stare.

The news spread from the prison as fast as it had spread from cell to cell: The rebels had attacked instead of running. The rebels had advanced instead of retreating. The rebels had won a battle.

Folks could scarce credit it.

CHAPTER XL

Wednesday, January 1–Tuesday, January 7, 1777

IT IS WITH MUCH CONCERN THAT I AM TO INFORM YOUR LORDSHIP THE UNFORTUNATE AND UNTIMELY DEFEAT AT TRENTON HAS THROWN US FURTHER BACK, THAN WAS AT FIRST APPREHENDED, FROM THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN TO THE REBELS.
–BRITISH GENERAL WILLIAM HOWE WRITING TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AMERICAN COLONIES AFTER THE AMERICAN VICTORY AT TRENTON

JUST AFTER THE NEW YEAR CAME word of another shocking victory for the rebels, this one at Princeton in New Jersey. Washington's troops chased the British from the battlefield, killed a passel of them, and took a couple of hundred prisoners. Folks could scarce credit this, neither. Colonel Hawkins let out a roar in the study when the news was delivered and hit the unfortunate messenger on the head with a rolled-up map. Then he called for his horse and galloped off to headquarters.

Within a day, the British promised boiled peas and rice with butter twice a week for their American prisoners. But they still did not allow fires in the Bridewell cells. The men had to eat their meat raw. Their chamber pots froze solid at night.

The master's trip to London was moved up so that he could deliver news of the setbacks to the Parliament and King. Madam had finally accommodated herself to the notion of his voyage and had found a way to turn it to her advantage. Whilst we prepared Lockton's clothes for the journey, she wrote out long lists of items she wanted him to buy in England.

I kept to the kitchen and cellar and woodpile when she was awake, but made my trips up island each day before dawn, looking over my shoulder at every sound, choosing a different path daily. The constant worry et a hole in my belly. Curzon was stronger and told me not to fret, for he was not coughing up blood and his bowels were in fine working order. But he always asked me to come back on the morrow.

The day of the master's departure, I roused myself extra early on account of I feared Madam might do the same. I deposited stale rolls and burnt hunks of pork on the windowsill of Curzon's cell, then crossed the Commons on my way to the pump. There were a few folk out on their own early-morning errands, all bundled in cloaks and blanket coats and shawls and scarves wrapped high.

"You there!" a loud voice called out. Everyone stopped to look. "You there, girl!"

Oh, no.

A British soldier hurried toward me. I relaxed some when I saw his face. It was the mountain-sized guard who had let me visit Curzon's cell when he was first imprisoned. The one who liked to eat.

"Haven't seen you round," he said as he neared me.

I bobbed quickly. "The rules don't allow civilians in the cells."

He lowered his rifle to the ground and eyed my bucket. "True enough. Wot you bring him today?"

"Bread crusts and burnt meat, sir."

He wrinkled his nose. "Wot about yesterday?"

"Yesterday was kidney pie and stale almond cake, sir."

He shook his head and licked his lips. "Sorry I missed that, I am. Wouldn't hurt to drop off a bite now and then to one such as myself, would it?"

"No, sir," I answered. "I shall remember that."

He tilted his head to the side. "Your master ever hire you out?"

'Twas common in those days for folks to hire out their slaves to make money. The slaves did not see the money, of course. But if I had the chance to work away from the prying eyes of Madam, I'd be grateful for it.

"Yes, sir," I lied.

"We need a maid to clean out the cells. Dying men do puke out some terrible things, they do. You're a steadfast girl. Tell your mistress we'd pay her the going rate for your services."

"I shall tell her, sir."

He shouldered his rifle. "I'm on the night watch now. The name is Fisher. Bring me round some cake, and I'll keep an eye on your brother."

"Thank you, Mister Fisher, sir. I shall."

"No kidney pie, tho'. Kidneys sour my gut somefink terrible."

The master left for London with much muttering on the part of his wife. She did not take to her bed as I expected but was driven round to the home of Missus Taylor to play cards and, no doubt, complain about her husband.

While she was gone, Sarah birthed her baby boy in the

cellar. I was sore tempted to sneak down the stairs and watch. I'd seen kittens and calves come into the world but not babies. I had a powerful curiosity about it, but I dared not. I kept water boiling for the midwife and stuck cloth in my ears to keep out the noise.

When Sarah stopped hollering, I crept down the stairs to see the babe. He was a round-headed fat fellow with big eyes and bigger ears. "George," Sarah called him.

"You named him after the King?" Hannah asked.

"Perhaps," Sarah said cheerfully. "We never figured the colonists would hold on this long. My man was saying the other night that mebbe the King should stop the war. Mebbe the babe and us might stay here, not sail home. 'Plenty of room here,' he said." She kissed the baby's nose. "A name like George is a good one on either side of the ocean."

"Shhh!" warned Mary.

The next day, Sarah and her George moved to a house set aside for new mothers attached to the army. I was sad to see them go, for I had wanted to hold the little one and make him laugh.

Lady Seymour wanted to hear all of the details about the new baby. I thought maybe I could visit Sarah and ask her to bring the little lad by. Something about a baby always brings old folks back to life.

When I mentioned this notion to the Lady, she just shook her head.

"Not until this pestilence has left my lungs." She coughed into a stained handkerchief. "Heaven knows when that will be."

Her health was changeable and flighty. One day she'd feel

strong and lively and she'd eat three meals and drink a gallon of tea; the next she'd lie abed with fever, looking so poorly it tempted Madam to order the coffin made.

I went to place another log on the fire. Lady Seymour was lying propped up on pillows in her bed. She shook her head. "No more wood, I am warm enough. Please sit down, Isabel."

"Ma'am?"

"I would like you to sit down, either in the chair or on the edge of the bed. I should like to talk to you."

It was improper for a servant to sit with a lady as tho' they were companions, but she asked me direct, so I sat myself in the chair that was close to the fire. I could not figure what we needed to conversate on. She hadn't sent me for a newspaper or sweets for days and days. Had I displeased her?

"Thank you." She sat back and used her right hand to place her left hand in her lap. "I will soon meet my Maker, Isabel. I am a sinner in need of forgiveness."

I relaxed. 'Twas the pull of Death that made old people go funny. Miss Mary Finch went the same way toward the end. Clouds would roll into her eyes, and she would talk nonsense for hours. Me and Ruth just sat polite and listened. The trick with addled old folks was to be agreeable.

"We all seek forgiveness, Lady Seymour."

"I wanted to buy you," she said.

I wasn't sure I heard that right. "Beg pardon, ma'am?"

"I tried to buy you from Anne after I first met you. She refused and we argued like a pair of fishwives. I rather lost my temper." She chuckled. "Hadn't done that for thirty years."

I knew not what to say.

She studied her useless hand. "When Elihu returned from exile, I should have demanded you be placed in my household. I was horrified by your treatment. And, of course, your poor sister. But then the fire . . ." Her gaze returned to the hearth. "I regret I did not force the matter. You would have suited my household."

It would have eased her mind if I thanked her for wanting to buy me away from Madam. I tried to be grateful but could not. A body does not like being bought and sold like a basket of eggs, even if the person who cracks the shells is kind.

"Isabel?"

She awaited some word from me. I did not know how to explain myself. It was like talking to her maid, Angelika, who was so much like me and at the same time so much different. We two had no string of words that could tie us together.

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you for telling me this." That was all I could muster.

"Forgive me," she said. "I am a clumsy old woman."

There was a shout from the drawing room upstairs, where Colonel Hawkins and his men had been meeting. I stood. "The soldierwives are all visiting Sarah . . . I should . . ."

"Go on," she said, closing her eyes.

Colonel Hawkins was in a right foul mood on account of all the forms he had to fill out and reports that were late. The war seemed fought with as much paper as bullets, what with the letters and the passes and permissions piled on the table, orders received and recorded, recordings of conferences noted down.

When I entered, he hollered that the room was colder than a barn and called me all manner of rude names.

I chose the wood for his fire very carefully, the greenest, dampest logs in the entire woodpile, guaranteed to smolder and sputter without giving off any heat and even less light. After a frigid hour, he left for headquarters. It took all my might not to crack a smile.

The grandfather clock ticked off the minutes.

Madam would not return home for a goodly while. She was a terrible card player, but she had loads of money to lose, so her companions would keep her at the faro table as long as possible. I peeked in Lady Seymour's door. She was wrapped up in her coverlet and sleeping; the blankets barely moved when she took breath.

I pulled out *Common Sense* from its hiding place and read by firelight. In truth, there were some pages that I jumped over for I found it hard to figure their meaning. But I gathered many of his thoughts: Americans had good cause to overthrow their British masters, a person born to wealth was not born to rule over others, and 'twas good and proper to fight injustice.

I kept the mending basket close to hand in case I needed to hide my crime.

CHAPTER XLI

Tuesday, January 7–
Wednesday, January 15, 1777

IT IS NOT IN THE POWER OF THE SMILES OR FROWNS OF HER MAJESTY TO AFFECT ME EITHER BY CONFERRING PLEASURE OR GIVEING PAIN—I WAS WHOLY INCAPABLE OF TAKEING THE PLACE SHE SEEMED TO ASSIGN ME WHEN I WAS PRESENTED TO HER. I SUPPOSE SHE ASSENTED TO THE ASSERTIONS . . . THAT THERE WERE NO PEOPLE WHO HAD SO MUCH IMPUDENCE AS THE AMERICANS—FOR THERE WAS NOT ANY PEOPLE BRED EVEN AT COURTS WHO HAD SO MUCH CONFIDENCE AS THE AMERICANS—THIS WAS BECAUSE THEY DID NOT TREMBLE, CRINGE, AND FEAR, IN THE PRESENCE OF MAJESTY.
—NABBY ADAMS, DAUGHTER OF ABIGAIL AND JOHN ADAMS, ON MEETING QUEEN CHARLOTTE OF ENGLAND

WHEN MADAM WOKE THE NEXT MORN, her first command was for hot scones. Her second was that the seamstress must be fetched immediately. The British commandant was throwing a ball in honor of Queen Charlotte's birthday in ten days' time. Madam required a new gown for such an occasion. Perhaps two.

I learnt of all this when I returned from the market with a fresh-killt chicken. Hannah, who had taken over the bosslady job from Sarah after the baby was born, was

preparing a cherry pie. Mary sat by the window, mending one of Madam's skirts.

The notion of a ball for a queen confuddled me. "That's a long voyage for a celebration," I said.

Hannah laughed. "No, you ninny. The Queen isn't coming. How could she? She's got ten children to take care of, plus all them castles."

"Eleven," added Mary. "She popped out a new one last spring."

"Even tho' the Queen can't come, the officers always hold a ball in her honor," Hannah said as she rolled out the pie dough. "Gives them a good excuse to eat too much, drink too much, and make proper fools of themselves whilst dancing."

I pulled out the feather bag and a basin. "And Madam Lockton is attending?"

"The colonel will be her escort." Mary bit her thread in two. "All the rich folk will be there."

I ripped a handful of feathers from the chicken and stuffed them in the bag. "Does Madam require anything of us?"

"Not yet," Hannah said, carefully laying the dough in the pie plate. "That will change, no doubt."

"I seen the Queen Herself, you know," Mary said, squinting at her stitches.

"With your own eyes?" asked Hannah. "I don't believe you."

"Well, I seen her carriage and she was in it. The backside of the carriage, mind . . . actually the backside of the troops guarding the backside of the carriage. But I saw the wheels. Bent down to do it." She threaded another needle. "Bet you don't know her name."

"Her Majesty," said Hannah.

"Proves you're not a Londoner," Mary said. "Her proper name is Her Majesty, Queen Charlotte of Great Britain, Dutchess Sophia Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz."

"How do you remember all them names when you can't remember from one minute to the next how much salt goes into the biscuits?" asked Hannah.

"Biscuits are not as important as the Queen. I practiced her name from the time I was a girl, case the day ever come when she saw me on the street and I could call out her entire gracious name. If I did that, her carriage would stop and she'd make me a lady-in-waiting on account of my good manners."

There was a moment of silence while the two women considered this, then a loud outburst as they near fell over themselves in laughter.

After dinner, Lady Seymour had a frightful seizure of the apoplexy. Looked just like one of Ruth's fits, except not with so much shaking. She fell into a sleep so deep I thought she was stone dead, but every so often she'd take a breath and once, she opened her eyes.

When she woke the next morning, she could not speak nor move her legs. Doctor Dastuge arrived and bled her and stuck pins in her limbs and gave her a bitter tea. In truth, there was nothing could make her better. I was told to tend her again, as I had right after the fire. I fed her and held the teacup to her lips and wiped her chin when she dribbled and helped her with the chamber pot business. This last was most distressing for her, and she cried. Then I wiped the tears from her face.

I heard Madam ask the doctor plain when the old lady would die. The doctor could not answer her.

I figured Madam wanted Lady Seymour to die as soon as possible, but not before the Queen's ball. If the house was in mourning, it wouldn't be proper for Madam to dance with the admiral and make merry.

A week before the ball, Madam ordered that Lady Seymour be moved to the parlor bedchamber downstairs so she could reclaim the largest bedchamber for herself. After two privates had carried the Lady down, and she was propped up on her pillows so she could look out the window, Madam called me upstairs.

"I want this room aired and the linens boiled, girl. It smells of decay in here."

The work of the day was simple and heavy: strip the bed, haul down the linens for to wash, clean out the hearth, open the windows and wash them inside and out, take the rugs down and beat them in the yard, sweep and mop the floor, take the rugs back in, close the windows, and give all the wood a polish.

When the chamber was clean, Madam told me to open the windows again and let them stand open all afternoon to make sure there was no lingering pestilence in the air.

I did as I was told. The doctor came right before supper and gave Lady Seymour a potion that would make the night pass quickly for her.

When she was ready for bed, Madam called for me to bring up a warming pan filled with coals and run it between the sheets because they were chilled and still a wee bit damp.

I did what she asked, then returned to the kitchen, dumped the coals in the hearth, and crept under my own blanket.

She called for me again. The sheets were still too cold for her liking.

I refilled the warming pan, carried it up the stairs, and warmed her bed. Then I stoked the fire in her hearth before returning down the stairs.

The third time she called for me, I was sore tempted to dump the glowing coals onto her bed, let it blaze, and ask if that was warm enough. But I did not. I performed the task she gave me. And when she called a quarter hour later, I did it again.

The sun rose bright the next day, catching in the icicles that hung from the eaves and jumping off the snow like a mirror. The linens pegged out on the line were froze stiff as wood and covered in a lacework of ice. The clouds scuttled away and the sun blazed, turning the yard into a garden of jewels.

Ruth would love this. If we were free and at home in Rhode Island and these were our sheets and our laundry lines and our snow, she'd dance like an angel.

The pictures in my brainpan caught me by surprise. I could not clear them away. She'd clap her hands at the sight of the frozen laundry, she'd twirl in the spinning swirls of snow that lifted in the breeze, she'd plunge her hands into the bushes to pluck off the diamonds. She would do all these things and laugh and . . .

The wind tossed a handful of snow in my face and washed it all away.

Ruth would not see this. Never.

I dried my face. Why was I thinking of Ruth? I'd worked hard to pack her away from my mind, along with the thoughts of Momma and Poppa and the life Ruth and I were promised. Didn't help to ponder things that were forever

gone. It only made a body restless and fill up with bees all wanting to sting something.

I kicked at the new snow. It rose up, a sparkling diamond breeze fit for a queen.

'Twas Lady Seymour who did it. Her with her begging forgiveness for not buying me and telling me I'd have been a good slave for her. Her with her wet eyes and skeleton hands. Did she never think about setting me free? That would be a fine question to ask. 'Course, there was no sense to asking it because her mouth didn't work anymore.

I carried the big laundry basket out to the sheets. I'd have to hang them in the kitchen else they wouldn't dry till spring.

Another picture hung itself in my mind, the poetry book in the stationer's shop. The one I'd been afraid to read. Miss Phillis Wheatley went free when her master released her. 'Twas on account of her fame, Momma said. Master Wheatley looked the fool for keeping a poetical genius enslaved in his household.

I'd heard of other slaves who bought their freedom, folks who were given their Sunday afternoons to work for themselves, who saved their pennies and farthings for years and years until they had piled up the hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds to buy their body and soul from their master. If I had Sunday afternoons free, I'd figure a way to earn my pennies. I could sew or hire out to scrub stables. I'd even clean the cells of the Bridewell, like that guard asked.

I took a long stick from the pile of kindling wood.

It would never happen. Madam would not allow it.

She was set on keeping my arms and legs dancing to her tune and my soul bound in her chains.

I pulled the stick back and cracked it against the side of the frozen bed linen. The ice shattered and fell to the ground, tinkling like pieces of falling stars.

CHAPTER XLII

Thursday, January 16–Saturday, January 18, 1777

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.
–DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DOCTOR DASTUGE VISITED LADY Seymour each morning and eve. She could nod her head yes and shake it no to his questions; yes, she knew who she was; no, she had no sensation in her feet nor her hands. She could barely chew milk-soaked bread and sip broth. Her mind had not gone soft, tho'. Her eyes blazed bright in her skull and followed me as I moved around the room, and when the doctor and Madam talked, she listened in right close. Plainly said, she was as much a prisoner in her broken body as Curzon was in his cell.

Madam's seamstress came near as frequent as the doctor. The birthday ball gown had a scarlet red underskirt topped with a short gown of Royal Navy blue, embroidered with gold. The hairdresser and Madam spent hours consulting

prints of fashionable ladies in Paris so that they could design a suitable hairstyle. I was not privy to the details, but I heard Madam talking about jewels made of paste that would sit in her curls. She also wanted a small British flag to fly atop her locks, but the hairdresser talked her out of it.

Hannah and Mary talked about the ball every waking minute. I'm sure even the Queen herself would have grown tired of hearing about it. At noon, the guns at the Battery, which the British had taken to calling Fort George, would fire a royal salute. An hour later, the warships in the harbor would blast a response. At six o'clock, the guests would arrive at the ball, with trumpets playing and drums beating a welcome. The dancing would last until midnight, when the fireworks would explode over the harbor. After that, the banquet would begin.

There was no way under heaven that Madam would survive six hours of dancing without having something to eat.

I finished reading *Common Sense* the night before the ball. The bookseller was right; the words were dangerous, every one of them. I ought throw it in the fire but could not bring myself to do it. Mr. Paine knew how to stir up the pot; he went right after the King and attacked the crown on his head.

I laid down one long road of a sentence in my remembery: "For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever." Way I saw it, Mr. Paine was saying all people were the same, that no one deserved a crown or was born to be higher than another. That's why America could make its own freedom.

'Twas a wonder the book did not explode into flames in my hands.

I buried it back in its hidey-hole and laid myself down to sleep.

My eyes would not close. My thoughts were churned up like muddy water, with dangerous eels thrashing through it.

If an entire nation could seek its freedom, why not a girl? And if a girl was to seek her freedom, how could she do such a fool-headed thing? Especially a girl trapped in New York? Best thing would be to break into the desk of a British commander, steal a pass and forge her name and his name on it, and act free.

And pigs were likely to fly, too.

Plus, that girl seeking freedom would have to walk.

She could walk the mile from Wall Street to the north edge of the city. But then she'd run into the guards stationed there. She'd have to sneak past them and not get shot. Then she'd have eleven miles of running to the north edge of the island. If she took the Greenwich Road or the Post Road, she'd likely be captured by one in need of a slave or in need of the reward paid for a healthy runaway. If she stuck to the woods that ran up the center of the island, she could be et by a bear or drowned in a swamp. If angels guided her safe through the woods and she made the north edge, she'd have to get past the guards watching over King's Bridge, where New York Island touched the rest of America.

I rolled over, my back to the fire. That girl could more likely grab hold of the feet of a passing crow and bid him fly her to safety. Better yet, sprout her own wings.

The only path left was across the water. A girl like that could not swim and did not own a boat, not to mention the river currents were fast and the crossing would be noted

by someone who would raise a ruckus and then the soldiers would line up like a firing squad and shoot that girl dead in the water. They wouldn't even bury her proper, just let the water take the boat and the body and both would be consumed by sea monsters.

I fell asleep cursing them that planted the city of New York on an island.

My dawn visits up the Commons had become the most ordinary of errands. Madam never woke early enough to note my absence, and the soldierwives were so grateful to avoid the chore, they never told. Curzon had grown terrible thin and was still feverish, but his leg had healed up, and he greeted me at the window every day. After I left the prison, I'd fetch the water and head back to Wall Street, passing by the Golden Hill Tavern in case Captain Morse needed me, which he never, ever did.

So when the captain signaled me from the tavern porch the next morning, I was surprised. I had not seen him for weeks, not since the news of the rebel victory at Trenton.

"Good day, Just Sal," he said with a sleepy smile. "How do you fare?"

"Good enough, sir," I said. "Is something amiss?"

He winced and pulled his coat tighter. "Nothing grave, no news of battle or a prisoner exchange."

I waited while he sought the words.

"I'm in need of a favor," he finally said. "It's of no worldly import, but it is a matter of honor for me."

"Sir?"

"I must repay a debt, Just Sal. I wagered Captain William Farrar that the British would not dare hold this ridiculous

birthday celebration. It's a slap in the face to the people who are starving."

"Yes, sir."

He frowned and kicked at a stone poking up from the half-frozen mud. "But I'm proven wrong, aren't I? Thousands of pounds are being wasted and so I owe my friend, Captain Farrar, a penny. A gentleman always pays his debts promptly, be they large or small."

I was confuddled. "And you want that I should . . ."

He threw up his hands in frustration. "The British have confined all American officers to their lodging houses today."

"Why?"

"They fear we might mount an insurrection while they are dancing minuets and gorging on stuffed goose. They have a point; the ball would provide the perfect cover for a surprise attack if Washington were nearby. So I am prevented from making good on my bet to William, and he is prevented from coming round to collect his due. 'Tis a small matter of honor, to be sure, but when in reduced circumstances, these things take on greater weight, don't you think?"

Still confuddled, I nodded my head. "Yes, sir."

"Good! Then you'll do it!"

"Do what?"

"Take the penny to William with my salutations. It will give him a good laugh. He lives on Chapel Street, a house with red shutters on the corner of Warren. Say you'll do it for me, Just Sal, and the next penny I earn goes into your pocket, upon my word."

Madam would be wig-deep in preparations for the ball all day. The soldierwives would too, for they belonged to the army of servants who would work at the birthday dinner. Lady Seymour required only a warm fire and occasional

help with the teacup. A walk up to Warren Street on a sunny day such as this would be most welcome.

"Happy to help, Captain," I said.

The roar of cannon shook the kitchen just after midday and made me near jump out of my skin. I dropped the turnip I was peeling and it rolled across the floor.

"What was that?" I asked, clutching the table. "Are we under attack?"

Hannah laughed and used the poker to push the logs to the back of the hearth. "No, you goose. That's the royal salute for Her Majesty."

Mary pressed the hot iron against the apron on the table. "Do you figure they might need us early?"

"The major said five o'clock," Hannah said. "Gives us time to finish up here."

"Will you get to see the dancing?" I asked.

"Nah," Mary said. "They'll be too busy running us ragged setting up the dinner. But they've promised to feed us good." She picked up the apron and studied it for wrinkles. "I wish my mother could see this; me, serving at a Queen's Birthday Ball."

"Too bad your mother is on the other side of the globe with Her Majesty," Hannah said.

"They'll both be tragical late to the party." Mary giggled.

Madam sent a note to her friend Jane Drinkwater, who agreed to bring her collection of necklaces and the latest gossip to tea. The news caused Madam to send the soldierwives

pawing through the attic for a gown she had not worn yet this year. Hannah sent me to fetch more water, which I did with great pleasure and a short detour.

The houses on Warren Street were a mix; some were modest, two or three were rather grand, with arches over the windows and fancy boot scrapers by the front door. The trees and fences in the neighborhood had all been cut down for firewood. It made the corner of Warren and Chapel looked underdressed.

I went round the back of the house with the red shutters, knocked on the door, and explained my errand to a maid, who fetched Captain Farrar for me, a horse-faced man with an easy laugh.

"Good Captain Morse is indeed a gentleman," he said as I presented him with the coin. "And you're the girl who carries messages to his men in Bridewell?"

"Yes, sir."

"My lads are locked up in the old sugarhouse," he said, his smile fading. "The ones still alive." He stood there caught up in silence and his own thoughts.

I tried to think of a polite way to take my leave but could not find the proper words. The breeze came from the south and carried a salt tang with it. Although snow lay about and everyone was wrapped deep in their clothing, the appearance of the clouds made a body know deep down that spring was stirring.

"Yes, sir," I finally said. "Begging pardon, but I must be on my way."

"Of course, of course," he said, his eyes still distant.

I walked down the path to Warren Street and stopped

when I heard him call me. "Sal, wait there a moment!"

I stood a while longer, watching the clouds and scolding myself for mixing in with the affairs of gentlemen and their honor. Several carriages containing bundled-up ladies and serious-looking officers passed along the street, pulled by shaggy-coated horses. Most folks took no more notice of me than they would a cartman selling oysters or a vagabond from Canvastown.

Just as I set my mind to leave, Captain Farrar came back out. "Give this to Morse, please," he said as he handed me the note. "He'll know what to do."

I studied the folded paper and made bold. "Another wager, sir?"

Another carriage passed on the street, the horses clip-clopping slow.

He shook his head, the laughter gone from his eyes. "No, news from headquarters. Don't tarry with it." He touched his fingertips to the brim of his cap.

I bobbed a curtsy and took my leave, hurrying toward the Tea Water Pump. I should have known I'd be pressed into more message carrying. These soldier types were forever scheming up one thing or another. And it put a girl like me in a rough spot, not that they ever thought about that. I didn't ask to ferry messages across the city for some captain I didn't know. How was that connected to my deal with Dibdin to treat Curzon proper? It wasn't, not one bit.

The good Captains Morse and Farrar would just have to wait till it suited me for this last message to be delivered. If I didn't get back soon, I'd be in for it.

I pushed through the backdoor to the Lockton kitchen, still fussing about selfish captains who only thought of their

own skins. When Curzon got out, he'd have a debt of honor the size of a whale to me. I'd make that boy–

I set down the water buckets, removed my cloak, and hung it from a peg near the fire. I stood rubbing my hands together and warming them over the flames. As soon as I could move them, I'd boil up the water.

The door from the front hall slammed open.

"There you are." The words came at me like shards of glass.

I turned. 'Twas Madam Lockton holding a small riding crop in her hand.

"Ma'am?"

She crossed the room and slashed the crop across my face. It hurt fierce, but I knew not to cry out.

"How dare you?" she spat.

CHAPTER XLIII

Saturday, January 18, 1777

THAT EVEN A FAILURE CANNOT BE MORE FATAL THAN TO REMAIN IN OUR PRESENT SITUATION IN SHORT SOME ENTERPRIZE MUST BE UNDERTAKEN IN OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES OR WE MUST GIVE UP THE CAUSE . . . OUR AFFAIRS ARE HASTENING FAST TO RUIN IF WE DO NOT RETRIEVE THEM BY SOME HAPPY EVENT. DELAY WITH US IS NOW EQUAL TO A TOTAL DEFEAT.
—COLONEL JOSEPH REED IN A LETTER TO GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON

"PLEASE, MA'AM—" I STARTED.

"Silence!" She cracked the crop across my shoulder.

The back door opened and Hannah entered. "Oh, 'scuse me," she said, turning to leave again.

"Stay," Madam ordered.

Hannah let the door close and murmured, "Yes, Madam," her eyes stealing once to me, then quickly away.

I fought the urge to run for the knife drawer.

Madam paced in front of me. "I have never in my entire life been so humiliated." She paused and put on a mimic-face. "I saw your little black girl talking to a rebel officer on Warren Street. Do you allow your slaves to consort with the enemy?"

I could not swallow nor breathe.

She brought the crop down with a crack on the edge of the table. "Jane Drinkwater said this to me. Jane Drinkwater, the biggest gossip in New York." Madam paced again, her hair flying loose, her manner quite unsteady. "I said no, Jane, you must be mistaken, not our Sal. Colonel Hawkins himself uses her for errands."

She stopped suddenly. "And Jane says, 'No, Anne, your girl was speaking to a rebel prisoner on Warren Street. It's hard to miss the mark on her face. From my carriage I saw her take a note from his hand.'"

I opened my mouth to protest, but she slashed at me again. This time the blow opened a cut on my forehead.

"Give me that note," Madam demanded.

"I have no note, ma'am," I said quiet.

She held out her hand. "Liar! Give me that paper or I'll turn you over to the British commander so fast your fool head will spin."

Her voice shook with rage. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the folded note.

Madam looked over to Hannah. "See? You just need to be firm with them."

Hannah said nothing. A drop of blood rolled down the side of my face. I clutched the note in my fist.

"Give it." Madam narrowed her eyes. "Did you hear me, girl?"

Everybody carried a little evil in them, Momma once told me. Madam Lockton had more than her share. The poison had eaten holes through her soul and made room for vermin to nest inside her.

"Girl!" Madam stamped her foot on the floor.

The evil inside of me woke and crackled like lightning. I could wrap my hands around her throat. I could brain her

with a poker, thrust her face into the flames. I could beat her senseless with my fists.

I shook from the effort of holding myself still, clutching the crumpled paper. Momma said we had to fight the evil inside us by overcoming it with goodness. She said it was a hard thing to do, but it made us worthy.

I breathed deep to steady myself.

I threw the Captain's note into the fire.

Hannah gasped. Madam shrieked and pushed me out of the way, but the paper was already alight. She dropped the crop and smacked me again in the face with her hand, as she had the day I first landed in New York.

"You foul, bloody wench!" She reached behind her, picked up a bowl, and hurled it at me. I ducked and it crashed against the hearth.

"I will sell you!" she screamed. "I will auction you at dawn on Monday. I'll sell your demon sister, too, to the most cruel, heartless master I can find, the Devil himself if he wants."

She paused to catch her breath.

Ruth?

Hannah stepped forward. "I do believe there was a knock at the front door, Madam," she said.

But she already sold Ruth.

Madam glared at her. "Then answer it, you bloody fool."

Didn't she?

As Hannah left, Madam brushed back her hair, gathering her dignity. I still stood by the fire, where the note had burned to fine ash. I could not think what might happen next.

Madam tugged at her short gown. "What's that stupid look on your face?" she said with a harsh laugh. "You didn't know I still owned her, did you?"

"Ruth?" The name escaped my mouth.

"Brat," Madam spat. "Couldn't find a buyer. Had to ship her down to Charleston. I shall tell the estate manager to get rid of her, toss her in the swamp. Her death will be on your head, you insolent fool."

Hannah came back in from the hall. "The hairdresser, Madam."

"What?" Madam wheeled about. "What did you say?"

"The hairdresser is come to prepare you for the ball. The Queen's ball, ma'am. You must leave in a few hours."

Madam cleared her throat and stood straighter. "Of course. You must first help me into my gown."

Hannah nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"Lock the girl in the potato bin, then come upstairs."

The bin was more than half-filled with potatoes and smelled of damp earth and worms. There was not enough room to sit up, but lying down was like lying in a bed of rocks. I wanted to scream and pinched myself hard to fight the urge. I did not want to give Madam any satisfaction.

Overhead came the noises of footsteps as the hairdresser performed his job and left, and the colonel returned from headquarters to change into his dress uniform, and Madam sent Hannah running for this folderol and that. There was the sound of horse hooves and the roll of carriage wheels and the front door opened and then closed and the house fell quiet save for Hannah's steps in the kitchen.

A light appeared through the boards of the bin.

"It's me," Hannah said. "She's gone."

The light was set on the ground, then there was a fumbling of a key in the padlock. The bin door opened and Hannah peered in.

"I brought you some things. Here." She handed me a chamber pot, a blanket, and a mug of water. "T'ain't right to lock you away with nothing. You ain't an animal."

"Let me go, please," I pleaded. But before I could say anything further or reach for her, she had slammed down the door and shot home the lock again.

"I'll be back by dawn and check on you then," she said. "Try to sleep."

"Please, Hannah!" I cried. "Please, I beg of you!"

Her footsteps flew up the stairs and the door slammed. I thought I heard a sob, but perhaps I didn't.

The bees overtook me then. As evening moved into night, they ate through me and hived up inside my brainpan with a loud buzz, their wings beating me into submission. Someone whimpered and cried and it must have been me, but it mattered not for I was already dead. It was only a few days, hours perhaps, until my heart would stop beating, in truth, and the bees would fly off to haunt someone else.

And then came the sound of a distant roar, like a lion just sprung from a trap.

The bees paused and I froze, waiting. No one was home except for Lady Seymour, and she was not capable of making noise.

The roar came again. I cocked my head and listened. It did not come from the street nor the house above. It was not cannon fire. 'Twas inside me. A thought, thunderous loud.

Ruth was alive.

Alive, in Charleston. In South Carolina, not on a ship, not on an island.

Alive in a town I can walk to.

My toes wiggled in my sturdy black shoes and my legs itched. I lay flat as I could on the bumpy mound of potatoes

and kicked once at the boards of the bin. My heavy shoes made a terrible loud noise on the wood. I stopped, counted to one hundred.

There came no sound from overhead, no commotion out on the street.

I kicked again, at the same spot. The potatoes under me shifted and the mug of water overturned. I kicked a third time. The boards did not move at all. I cursed the carpenter who had built this tomb.

There has to be a way out.

I kicked, stomped, slammed. I raged and screamed and fought. Nothing happened.

I stopped, wiped the sweat from my face, and closed my eyes.

Think.

The bin stood a little taller than Ruth, and was as long in both directions as it was tall. I reached up to touch the boards above my head. They were rough-hewn, put together with cold nails. My fingertips traced the length of each board, feeling along the splinters and the knots in the wood. The top was as solid as a brick wall, each nail fastened tight. I fought back the panic that rose in my throat and tested the strength of each board that ran from the top down the sides. All strong, all sound.

Think. Remember.

When Ruth and I slept down here, the far corner of the cellar went muddy in a heavy rain. Maybe the damp had eaten at the boards. I moved over to that corner of the bin and scooped the potatoes out of the way, heaping them behind me. I sat back and put my feet on each board in turn and pushed.

The third board I tried gave way a little. So did the next two.

I moved the potato heap so I could best lean against it and push with my legs. I kicked. There was a quiet *crack*.

I kicked again and leaned forward to feel the boards. The one had a piece chipped off where the wood was rotted through, the other had a long split in it. I leaned back and took a deep breath, then kicked and kicked with all my strength until the wood broke and flew into the dark.

I took the stairs two at a time and paused before I entered the kitchen. The house was still silent. I hurried down the hall, past the grandfather clock, and up the stairs to the drawing room. I needed a map and had a mind to steal a pass, too, if I could.

I threw some wood on the fire, lit a candle from the flames, and carried it to the long dining table covered with maps and countless papers. I lit the rest of the candles on the table as if preparing for a feast, then searched through the papers, throwing those that were useless to me to the floor.

Finally I found a small map that showed the colonies from Massachusetts down to Georgia. The distance from Rhode Island to New York was the same as the tip of my little finger to the first knuckle under it. From New York to Charleston stretched all the way down my fingers to the palm.

The crackling firewood startled me. I glanced up. There was a movement over the hearth and for an instant, my heart caught in my throat.

A ghost?

The firelight brightened. No, not a ghost. I had caught sight of myself in the large mirror that hung over the mantel.

I could scarce recognize me.

My hands fumbled for a candle. I moved to the mirror,

guarding the flame, and lit the oil lamps that were set into the wall. The mirror caught the light and reflected it back at me.

I leaned in.

In truth, it seemed I was looking at a stranger who lived beyond the glass. My face was thinner than I remembered and longer from brow to chin. My nose and mouth recollected Momma's, but the set of the eyes, those came from Poppa. As I stared, their two faces came forth and drifted back, until I could see only me.

I turned my head to the side a bit and studied the brand on my face; for the first time, studied it hard: the capital *I* that proclaimed my insolent manners and crimes. I leaned closer to the mirror. The letter was a pink ribbon embroidered on my skin.

I touched it, smooth and warm, flesh made into silk.

The scars on Poppa's cheek had been three lines across his cheek, carved with a sharp blade. He was proud of his marks. In the country of his ancestors, they made him into a man.

I traced the *I* with my fingertip.

This is my country mark. I did not ask for it, but I would carry it as Poppa carried his. It made me his daughter. It made me strong.

I took a step back, seeing near my whole self in the mirror. I pushed back my shoulders and raised my chin, my back straight as an arrow.

This mark stands for Isabel.

The clock struck eleven and made me jump. I had much to do and little time.

The fastest way off the island was a boat, much as the thought made me tremble. I searched through the sea of papers on the table until I found a chart of the tides. I ran my finger down the columns. *Huzzah!* The tide would not turn against me for a few hours.

I lacked only a pass. Colonel Hawkins had been in the habit of keeping them locked in the chest in the library, but he had become sloppy and overworked since the rebel victories. I opened the drawers of the secretary table and looked through the large boxes of official papers.

There!

I grabbed the paper and dashed to a small side table for a quill and bottle of ink. I crowded the candles in close together to give me enough light, took a deep breath to steady my hand, and dipped the quill. I took a second breath and bent over to fill in the empty bits of the pass:

New-York, _____, 1777.

I wrote in *18th, January* in the blank space. It had been some time since I wrote out letters. The *J* wobbled and the *r* appeared to be an *n*. I set down the quill, wiped my damp hands on my skirt, and picked it up again.

This is to Certify, to whomsoever it may concern, That the Bearer hereof _____

That was where I had to write my name. I scratched out *Isabel* and stopped.

I was not a Lockton. Nor a Finch. Isabel Rhode Island? That would not do. Isabel Cuffe, after Poppa, or Isabel Dinah, after Momma?

I closed my eyes and thought of home; the smell of fresh-cut hay and the taste of raspberries. Robins chasing bugs in the bean patch. Setting worms to work at the base of the corn plants. Showing Ruth what was weed and what was flower . . .

I opened my eyes, dipped the quill, and wrote out my true name: *Isabel Gardener, being a Free Negro, has the Commandant's Permission to pass from this Garrison to whatever place she may think proper.*

It was signed with lots of fancy titles that belonged to the colonel and the commandant, and the King Himself. I wished that there would have been space for Her Majesty, Queen Charlotte of Great Britain, to sign it too. She and me shared a birthday now, for I was reborn as Isabel Gardener and that paper proved it.

CHAPTER XLIV

Saturday, January 18, 1777

THAT THE QUESTION WAS NOT WHETHER, BY A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, WE SHOULD MAKE OURSELVES WHAT WE ARE NOT; BUT WHETHER WE SHOULD DECLARE A FACT WHICH ALREADY EXISTS . . .
—THOMAS JEFFERSON ABOUT THE WRITING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

I FOLDED THE MAP AND PASS, BLEW out the candles, and crept down the stairs. I took the scissors out of the sewing basket in the kitchen and snipped the threads of the hem of my cloak. I opened the map flat, inserted it between the lining and the woolen layer, then quick resewed the hem.

Next I dressed myself in all of my clothing: two shifts and two skirts, my cloak, shawl, and the blanket from my pallet. I took a basket from a high shelf and loaded it with bread, hard cheese, and a piece of dried beef I cut from the slab that hung in the pantry. As I put the beef back, I studied the loose board in the back of the pantry. I pried it up and removed the lead piece from the king's statue and my cloth packet of seeds. After some consideration, I took out *Common Sense*, too, and stuck all of it in the pocket I wore under my skirt, alongside the false pass.

I walked down the hall, reached for the handle of the front door, and stopped. Lady Seymour lay in the silent parlor. I doubted anyone had thought to put wood on the fire for her. That was my chore.

No, not anymore. I was quit of this place. I reached again for the handle.

But she was alone, old, and maybe freezing.

It would take only an instant.

I stepped into the parlor. Lady Seymour lay in her bed, her eyes closed, the covers barely moving. Her fire was near burned down to ash. I quick added logs and blew on the coals until small flames jumped up and bit into the wood. She wouldn't die of the cold this night, not on my account.

I was halfway to the door when I saw her silk reticule hung from the back of a chair. There were coins in that bag, coins that would help a girl set on walking to South Carolina. But that was stealing from somebody who had showed me kindness. But she stood by when Ruth was taken, and she returned me to Madam. But taking her money was still stealing.

'Twas wrong, but I swallowed hard, opened the bag, and removed the coin purse from the bottom. When I hung it back on the chair, Lady Seymour's eyes were open and following me. The question on her face was plain.

"I'm sorry," I said. "She's made up her mind to sell me."

She nodded once.

"I built up the fire. Would you like some water?"

She nodded again. I poured a cup of water from the pitcher and held it to her dry lips. She swallowed a little, but the rest spilled down her face. I set down the cup and wiped away the water.

"I have to go. Please forgive me."

Lady Seymour cut her eyes at her husband's small portrait on the bedside table, then to the coin purse that weighed down my hand. She gave a sharp nod of the head, one side of her mouth turned up in a smile.

"I'll put the money back," I said. "Forgive me."

She shook her head from side to side, her mouth moving with trapped words.

"I can keep it?"

Another nod and another pointed stare at her husband.

"Because I rescued his picture?"

She nodded again, and a tear slipped down her cheek.

"Well, then, ma'am, I'm happy to take it."

As I set the coin purse in my pocket, she opened her mouth and a small sound escaped.

"Did you say something, Lady Seymour?" I leaned in close, though it scared me, for the smell of death hung over that bed like a fog.

Her lips moved again, forming her last word to me, a whisper almost too faint to hear.

"Run."

I opened the front door of the Lockton mansion and looked up the street and down. Not a soul in sight.

I picked up the basket, tightened the blanket across my shoulders, and stepped over the threshold. I closed the door behind me, walked down the front steps, and turned west.

My plan was simple and foolhardy: steal a rowboat, cross the river to Jersey, and walk to Charleston. I was counting on the commotion of the Queen's ball to distract

folks. If I could get to the boat in time, the tide would help pull me away from New York.

At the first corner, my feet stopped. This was where I turned north most mornings to head up to the Bridewell.

I urged my feet west, toward the wharf. They did not listen.

My remembery called up the feel of being locked in the stocks, of my face being burnt, of him watching me from across the courtyard; him watching out for me. 'Twas Curzon who made sure I survived. 'Twas he who had been my steadfast friend since the day they brought me here.

I couldn't. It would be hard enough to sneak past two armies and not get stolen again by someone who would tear up my pass. And I didn't even have a pass for him, how to explain that? No, I couldn't. I looked west, toward the river, then north, then west again. No—not couldn't. I shouldn't. But I had to.

I had a debt to pay.

"Good evening, sir," I said, holding out my basket to the huge soldier, Fisher, who opened the door to the Bridewell guardhouse.

Fisher grunted and yawned. "Wot's your business here? It's going on midnight."

I prayed that the Lord and Momma would forgive the river of lies about to flow from my mouth. "Colonel Hawkins sent me, sir, to clean the cells. As you suggested."

The guard stepped inside and I followed him. He sat heavily in a chair and drank from a mug on the table. "Terrible late to be cleaning cells."

"The colonel got wind of a prison inspector arriving."

"Nobody told me," he growled.

I swallowed hard. Should I flee and give up on this senseless plot?

He spat into the fire. "But they don't tell me nuffink. Wot's in the basket?"

Food to keep me alive for a week, I thought. "Help yourself," I said.

He pawed through it, took out a soft roll and stuffed half of it in his mouth. "Mebbe I should ask the colonel."

I thought quick as I could. "Yessir. Of course. He's at the Queen's ball."

Fisher winced. "Best not disturb that. All right." He stood slow and reached for the key ring and a lantern on the wall. "But don't be asking me to help. Cleaning the cells ain't my job."

I took the key. "Yes, sir."

"Wheelbarrow's in the hall," he said. "Once you've filled it, roll it back here, and I'll let you out so's you can throw the muck and filth in the pit." He yawned. "Mind yer breathing."

I turned. "Pardon?"

"Prisoners been dropping dead like flies. Fever."

The men in the first cell were mostly sleeping, or dying, or dead. None of them had the strength to do more than stare at me in the weak lantern light. I gagged and gagged again as I carried out overflowing chamber pots, and forced myself to take a blanket from a corpse.

Hurry! I screamed inside. *Hurry or it will be too late!*

Fisher looked up and chuckled as I passed back through the guardhouse with the barrow. I pitched the filth into the pit behind the prison and prayed it was not going atop any

corpses. Before I went back inside, I cleaned off my hands in a snow bank. My teeth rattled with the cold.

"No fun, is it?" the guard asked as I passed through again. He pulled at the blanket around his shoulders. "Hurry up, now. I need me sleep."

"Yes, sir." I wiped my hands on my skirt. "Almost done, sir."

I did not open the door to the second cell, nor the third. I set the lantern in the wheelbarrow, pushed it down the hall to the fourth door on the right, and held my breath as I unlocked it.

The stench was overpowering—men unwashed for months and puke and muck and rot that was eating living flesh. Two dozen pairs of eyes watched me, burning in skull-like faces. No one spoke. I stepped inside and held the lantern higher. The faces were new to me, men and boys who had been moved in here after Curzon's original companions died.

"Where's Mister Dibdin?" I asked in a small voice.

"Died this morning," croaked a man. "Everyone's dying."

"What about the slave boy?"

He pointed to a corner.

Curzon lay insensible, his skin burning with fever, his eyes rolled up into his head. I called his name and pinched him, but he did not look my way nor speak a word.

He'll be soon dead. Leave him and run.

A weight settled on my shoulders like a cloak of iron. I bent close to his ear. "Shhhh," I whispered.

A blast of cannon fire sounded from the Battery, more royal celebrations. A few men looked to the window.

"He's dead." I stood up. "Can someone help me with the body?"

No one moved.

"Then I shall do it myself."

I grabbed Curzon under his armpits and dragged him across the floor and out the door. It took no effort at all to load him into the wheelbarrow. He weighed hardly more than a large sack of potatoes or a full butter churn. I dashed back into the cell, snatched his hat out of the shaking hands of a man who was putting it on his own head, grabbed the lantern, and closed and locked the cell door.

I could not ponder the fate of the rest of the men. Some things were not to be borne.

Before I pushed him down the hall and into the guardhouse, I covered Curzon with the filthy blanket I'd stolen from the first cell. "You're dead," I hissed to him. "No noise."

In the guardhouse, Fisher was sitting on his bed, leaning against the wall and snoring. He roused some as I shut the door to the cells.

"Got a nasty load here," I said. "Might take a bit to bury it."

He nodded, already half-asleep.

As I pushed the wheelbarrow into the night, my legs shook so hard I thought sure they'd set the earth to trembling and bring the whole building crashing to the ground.

CHAPTER XLV

Saturday, January 18–Sunday, January 19, 1777

EVERYTHING THAT IS RIGHT OR REASONABLE PLEADS FOR SEPARATION. THE BLOOD OF THE SLAIN, THE WEEPING VOICE OF NATURE CRIES 'TIS TIME TO PART.
–THOMAS PAINE, *COMMON SENSE*

THE PRISON WAS TEN BLOCKS FROM the wharf. I covered the first eight blocks as fast as a girl pushing a near-dead lump of boy could. Then I stopped.

A sentry fire was lit at the corner, burning between us and the last two blocks to the wharf. Six British guards stood warming their hands, their muskets leaning against the small pile of firewood. A dog lay at their feet, head resting on its front paws. One of the men stretched his arms over his head and gave a mighty yawn, and his companions laughed at him. The dog lifted his head once and looked in our direction, but a soldier reached down to scratch his ears and he relaxed.

If I tried to push the wheelbarrow over the cobblestones, we'd be arrested in an instant. If it were half an hour earlier, we could have tracked backward and gone down another street. But the tide wouldn't wait.

I backed up slow as I could, cringing with every creak of

the wheels. Once we were well out of sight of the men, I pulled the blanket off Curzon.

"Get up," I whispered as I helped him from the barrow. "We need to get past those soldiers. After that, it's only two blocks to the river."

"Boat?" he asked, leaning against a wall.

"Of course. Follow me, stay close."

He took one step forward and collapsed against me, the two of us crumpling to the ground.

"No!" I scolded as I stood and pulled him to his feet. "You have to try harder."

"Sorry, Country," he muttered.

He was not strong enough to walk on his own. I was not strong enough to carry him on my back, not after pushing him so far. I pulled his arm across my shoulder and had him lean on me heavily.

"Step quiet," I whispered as we drew close to the corner again.

Twenty paces of open street separated us from the shadows on the other side. One of the soldiers walked to the woodpile, picked up a split log, carried it to the fire, and tossed it on the flames. For the moment, all the men had their backs to us.

"Ready?" I said in Curzon's ear.

He nodded. I drew a deep breath and we started to walk, soft as we could. Twenty paces stretched twenty miles, every faint crunch of our shoes sounding like gunshot.

Five steps, I counted silently. *Six. Seven.*

Curzon had little strength in his legs. He faltered and almost fell again. I wrapped my other arm around him and clutched his shirt. *Eight. Nine. Ten.*

The dog lifted his head. He stared right at me and barked.

One of the soldiers, startled, shouted, "Look at that!" and pointed to the sky.

The heavens exploded into the red glare of rockets and white fountains of light. Curzon and I stood as if planted, amazed at the sight of the fireworks being shot off in honor of Queen Charlotte.

The dog barked furiously in our direction, but the soldiers were all staring at the illuminations above. The noise rolled up, booms that sounded like thunder and cannons. The men all smiled and laughed at the spectacle.

I dragged Curzon across the street and down the last two blocks to the wharf.

It was dark, no watch posted, as I had hoped. "Thank you, Momma," I muttered as we crawled into a rowboat.

Curzon groaned. "What you say?"

I untied us from the wharf. "Never mind."

But he was already insensible again. I picked up the oars.

I rowed that river.

I rowed that river like it was a horse delivering me from the Devil.

My hands blistered, the blisters popped, they re-formed and popped again. I rowed with my hands slick with blood. My back, my shoulders, my arms, they pulled with the strength of a thousand armloads of firewood split and carried, of water buckets toted for miles, of the burdens of every New York day and New York night boiled into two miles of water that I was going to cross.

Set after set of the Queen's fireworks exploded over the roofs of the city, over Canvastown, over the mansions that held the King's subjects in their ball gowns and fancy dress

uniforms. Her fireworks blasted off and everybody gazed into the sky and I rowed and rowed and rowed past their homes, aside their warehouses, underneath their cannons, and out into the open harbor betwixt New York Island and Jersey.

My wits wandered some, 'bout the time my hands started bleeding.

Tongues of fog oozed across the water and curled around the bits of ice that floated past. I saw in the fog the forms of people. They never came close enough that I could see their faces. Once, I reached out, feeling a warm presence, but I near tipped the boat over and had to grab for the oar before it slid away. My hands plunged into the icy water. And I rowed and rowed, but it didn't hurt after that because my hands had froze.

I rowed and the tide pulled and the ghosts—who could indeed travel over water—tugged my boat with all their strength. My eyes closed and the moon drew me west, away from the island of my melancholy.

When my eyes opened, I knew I had died and passed onto glory.

Heaven was crystal lit with white angel fire, colored peach at the edges. Heaven smelled of wood smoke.

I blinked.

The Bible did not mention that Heaven smelled of wood smoke.

I blinked again. When I opened my eyes, they watered because of the bright morning light. The rowboat had come ashore in a tangle of bushes that overhung a small bank at the side of the river. The branches overhead were all coated

in ice. I was coated in ice, too, that fractured and crackled as I moved.

I looked to the water, then to the rising sun, then to the water again. I looked around me—no houses, no ships, no wharves. The river was narrow and flowing out to sea, south. The sun rose beyond the water, at the other side of the river. I was on the west bank. I was in Jersey.

I had set myself free.

I wiped at the water that flowed down my cheeks and kicked at the stinking bundle at the bottom of the boat.

"You alive?" I asked.

The bundle groaned and pushed aside the shredded blanket. Curzon lifted his head enough to look at me sitting there with a fool grin on my face.

"Where are we?" he asked in a thin voice.

"I think we just crossed the river Jordan." I stood up, steadied myself as the boat rocked a bit, and offered him my hand. "Can you walk?"

RUNAWAYS

NOTICE TO READERS!!!
One & All, Be Hereby Advised
that the Account of Runaways

ISABEL GARDENER

Formerly Sal Lockton

& Companion

CURZON BELLINGHAM

WILL BE CONTINUED
in the Forthcoming Volume

FORGE.

APPENDIX

Was Isabel based on a real person? What about the other characters in the book?

Chains is a work of historical fiction. Most of the characters: Isabel, Ruth, Curzon, the Locktons, Lady Seymour, Bellingham, and various British and Patriot officers, are fictional. The real letters, diaries, newspaper articles, runaway ads, cookbooks, and military reports that I found in my research helped me develop the characters.

There are three "real" people in the book. The mayor of New York, David Matthews, actually did participate in the conspiracy to assassinate Washington. Thomas Hickey was a member of Washington's Life Guards, and was hung for his part in the assassination plot. And Dr. Abraham van Buskirk, the Loyalist sympathizer who sheltered Mr. Lockwood, truly was a doctor in New Jersey.

While the character of Isabel is fictional, her situation is realistic. Child slaves were sold at very young ages and had to work extremely hard. During the war there was an increase in the number of slaves who freed themselves by running away. Most of them ran in search of family members, so they could start their new lives together.

The tension between Patriot and Loyalist New Yorkers, the Tea Water Pump, the taking of lead from houses, the pulling down of King George's statue, the chaos surrounding the British invasion of the city, the fire, prisoners of war, the Queen's Birthday Ball: all of these are historical facts. I wove the fictional characters of Isabel and Curzon into the history to give readers a sense of what life might have been like in those days.

What about the battles? Were they real too?

Yes. There were a number of big battles around New York City in 1776.

In August the British army, with more than 30,000 men, landed at Gravesend in Brooklyn and the Americans prepared to meet them. The two armies clashed on August 27, near the village of Flatbush. The Americans, with only 10,000 troops, were beaten and withdrew to Brooklyn Heights, then across the East River to Manhattan.

This part of the war is sometimes called the Battle of Brooklyn or the Battle of Long Island. It was the first major battle of the Revolution with more than 40,000 men fighting for six hours. The British crushed the Americans, capturing, wounding or killing thousands of men.

A few weeks later the British attacked the Patriots at the northern end of Manhattan, in the battle of Harlem Heights, and later, in the battle of Fort Washington, where thousands of Americans became British prisoners of war. Washington was lucky to escape with the remnants of his army. They marched into New Jersey and headed south to Princeton and Trenton.

Was the Revolution the most important thing that ever happened in America?

That is an interesting question. The American Revolution (also called the War for Independence) was fought for many reasons, but mostly because Americans wanted to be in charge of their own government and have more control over how their taxes were spent.

Most people who lived in the Thirteen Colonies considered themselves British, or at the very least, British colonists. Historians estimate that 40 percent of colonists were firmly dedicated to breaking free from Great Britain, 20 percent wanted to remain a colony, and 40 percent stayed neutral or supported the side that was winning at the

moment. After the war, it took a while for Americans to develop their own sense of national identity and pride.

Equally important to the war itself was the establishment of the United States Constitution, which called for a representative government, regular elections, and the checks and balances of the Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court. The Constitution is an amazing document: one that has grown with the evolving perspectives and needs of the country.

The American experiment in democracy, which we are still working on, changed the world forever.

How many slaves lived in America at the time of the Revolution?

When the American Revolution broke out, about 2.5 million people of European and African descent were living in the Thirteen Colonies.

The war came after decades of increased immigration across the Atlantic Ocean. About 150,000 Europeans journeyed to America between 1700 and 1775. About 100,000 more came as indentured servants. In the same time period, nearly 300,000 Africans were kidnapped and shipped to the colonies to work as slaves.

On the eve of the Revolution, one in five colonists—20 percent of the population—was a slave: approximately 500,000 people. Most of them were held in bondage in the southern colonies, but slaves were owned by everyone from farmers in Albany, New York, to shipbuilders in Newport, Rhode Island, to bakers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to merchants in Boston, Massachusetts.

Which side did African Americans fight for during the Revolution?

African Americans fought for both the Patriots and the British, just like members of all other ethnic groups in the country.

Historians estimate that five thousand African American men enlisted on the American side of the war. Free and enslaved black Patriots fought and died at the Boston Massacre, at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Saratoga, and every other significant battle. Some were Patriots because they believed in the cause of American liberty. Others fought alongside or in place of owners who forced them to take up arms. A few slaves were granted freedom for being soldiers, but not many.

On November 7, 1775, the Royal Governor of Virginia, the Earl of Dunmore, declared that all male slaves and indentured servants owned by Patriots would be freed if they volunteered to work for the British Army. On June 7, 1779, British Commandant David Jones added: "All Negroes that fly from the Enemy's Country are Free–No person whatever can claim a Right to them–."

Tens of thousands of slaves ran away from their owners and fled to the British lines, including slaves owned by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Most were used as military laborers digging ditches, building barricades and roads, and driving carts, though some fought as soldiers with Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. While the Patriots talked about freedom, the British actually gave it to some slaves.

I'm confused. I thought the British were the bad guys. But if they gave freedom to the slaves, wouldn't that make them the good guys? And does that make the Patriots the bad guys?

It's complicated, and yes, confusing. The situation was too muddy to think about in a "good guy vs. bad guy" way.

Most Americans supported the idea of slavery, though opinions were beginning to change in the late 1700s. Many of the Founding Fathers owned slaves and much of the wealth of America's upper class came from slave labor. Some leaders, like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, changed the way they felt about slavery as

they grew older. Both men freed their slaves in their wills, though all but one of Franklin's slaves died before he did.

Some young American leaders, like John Laurens of South Carolina, saw the immorality of slavery and tried to design plans that would free slaves, including those owned by his father. His plans never gained approval. He died at the end of the war.

To us today, it seems completely hypocritical to fight a war for "liberty and freedom" when 20 percent of your population is in chains. People back then saw the hypocrisy too. It made some of them uncomfortable, but not uncomfortable enough to change the law, not right away. Vermont abolished slavery on July 8, 1777, when it adopted its state constitution. After the Revolution, the other states in the North gradually required slave owners to free their slaves.

Americans had to fight another bloody war, the Civil War, before all of our people were free.

So the Americans were good guys about liberty and bad guys about slavery. Does that mean the British were bad guys about liberty and good guys about slavery?

Again, you can't look at this through good guy/bad guy glasses.

The British were not interested in freeing slaves because it was the morally right thing to do. Dunmore's Proclamation was issued to ruin the Patriot economy, particularly in Virginia, the home of many slave-owning Patriot leaders. British General Sir Henry Clinton promised "to use slaves as weapons against their masters."

Their offer of freedom was not made to everyone in bondage. If a slave owned by a Loyalist escaped to the British, he was returned to his owners and punished. Loyalists were given runaway slaves as rewards for helping the king's army. The British also sold escaped or captured Patriot slaves to their Loyalist sympathizers. Ex-slaves who came down with smallpox or typhus were abandoned by the British to die or be recaptured.

The abolition movement did grow faster in England than in America. In 1772 an English judge ruled that slavery could not exist in England itself. In 1807 Parliament banned British involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. (From 1690 to 1807 British ships carried nearly three million kidnapped Africans across the Atlantic Ocean.) Slavery was completely banned throughout the British Empire in 1833.

How was life different for slaves on big plantations, on small farms, and in the cities?

In the northern colonies, European Americans tended to own one or two slaves who worked on the family farm or were hired out. Rhode Island and Connecticut had a few large farms, where twenty or thirty slaves would live and work. Plantation-based slavery was more common in the South, where hundreds of slaves could be owned by the same person and forced to work in tobacco, indigo, or rice fields.

In most cities, slaveholdings were small, usually one or two slaves who slept in the attic or cellar of the slave owner's home. Abigail Smith Adams, a Congregational minister's daughter, grew up outside Boston in a household that owned two slaves, Tom and Pheby. As an adult, she denounced slavery, as did her husband, John Adams, the second President of the United States.

Historians recently discovered the remains of slaves found in the African Burial Ground near today's City Hall in New York City. By studying the skeletons, scientists discovered that the slaves of New York suffered from poor nutrition, disease, and years of backbreaking labor. Most of them died young.

What were the differences between servants, indentured servants, and slaves?

Servants were usually working-class white people, often recent

immigrants, who were paid wages for their labor. Servants could quit their jobs if they wanted.

An indentured servant was a person, usually white, who promised their labor for seven years or so, often in exchange for passage to America. If they left their master before their term of service was up, they could be arrested. They did not have all of the freedoms of a nonindentured white person, but they had many more rights and protection than slaves.

Slaves were people of African descent who were not paid for their work and had to do everything demanded by the person who owned them. They had no rights and little protection from cruel treatment and inhumane living conditions. Slaves were not allowed to marry and children were frequently sold away from their parents.

Why don't we hear much about the Revolution in New York City? What was the city like back then?

Maybe because the British occupied the city for nearly the entire war.

Before the Revolutionary War began, New York was the second largest city in the American colonies with approximately 20,000 residents, smaller than Philadelphia (34,000 residents) and larger than Boston (15,000). It took up less than a square mile at the southernmost tip of Manhattan, then called York, or New York Island, stretching a little more than a mile north to south, and about a half mile, east to west.

The rest of Manhattan, called the Outward, consisted of forest and marshes dotted with small hamlets, such as Greenwich Village, farms, and a few grand summer estates. Fort Washington, eleven miles to the north of the small city of New York, was located between what we today call West 183rd and West 185th Streets, in the Hudson Heights neighborhood. Today's New York City Hall, where Broadway, Park Row, and Chambers Street intersect, was

built on the area known as the Commons during the Revolution, which was then at the northern edge of the city.

When the British occupied New York and the region around it, Patriot supporters fled and Loyalists poured into the city, seeking the protection of the king's army. Life in the city was very hard for most people. They struggled to find firewood and affordable food, while the British officers and wealthy Loyalists enjoyed comfort and luxury.

The city was in a strategic position for the British, located between the Patriot hotbeds of Boston and Philadelphia, but they never figured out how to use it effectively to squelch the rebellion.

Are you sure there were slaves in New York back then?

Absolutely.

The earliest slaves were brought to New Amsterdam (later called New York) by the Dutch in the 1620s. When the British took over New York in 1664, about 10 percent of the population was of African descent.

The number of slaves skyrocketed as the British kidnapped thousands of African men, women, and children and brought them to the city. By 1737, 20 percent of the city's population was enslaved—more than 1,700 people. By the middle of the century, New York had the second highest percentage of slaves in the colonies after Charleston, South Carolina. Historian Shane White analyzed census data, tax records, and directories and found that every street in New York had slave owners on it, and most people lived a few doors down from slaves, if they didn't own one themselves.

Historians estimate that about 5,000 African Americans, nearly 22 percent of the population, lived in and around New York in 1771. Very few of them were free. By the end of the American

Revolution, thousands had fled to the British or run away, but thousands more continued to live in bondage.

In 1799 New York passed the Gradual Emancipation Act, which set out the very slow timetable for freeing the children of slaves, after they had given nearly thirty years of servitude to the people who owned them. The law was changed in 1817, freeing the rest of the slaves of New York on July 4, 1827.

On July 5, 1827, thousands of free African Americans marched down Broadway, following an honor guard and a grand marshal. In front of the African Zion Church, they listened as abolitionist leader William Hamilton announced, "This day we stand redeemed from a bitter thralldom."

The African Americans of New York were finally free after two hundred years of bondage.

Did that huge fire really destroy part of New York in 1776?

The fire was a terrible disaster that affected the city for years. No one has ever proved if it started by accident, or was the work of Patriots angry that the British had driven them out of the city. It started near the tip of the island and was spread by strong winds up the west side, burning through the night as panicked families rushed into the streets.

When the flames finally died, nearly five hundred buildings—a quarter of all the homes in the city—had burned to the ground. In the chaos that followed, no one counted the dead. They were buried as quickly as possible, then thoughts turned to survival.

With winter approaching, finding shelter for the homeless was critical. Families were forced to let British soldiers live with them, and homes abandoned by fleeing Patriots were taken over by the army. Poor people lived in the remnants of cellars and built so many hovels in the burned-over district that it was known as "Canvastown."

Since the Revolution, Manhattan has expanded, reaching farther into the two rivers that flow by it as developers added landfill so they could erect more buildings. Two centuries after the war, the World Trade Center Towers were built. Part of the complex stood on the land that was devastated during the Great Fire of 1776. When the World Trade Towers were destroyed during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the same region of the city suffered.

St. Paul's Chapel, a small Episcopalian church in that neighborhood, somehow survived both disasters.

Were conditions for the American prisoners of war really that bad?

The conditions suffered by the American soldiers captured by the British in and around New York were almost too horrible to describe. They were stuffed into jails, churches, warehouses, and decrepit ships in the harbor and left to rot. Their cells had no heat. They used a corner or a bucket for their toilet and were never allowed to bathe. They did not have blankets, warm clothes, or medical care. They had to drink dirty water. Their meals were raw pork, moldy biscuits infested with maggots, peas, and rice.

About half of the two thousand Americans captured at Fort Washington died from disease and starvation within weeks. If the British had not allowed the citizens of New York to bring blankets and food to the prisoners, the death toll would have been higher.

Captured officers, however, were treated differently. They were allowed to stay in boardinghouses, to work, and to walk around the city as long as they did not try to escape. The British felt that officers were gentlemen and deserved to be treated according to their higher social class.

More than 10,000 American prisoners of war died in British captivity.

What happened to King George's head?

After the Declaration of Independence was read to a crowd of Patriots on July 9, 1776, the excited Americans rushed down Broadway to the Bowling Green and pulled down the gilt-covered lead statue of King George and his horse. The statue was dragged up the length of Manhattan to Fort Washington. Some historians believe that the king's head was displayed in front of the Blue Bell Tavern, near what is today the corner of Broadway and 181st Street.

Most of the statue was melted into 42,088 bullets by the women of Litchfield, Connecticut. Other fragments of the statue were stolen and hidden. Over the next hundred years, pieces of it turned up in fields and swamps. A number of families kept bits of the statue as a reminder of the day.

Loyalist spies were outraged at the treatment of the image of their king. They stole back the head and delivered it to Captain John Montresor, a British engineer. Thomas Hutchinson, former Loyalist governor of Massachusetts, claimed he saw the head—the head of the statue, that is—in London, England, in 1777. He said the nose didn't look so good.